

very good living by being treated with phosphates and manures. I understand that evidence will be given by settlers that you can bring the lands into profitable occupation and sow it down in grass at a cost of about £2 10s., and certainly not more than £3 an acre. Speaking as a late Under-Secretary for Lands in charge of the State forests, I have noted the extraordinary growth of the pumice lands in the State forest plantations. About ten or twelve years ago, on the wind-swept plains of Kaingaroa beyond Waitapu we tried the experiment. Areas were just fenced in, inside of which *Pinus insignis* and larch were planted, and to-day you will see there trees 20 ft. high, while the larch-trees are growing splendidly. I am only giving you an example of what the pumice lands will bring forth in their present condition without manure. Yesterday Sir John Findlay made reference to the large area of Crown lands—350,000 acres—at Taupo, and it is true that there is a very large area there, also that it is unlet at the present time, or at any rate 242,000 acres of it. There are about 81,000 acres held under temporary grazing lease from the Auckland Waste Lands Board by different persons. Nearly the whole of this land was offered ten or twelve years ago in large areas for pastoral runs, but they lay for many years because no one would take them up. At that time no one would look at pumice lands, because their characteristics were not understood. Sir John Findlay referred yesterday to the education reserves. There is an area as an educational endowment of 17,865 acres included in these 350,000 acres mentioned, and 8,000 acres or so are held as scenic and bush reserves. My opinion is that within a very few years it will be found that on areas of from 500 to 700 acres people will be able to make a good living when there is easy transit for manures, and that it will be extremely profitable to work this class of land in small areas. I do not think these lands can be worked as runs except with large capital. They need to be worked in small areas with close settlement. The other question which came up last year and was mentioned yesterday is the question as to the railway-line which would best serve these lands. Now, supposing you had no railway such as that line run by the company from Putaruru to Mokai, then undoubtedly most people would say the proper thing would be to carry on the railway-line from Rotorua through the Waitapu Valley to Taupo. But we are faced with the position that there is a railway or tramway already constructed which is now open for traffic from Putaruru to Mokai, and which is now carrying goods. Only another fifteen to twenty miles are required to bring the line into Taupo. Therefore it seems to me that it would be far better for the Government to take over the company's line at £180,000, at which it is now offered. That is my personal opinion, and is not given in any official capacity. By and by the whole of these lands from Putaruru to Taupo will be cut up and brought into profitable occupation. It would be better to take over that line to be completed into Taupo for £180,000 than to wait for the possible line from Rotorua onwards, which cannot certainly be built for less than from £6,000 to £7,000 a mile. There are fifty-six miles of railway to be constructed, or probably a little less, from Rotorua to Taupo, and it is all fairly easy country. I know the country very well indeed, and there are no engineering difficulties except that it will probably have to cross the Waikato River twice, but it cannot be built under from £6,000 or £7,000 per mile. So far as opening the Crown lands is concerned, the line from Mokai would serve the Crown lands better, to my mind, than the line from Rotorua to Taupo. The argument used by Mr. Vaile last year was that there are large areas of Crown lands to be opened up by the line from Rotorua to Taupo, but the lands he refers to are lying to the east, as will be seen by the plans. That is all I wish to say, but I shall be glad to answer questions.

6. You referred to the change in public opinion as to the value of the pumice lands: can you explain to the Committee why, in view of that change of opinion, the Government has not had these lands cut up within the last few years and offered to settlers who are clamouring all over the Dominion for land?—I was partly responsible for that when I was Under-Secretary for Lands. I did not consider there was sufficient warrant to offer the land, because there were no means of getting manures and so on upon it. It is absolutely necessary that these lands should be well manured before they can go into profitable occupation, and before the settlers had a line to Taupo they could not be profitably opened for selection in small areas.

7. Did you as Under-Secretary for Crown Lands have many applications? Can you give the Committee any evidence of public demand for this land?—There were comparatively few applications. We had a large number of suggestions at different times that if we could only cut up the lands into small areas they would be immediately occupied. We had a number of schemes proposed by different persons for cutting up the areas into 600- to 800-acre blocks, but it was always proposed that there should be some scheme for advancing moneys, manuring, &c., and obtaining cheap access.

8. The company's line is opened to Mokai, and has been carrying goods at reasonable rates for some time: is that not so?—It is.

9. Is not the tramway within reasonable distance of very considerable areas of those Crown lands you have been describing?—No. There is no direct road from the present terminus—no properly constructed road—which would enable those lands to be opened.

10. Have you not in various parts of the Dominion—Whangamomona, for instance—settlers who have been on the land for some years in a country that has an immeasurably worse access than is available on this open country at this present moment?—Possibly that might be so, but all the Taranaki lands have been tremendously run after. People have taken up forest lands in that district which have no access for the last three or four years.

11. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] And no manure is required there?—No manure. You could just turn your cattle or sheep on to the land after the forest has been burned and grass sown.

12. Can you say that the manure could not be carried at a reasonable rate across this open country spoken of?—From the end of the Mokai tramway?

13. Yes, I mean at present?—Of course, it could be packed, and that sort of thing.