

leasehold is about sixty thousand acres. Indeed, he doubted whether he would have it at a gift on account of the rabbits. I wish the Committee to take particular notice that the Commissioners' action in disposing of the low-lying good country at the near end of the pastoral lease very seriously damaged the future beneficial disposal of that country, and consequently decreased the revenue arising therefrom. Further, between these pre-emptive rights and the River Waikaia there was a long, narrow strip of alluvial land, which Mr. Gall represented to the Commissioners as so infested by rabbits—that the only way to eradicate them was by cultivation. He informed the Commissioners there were 250 acres. The Commissioners authorized the survey of this land by a private surveyor. The Government would have had no knowledge of this fact but for the accident of myself and the late Mr. Arthur, the Chief Surveyor, happening to visit that district. On our seeing evidence of a surveyor there, we inquired who it was, and discovered that he was a private surveyor in the employ of Mr. Gall, laying off this land to enable him to get a lease from the Commissioners. On my return to Dunedin I brought this to the attention of the Chairman of the Commissioners, and pointed out to him that the action of the Commissioners was entirely opposed, if not to the letter, decidedly to the spirit of the Act under which they administered this estate. I pointed out to him that under "The Otago and Southland Education Leasing Reserves Act, 1878," the Government was empowered to set aside 20,000 acres of this Waikaia Reserve for the purposes of settlement; that that had been done, and the land surveyed, and it was only within that 20,000 acres that the Commissioners had the right to offer land to any one; and that this giving leases to Mr. Gall of the land before the expiry of the pastoral leasing was simply muddling away the public estate. He informed me that the Commissioners were under the impression that this land was within the 20,000 acres, and he would immediately convene a meeting of the Commissioners to see in what way the matter could be rectified. I also informed him that the stretch of land, instead of containing 250 acres, really contained about eight hundred acres. The Commissioners met. They came to this conclusion: that they were already committed to Mr. Gall to the extent of 250 acres; and accordingly that was marked off, which Mr. Gall got on a further lease of twenty-one years. On behalf of the Commissioners I would say (I do not wish to mislead the Committee in respect to this) that in both cases the lands were submitted to public auction; but there were no plans available for the public—simply a newspaper notice that Section So-and-so, Block So-and-so, will be offered for lease by public auction at Gore on such-and-such a day. The public, without the aid of maps, have no conception—or a very vague conception—of where the lands are. On several of the settlers in the Waikaia district speaking to me indignantly on the subject, I said, "Why did you not appear at the sale, if you were so anxious about the land?" Their reply was this: that Mr. Gall's people gave it out that it was quite true they were going to get a bit of land to grow turnips on, but it was such-and-such a piece of land; misleading them altogether as to the actual piece of land offered. That is so far as that point is concerned. I would further say to the Committee that any set of Commissioners are quite unable to deal with either public estate or any other estate unless they themselves are personally acquainted with that estate or have officers to inform them about it. The public estate in the shape of educational reserves is so extensive that it cannot be expected that Commissioners can acquaint themselves with all the details and localities scattered over millions of acres, as they happen to be in Otago, Canterbury, and Southland. In other words, the Commissioners who administer these estates ought to have a survey department of their own; and that brings us to this conclusion: that, as the Government is responsible for titles, and there can be only one survey department in the colony, the Land Boards, which have this technical branch to assist them, are the proper authorities to administer these estates. Further, as the law now is, the Commissioners have to receive the approval of the Minister of Lands to certain steps in their procedure; and it may happen that the Minister of Lands and the Commissioners are not of one mind, as has been actually the case, and is at this moment with regard to seven or eight thousand acres of the very best land now available for settlement in New Zealand. The consequence is a dead-lock; for in the Waikaia Valley there is that extent of land mapped, surveyed, and lying idle, a "no-man's-land," for the last two or three years, simply because these two authorities cannot agree as to the best method of disposal. Meanwhile, during all that time, there have been urgent representations from settlers who are eager to settle there. In the matter of opening up Crown lands by roads the School Commissioners have no means to do so; and any opening-up of these education reserves has had to be done by the Minister of Lands advancing the money and doing the work. To sum up, my observation of the matter is this: that the Commissioners, as administrators of land, are altogether unnecessary; they are the proverbial fifth wheel of the coach. The real work has to be done by the Land Department; and a great deal of correspondence and misunderstanding and explanation have to be gone through before the settler gets the land placed before him. You simply asked information about the Otago School Commissioners: there are other estates administered by high schools, and I presume you meant to include them as well. The department has had a very unfortunate experience with regard to high school trustees. I cannot do better than read a letter from the department of the Minister of Lands with regard to the Strath Taieri Reserve. [Letter read.] The Committee is of course aware the lands cannot be disposed of for sale without the concurrence of the Government. That concurrence was given in respect of the Wyndham and Strath Taieri Reserves. The secretary to the trustees sent up plans to the Secretary of Education here. They were sent on to Mr. Rolleston, who instructed the Land Department to see that they were in order, and this is the report upon the subject, which gives but an inadequate idea of the trouble we had in putting matters right:—

*"Proposed Sale and Lease of 10,000 Acres of Dunedin High School Endowment, Strath Taieri.*

"MEMORANDUM for the Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS.

"General Crown Lands Office, Wellington, 10th April, 1883.

"REFERRING to your memorandum of the 9th instant; to the letter of the Secretary of the Dunedin