

with the lands under the perpetual-leasing system. The other three Commissioners do not agree with that system.

286. When you say "Give way to the Minister of Land," do you mean that they would give way against their own convictions?—I mean this: That one of those gentlemen was quite in accordance with the views of the other Commissioners until pressure was brought to bear by the Minister of Lands, and then he expressed a different opinion. But I may say, in regard to the other gentleman, that he has all along consistently wished to deal with the lands on the perpetual-leasing system.

287. Would you explain the way in which pressure was brought to bear?—In this way. The Act provides that the lands can only be disposed of in the way recommended by the Commissioners. The Commissioners, in accordance with this provision, made recommendations. The Minister of Lands, said, "No; I won't allow the lands to be dealt with in that way," and suggested that the recommendations should be made in another way; otherwise he would not deal with the lands.

288. But you were aware that you had to get the consent of the Minister of Lands?—Well, that was a secondary consideration. The first provision was that the recommendations should come from the Commissioners. The Minister was simply a consenting party.

289. Has there been any conflict in reference to the system of settlement, as to the Land Board adopting one method of settlement and the Commissioners adopting another?—The School Commissioners, in order not to hang up settlement in the district, endeavoured to deal with a portion of the land under the perpetual-leasing system, but it was understood that this would be an experiment, and that if it did not turn out satisfactorily they would not do so again. The Waste Lands Board were selling under all systems. The Commissioners have also tried all systems, but they are not of opinion that the system of perpetual leasing is conducive to the best interests, either of settlement or of the trust, and consequently they have objected to dealing with any more of the lands under that system. I may say that the Commissioners are aware of the feeling of a great many would-be settlers, and the great desire is to get a freehold.

290. Then you consider you gave the perpetual-leasing system a fair trial?—No; we have not had time yet. It is only about eighteen months ago that we offered these lands. It is impossible to say yet whether it will be successful.

291. Are you still giving effect to that system?—We only used it once—in one block.

292. *Mr. Brown.*] What is the area of your land?—There have been 11,272 acres let on perpetual-leasing system. These have brought an average rent of 2s. 3d an acre. There have been 1,828 acres opened up under the perpetual-leasing system since 1883, for which there have been no applications; so that there are now 1,828 acres open under that system for which there are no leases.

293. What is the total area you administer?—I cannot give you that, but I can tell you the quantity disposed of.

294. You do not know the area?—No.

295. Is it half a million?—No.

296. A quarter of a million?—I think it is something under 100,000 acres. That is, the whole of the endowment. But I do not know the exact amount.

297. What is the area sold?—11,272 acres on perpetual lease; 15,780 acres on deferred payments; and 8,396 acres for cash.

298. About how much did you get for the 8,396 acres sold for cash?—I think £2 10s. an acre on an average.

299. That is about £20,000?—Yes.

300. How do you apply the money?—It is principally invested in mortgage.

301. The whole of it?—Yes.

302. You say principally?—Well, there may be some now awaiting investment.

303. Could you give the Committee any information with regard to the annual expenses—roughly?—There is a return from which you can get the information. I could not state it from memory.

304. How many paid officers have you got?—A secretary and a clerk. The clerk is simply an office-boy.

305. Are the Commissioners paid so much a day for travelling expenses?—The Commissioners who live out of Dunedin are paid railway expenses, but three of the Commissioners reside in Dunedin. Dr. Menzies, I believe, has a free railway pass. Mr. Pearson has been paid travelling expenses.

306. *Mr. Smith.*] Do you not think that the Land Board of Otago would be in possession of equally good local information as to the reserves as the present Commissioners?—Well, the Land Board is a changing body, and is not always composed of the same members. Some of its members have knowledge of one part of the country and some of another. The Board would not have as large a knowledge as the Commissioners.

307. *Mr. Fulton.*] You have been asked a while ago, why you changed the purposes of the trust, that is, of retaining, the endowments—and began selling the land. Would you explain what the reason was for that?—The reason was that in the original Act we were empowered to lease the land. We found, in working, that we could lease pastoral but not agricultural land; and application was made to the Legislature for power to sell a limited area of agricultural land on terms to be approved by the Minister of Lands.

308. Was that Act passed at the instance of the Commissioners or of the public?—Of both. The public complained to the Commissioners that the leases were not satisfactory. The settlers wanted freeholds. The Commissioners took the same view of the matter, and applied to be allowed to sell and invest the proceeds.

309. Were there any complaints in the districts over which the Commissioners had control as to the Commissioners' property stopping settlement?—Yes.