

32. Did Mr. Douglas lease the land alongside of you?—Yes.

33. Did the gravel up above come on his land?—Yes, but it did not flood over in Mr. Morrison's time on Mr. Douglas's land—he used to grow crops.

34. Did not the water trouble Mr. Douglas?—That was later than Mr. Morrison's time.

35. But before it commenced to trouble you?—Yes.

36. But the flood came along, and put the flow of water on to your land?—Yes.

37. Was that a matter that could have been foreseen? Did you not take that chance when you bought the low-lying land?—There was an open watercourse at a distance of $4\frac{1}{2}$ chains, and I thought that was safe enough.

38. Then, when the trouble arose with you it commenced with Douglas?—That is what drove the Morrisons out of it—when the troubles began.

JAMES THOMAS GIBSON examined. (No. 16.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A farmer in the West Taieri District.

2. *Mr. MacGregor.*] And you are Chairman of the Taieri Drainage Board?—Yes.

3. How long have you been on the Board?—Since its constitution.

4. Will you make a statement to the Committee?—Yes. I have only been Chairman of the Board since the election in November last. Previous to that Mr. Barron, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, was Chairman, and when he retired Mr. Shand was elected Chairman, and I followed Mr. Shand. I should like to say at the beginning that when the Royal Commission took evidence in Mosgiel, Dunedin, and other places they gave ample opportunity for all and sundry to come forward and state their objections or otherwise in the matter of forming a Drainage Board to control the drainage matters throughout the Taieri. Of course, at that time the principal part of my evidence was touching the matters within the West Taieri, where I reside at the present time, although I was born on the north side. Well, the main feature of my evidence touching the questions at issue—namely, the severance of East Taieri and the question of separate Boards—was whether it was advisable to have separate Boards for the control of the east and west, or whether a combined Board should control the whole area. The evidence that I gave on that occasion was that I favoured separate Boards, and, if the conditions as placed before me at that time when my opinion was asked were the same to-day, I should still hold to that opinion. I was amongst the first to give evidence before that Commission. I was concerned with another case on drainage in Mosgiel, and during the time I was there I was asked to go up and give evidence, and that is the reason why I was amongst those who gave their evidence there. At that time the question of the control of the east and west under separate Boards had not been taken into consideration very much by the Commission, but of course when they brought it up prominently they suggested the nomination of three Government men to take seats on the Board for all time, thus holding the balance between the two districts.

5. Who suggested that?—The Commission. That was not suggested during the first day or two, and I assume that most of the witnesses had given their evidence stating that they favoured separate Boards for each side, the reason given being that there would be strife and conflict on both sides under one Board. Now, seeing that Government nominees are appointed to the Board permanently, and taking into consideration the positions they occupy, every one of them professional men occupying important positions in the Government service, as Mr. MacGregor has pointed out, the mere fact of the Board being so constituted is a safeguard against that conflict which must otherwise of necessity have arisen. That is why I altered my opinion and said that it was safer for both sides to have joint control under a Board as constituted. I might further say this in that respect: that, assuming there were not separate Boards, there would be four members on one side and two on the other, and of necessity the West Taieri would have the larger number of members, and would be in a position to overrule the East Taieri; but the fact of the Government nominees being on the Board would prevent any such unjust course taking place. It has been asked by one or two members of the Committee how the accounts are adjusted; but under the Act there is no possibility of any injustice being done in that respect, because not only the maintenance accounts, but also the loan-moneys or money likely to be expended for works on each side is put down, and the charges against each side are kept separate. The cost of the clerical and engineering work is borne *pro rata* according to the area of the different subdivisions and the time expended thereon. So I think that was a wise and very just provision that the Royal Commission suggested, and which has been given effect to. There is another matter I wish to refer to briefly, and that is the petition that is before the Committee from the owners of the land on the east side of the Taieri River below Allanton and extending to Henley—the petition of Mr. Palmer and others, which has been referred to as the Maori petition. I might say that a petition from Mr. Palmer and others came before one of the meetings of the Board some considerable time ago, asking, I think, for reclassification into Class “D.” Of course, the Board had no power to do anything else—they could not free them from the district. The matter was discussed pretty freely, and the majority of the Board, at all events, if they were not unanimous, were in favour of that being given effect to, only that it would entail a reclassification of the whole district. We could not confine our classification to this portion we were dealing with. The Act is specific on that point—we should have to reclassify the whole district; and I have no doubt that will be given effect to in the near future.

6. *The Chairman.*] But what rule did the Board proceed on with regard to classification?—We must classify our lands on the basis of the works done and the benefits received.

7. But there is land which came under the classification which is 50 ft. and 100 ft. above water-level at high flood?—Yes. The reason of that is this: that those lands are dependant on their drainage from the maintenance of streams into which they drain, which originally flooded their lands. If the Board does not control those streams, then the silting-up and blocking process begins first at the outlet end and then gradually proceeds up the stream.