

as soon as possible, as the country there will carry an enormous population once the land is out of Native hands. I have no wish to inflict hardship on any of my neighbours, but taking the line through the centre—east or west—would not be a payable proposition for many a long day. Most of the land on either of those routes consists of extremely broken country, and as soon as it has been cropped its value is lost as far as agriculture is concerned, and then is fit only for running sheep and cattle on. It has been stated in evidence that these hills produce beef. They do when the grass is new, but after that they are only fit to carry “stores.” To-day a man on 200 acres might do well, but in five years he would require 300 acres of the same land to get the return he does to-day. My neighbour, Mr. Crawford, the last witness, referred to the prospects here to-day, but it is no use taking notice of what we are doing to-day, as our farms are simply lying idle for want of communication. I have known of as many as three hundred sheep being fattened on 5 acres of turnips in Maungakarama, but had it not been for the fact that we had been looking forward to getting a railway here, most of us would have settled in other districts.

3. *Mr. Evans.*] If you can fatten sheep in that way, why is not more stock being sent south?—The sheep I refer to belonged to a man to whom money was not much of an object. He was not a struggling farmer like most of us, but could afford to do things that we cannot.

4. What is the difficulty in regard to getting the sheep away?—The difficulty in getting manure, and the want of capital to buy the three hundred sheep with.

5. *Mr. Coom.*] You said you thought the line neither to the east or west of the Tangihuas would pay even if you extended it to Kaikohe?—It would pay, no doubt, when it got near to Kaikohe, and to Kaikohe itself; but as regards the intermediate country, it will be many a long day before it will pay.

6. You said that most of the country is broken, and eventually becomes fit only to run “store” sheep and cattle on?—Yes; many acres of it which have been settled for any length of time will not to-day carry sheep or cattle, because of the fern.

7. Does that apply to the land about Maungakarama?—No. We can plough and break up our land, but the other land I am speaking of you cannot work very readily, because the grass dies out. It will not pay.

8. Does that apply to all the hill country?—Perhaps on a few little patches of limestone the grass might last a little longer, but eventually it dies out even there.

9. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] Has any land been sold here lately?—No, we are permanent settlers here, and we value our homesteads fairly high; but what the actual market value is I cannot say.

10. What have persons seeking to buy land in this district been offering for it?—I cannot say, but any little bit which has been offered has been very soon picked up.

11. Could you name the price?—I heard it was about £6 or £7 per acre.

12. Do you not know that land has been selling in other parts of the Dominion for a much higher price than that?—We have sold land up to £50 and £100 per acre in Maungakarama.

13. Are you not aware that land has been sold in other parts of the north for more than £6 per acre which has been in grass for more than five years?—Yes. In Mangapai there was land sold the other day for £22 10s. per acre. I have no intention of selling mine, as I do not believe in land-speculation in any shape or form.

14. Have you had any experience of land in any other district?—At Waikiekie, where I was dairying two or three years ago, and I fancy I had higher returns then.

15. Did you travel into what is known as the Omana Block?—No, I have not been there.

16. You do not know anything about the country there?—No.

17. *Mr. Becroft.*] Are you acquainted with the land north of this district?—Yes.

18. How far up?—For very nearly a hundred miles, up to Kaihu.

19. Are you prepared to apply the scathing denunciation you have applied to-day to the land on the eastern and western routes to all that land also?—No, not to all of it. I exempt the land near Kaikohe.

20. If I were to tell you that twenty-five miles north of here land is valued at £25 per acre—the land you have condemned—would you believe it?—No. I pity the men who bought it.

21. What do you produce here?—I have grown from 20 to 30 tons of mangolds under difficulty as regards manure, and about 15 tons of carrots to the acre, and oats that would chaff 3 tons to the acre.

22. Are you still doing that?—It depends on the season.

23. Did you not give it up because you found something else that paid better?—It was given up because we found that the expense we were under in getting our manures was too great to justify the risk. If we were near Puhekohe, and could get manure for £5 per ton, it would be different, but we have to pay £10 per ton here.

24. *The Chairman.*] What stock are you carrying at present on your place?—About thirty head of horses and cattle. I carry no sheep. I grow no crops for sale, but only for home use. If I grew crops, I could not sell them, because I could not send them away.

JAMES CAMERON MILLER examined. (No. 49.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Where do you reside?—At Maungakarama. I am a farmer, storekeeper, and bush contractor, and have been here forty-five years. My holding is 500 acres of freehold in Maungakarama, between 100 and 200 acres in Waikiekie, and nearly 600 acres in Kirikopuni.

2. Would you like to make a statement about the matter we are inquiring into?—I still hold to the original central route as laid down some years ago on the eastern side of the Tangihuas. I believe the line should be kept as far away as possible from competing with the water carriage, and that the railway should be run through country that will pay the best. Water carriage will always compete with a railway, and as this is a question of east or west, I consider that on the