

it is kept in the hands of land-monopolists. When they heard of this discreditable arrangement they formed themselves into an association for the purpose of seeing that the Crown lands were dealt with in the interests and welfare of the district and the colony. The Minister of Lands was interviewed by a deputation concerning the matter, and he gave an assurance that the country would be at once cut up for settlement. This was in October last. After six weeks' correspondence with the Lands Department they were informed by the Under-Secretary for Lands that the Government did not intend to give the tenants notice, as there would be enough land offered shortly to satisfy the requirements of the Kaikoura people; but later on the Minister said that it would be given on the 1st December, 1897. Then, again, about 400 acres of the best land on the northern part of the Kahutara Crown land block, including about 50 acres rich swamp, was given to Mr. Bullen for about 434 acres freehold by the Government. This was on the summit of the hills. The land given by the Government was part of Small Grazing-run 90, and the exchange would entail about one-third more fencing of the boundary-line of the run, and would cause a loss of one-third of the income from the run. I wish now to refer to the Monkey-face Reserve. Mr. Bullen, who owns over 40,000 acres freehold land, made a struggle to get the Monkey-face Reserve of 878 acres. There is on this reserve a wonderful geological formation which is a very great curiosity. The Surveyor-General wrote to the Land Board in March last suggesting that Messrs. Bullen should get the reserve for three years under a pastoral license. The Board decided that there was no application before them from Messrs. Bullen. When our association saw this they sent a strongly-worded resolution to the Government against the proposal. At the meeting of the Board on 9th May Mr. McCallum (Messrs. Bullen's solicitor) applied on their behalf to have the reserve put up to auction under the pre-emptive right of the Marlborough Waste Lands Act, and, although the lease of Messrs. Bullen under that Act had expired on 28th February, 1897, the Board resolved that the application be granted. Our association again returned to the charge, and no notice was taken of the resolution sent to the Minister of Lands. The Board at its meeting in August last said it had no intention of selling the reserve, but at the meeting on the 12th September last it resolved that, as Messrs. Bullen hold the Monkey-face Reserve under the Marlborough Waste Lands Act, they be allowed to purchase 253 acres of it without further delay. If Messrs. Bullen are allowed to purchase this land the Monkey-face Reserve will be useless to any one else.

*The Chairman:* Were they allowed to purchase it?

*Witness:* I do not know. If this part of the reserve were sold, the remainder would be no good to anybody else. Now I come to the Clarence Run of 125,000 acres of Crown land. It now carries about twenty-eight thousand sheep, but sixteen years ago it carried forty-five thousand. The Land Department are desirous of leasing this large area to the Assets Realisation Board for twenty-one years, doubtless with a view of the Board selling the run to some land-monopolist. The Land Board declines to lease for longer than seven years, as this fertile valley will be wanted for settlement. The Assets Board has 16,660 acres of splendid fertile land along the river, which would make the finest fruit-growing land in the world; there is nothing to equal it in Australia for this purpose. There would be no engineering difficulty in making a good road to it. It should not be leased for twenty-one years, as it will be required for settlement long before then. The Kaitoa Block is being cut up into holdings from 103 acres to 404. The blocks are too small to keep a family, and the result will be that two-thirds of the settlers will have to sell out at a loss of time and money to their neighbours. A man requires a square mile of land on that block to live in comfort. It is cruel putting settlers on such limited areas on land like that. The Commissioners who are appointed to buy these properties make mistakes as to value, as they get into the hands of people who give them misleading information. It has taken over four years to place twenty-two settlers on the Kaikoura surveys with an area of 35,000 acres, and as there are 260,000 acres of Crown lands in Kaikoura district that are being devastated by rabbits, at the present rate of progress it will take over thirty years before all the Crown lands are settled. I do not blame the Commissioners for this state of things—it is the system that is bad. They should take advantage of local knowledge, and get the aid of the member for the district as to the quality of the land and the requirements of the settlers.

1. *Mr. Duncan:* How long since you went to the Clarence district?—I have a knowledge of Kaikoura for thirty-eight years.

2. How long is it since you entered there?—About sixteen or seventeen years.

3. How many sheep did it carry then?—It was carrying forty-five thousand.

4. Is that in the Upper Clarence?—It is in the East Clarence, near Kaikoura, over the range.

5. Then, you mentioned about the Ferniehirst Run: was part of that run sold?—Yes; 9,000 acres were sold. The Tinline trustees purchased it.

6. How was that land situated—was it gridironed?—There was a narrow strip along it. The key to it was purchased.

7. You stated something about the fencing of the Hawke Hill property?—It was advertised without any weighting. It was sold for a fraction over 15s. per acre.

8. Then, it was advertised without any weight?—At the last moment it was weighted with £270.

9. Have you formed yourselves into a settlement association?—Quite so.

10. Was it not your place to point this out, as a member of the association?—It was the duty of the surveyor to point it out.

11. Why did you not protest when the change was made in the weighting?—We had no time to send a resolution to Wellington.

12. Then it was sold the 14th of last month?—Yes; it was sold to Mr. Bullen for 15s. an acre.

13. Was the Dog Hill Run sold?—It was exchanged. Mr. Bullen got it; he got it at the rate of three acres for one.

14. Did you write to the district member about this matter?—A deputation told him about it in October, 1897, when they came up here.