

very nearest point for me. From my point of view, if it were not for the doubt about the continuity of this line, I would not want it to go under the Government control. That is a point that should not be overlooked. Probably some of you gentlemen know the Canterbury Plains. Thirty-five years ago I came to New Zealand, and at that time I was told by lots of people not to go on the land, because I would do nothing with it, the soil was so light. Another reason was that there was no water there; yet all the difficulties have been overcome. I maintain that the pumice lands are in exactly the same position as the Canterbury lands were thirty-five years ago; but as science has advanced, with a thorough knowledge of how to work the land, a change has come over the whole thing. The prices of different commodities, such as beef, wool, and mutton, are good, and I say without hesitation we can grow on that land now, with manure and proper tillage, better clover and turnips than were ever grown on the stony lands of the Canterbury Plains within my knowledge. That is a very great thing to say, but I am open to prove it by showing what the Canterbury Plains were many years ago and what this place is now.

7. *Hon. Sir J. Findlay.*] What is land on the Canterbury Plains selling at now?—The very worst of it not under £6 an acre. A property I had a mortgage over I sold for £4 an acre, and was very glad to get it. That very property is now valued at £12 an acre. That land lies between Hororata and Dunsandel. I was going to refer to a large block of land in my present district known as Smith's Block. I believe that was purchased some time ago for a mere nominal sum. It has been repurchased within the last twelve months by some friends of mine from Canterbury, and is now subdivided. I find that they have sold a portion of it—somewhere within the region of 15,000 and 20,000 acres—at £1 5s. to £1 10s. per acre. There are 57,000 acres altogether in Smith's Block [position pointed out on the map].

8. Is that in an unimproved condition?—Absolutely. I have been all over it, and am quite satisfied there is a big future before that particular area. I have been south of my place to Taupo, and seen the land all through there, and am satisfied that it is a crime that such a large area should be left in the condition it is to-day when there is such a crying-out for land. The Maraetai property adjoins my property. There is a lot of land there which is quite equal to anything in Lichfield and the Putaruru district, and I believe they are making an endeavour to cut it up and sell it.

9. Do you know anything about the prices?—They are trying to sell it as a whole block, and they are asking £1 5s. an acre. The Tokoroa people bought their land for £1 5s. They have had it surveyed and are putting roads through it, and the price they are asking for the small sections is £2 10s. up to £3 15s. per acre. It has only just been put on the market, and people are going up to have a look at it.

10. The piece of land you broke in and put down in grass was in its virgin state?—Yes.

11. And you converted it from its virgin state to what kind of grass?—Very good; it looks exceedingly promising, and was only put in in the spring.

12. Is there any superiority over the average of this country?—I think it is a little stronger.

13. You have been farming—how many years?—Thirty-five years.

14. I wish to get your frank opinion as to what proportion of this land is capable of profitable cultivation if the line is completed?—I think you can say about two-thirds of the 2,000,000 acres.

15. With regard to what you said about having an assurance of the permanence of this line in the hands of the company: what influence, in your opinion, has the uncertainty of the continuancy of the line upon settlement?—It is a little bit difficult to answer that, but wherever there is doubt as to how they are going to work the place and get their goods to and from a certain point it must have a disturbing effect on intending settlers.

16. You told the Committee that this land has been retarded as regards settlement by want of knowledge on the part of settlers?—Yes.

17. The same feeling acted against the settlement of the Canterbury Plains?—Yes.

18. And you say that this will disappear in the case of these lands as in the case of the Canterbury Plains?—Yes, I am quite satisfied of that.

19. *Mr. Wilson.*] How many miles are you south of Lichfield?—My nearest point is five or six miles.

20. You adjoin the Taupo Totara Timber Company's line?—No, I am about three-quarters of a mile away.

21. Your country is mostly open pumice country?—Yes.

22. South again of your property, away towards Mokai, is there much country of that character?—Hundreds of thousands of acres.

23. Is the quality of that country such as that you are on?—I do not think it is quite so good.

24. In your judgment is it capable of treatment to render it profitable?—I think every acre you can get a plough into is.

25. Should the railway be closed down, what would be the effect?—Well, if it were closed down I should very seriously consider whether I should not let some one else work my land.

26. *Mr. Buchanan.*] How long have you been farming in this particular locality?—Two years.

27. That is the extent of your knowledge of this class of country?—I have also travelled about it a good deal, and learned a good deal from other people.

28. We had a witness before the Committee—a Mr. Crowther—who has for forty years been up and down that country, and he stated that oats attempted to be grown were only 10 in. high?—I can tell him that I bought oats from a man named Pearson grown on a place called "The Club" that went a ton and a half to the acre, and I gave him £5 a ton for them.

29. That is your evidence after an experience of two years, as against the evidence of another witness of forty?—I do not know anything about the other witness.

30. You gave us some figures as to the cost of cultivating open land with a view of making a comparison between working open land and bush land, did you not?—Yes.