

was the market-value of the land I had no cause to be dissatisfied. Now, sir, I have had valuations made of my land for public purposes on five different occasions during the eleven years I have been on it. These valuations were made by competent valuers appointed by Government and local bodies. My original valuation was £3 per acre, in the year 1884. In the year 1887, when we applied for a reduction of rent, Mr. Robinson, Crown Lands Ranger, of Taranaki, valued the land at £1 15s.; in 1892 Mr. Moore, acting for the purposes of the Land and Income Assessment Act, valued the land at £2 5s. I am speaking of the unimproved value. I appealed against that to the Board of Reviewers, and it was reduced to £2 2s. 5d. per acre. The whole of the circumstances were then laid before the Board of Reviewers, and Mr. Moore argued very strongly in favour of his valuations. The Public Trustee comes in 1893 and values my land at £3 8s. per acre. That is, as I said, the unimproved value. In 1894, by the latest assessment, the total value of my land, with improvements, is £2,660. That assessment was made for local purposes. The area of the land is 634 acres. Within the last month the improvements on the land have been valued under the Advances to Settlers Act, and the value that is put on them is £1,680. Taking the improved value from the total value we get an unimproved value of £980, or £1 10s. 11d. per acre. There are the actual figures, sir, in which you will see that the whole of that valuation has been in excess. There are letters here from tenants in different parts who have suffered in the same way. In the case of Mr. Smith, the valuation was excessive, being over £5 per acre. In another case where an excess occurred the farmer had his land appraised, and it was found that the valuer must have taken in his nursery stock—he had a nursery garden—as permanent improvements, and his shelter-fences must have been taken as permanent improvements, to bring him over £5. There are other statements here from different people which speak for themselves. I should like to show that the administration of this estate is not in the interests of the Natives themselves. I can mention four or five cases. Mr. McCullum leased a piece of land from the Natives, and when the new Act came into force he was willing to pay a rent of £30 rather than leave the place; but he was worked through the Supreme Court, and had to leave the place. The whole of that estate, which he had improved very highly by putting up permanent buildings and a bakehouse, is now virtually ruined; there is no one on it now. In the case of Mr. Rothery, he had built a sawmill and was using the good timber of the district, and was a great benefit to the district. Hitherto we had to bring all our timber from New Plymouth, but when Mr. Rothery started his mill we were able to get the timber we required on the spot. When the Act passed the Public Trustee took action under it, and the mill was pulled down, and the land is waste. It has not been let. Mr. Luxton was paying a rental of £60 a year two years ago. He was ousted from his land, and that land has not been relet. The trust is therefore a sufferer to the extent of £60 in his case alone. Mr. Leedom built a flax-mill on a piece of land. He lived there with his family, and was willing to pay rent. He had to leave, and that land is now a complete gorse-brake, and it is doing an infinite amount of harm to the district. He was ousted by the Public Trustee. At Okato there is a large quantity of land which is growing gorse; 300 out of the 800 acres is one solid mass of gorse, and it is travelling all over the district, and nothing is being done to eradicate it. The Natives say they will do it; but they do not, and there is an end of the matter. Roothing is one of the most important things. Sections have been let, and for two years the men have been unable to get their things, such as grass-seed, &c., on the land; and yet their rents are demanded. They petitioned Parliament a few days ago, and I am told that the Trustee proposes to lend the settlers £150, and when this is secured on their leases the road will be opened up for two miles through 1,700 acres. But above that 1,700 acres there are nearly 5,000 acres belonging to the Trustee in fee-simple, and that land will be benefited by this road; but the Public Trustee does not consider that he has any right whatever to subscribe one iota on the part of the Natives towards its construction. That is the Puniho Road. Now, sir, in connection with this Act, clause 4 says: "From and after the coming into operation of this Act reserves shall become by virtue of this Act vested in the Public Trustee in fee-simple, subject to all valid leases and contracts affecting the same, upon trust for the Native owners, but to be managed, dealt with, and disposed of under the provisions of this Act, and not otherwise." I take that to mean that the Trustee is placed in the same position as the Crown would be in regard to land (lending). When a man takes up land under this Act, adjacent to unoccupied land, he applies to the Public Trustee to do his half of fencing his boundary. In one or two instances the Public Trustee sent money and paid for the fencing. He refuses, however, in other cases. There is a letter from Mr. Lysaght, and he says that Mr. Morton Jones had not been accustomed to value land. Applicants have never been allowed to know in what way the value of their land has been arrived at. I have omitted one point in connection with the meetings of Natives. These settlers who applied for new leases were charged the cost of the Native meeting. Is it fair that a meeting shall be called to discuss a foregone conclusion, and one of the parties called to the meeting should have to bear the whole cost of it? The thing speaks for itself. There are some other points that I would have liked to bring before you, but I am getting too lengthy. The gist of the requirements of the settlers may, I think, be summed up in the alteration of one clause. If clause 8 were excised from the Act, and a new clause something to this effect substituted, I think it would meet the requirements of the case: "Any lessee under this Act who has obtained a new lease shall receive from the Public Trustee a lease in perpetuity, and any lessee who has not obtained a new lease under this Act may, within twelve months from the passing of this Act, apply to the Public Trustee for a new lease." It might also be stipulated that the Land Board shall hand to the Public Trustee all rents and money. That, I think, will meet the case of the present leaseholders.

62. *Mr. Warburton.*] By whom were you informed that McCullum offered £30 a year?—By himself. I did not say he offered it, but that he was willing to pay it.

63. He told you?—Yes. He said that rather than leave the place he would pay £30 a year for it.