

While criticising so unfavourably the existing state of the surveys, we are far from wishing to throw discredit on the officers of the department. We feel that they have had to work under great disadvantages, arising both from outside pressure and from the complicated nature of the land laws. We have confidence that, if the proper responsibility is thrown upon them, they will willingly and efficiently carry out reforms in the directions we have indicated.

Officers of department not solely responsible for mistakes.

The fact has been forcibly brought before us by all the evidence taken that the value of the remaining portion of the Crown estate has been greatly over-estimated. In thus placing before your Excellency somewhat at length the evils which arise from an unintelligent interpretation of the existing land laws of the colony, we are mainly influenced by a desire to draw attention to the fact that little or no reduction can be made in an expensive staff till the evils themselves are put an end to with unflinching determination.

Crown estate over-valued.

CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT.

In the Customs we find that there has been great reluctance to reduce any existing staff which a removal of business from their port of residence has left with very little to do. Our inquiries into this department have been very superficial, but enough to find that at some ports expensive officers are maintained where they have no proportionately active or important occupation. If it is necessary for revenue purposes to retain so many officers at ports where vessels call so unfrequently, it is evidently desirable that such officers should be utilized for the collection of other taxes and the performance of other public duties when possible.

Reform needed.

With regard to the returns from this department, we find the value of exports is ascertained by obtaining from merchants a statement of values. Nothing could be more unreliable than this. There being no pecuniary reasons for accuracy, the statements are furnished in a careless manner, but with a natural tendency to over-estimate, as every firm wishes to appear as a large exporter when the ship's list of cargo is published. Much more reliable information would be obtained if shippers were required to state quantities only and the values were made out monthly or quarterly by the Customs Department, on the basis of the actual average market price of the articles.

Unreliable returns.

POST AND TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENTS.

Some economy and public convenience may be effected by the complete union of Telegraphic and Postal services under one head, combining the duties of the two services in one building, and in country districts in one office. The evidence on this subject was very unanimous. Considerable progress has already been made in this direction. In these departments we see much evidence of a desire to keep down expenditure and to promote the public convenience and interest, and have therefore not thought it wise to devote any large portion of our attention to the suggestion of possible reforms, where the heads of the departments are so evidently working in the desired direction. We would, however, suggest for consideration whether, it would not be a wise concession to the public to discontinue the practice of requiring telegrams passing through any post office to be stamped. The loss of direct receipts would be small, and would probably be fully recouped by the consequent increase in number of telegrams.

Union of Post and Telegraph Departments.

The double inspection of the country offices by an officer from each department is an unnecessary expense. The duty should in future be performed by one officer well versed in the business of both departments.

Inspection.

One defect in the practical working of the Telegraph Department has been brought prominently under the notice of the Commission. The best operators are necessarily retained at the transmitting and more important stations, without getting their superiority recognized by any increase of salary, whilst the less skilful operators are transferred to country stations, where their work is far less severe, and their salary often supplemented by the combination of some other service. This is capable of easy remedy, as the operators can be subjected to tests of skill that will be perfectly impartial, and their title to increased pay can literally be decided by machinery.

Skilful telegraphists.