

68. And on the West Coast?—20,900 acres.

69. Has most of the land been disposed of?—The whole of the eastern land has been disposed of with the exception of one block containing nominally 9,000 acres, which is being held until the opening of the company's railway through it. Also, two blocks of western lands which are not yet sold because they have only been recently acquired by the company, and now are being held until the railway being made through them gives better access for purchasers.

70. In disposing of the lands, did you get them subdivided at all?—With the exception of one block. All the Canterbury lands that I have mentioned have been cut up into sections and offered for sale at two different public auctions. We cut up the blocks into as small sections as the nature and quality of the land would permit. They varied very much, from small pieces up to 5,000 or 10,000 acres.

71. Are you of opinion that your policy in disposing of your lands is to promote settlement?—Yes; because it is obviously the wish of the company to get as many people as possible on the ground, so as to furnish traffic for the railway.

72. Do you remember what was the size of the largest block sold?—Actually sold? I should like to explain to the Committee that it was cut up into small areas for auction, but some people bought many of them. The largest block offered by auction was about 12,000 acres, from memory. There were two blocks about that size—back-country land. That was quite as small as they could have been wisely made. These were both bought by the same person. One block was bought at auction, and there was no bid for the other; but a day or two afterwards the purchaser of the other block came and bought it.

73. *Mr. Tanner.*] I understood you to state that the Act says that the reserves shall be made in blocks of not more than 10,000 acres?—Yes.

74. And I also understood you to complain that some of the blocks, in your opinion, and from the best information you can get, are of a larger size than that. You further complain that the blocks are in immediate contiguity to one another. What can it matter, if there are 13,000 acres reputedly gold-bearing, whether the Government take it in 3,000 acres or 4,000 acres each, if they are immediately contiguous one to the other? Is there any stipulation in the contract against that?—The provision matters very much, for the making of an 11,000-acre block is an absolutely illegal one. You say, "Why grumble at it when you might do it in another way?" I grumble at it because it is so, and because in making them it has been considered that there is much more land payably auriferous than it is possible actually to find; and I point out that, having been made on such a large scale, they must necessarily in my opinion contain a lot of land that is not payably auriferous, and not *bona fide* required for mining purposes.

75. Then I take it that your objection is not only that the blocks as made cover too large an area in your opinion, but also by adjoining each other they cover a larger amount of undivided space than was contemplated?—Yes; and this debars the company from getting the benefit which, in my opinion, it was intended they should have—that is, the benefit from owning for settlement purposes lands near *bona fide* mining lands.

76. What is considered the best gold-bearing country on the West Coast, if we except the Kumara district?—I should think Reefton.

77. In the neighbourhood of these reserves?—One of the reserves covers the land about Reefton.

78. Had the Government made whatever reserves it is possible to make there?—I should think so. They have made, or promised to make, more than I think is necessary.

79. In doing that, they have not by any means exhausted the 750,000 acres within their powers of selection?—Not nearly.

80. Consequently they would go on to lands next in value for gold-mining purposes. Where would you place that land, assuming that Kumara is first, and Reefton second?—I should imagine that some of the southern land about Ross and the Rimu would be the best. I speak with hesitation about that. The largest gold settlements after Kumara and Reefton are down about Hokitika, Waimea, Stafford, Ross, Rimu, also Ahaura, and Nelson Creek.

81. They have made reserves there?—Very liberal reserves.

82. Still, not having exhausted their power of selection up to the 750,000 acres, they naturally go to land which we may call for the moment fourth-grade land. Where do you find that?—You would find it scattered up and down through the country. There is a piece about O'Callaghan's, which is near Nelson Creek.

83. Is that reserved?—Yes, or proposed to be reserved. Then there is Maori Gully. There is a suitable piece there; and O'Callaghan's is the next best.

84. I take it that your statement amounts to this: that the Government have reserved all the best gold-bearing land within their knowledge on the West Coast, and all the most likely spots, as far as their information goes?—I should think they have reserved all of them.

85. You imagine that they have reserved more?—I cannot imagine that any has been left out.

86. Now turn to the eastern side of the range. With regard to the land there selected and sold, I understood you to say, in answer to Mr. Shera, that the largest undivided block of land sold was 12,000 acres in extent?—By auction. I said another piece was privately sold, previously.

87. What area might it be?—About 32,000 acres.

88. Have you ever sold a larger block than that privately?—No; there is one now being selected about the same size. It does not appear in my list here, because it has not yet been agreed to. It is a block at the Waimakariri, containing about 31,000 acres, which was agreed to be sold to promote irrigation works.

89. Do I understand you to say that 31,000 or 32,000 acres is the largest-sized area you have ever sold in a single block?—No; there is another block of 44,000 acres, Block 127, in the Amuri District. That land was sold to Messrs. Wharton and Company. It was held by them under the Nelson leases, and the tenants had the right of purchase from the Nelson Land Board. Instead of doing that they made a bargain with the company. As to that block, the whole of it.