

210. In fact, he risked his own?—Yes, he risked his own altogether; but even then most of it was eaten up in paying the interest on money borrowed.

211. Was there a lot of interest paid in this way by some of those persons who gave evidence, for prices of goodwill in leases, where there was actually no value in the long run?—Do you mean since 1882? I do not know of any instances of that kind.

212. Were there not some Government sales, after the sales of 1882, where there was a bonus given for a lease—for the goodwill of a lease?—I do not know where the goodwill comes in; if a man pays too high rent there can be no goodwill.

213. Do you know Taieri Lake Station?—Yes.

214. Has that changed hands?—Yes.

215. And the Garmoye Station?—Yes.

216. Do you know that these two sales did take place?—Yes, I am aware of it; but I do not think there was any goodwill given for the run, so far as the leasehold was concerned.

217. *Mr. Cowan.*] You have told us positively that runs have been worked at a loss?—Yes, I feel confident of it.

218. That is, at the expense of capital?—Yes.

219. Do you think that can continue much longer?—I am sure it cannot. The effect will be that a lot of these Government runs will be thrown on their hands. They are bound to be. They cannot go on. As far as the individual owners are concerned, they will be absolutely ruined; what little capital they have will be wholly absorbed, if it has not already taken place.

220. This petition which is now before the Committee is urging on the Government to do something before this contingency arrives in the immediate future?—If I may be permitted, I will give the Committee my view. I am not so unreasonable as to suppose that the Government will reduce rents that other people may make profits. I have thought over the matter, and my views go in this direction as to what should be done: I think a Commission of Inquiry should be appointed, to inquire into the cases of those persons who thought they had a claim for relief. Let them appear before the Commission and show their accounts, and prove that they were paying rent out of capital. If a man did not like to do that he would have no right to complain.

221. This rabbit scourge has a considerable effect in reducing the general result?—No doubt about that, for irrespective of the loss on sale of skins there is a diminished return from the sheep.

222. In consequence of the presence of the rabbits?—Yes.

223. Do you consider that, under the present system of keeping them down, the rabbit pest is likely to be cured?—It depends upon the extent to which the operations are carried out. I think if the operations are carried out to the fullest extent it could be done. It will take some time before the pest can be so diminished that we will not see much more of it. But the present holders will be ruined long before, for the whole thing is a question of money. They cannot afford to wait for assistance. It is on the face of it a grossly unfair thing that, with short leases and bad tenure, the present tenants should be expected to go on ruining themselves, in order to remove from the property of the Crown landlord all rabbits, and make that land more valuable for settlement or re-leasing.

224. In fact, the Government have a large interest in this question of the rabbit pest?—Yes, they are owners of property; they must interest themselves in their own property if it goes on being depreciated.

225. Talking of the prospect of these leases being thrown on the hands of the Government, I would like to ask you as to how much of it would be again offered to the public, and whether it should be offered at auction?—I do not see how you could do it in any other way. I have heard it suggested to put them up to tender.

226. Have you any objection to that mode—to their being put up to tender?—There is an objection to tender on this ground: that when a man has got a particular piece of country he builds a house on it, and establishes a home; he has got all appliances for working the property; and he knows that he can make more out of this land than anyone else. He knows how to work it; his stock is there; and if he has to remove them, he is placed in a position different from anyone else. No doubt the position of the man who had stock in 1883 was worse than that of the man who had no stock.

227. Is it not a complaint against the auction system, from experience of the circumstances of 1882 and 1883, that it was unfair, because one or two individuals, who were not supposed to be *bonâ fide* bidders, were bidding up every lease?—I heard a good deal about this, but I would not like to speak definitely. There was one individual spoken of. I know a dispute occurred because one run was knocked down to him, and he said he did not bid.

228. Were you present at the time?—No; I was informed of the circumstance.

229. Would you object to state the name of that person?—Yes; because if I stated the name it would appear as if I were cognisant of a fact, and were making a charge. I would not like that. It is only rumour as far as I am concerned.

230. *Mr. McMillan.*] I think you stated that you appear in support of this petition, not so much on your own account as on that of others?—Generally.

231. I suppose you had to buy your property at the 1883 sales?—I got it at the upset price. It was supposed that I got it at a reasonable rent.

232. Yet you complained of undue competition being brought against yourself?—That was in 1879.

233. I suppose the purchasers at these sales were men who had been in occupation before?—Yes; chiefly.

234. Then no person would know the value better than these men?—No.

235. They were placed in a better position to give a high rental on account of being in possession?—Yes, in one way they were, but in another sense they were fighting for existence. The whole of their capital was invested in their stock; if they could not get their runs back they would be heavy