

192. What responsibility is there in respect to the transactions of the Board with regard to mortgages? As far as you are aware, what check is there on the proceedings at all?—I suppose there is a large moral check. The character of the Commissioners would lead to the supposition that their transactions would be guided by upright principles and by the advice of their legal officers.

193. Is there any audit?—I am not aware that there is any.

194. And do you not think there should be some general means of overlooking the transactions?—No doubt.

195. *Mr. Bruce.*] How long have you been a Commissioner?—Since the first appointment of Commissioners.

196. Do you think that in the interests of education it is better that these endowments should remain in the hands of the Commissioners as at present, or do you think that it is better that they should be vested in the Crown?—The Commissioners have applied these reserves to the best purposes in the interest of education, and also considering the amount of revenue to be derived. The Commissioners have not considered themselves to be occupied solely in the interests of education, but also in the interest of beneficial settlement, as ultimately conducive to the interests of education. I am of opinion that the Commissioners have administered the reserves wisely. That does not extend to Commissioners in other parts of the colony. I do not know what they have done.

197. Then I understand you to say that your own personal experience would not lead you to advocate the change?—I see no reason for making a change.

198. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.*] I gather from your replies that you wished to combine beneficial occupation of the land with the greatest possible revenue for the trust?—I have tried to explain that I consider the beneficial occupation of the land would conduce to the interests of the trust.

199. I suppose your object was to get the best class of settlers?—Yes.

200. Would you have any objection to setting aside a portion on perpetual leases?—The majority of the Commissioners do not consider that a beneficial mode of settlement.

201. Would you not have been likely to get a better class of settlers than under the twenty-one years' system?—Possibly.

202. When you were forced by the refusal of the Government to accede to your request, you considered the powers the Act gave you were such as you would not have acted upon if you had not been forced to it. Do you consider the twenty-one years' leasing system inferior?—I have said that the Commissioners had endeavoured to settle the land in that way for several years, without success. But undoubtedly I should consider it inferior.

203. Only a portion of the land was taken up?—Yes.

204. Then, I understand the department was willing for you to sell one-third on deferred payments, one-third for cash, and one-third to be let on perpetual lease?—Yes.

205. Then, why did you not avail yourselves of this, and sell two-thirds of the land, as you wished to sell it. You were only compelled to settle one-third, and you could have disposed of two-thirds as you had proposed to dispose of it?—We did not want to settle on perpetual lease.

206. For what reason?—We disbelieved in it.

207. Did you believe one-third would be taken up on perpetual lease?—I do not know. As far as I can gather, there appear to be two classes willing to take up land under perpetual leases, the most numerous being of persons who take up land in good faith, with a conviction that the non-purchasing clause will be repealed, and that they will be able to acquire freehold. Another class—the smaller one—would take up leases with a view of getting all they could out of the land—scourging it—and then throwing it up.

208. That is the smaller class?—Yes.

209. Does not that apply to a much greater extent to the present system of leasing for twenty-one years?—I do not think it does.

210. Would a man not be likely to do so under that system?—No; I do not think so. He would have no security for his continued occupation under the perpetual lease.

211. Why?—Others might give a higher price than himself.

212. That would have been impossible if he was on the land. He could not scourge until he got possession. Under the perpetual-leasing system he could very readily scourge, either at the end of his lease or, if he found the land was not giving a large produce, in the earlier years.

213. But he could do that under the twenty-one years' lease system?—That depends a good deal on the terms of the lease. There are two classes, agricultural and pastoral. The leases given by the Commissioners were pastoral, and there the tenant would not have the right to scourge. But under the agricultural lease he might scourge.

214. What inducement would there be to a man to take the value out of his land when he would be destroying the value of his improvements?—For the value of what he could get out of it.

215. Therefore the class that would have gone in for making their lands freehold would have suited your purpose?—No; they would go in with a belief that the law would be altered.

216. But would not that be in favour of your theory? Would they not have taken up a position as *bonâ fide* settlers?—I do not know that it would.

217. *Mr. J. McKenzie.*] It has been represented to some members of this Committee that in the immediate neighbourhood where these reserves are situated the people complain of the Commissioners not opening up the lands for settlement; and, on the other hand, the Commissioners complain that the Government would not allow them to carry out the work in their own way. Has the interference of the Government prevented you from carrying out settlement of the land?—It has certainly prevented people from acquiring a freehold; but whether it has prevented settlement is a totally different question, on more general grounds.

218. Then, your general view was that the perpetual-leasing system would not be a good one—that is the opinion of a majority of the Commissioners?—Yes.