

would be far too expensive in comparison with the area of land that would receive any benefit. There are only about two thousand acres in the swamp. To show you that what I am saying is quite correct, let me quote the report that was signed by Mr. C. Napier Bell, Mr. Higginson, and Mr. Blair. The Taieri River is a very serious problem, and it is one which has been considered by a large number of people who have not been able to recommend anything that is likely to give relief to East Taieri. The settlers near the river who are rated by the Drainage Board believe that nothing can be done; and they object to being included in the drainage district and being rated against their will when there does not seem to be any prospect of anything being done. The Drainage Board's reply is "How do you know?"

We have not decided upon a scheme. Several engineers have considered this question during the last twenty years, and the report of the three engineers I have just mentioned is as follows: "We therefore reluctantly recommend that from Outram Railway-bridge, as far as Greytown, the Silverstream area be left open, and on the other side of the river that the existing banks be maintained in their present position and at their present level." That is to say, that the West Taieri bank which protects the lower part of the plain from flooding should be maintained; and it will be maintained—it has been there for the last thirty years. But nothing can be done for the East Taieri. That is the conclusion that those three engineers came to. Some questions have been asked about the banking of the river on the East Taieri side; but the member who asked them does not know the district, or he would know that that is improbable. There is an immense volume of water flowing into the plain; the fall is great down to the point where it enters the plain, although from there on it is comparatively level. Such an immense volume of water coming down in flood-time cannot get out of the gorge quickly enough. The tide also affects its flow, so that a bank on the East Taieri side would never do. If they put a bank there the river would probably break through on the western side. We have left things as they were ever since the West Taieri bank was erected, which, I think, was thirty years ago. Now, of course, we do not know what the other side will have to say about this matter, but I can tell you one or two grounds on which they have objected. One of them, I understand, is that the river is silting up, that it may be necessary to dredge it, and that that would do good to East Taieri as well as West Taieri. Well, if any good were done to East Taieri it could only be to the land included in this very small portion near the river. But, curiously enough, in 1870 Mr. J. T. Thompson was sent to inquire into this very question of the silting-up of the river, as it had been stated that the silting-up would interfere with the railway; and his report is probably one of the best that has been written so far. He went into it very exhaustively, and came to the conclusion that the river would not silt up, but that it would always maintain about its present level. He said it might alter its course. It has altered its course undoubtedly in the past; but it would always find another course and maintain its present level, because the fall is greater down to where it enters the plain, although it is very slight from there on. I have no doubt that if the West Taieri bank is maintained it will not be possible for the river to alter its course, and that means that it will cut a channel and wash away the silt.

*Mr. Witty:* Not alter its course from east to west?

*Witness:* No. It flows down towards the bank: that is the direction in which it is going all the time. I have only mentioned that point to show that it has been considered for the last thirty or forty years, and still the river goes on in the same course and with practically the same results. The record flood was away back in the year 1868, so that the same state of affairs has existed for the last thirty or forty years. That is one objection. The other is this—and I think this is the objection that Mr. Shand takes principally: that this Silverstream is not a natural stream, but an artificial cut, and therefore the people on the higher level should be in this Board to help to clean it out and generally to keep it in order. Our reply to that is that the artificial cut was made not by the landowners originally, but by the Provincial Government. I might say that originally the plain from the river up to about Mosgiel (which is about half-way) was a large swamp, and it was impossible to go anywhere on the lower land except in a boat, as it consisted of Maori heads, rushes, and water to a considerable depth. We have representatives from the North Taieri, above Mosgiel, which was the lowest point at which the plain could be crossed. The Provincial Government constructed a road across the plain at about Mosgiel, and, as I have already said, the natural fall of the plain is towards the river, so the result of constructing that road was to dam back any water that was coming down the natural channels. After they constructed the road, therefore, the Provincial Government made a cut which is now the Silverstream. That was the first artificial cut. It has been made now, I suppose, for thirty years. The North Taieri people, who were compelled by legislation to spend £2 per acre in improving the land, spent it partly in fencing and partly in draining, and they drained into the Government cut. The Silverstream is a continuous cut down to the River. Another point made by the other side is that because the people on the higher lands are sending down water to the lower lands, they ought to be included in the drainage district to help to get rid of the water, and that is the only point that is worth considering. The net result of the cutting of that stream and the consequent drainage of the whole plain is that, instead of there being now a swamp or bog, they have cultivated fields down there, so that it is difficult to see how they have suffered any detriment. The whole plain has been improved by this direct stream which runs down to the river. The contention that because people on the higher lands drain into it therefore they should pay something towards the drainage of the lower part of the plain is in my opinion absurd. In any case, that state of affairs has existed for over thirty years, and some of the settlers now in North Taieri and East Taieri have purchased their lands for anything from £25 to £30 an acre because those lands were drained or high and dry. They have paid that special price for it on that account. Some of the people down below bought their lands knowing that the cut was there at the time. Not only is the legal position in favour of the higher people, but in equity I consider that everything is in their favour. In any case, it is a new idea that people who