

might be enabled to work their claims. After the Government had made the purchase the clamour increased on the part of the *bonâ fide* miners. These people complained, and with very good reason, that the purchase of the Argyle Water-race by the Government in no way increased the supply of water in the district. It was, in fact, of no advantage to the people there. So far as the benefit derivable from the Argyle Race was concerned it did not matter whether it was owned by the Government or by private individuals. What the people wanted was more water; not a new owner for that already available. Now, with regard to point No. 2, which refers to the improvement and enlargement of the said reservoir and works, the only improvement the Engineer suggests is to raise the wall of the dam; and the people say that during the nine years this dam has been constructed it has never been full but once, so that unless the means of supply to the dam are increased, the carrying-out of the second part of the scheme would be of no benefit at all. The estimated cost of Part 2 of the scheme is £3,500. With reference to Part No. 3, relating to the construction of a further supply-race from the Four-Mile River to the reservoir known as "Haines's Dam," Mr. O'Connor says that the length of the race as now surveyed would be 7 miles 30 chains, and its cost about £7,500. The total cost, therefore, would be about £11,000. It is only by giving effect to that scheme that the people in that district can be benefited. I may say, further, that Charleston was in a declining state until about two years ago, when we had had about two years' solid rainy weather. To show the Committee how much rain fell, I have only to mention that no less than 127 inches of rain fell in Hokitika in one of these years. The effect of this continued wet weather was to erect the Charleston District out of a state of stagnation into one of great prosperity. It is a well known and recognized fact in Charleston that five months' continued dry weather would ruin the district and the people, and that the construction of this race would shut out all chance of such a calamitous result.

2. You told us yesterday that Mr. O'Connor had changed his mind since making his report?—Yes. Mr. O'Connor was under the impression that the purchase of the Argyle Water-race would meet the requirements of the agitators until September last, when he went to Charleston, and was interviewed by a body of miners who were waiting for the water. These people waited on Mr. O'Connor, and assured him that they and numbers of others held areas of ground, to which they had been clinging for a length of time, and which they had continued to work for a miserable pittance, in the hope that some day this water-race would be constructed. They showed him that they had only obtained five and a half heads of water from the Argyle Water-race, while they were willing to take thirty Government heads at £3 per week. They showed him, moreover, that if they had more water they could give employment to twice the number of men now engaged upon their own workings, and that a three or four times greater number would be employed upon new ground, which would be opened up immediately they had the water, or whenever it was known that the race was to be opened. They showed him also that the works upon their various areas would afford constant employment to a large number of men for from fifteen to twenty-five years to come. I may inform the Committee that, taking in Sardine and Ballarat Terraces, and Charleston and Fenian Flats, the total area of ground affected and rendered workable by this race would be four square miles, and the whole of this ground would be commanded by water if the Four-Mile Race were constructed. A large number of the men who are now only doing two or three days' work each week would be employed constantly, and they would be able to earn from £7 to £9 per week, instead of about £2 10s., as at present. I am informed that the effect of Mr. O'Connor's interview with the miners was, that he reported to Government that he had greatly modified his views as expressed in his report. He concluded that the construction of this race would be a profitable undertaking to the country, and that the effect would be, not only to put the men in a position to make more money, but it would also open up a large area of new ground, and give employment to a large number of other men. The effect of Mr. O'Connor's last report to the Government was, that the Hon. Mr. Macandrew, as Minister for Public Works, instructed the Engineer to place a sum on the estimates for the construction of the Four-Mile Water-race. When Sir George Grey, Mr. Macandrew, and other members of the Ministry were down at Westport in 1878, they promised that when the two-million loan was raised, they would take care that this water-race was one of the first works proceeded with. That was Sir George Grey's promise to the people of that place. I may say also that so anxious are the people to have the race constructed, and so sure are they of the reasonableness of the request, that the County Council, in 1878, informed the Government that if they would construct the race, they (the County Council) would undertake to pay the interest on half the cost; and on the 30th August, 1878, Mr. Knowles, the Under Secretary for Public Works, wrote to the Chairman of the Buller County Council to the following effect:—"Sir,—Referring to your recent interview with the Hon. the Minister for Public Works, relating to the construction of the Four-Mile Water-race, I am directed by the Minister to inform you that the Government agree to comply with your request, and that the vote of last year will be renewed; the work to be proceeded with on condition that the interest on half the cost of construction shall be paid by the Buller County, and that any profits which may accrue from the race, over and above the cost of its maintenance and management, shall be applied to recouping the outlay by the colony, and thereafter it shall become County revenue." The Buller County Council accepted these terms, and I presume it was in consequence of that agreement, as well as from a conviction of the desirability of the work from a colonial point of view, that Mr. Macandrew instructed the Engineer to place the necessary money on the estimates. To show how rich the district is, I may inform the Committee that between the 1st April, 1866, and the 31st March, 1879, the total amount of gold procured in the district was 321,980 ounces, valued at £1,287,920. This gold was obtained in Charleston District alone.

3. *Mr. Brown.*] You have given the quantity for the last thirteen years. Could you not give us the figures for the last three years?—I have not got them. The yield of gold has been maintained during the last several years, and the miners are making Charleston their permanent home. I went down there and saw several of the miners, and I found that eleven owners of claims, instead of employing twenty-four men, were prepared to give work to forty-eight if they got the water-race, and that they would take eighteen and a half heads of water for sluicing purposes. The