

94. At all events, we will take the report of your evidence at the Commission. It states, "Mr. Gibson did not favour the amalgamation of all the Drainage Boards; he objected to taking in the East Taieri. He would confine the west side under one drainage body, and let the east side control its own affairs." That was your opinion then?—Yes.

95. And the addition of three Government nominees to the Board has caused you to change your mind on the subject since the drainage district was formed?—That is so.

96. Now, with regard to a conflict of interest between the two sides of the plain: You say that a conflict of interest existed?—It probably would.

97. I understood you to say so in reply to a member of the Committee?—The question put to me was this: Was there not a conflict of opinion between the members of the Board as at present constituted?

98. You agreed with that suggestion because it would do away with the conflict between the West and East Taieri?—I was always speaking of the possibility of conflict.

99. Of conflict which did not exist?—The possibility of it existing.

100. Do you admit that no conflict existed before this Taieri District was formed?—There was always an element of conflict existing in the controlling of it.

101. Was there any conflict between the people of the East Taieri and those of the West Taieri?—I have no knowledge of it.

102. You have no knowledge of any conflict or ill feeling between the East Taieri and the West Taieri?—Previous to the Royal Commission?

103. Yes?—That is correct. The matter never cropped up in discussion.

104. But in writing that letter to the Under-Secretary, is it a fact that you wish the Committee to believe that there was conflict and ill feeling?—No one tries to dispute that conflict exists now in connection with drainage matters.

105. But do you wish the Committee to believe that there was ill feeling existing before the Royal Commission sat?—I have no knowledge of any ill feeling existing before the Royal Commission sat.

106. That letter which was written to the Under-Secretary was drawn up by you, Mr. David Shand, and Mr. Kempshall?—That is so.

107. Why do you say in that letter, "The probabilities are that if the suggested severance were carried out there would be a repetition of the old evils of divided authority and conflicting interests, with antagonistic schemes for fighting the common enemy, the river—the very evils which the special Act was intended to prevent"?—Because we were covering this ground taken up by the Commission which established our existence.

108. You put that forward as a ground for keeping the East Taieri in, did you not?—Yes.

109. But you knew it was not true?—That ill feeling did exist at the time we wrote that report.

110. Then I take it that all the ill feeling that has arisen is since this district was formed?—Yes, I have said so. None existed, to my knowledge, previously.

111. Then, taking the object which the Royal Commission had in view, their report has brought about the very thing which they say they wished to avoid?—Evidently; yes, I admit that.

112. That was their only object in making a united district?—No, you are getting beside the question. Their object was evidently to constitute a Board with sufficient powers to deal with all problems connected with the Taieri Plain.

113. In regard to the gravel in the stream, you heard Mr. McGregor speaking eloquently about Mr. Couston's good qualities?—Yes.

114. I suppose you pin your faith on Mr. Couston, do you not?—Yes.

115. And Mr. Couston has a knowledge of the stream as County Engineer?—Yes, he has a knowledge of the plain generally.

116. Do I understand that you agreed with Mr. MacGregor when he said that the evidence given by Mr. Gow was absurd?—I have no recollection of that.

117. At all events, do you agree with this: Mr. Couston says, "The gravel brought down by the Silverstream gathered principally between Leishman's and the Mosgiel Borough intake"—I do not agree with that portion of his statement.

118. But you will admit that that agrees with Mr. Gow's evidence?—Yes.

119. You referred to your father?—Yes.

120. He is an old and respected settler in that district?—Yes.

121. And he also gave evidence before the Royal Commission?—I believe so, yes.

122. And he said then, "Gravel coming from the North Taieri settlers' lands was now a thing of the past"?—I do not agree with that, because even the land which he occupies jointly with my brother, which he must have overlooked, is washed down to a great extent by every flood nowadays.

123. At all events, we have statements by Mr. Couston and your father bearing out what Mr. Gow says?—Yes. Mr. Douglas, who was Chairman of the Taieri County Council for some time, is here, and he will establish the fact that that was a gravel bed from the Blackbridge four or five miles up the valley of the Silverstream.

124. The Silverstream is practically a straight cut right through to the river?—No, it was not cut naturally through to the river.

125. You mentioned the names of several people in connection with the amalgamation of those districts, and you said they had ample opportunity of giving evidence?—Yes.

126. As a matter of fact, did those men whose names you have mentioned not give evidence before the Royal Commission, and every one of them said he did not want a united district?—The only point I was establishing by making that statement was that they had ample opportunity of stating their objections.