

33. About £5 10s. per acre?—Yes. My improvements at that time were over the £5 per acre talked about, and that was the reason I wished to convert.

34. So that you are in this position: you have really 8s. per acre from your sublessee?—Yes, that is so.

35. With a perpetual right of renewal?—Yes.

36. On the unimproved value?—Yes, 5 per cent. on the unimproved value.

37. *Cross-examined by Mr. Bell.*] I have got in front of me, Mr. Elwin, a copy of the *Taranaki Herald* of the 16th May, 1912?—Yes.

38. You knew this Commission was sitting to inquire into this matter?—Undoubtedly.

39. And you took it on yourself to write a letter, I suppose, for the guidance of the Commissioners?—No, I do not think so. I think it was in the interests of my fellow-lessees.

40. I just want to refer you to one or two statements which you make in that letter. You tell us, or, rather, I presume you were endeavouring to tell the Commissioners, "When in 1881 the Native lands on the west coast were vested in the Public Trustee for administration for the benefit of the Natives": you say for the benefit of the Natives?—Yes.

41. "It was after their condition and ability to live on the lands reserved for their use had been ascertained." Who ascertained that?—Did not Sir William Fox?

42. Did Sir William Fox ascertain it?—He had a Commission on the west coast after the confiscation of the lands, and reserves were made for Natives all over the place.

43. Will you tell me whether Sir William Fox reported at all on the ability of the Natives?—I will not tell you anything at all, because I do not know.

44. Well, that statement was a wild statement?—It was not a wild statement; it was currently known at the time. It was made probably before you were born, so you can know nothing about it.

45. You also say, "And it was distinctly understood that, as far as these leased reserves were concerned, they passed absolutely, entirely, and for ever from the possibility of occupation by those for whom the Public Trustee was acting"?—Quite right.

46. What basis have you for that statement?—On one occasion a Native came on to my land—his name was Tui—and he said, "Now, So-and-so is dead, I am the head of this hapu, and all your transactions must go through me." I did not understand the position, and I went down to Mr. Rennell. I told him what had occurred, and he said, "We must see to that; these lands have absolutely gone from them, and they have no position in the matter whatever." A little while after this man was in the office talking with Mr. Rennell, and he then explained the position. I cannot remember the exact words, but the position he took up was that the lands were vested in the Public Trustee, who was to lease the lands for the benefit of the Maoris, and that the Maoris were not to look forward to having these lands revert to them in any shape or form in the future.

47. *Mr. Kerr.*] In what year was that?—That would be about 1885.

48. *Mr. Bell.*] This was the time at which Mr. Rennell knew perfectly well that the lands were not vested in him as you say, and that the Natives were to have the chance of getting back on to the lands at the end of twenty-one years?—I do not know what Mr. Rennell knew; I only know what he said.

49. And on that you based your statement that it was distinctly understood after inquiry by Sir William Fox?—I did not say anything about Sir William Fox. I say there was an inquiry made by Sir William Fox when we came up to the district. It was part of the reason given that these lands were vested in the Public Trustee, and would not become Native lands again.

50. Now you go on to say, "The desire of the indolent half-breed to acquire the well-titled productive home of the industrious settler should have no standing either in law or in equity"?—Quite right.

51. Your present position is that you pay a rent for your land of £70 19s. 10d., and you draw from the sublessee to whom you leased it the sum of £218 18s.?—Yes.

52. That is your position?—Yes, that is my position.

53. You are leasing lands which are owned by the Natives, and without doing a hand's turn you are making a profit of something like £138 a year, and you talk about indolent half-breeds?—What did I and my family do for twenty-two years on that land? You are ignoring all that. Am I to receive nothing for that?

54. I presume you received something at the time?—No, I did not. For some years I received nothing at all.

55. *The Chairman.*] And for some years you also had a reduction in your rent?—Because we could not possibly pay it. I sold butter at that time for about 16s. a keg. I had to reclaim the wilderness; I had to put up fences, ditches, and so on, and build houses; and that is what I am receiving the rent for, as it were.

56. *Mr. Bell.*] What was the state of your section when you took it up?—It was a mass of swamp, flax, fern, scrub, and wild horses.

57. *Mr. Kerr.*] Was there no dry land at all?—The swamps ran through it, but there were runs of dry land that we could get on. When I was looking for my pegs I found them in a swamp, and we were pretty well up to our knees in water looking for them.

58. Those swamps became the best land, did they not?—Yes, but you have to drain them first. There are some miles of drainage on my land.

59. I suppose there is a good fall to the sea?—Yes. There was no difficulty in draining except that some went down 6 ft. or more.

60. *Mr. Bell.*] Is a good part of the section flax swamp?—There is a considerable portion flax swamp.

61. What did you do with the flax?—It was burned.

62. The whole lot?—Yes.