

bush without roads and without conveniences. In the case of the Heathfield Settlement, it was surveyed half-way between Catlin's and Waikawa, and the farms were laid off in small lots, with the result that three-fourths had to go under.

32. Do you think, in view of the unfortunate experience of those who have attempted settlement and made failures, that there should be a very careful examination of the whole of that district?—I think it would be well to open it up very slowly, and from the railway.

33. So that those on the land will have a means of marketing their produce?—Yes, and get rid of the timber at the same time.

34. Then the land has been cleared of its best crop?—Yes.

EDWARD O'NEILL sworn and examined. (No. 34.)

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What are you?—Crown Lands Ranger for Otago.

2. Can you give the Commission some information with regard to the amount of land deserted in the Catlin's district which has been referred to by Mr. Arnold?—A casual observer going into the Catlin's district would imagine that the sections which are producing what we call an undergrowth were deserted, but those sections are still held, or a good many of them. It is not only the deserted Crown land that is growing the undergrowth, but a good many of the settlers are allowing it to come up on their own land without making any attempt to prevent it. They maintain that the second growth is very much more difficult to clear than the original timber, but there is practically only a small area of deserted land in that position. I could not give the actual figures. I can quite imagine that any one going into the district would naturally be struck by the appearance of a lot of those sections, and without having any one to point out whether they are held or not it would be difficult to say whether it is Crown land or land that is held under lease.

3. *Mr. Arnold.*] But if the conditions compel those people to clear the best timber, should not something be done to compel them to keep it clean?—The conditions of the lease do not exactly compel a man to fell the timber; they say a man must effect certain improvements within a limited time, and he could effect those improvements by fencing or building, but he would then have no means of living. It is his means of living that forces him to fell the bush in order to get grass to graze the cows.

4. We heard a few moments ago that some of this country is not fit for agricultural purposes; but is it not all splendid dairying country when it is cleared?—A good deal of it is very good dairying country, but a portion of it is land that will never be fit for the plough.

5. *Mr. Hanan.*] The railway is being constructed down there?—Yes, the Catlin's Branch.

6. From timber and agriculture, do you think there is much to be obtained in the way of traffic on the line?—Yes, from timber there is considerable traffic to be obtained.

7. What class of timber is it?—I should say it is fairly good timber.

8. How does it compare with Southland?—I do not know Southland timber.

9. Where is the closest bush that is not cut out in the radius of Dunedin?—That is the closest bush, and it is roughly about eighty miles away. I am referring to Catlin's Bush.

10. Have you had bush nearer?—In the early days we had bush in the City of Dunedin.

11. Has it all been cut down?—Yes. Around Dunedin there is very little timber now. In the Waipori there is a little, but it is practically valueless.

12. Have you had any sawmilling experience?—No.

13. *Mr. Ell.*] We have heard from Mr. Barron that some land that was opened up for settlement in this district proved to be entirely unsuitable?—No; he did not say that it was entirely unsuitable.

*Mr. Jennings:* That is not so, Mr. Ell.

*Mr. Ell:* He said that the land generally was fair to medium, and some land would not take the grass because the subsoil was so cold. That was in Catlin's.

*Mr. Jennings:* He did not use those words.

14. *Mr. Ell.*] I am not in the habit of misleading. Is Mr. O'Neill aware of the fact that some of the land has proved entirely unsuitable?—That is so; some of it has proved unsuitable for settlement.

15. From your knowledge of some of the land which has not been opened up, do you think there is any of the land which has not already been opened up likely to prove unsuitable not only with regard to the subsoil, but with regard to the climatic conditions and bleakness?—Yes, I know there is some of it.

16. Is it not growing the best crop it will ever grow?—Of course, the best of the present crop could be moved and another young crop would be coming on. It could in time be used for milling or for firewood.

17. With regard to those holdings that were isolated, how many settlers were put on the blocks?—About sixty.

18. What was the size of their holdings?—From 100 to 150 acres.

19. They were entirely isolated?—A road was cut to them eventually, but it was not a good road.

20. The men, then, practically wasted their labour?—A number of them have been forced to abandon the position, and the place has resolved itself into much larger holdings.

21. Even now presumably there is some difficulty?—They are getting on better now. The original holders depended on milking, but now those remaining are going in for sheep.

22. Do you indorse what Mr. Barron says, that settlement should proceed very slowly—that is, only so far as it is made available by good roads?

*Mr. Jennings:* That is a question of policy.