

claim for rates against portions of these reserves, and the Government referred the matter to me. I wrote a reply, of which this is a portion: "The recovery of the rates is, I think, impracticable, and, this being the case, I would not be justified in promoting a claim for the amount against the estate which it is my duty to protect. The letter of the Clifton County Council is tantamount to an application to the Government to interpose its authority to compel a private party, who is represented by the Public Trustee, to pay to another private party—the Council—a claim which may be found unjust and impracticable to enforce. I would suggest a reply to the Clifton County Council that their letter has been communicated to the Public Trustee, but that, with regard to the claim sent to him by the Council for rates, the course which he may take affects the private property of a trust, in the administration of which the Public Trustee must exercise his discretion, and that, as the Government could not justly interfere in such administration, the Clifton County Council must be left to deal with the Public Trustee as with a private party." And that is the whole principle of my administration with regard to rates. I will say this about Native rates, however, that, although it may be reasonable where a block of land is producing a large income sufficient to pay rates that the Native owners should pay rates, there is, on the other hand, a danger of a sort of indirect confiscation by means of rates. In regard to the lands which cannot be leased, the difficulty of levying rates on these is that you must either load the land for the future, and deter its settlement by that load, or that you must go for the purpose of those rates to alienation of the land, or that you must go to the Consolidated Fund. It is, I think, absurd to talk of rating Native lands unless these alternatives are considered. But, as to rating Native lands generally, there is the danger that through the rates the land itself may be confiscated. Legal proceedings which I have taken on behalf of the Natives in Taranaki show there is very little consideration for the Natives. I am not reflecting on the local bodies themselves, but am simply stating, in the abstract, what may be a possible consequence.

As to fencing, my administration in regard to that is on the same principle as with regard to rates—I will not fence except in compliance with the Fencing Act. It is absurd to expect me, acting as a trustee, to pay for fences run through bush from one tree to another without regard to the survey-line and the Fencing Act.

As to roading, that I should say is a matter regulated by the condition on which I offer the leases. I offer lands for lease on public competition by tender with or without conditions about roads. If I make no conditions about roads, I make no roads. In regard to the case mentioned by Mr. Smith where I am making roads, I am doing so because the making of roads was a condition of leasing the lands—was promised prior to leasing. I should not be justified in spending 1s. on roads where I had not made the expenditure a condition of the leases.

Now, as to the spreading of gorse. All over New Zealand there has been an enormous spreading of gorse on idle land. In these reserves it is very bad. Natives are notoriously slow in clearing their land of gorse. They have received notice after notice from me that if they do not clear the land I will lease it. Time is of no moment to the Natives, and I must allow them a long time to consider these notices. If I want to make the administration of these reserves successful, I must not come down to the Natives with a peremptory notice to clear their lands in a few days, weeks, or even months, if I am not to lease them, for if I were to lease I would in some cases perhaps take away from them all that remained for a residence. The case which Mr. Wells quoted of a neighbouring piece of land occupied by Natives not being cleared of gorse goes rather to prove that the administration is concerned as to these things. Notice was sent to the Natives, and my reserves agent there, who is very attentive to his business, states: [Letter put in. Appendix H]. If, as Mr. Wells states, the land has not been cleared, it is simply another instance of the neglect of the Natives, though that letter would show that they were doing something in the direction required by Mr. Wells.

I have already answered the objection that lands were not leased by stating that a very large area indeed has been leased. Although the work is of my own department, I think it wonderful that nearly 40,000 acres should have been leased by the office administered by myself, and that all this land should have been let in small farms. It was only the other day that I leased upwards of 5,000 acres to upwards of thirty settlers, and during the next six months I expect to let 6,000 acres more, though one result of that may be to add by these settlers to the number of petitioners.

With regard to the valuations, I have already explained that it was properly and strictly in accordance with the principle of discretion in the administration of the Public Trustee that he should fix the valuation without appeal—that if there should be an appeal his discretion would be transferred to valuers and arbitrators. But I will go into the question of the merit of the valuation itself, because there have been so many reflections on this work, and I will show that they are undeserved reflections. The petitioners have endeavoured to support the position which they have taken up by an attempt to prove that Mr. Morton Jones, whom I employed to inspect and report on the lands, was, as a valuer, incompetent for the service. In my report, which was laid before the General Assembly during the session of 1893 (Appendix to Journals of House of Representatives, H.—11, 1893), I stated as follows: "In selecting a person competent to properly inspect the properties, and to furnish me with accurate report upon them, my desire was to secure one who, without property in, and not a resident of, the district of the reserves, should combine with experience acquired by a long residence in the colony a knowledge as well of business generally as of the character and value of the land comprised in the reserves, and on whom I could depend for information necessary to a reliable estimate of value; and I found these qualifications in Mr. Morton Jones, who is carrying out the work with an economy of importance to the lessees, and with general satisfaction both to them and to the Native owners. In his inspection of the properties which he is required to value, Mr. Jones is accompanied by Mr. George Broughton (Ngarangi Katitia), whose employment in this work has inspired the Natives with confidence, and precluded the suspicion with which they would certainly have regarded a valuation made by any one not of their own race or choice." Now, by what are we to judge of the compet-