

*Hon. the Chairman:* There are four properties, numbered 41, 42, 43, 44. Nos. 43 and 44 we are dealing with now: 43 is 75 acres—rent under the old lease, £45; under the new lease, £25 19s. 3d. No. 44, 165 acres. There are two rents mentioned here, apparently referring to two periods.

*Mr. Levi:* Or does it refer to different qualities of land?

*Hon. the Chairman:* I do not think so. Under the new lease the rent is £39 17s. 6d.

*Mr. Peacock:* What was the rent of the previous one you mentioned?

*Hon. the Chairman:* £25 19s. 3d.

*Mr. Seddon:]* The acreage?

*Hon. the Chairman:* 165 acres.

*Witness:* I consider these rents exceedingly low.

279. *Mr. Levi:]* What is the quality of the land?—It is of excellent quality; there is no better land that I know of.

280. How does it compare with the rest?—The whole block right through is perhaps the most famous block on the West Coast, and this is one of the choicest pieces in it.

281. *Hon. the Chairman:]* Now, about George Gower (41)?—There are two pieces.

*Hon. the Chairman:* Then, there is another (42). The first is 598 acres, the second is 376 acres. These are bracketed in the return; I cannot say for what reason; the rent is £358 5s. Then the rent for No. 41 is given under the new lease separately—namely, £50 6s.: for No. 42, £30 17s. 6d.

282. *Mr. Levi:]* That is to say, the rents were reduced from £358 to £81. What kind of land is this?—This is also very good land; not quite equal to what I spoke of last; but it is of very much greater value than was set on it by the arbitrators. The best proof of that is, I recollect, when it was taken by Alfred Gower, Sir Dillon Bell offered 9s. 6d. an acre for the block for twenty-one years.

283. Who did he offer it to?—Through me, to the Maoris; and I believe he offered it himself to the Maoris.

284. *Mr. Bell:]* Was he Commissioner at the time?—I do not quite recollect; I think not.

285. *Mr. Peacock:]* How many years?—He wanted it for twenty-one years; the Maoris would only let it for a shorter term.

286. *Mr. Levi:]* Do you know the date?—I do not recollect the date; but it is a considerable time ago.

287. Before it was leased to Gower?—I think it was about the time they were leasing it to Gower. The Native owner of the property was Ngarangi. I forget the names of the other Native owners in the block.

288. Is Ngarangi alive?—Yes, he is here in this building. Ngapaki is another; he is here too. The whole of the Natives who were owners in this block were present at the time.

289. *Hon. Mr. Peter:]* If he offered that price, how was it they let the land at so much lower rent to Gower?—I said they had already let it to Gower.

290. *Mr. Bell:]* Then, did he want them to break the contract with Gower?—No; he wanted to make an arrangement with Gower about the lease.

291. *Mr. Peacock:]* But if it were leased to Gower, why were the Natives dealt with?—I do not know whether Bell spoke to Gower about it; I only recollect that he offered 9s. 6d. an acre for this land.

292. Can you say how the Natives could possibly affect the question if Gower had the lease?—Mr. Bell (now Sir Dillon Bell) was to make an arrangement with Gower.

293. *Mr. Seddon:]* Then, if he made an arrangement with Gower the Natives were quite willing to take him as their tenant?—Yes.

294. The original rent paid by Gower was £358?—Yes.

*Hon. the Chairman:* For 41 and 42.

*Hon. Mr. Peter:* The witness ought to be asked to fix the date when this occurred.

295. *Mr. Levi:]* With regard to the time Sir Dillon Bell was up there?—I cannot exactly fix the date. I know that it was a considerable time before he was appointed Commissioner for the Native reserves on the coast. I recollect I went with him and with his son through the whole of the district of the Waimate Plains. I therefore know it was a long time before he was appointed Commissioner.

296. Are there any other Native leases about this part?—With regard to the Otoia lease, that is Major Turner's lease. As a proof that the rent is very low, Major Turner offered £100 if that would induce the Maoris to extend his lease.

297. *Hon. the Chairman:]* How do you know that?—It was offered through me to the Maoris.

298. Was anything said about rent?—Yes; he was also willing to increase the rent.

299. How long did he want the extension for?—An extension of twenty-one years. The extension was to continue for twenty-one years from the time the extension took place.

300. When was that?—I think it was about four years ago. He offered it also to the Natives in my presence. I merely mention this to show that the values are too low.

301. *Mr. Bell:]* Was that after the passing of the Act of 1884?—I think it was four years ago.

302. *Hon. Mr. Peter:]* How many years had the lease to run at that time?—I do not know.

303. *Mr. Levi:]* Was there any other confirmed lease about this part?—Yes; the Symes Brothers have a lease.

304. Are they in partnership?—I think two of them are; but there are so many of them. Some of them have separate leases. Francis Symes has a lease. With regard to one lease, that of Walter Symes, he offered the Natives £50 if they would extend his lease. I have only heard this from the Natives: he did not say it to me.