

more trouble I have the more I charge," I apprehend it would not tend to popularise the office, because in some estates the charges would be enormous, necessitated by the amount of work cast upon the office.

50. There is a charge made by the Crown under the Land Transfer Act, on the *ad valorem* principle, of  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the pound, which comes into this office. Do you think that charge is excessive? It is made *ad valorem* on land passing through the Land Transfer Act. Do you think that half-penny charged by the colony is excessive? In your experience of the working of that account, looking at the volume of the account, do you think that the charge imposed is excessive?—I do not think so.

51. Do you carry in your mind the balance standing to the credit of that account in your books?—Yes; it is something large—between £80,000 and £90,000.

52. Very few claims have been made on it?—Very few; none of any great magnitude.

53. Well, this fund has grown to an enormous amount in a very few years. Does that not show that very much less than  $\frac{1}{4}$ d., according to the value of properties, would still form a sufficient guarantee fund, looking at the risks that have to be run?—I am not quite clear, without looking the matter up, for how many years the colony is liable.

54. It is perhaps liable for ever. Looking at the past history and progress of the account, is it likely that any claims approaching even a small percentage on the balance now standing in the books of this office are likely to be made against the fund?—I should say the likelihood is not great; but it is absolutely impossible to say when a large claim may have to be met out of that fund. It is perfectly true the experience of the past leads one to suppose that large claims will not be made; but it is impossible to say they will not, especially if the colony is for ever liable for any claims that may be made.

55. Have you ever taken any steps to make an estimate of the average value of particular properties which have caused that fund, that have gone through the Land Transfer Act annually?—I have not. That is out of my department altogether.

56. Perhaps, if you looked into this question, and had some estimate of the kind made, it would give you a better idea to form an opinion as to the probable or possible risk of claims in future, and the extent of them?—I will do so if you wish it. I have always held that I have nothing to do with the working of the Land Transfer Office. I am merely the custodian of the fund. I may mention, as being *à propos*, that we pay our agents exactly half what they receive. The remuneration of agents is the moiety of the amount received on receipts by them.

57. In other words, you divide commissions with your agents?—Yes. It happened in Nelson that a miser died. He was a man who denied himself even the necessities of life, and lived in a very miserable kind of hut. When the man died the agent went to make the usual inspection with the policeman, and found stowed away in a crevice of the wall of the hut a fixed-deposit receipt for five thousand some hundred pounds. The trouble of the agent was slight comparatively in that estate, his remuneration was very heavy in that estate; but in nineteen cases out of twenty of small intestacies the agents are not paid sufficiently, nor is the office paid sufficiently in small estates. I mention this as an instance where it may be fairly said that the agents must take the fat with the lean, as it is called. Some estates pay fairly well, others miserably badly. I would not say that the fees of the office should be reduced because of such an estate as that. The Head Office made  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of that large amount for very little trouble, but in the great majority of cases the trouble is greater than the remuneration. While I am on the question of charges, I would say that about a year ago—perhaps two years ago—I moved the Colonial Treasurer to reduce the charges then made on four items of receipt—life-insurance policies, fixed-deposit receipts, moneys in banks, and the fourth was where we simply received moneys without realisation of property. The charges used to be the same exactly as made on realisation. It appeared to me to be a hardship on the estates, and the office was put to very little trouble drawing moneys from banks or getting life-insurance policies cashed; and the Colonial Treasurer authorised the reduction which is now allowed by Order in Council. That one action on my part caused the office a diminution of revenue last year to the extent of £817. It shows what the effect is—£817 was the result of that reduction of charge. Since then the office has reduced the charge for collection of rents. Ever since Mr. Woodward was appointed, in 1873, the office has charged 5 per cent. for the collection of rents. That is to say, it has paid 5 per cent. to somebody to collect, and it has charged for itself 5 per cent.—that is, 10 per cent. on the collection of rents. It appeared to me that was a very high charge, and it has been reduced by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. That is to say, I have said to the agents, "Instead of charging 5 per cent. for the collection of rents, you must charge  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent." Receiving rents is ordinary receipts. It is all 5 per cent. Now, there are some cases of old agents who have not been so instructed. In those cases the agent still receives his 5 per cent. for the collection of the rents—5 per cent., and the office  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.; so that in no case are rents charged by the office at more than  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., whilst in many districts rents are treated as ordinary receipts, the charge for which is 5 per cent.

58. Could you name those agents?—They are at Dunedin, Invercargill, Oamaru, Woodville, Wanganui, Palmerston North, and Tauranga.

59. Mr. Loughrey.] Then, the people in those districts pay  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. for collection, while other people, under the new regulations, pay only 5 per cent?—Yes; that is so.

60. Why is it so?—That is being remedied in the appointment of every new agent, who is told his predecessor has received  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., but he will only receive 5 per cent., or  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., as the case may be. Under the old system, the charge was very heavy.