

I have never seen one raise a fire yet. I think they are pretty careful. I live only a short distance from a Maori settlement, and I know of only one fire accident they had, when a whare was burnt down. I have lived there for about fourteen years.

592. Your experience of the Maoris, then, is that they do not set up fires?—I have never seen them set up a fire.

593. You are an old railway-man yourself, are you not?—Yes. I was for many years in the service of the Midland Railway Company in England.

594. Do you think that in this country the danger from fires is great on account of the narrow track?—Yes. I have never heard of fire from an engine in England.

595. They throw the ashes on the space beside the line?—Yes. Of course, the space is wider than it is here. It is 4 ft. or 6 ft.—a space the men here have not got to work with.

596. But they do throw the ashes out here?—Yes.

597. *Mr. Cooper.*] When was it that you were working with Mr. Potter?—Sixteen years ago.

598. When did you leave him?—I stopped with him for two years.

599. Then it is fourteen years ago when you saw the ashes thrown out?—Yes.

600. Have you ever seen a Maori smoking?—Yes, most decidedly.

601. And you say they are careful not to set their whares on fire?—Yes.

602. Have you ever seen a Maori set the scrub on fire?—No.

603. Have you not seen them fire the scrub when they are clearing?—No; they are clearing four miles of scrub up in my district now, and they are not burning.

604. But they will burn it next season?—No, I do not think so.

605. Have you had any experience of Maori gum-diggers?—No.

606. In what capacity were you employed in the service of the Midland Railway Company?—I was the horse-keeper—I was manager of the stables; and for four years I was in the traffic branch.

607. Were you a guard?—No.

WILLIAM YOUNG, Jun., recalled.

608. *Mr. Oliphant.*] Have you stripped 100 acres recently of a similar growth to that destroyed in 1896?—Yes, an exact 100 acres.

609. And what does the bark yield?—114 tons, in addition to a small quantity a year or two previously in the way of thinning. The 100 acres is of mixed quality—about two-thirds fairly good and one-third very bad with scarcely any trees on it.

610. Would it compare as an average with that destroyed?—I think it would fairly do so. I think the bad part on this plantation would be worse than any part planted on the other, and that the good part would be about as good as we have.

## WELLINGTON.

MONDAY, 12TH MARCH, 1900.

HENRY PENN, SWORN.

1. *Mr. Poynton.*] What are you, Mr. Penn?—Inspector of Permanent-way.

2. You were in charge of the permanent-way at Rakaia and Hinds when certain fires occurred?—Yes.

3. Do you remember the fire by which Mr. Gardiner's sheep and other property were destroyed?—Yes, I remember it well.

4. Where were you then?—When I heard of the fire I was at Ashburton.

5. Did you see the fire during its progress?—After getting a telegram that there was a fire at Rakaia I went there, but it had by that time, practically speaking, burnt out.

6. Can you give any idea of the damage that was done?—I think you will find that in my report. My report is as follows:—

Memorandum for Resident Engineer, Christchurch.

Ashburton, 4th January, 1897.

SIR,—

In re Fire at 42½ Mile.

I beg to report that a fire started on the railway at or about 12.30, at above-mentioned place. It started on the dry grass or fence on the land leased by Mr. Elliott from the department. It burnt about a mile wide, and went as far as Mr. White's and the Acton Station, about three miles and a quarter from the railway. As far as I can learn at present, Mr. Gardiner, living near Rakaia, has lost about three hundred ewes and lambs, and 40 acres of oats. I will go to Rakaia by the first train this morning, and will report any further damage that I hear of. I may state that the wind was blowing a strong nor'-wester at the time.

7. You went over the ground next day, did you?—Yes.

8. And can you give any idea as to the damage done?—Mr. Gardiner lost three hundred ewes and lambs, and about 40 acres of oats.

9. Any fences?—Yes, the fences were burnt—gorse fences.

10. You had not seen them before, and you could form no idea as to their value, I suppose?—That is so.

11. With regard to the regulations for the preventing of fires in the way of burning off loose inflammable material, how were they observed on that section?—We always burnt off everything when we could get the chance.

12. Do you remember whether there was any dry grass about that particular place?—There was inflammable material on the land at the time. It was land leased to Mr. Elliott by the Railway Department, and there was some dry grass on it. I think the fire started in that grass or in the gorse fence.

13. Having leased the land you had no power to burn his grass?—No, we had no power.