

RICHARD EVANS examined. (No. 3.)

44. *The Chairman.*] You are a farmer?—Yes.

45. How long?—Thirty years.

46. Where at?—My home is in Kaiapoi, but I could not tell you the number of places I farm at. Kaiapoi is my home generally.

47. What amount of land are you farming now?—Four thousand five hundred acres—a good deal of it sheep-country.

48. Mixed farming?—Yes.

49. Will you make a statement?—Yes. With reference to the proposed accommodation, I think the Bill is a reasonable one so far as concerns the accommodation provided round the homesteads. I do not admit that there is any necessity for the Bill, but at the same time it will settle a vexed question. It is a reasonable thing that we should have to provide 240 cubic feet of air-space at the homesteads. With reference to camp-work, I am sure that if we sent out whares and tents with the required air-space you would find the men gathering together at night for the sake of the warmth and company. There are practical men here, and I do not think you want to stop the settlement of the country. I suppose I employ an average of thirty hands, and a difficulty I have met with is the dirty habits of some of the men—especially swaggers. The permanent men will not allow such men to be in the same place. I have only 120 acres of land where I live, and I find that we feed and lodge on an average ten of such men a week. Possibly there is a reason for that. Perhaps I am a little bit soft, and live a short distance from a township. The greatest difficulty I find is that the permanent hands will not have this class of man near them. I gave a lodging to a man on one occasion, and he would not, actually, sleep in a room where my son had slept for fifteen years—he was afraid to—and he had to go and sleep with my other men. A man came to me and said, “If you do not get rid of this man I cannot stop in your place.” I had to take a lodging for the man, and kept him for eight days until he found a ship, and afterwards I found that he did not go away in the ship, but stopped in Christchurch. We do not wish to put such a class of man in the same category as our permanent men.

50. You struck the “social pest” there?—Yes, I have struck a lot of them. Last Saturday my daughter had to give breakfast to four of such men, and we dare not leave our place without one of our own men in it. With reference to the regular hands, I think if the Bill is passed the men ought to be compelled to keep their places clean. I know a man who has a little station and who built a bath for his men, put in a looking-glass and a piano in their place, and what happened is too dirty to mention. When some of the men were leaving the place they did in the bath what I would not care to say. The Bill will decide a vexed question, but the men ought to be made to keep their places clean.

51. Is there a feeling of trepidation about the conduct of some of these men towards women on a large farm?—Perhaps.

52. Within your knowledge?—Yes.

53. On the whole, in some of these isolated places it is not advisable to leave them without having a trustworthy man about?—That is a fact, sir.

54. Have any cases occurred where women have been intimidated?—Yes, where men come and demand accommodation.

55. They do not ask for it in the most courteous way?—They simply demand it, and in the most insolent manner. There is a feeling that if they are refused they will burn your place down. They demand it with as much right as if you were buying a ton of coal, and they go away from your door with remarks of filthy insolence.

56. *Mr. Alison.*] You say that the provisions of the Bill with reference to the accommodation under clause 11 would be satisfactory so far as concerns the workmen employed near the homestead?—Yes.

57. Assuming the men to be working away from the homestead, do you think the provisions of the Bill would apply harshly towards the employer?—Yes. In many cases I do not think it could be done.

58. The Bill will apply to all parts of a farm just as much as to the surroundings of a homestead?—I do not think you could make the Bill apply to chaff-cutting, threshing, and things like that, where you have to find a tent for the men. We read the Bill as providing 240 ft. of air-space in such cases, but that has been explained by Mr. Millar.

59. But supposing that a number of men are employed at a distant part of a farm, far away from the homestead, should there not be proper provision made for them?—Yes; but you could not always give them 240 ft. of air-space.

60. But a waterproof tent would be satisfactory?—Yes. Nobody lives in tents in Canterbury in winter-time.

61. Do the Committee understand you to say you would be satisfied with the Bill if provision were made to compel the men to keep their places in a cleanly condition?—Yes, round about the homestead.

62. *Mr. Poole.*] Do you know of any cases in North Canterbury where the farmers do not treat their men properly with respect to accommodation?—I really do not know. I am told of cases that are bad, but I have never seen them.

63. From what you have heard, do you think there is any justification for bringing a measure like this before the House with the idea of putting it on the statute-book?—I think the question would be settled, so long as it could be made workable.

64. You do not think it would be a hardship to employers at the present time who are trying to be fair to their men?—No.

65. *Mr. Hardy.*] You say the Bill should only apply to the home farm where the men are working?—Yes. Generally speaking, you bring the teams home on Saturday night.