

place. As to which route is the best from a military point of view, I may say that I have not the slightest doubt, as I think I can satisfy the Committee that what I call the central line is incomparably the best, and for this reason: that either of the other lines, as soon as they enter on a broken country, would become absolutely useless from such a point of view; whereas the Marton route, which goes through the middle of the Island, goes through a very flat, open, country, which would afford numerous opportunities of putting roads, for military purposes if you like, on either side. I think, if you examine the reports from that point of view, there can be no possible doubt on the question. If, for instance, you put a railway along the bottom of a series of gullies of steep banks, it must be obvious that that line can scarcely be of as much value as a military line; but if you put a line over flat country, where roads can spread off from the railway on both sides, then, from a military point of view, that would be the best, undoubtedly: although I hope the Committee will not attach too much weight to this aspect of the question, because I believe it will be of comparative insignificance. In respect to settlement, I think that I have already said that all the routes are about the same between Te Awamutu and the Mokau River; I do not see any difference between them in that respect up to that point, and I do not believe there is any.

1578. To the south of the Mokau, what is it?—In my opinion, the land I have described as being of excellent quality at the back of Marton is a most valuable country for settlement. That is eastward of the papa country, where the line gets out into the open country, or rather, I take it—for I do not know exactly where it gets out—at the back where the country opens up between Murimotu and Marton. That would be highly suitable for settlement. It is good land and would be well opened by this railway, where the railway emerges, because it would be easily accessible to that part of the country. Then, another place suitable for settlement would be the limestone country, near the Kaimanawa Ranges.

1579. *Mr. Larnach.*] How far is that up?—It is from twelve to fifteen miles eastward and north-eastward of the great bend in the line. Well, then, the country under the Ruapehu Mountain traversed by the proposed central route is bush country, but the land is of exceedingly rich quality. Of course the bush would have to be cleared before the land could be used. As I have said, the only drawback there is the altitude of the country, which makes it rather cold.

1580. Is there a great extent of that bush land?—Yes; there is a good deal of it.

1581. Could you state how much?—Hundreds of thousands of acres. The flat land really available for settlement there lies very close to the mountain. As you go down to the Wanganui river westward of the line you have to make a great drop, and get into this papa country. In some places there it would be suitable for settlement, but I am not really able to describe that country well from personal observation, because I have not been actually on the Wanganui River at that place. Then, I do not think I had better go further with my description, because, although I have a knowledge of the country in my own mind, I have gathered it from the same sources as those at the disposal of the Committee.

1582. We have had the Rangipo Block described to us?—That is good land.

1583. Do you know it?—Only from hearsay; but I have necessarily been connected with the purchase of it.

1584. There is a great deal of maire timber there?—I have no doubt there is. I may point out to you that, as far as my observation goes, the existence of maire indicates cold or a considerable altitude; and, although maire may be valuable wood, yet, in my opinion, something is detracted from the value of the soil on account of its presence: it always indicates a cold country. Then, as to the probabilities of getting land from the Maoris, that is a matter that has really given me a great deal of thought and concern; and it is a matter, moreover, which, in my opinion, will have to be gone about very carefully if the results are to be satisfactory. For myself, I should not like to ask the Maoris to allow themselves to be exceptionally treated. If you could show them that they were being treated in the same way as Europeans are treated, they would acquiesce in any just proposal. I may say that I think, if the value of the land is added to enormously, as it will be by public expenditure, it is a reasonable thing to expect that that land should contribute something towards the cost of the construction of those works, and I was quite prepared to put that view of the case before the Maoris, as indeed I have done. Well, the position of a great deal of that country at the present time is this: that at last surveyors have been permitted to go over it for the purpose of investigating the title of the land. Those surveys are now completed, and an application for the investigation of title has been placed before the Land Court; and the Court, for anything I know, may sell at any time. I think we are on very delicate ground here. As you are aware, an Act was passed in 1883 which prevented private dealings with land before the investigation of the title, and goes so far as to render invalid a title preceded by negotiations before the title is ascertained, which is a very strong measure of prohibition indeed.

1585. Is that retrospective?—Yes, in one sense; that is to say, when the conveyance is carried before the Frauds Commissioner, he has to inquire whether this is the result of negotiations with the Natives previous to the ascertainment of the title, and subsequent to the passing of the Act, and, unless he is satisfied that there is no such fault, his duty is to invalidate that title. So that up to the present time, I take it, that country is entirely free from those complications and speculations which might embarrass the position; but as soon as the list of names of the owners is prepared then speculators could begin their operations, and the thing would have to be looked to. I understand from the Maoris that they go this length: they say rightly enough, "We will give you whatever land you want for a railway site, and we may add whatever you want for the stations;" but I do not think they have yet come to the point of contemplating the reasonableness of contributing towards the construction of the railway. Nevertheless, I think it is quite just that the land should contribute in that way; and I may say I have always found the Maoris willing to yield to an argument of justice, always provided that other people were treated exactly as they were. I make this statement in general terms. As to the purchase of the land by Government, there is an unwillingness on the part of the Maoris at the present moment to sell the land, and I suppose that, when