

however, and said to the parties from whom I was inclined to purchase, "Oh, this will never do." They said, "Why not?" "Look at the conditions," I replied. They said, "That is the letter, and will never be carried out. I have had the land for eight years, and nothing has ever been done to me about insurance or any of those matters; the land cannot be kept clear of noxious weeds, and nothing has ever been done." I said, "It will be the same with me, I suppose"; and I took the lease. Everything went well until the time of the reduction of the rental. I was paying 1s. 6d. per acre, and everything went right until the Act of 1892 was passed. Under that Act the termination of the period of reduced rental was December, 1891, and this Act was passed in 1892. It was undoubtedly intended that those who previous to this had occupied this land should take advantage of the new Act and the better terms, and could apply to be put under that Act if they thought proper. I made application to the Trustee to come under this Act. It was assented to, and the valuer came. The valuer was a person from Wanganui, who knew as much about land as the moon does. He came with a half-caste, and I was not at home when he arrived. He came to the house, and got a horse to go round the run. Of course, before he left, there were some words about the buildings. He asked what should be the value of the building, and the Native said £200; he wanted £250. My son said that I had paid £300 for the building, and it had not been up twelve months. He then went to the stable, and Mr. Jones said he would put £20 for it. The Native said, "No, put £10"; and £10 was put. I had paid £9 6s. for the iron alone on that building, and it had not been up more than six months. In going over the run the valuer followed the cattle-track, and every practical farmer knows that cattle-tracks always run through the best portion of the land. My area is 500 acres, and he went over that in one hour, after which he left. I saw him at Mr. Elwin's the same night on my way back from town, and I spoke to him about the furze growing on the land. He said he had not seen any furze growing on the land. I told him it had already cost me a large sum of money, and that I would give him £100 if he would exterminate what remained during my currency. I wrote to him afterwards in Wanganui, and renewed my offer, but got no reply. After that I got this notice from the Public Trustee, saying that he had appointed house at Stoney River to be the place of meeting between me and my Native owners to fix the rents. In the same notice he states, "I have assessed your value to be £2,406 15s." While we are on that value I will compare it with the previous ones. The original valuation in 1884 was £2 16s. 6d. per acre, or 4d. per acre rent; the valuation by Mr. Robinson in 1887 was £2 per acre; in 1891, Mr. Moore made the last valuation, where the two values were separated, and he put the value then at £2 5s. per acre. That did not include improvements, none of these values I have given included improvements; it is only the value of the Native interest on my 500½ acres. Now, you see that the first value was £2 18s. 4d., the second was £2, the third £2 5s., but the Public Trustee, some eighteen months afterwards, assessed the Native value at £4 15s. Now, compare my values with those Mr. Elwin has given you and you will find that his value in the first case was £3 per acre, whilst mine was £2 18s. 4d.; his next value was £2 5s., and mine was £2; his third value was £2 2s. 6d., and mine was £2 5s.; then, we have the final valuation, which was made by the Trustee's valuer, who valued the properties on the same afternoon, and that valuation gave Mr. Elwin's value at £3 8s. and put me down at £4 15s. Why these extreme values? Any man with sense amongst you must know that by that value my improvements were confiscated for the benefit of the Native owners. Not one man on the West Coast has spent more money on his land during the five years than I have. I wrote to the Trustee showing him the amount I had spent. I showed him that the land cost me something like £1,900 from October, 1889. I showed him what the conditions of the land were; and I showed him also that the Native interest in the land had hitherto been £1,130. I showed him also every section distinct as to its capable and pastoral prospects; also that my carrying-capacity was 150 head of cattle a year. Can any practical man, who has spent in round numbers £2,000, pay £100 a year rental and live when the land will only carry 150 head of cattle a year? In answer to that letter, the Public Trust Office informs me:—

"Public Trust Office, Wellington, 29th December, 1893.

"SIR,—

*Application for New Lease.*

"In acknowledging the receipt of your letter, in which you comment upon the valuation of your property, I beg to state that the value placed upon the land is that which it is estimated to be worth in the market.

"An allowance for improvements has been made in excess of their value by the Land-tax Office. In these circumstances you should have no reasonable ground for complaint.

"Yours obediently,

"J. K. WARBURTON, Public Trustee.

"Mr. William J. Wells, The Karakas, Puniho."

The Land-tax Office made their valuation in 1891; this value was made in 1893. When the Public Trust Office goes so far as to ascertain what my improvements were assessed at in 1891, why not go to the Lands Department and see that I had parted with 290 acres of freehold land, where the money was that I had got for that land? I would have referred him to my bank-book, and would have shown him where the money had gone. I say that under the Public Trustee's administration the honest industrious settler is to be robbed for the Native's benefit. I have forgotten to mention one item. I paid £7 10s. in making my application, and I got 16s. 6d. back. A portion of that sum went in defraying the cost of the meeting called between me and the Native owners. I might as well have thrown the money into the sea. I had no opportunity or chance of dealing with the Natives. They would have been quite willing to go into the matter, but the action of the Trustee barred them. Do you know that the market-value of this land was based upon this: The adjoining section to mine is a corner section, with long road-frontages. It had a ring-fence of barbed wire, and had been in occupation for two years. Bell had it. This land was covered with furze that had been burned when Bell took possession. The Natives would not lease that land unless he