

the route is determined, the unwillingness will for a time be increased. I do not apprehend, however, that it will last, because, I am rather sorry to say it, the Maoris, in my opinion, are too much disposed to sell their land. I think they can be induced to sell the last inch they have got in places almost as readily as the first inch; and although at present they profess to be unwilling to sell, but prefer leasing, yet I think that will pass away and they will be disposed to sell. I should not like to say that the Government could acquire these lands at once by purchase. Moreover, there is this difficulty: I do not see how they are to go about it until the title has been ascertained. They could not get the title under the present condition of the law, and if the Government treated before that it would be waste of money, and cause future difficulty in the acquirement of the land. I am pointing out these things because I wish that those who may have to deal with the matter may understand the difficulties that surround it, and pay attention accordingly. I do think that precautionary measures ought to be taken to prevent speculators getting hold of the land alongside the railway, and moreover the Government ought to make every effort to acquire the land on the neighbourhood of the railway before the works actually commence; I do not say, however, before the route is determined.

1586. *The Chairman.*] Your remarks apply generally to either of the lines?—To all lands generally, on either route, with one exception, the Rangipo-Murimotu Block. As I have said, that has been leased to the Government nominally, but really to private individuals with certain reservations. I think that that large block of land could very easily be acquired at once. I see no objection to its being done at once. The title of that has been ascertained, and I have knowledge, which I am not quite prepared to specify, that, if the Government do not get that pretty soon, private individuals will.

1587. *Mr. Larnach.*] What is the extent of that block?—It is 140,000 acres. But these remarks may apply to double that quantity. It includes, I may say, some very bad land—some of the worst land in New Zealand, the Rangipo desert—but it also includes those excellent limestone slopes I have referred to.

1588. And has the company of private individuals got this land on a purchasing clause?—No; the company has got the land practically for twenty-one years; it is a question for the determination of the Government as to when those twenty-one years shall date from. There is a reservation on the part of the Government that 25 per cent. or a quarter of the land may be taken for settlement purposes. I do not attach any value to that in respect to the lease, but it becomes of importance when required by the Government.

1589. That is still Maori land?—Yes; and uncomplicated by any private transactions.

1590. Then, apart from those 140,000 acres, your remarks would also apply to further blocks of the same amount?—Yes; adjoining this block.

1591. *Mr. W. White.*] Which of these lines passes through the greatest extent of the papa country?—I think the Marton line can scarcely be said to pass through it at all.

1592. Why?—Because it goes upon the terraces of the Rangitikei River, and the papa country lies to the west of it.

1593. Does it not come close to the line?—It is on the west of the line. The nearest part may be there or under Ruapehu. The line under Ruapehu goes along an easy plateau of rich land. But on the west of that is the Wanganui River and the papa country.

1594. And there is no papa country to the east of the line?—No; I do not think there is any, unless it is on the East Coast.

1595. Then, there would be more of the papa close to or run through by the Stratford line?—I think the most papa country would be run through by the Mokau line. Next to that would be the Stratford line, and next, in that respect, would be the central line.

1596. What was the size of the maire trees you saw?—I saw some maire trees when I last went through that country about twice the size I have ever seen before. Some of them must have been five feet in diameter.

1597. Was there any great number of them?—Yes; there was a considerable number. But, as I have already said, they never grow in groves or forests; you may see a cluster of them here and there.

1598. But still there would be a great number in the different clusters altogether?—Yes; a great number.

1599. Would you say which line you think the best in the interests of the colony?—Yes; if the Committee wish it. I will give a qualified answer. I think, if the object of the line is to connect two trading centres, the Stratford line is the best, because that would connect the Auckland and New Plymouth country. If, however, the object of the line is to open up country, and do ultimate good to those centres by the opening of country, I have no doubt that, both as regards Auckland and other places, the Marton or central line would be best; it would be better for Auckland as well as for other towns. And I may add, if you please, that I think the only qualification for borrowing money for the construction of railways is the opening of country.

1600. *Mr. Larnach.*] You say you have been three times between Lake Taupo and Wanganui: could you tell us what that country is, generally?—The first time I went I learned more about that country between the Rangitikei and Turakina Rivers than I have ever done since, and at that time the exploration was not made, so that I do not know exactly where the line comes out on that country: but in my opinion the country lying immediately eastward of the papa country situated in the Rangitikei District is the best land on the route; that is, I think a good deal of that will lie behind the point at which the line emerges from the Rangitikei into the open country: that I consider the best land on the route.

1601. Is there any good timber on that peculiar belt of the country called papa country?—No; the timber is generally light and easily cleared, and where the slopes of the hills are sufficiently moderate it is very good country in that respect for clearing and taking the grass, owing to the sweetness of the soil. Generally it is a very thin soil, but it is very sweet.