

HUGH LEAF WILSON sworn and examined. (No. 13.)

1. *Hon. Sir J. Findlay.*] What are you?—Land agent.
2. Residing where?—Christchurch.
3. You know the Tokoroa Block?—Yes.
4. It is about fifteen miles from?—Putaruru.
5. Southward from Putaruru about fifteen miles?—Yes.
6. What is the area of the block?—Tokoroa No. 1?
7. Yes?—I should say, about 50,000 acres.
8. Who is the owner of it?—There are several owners.
9. You are one of them?—I am in touch with some of them.
10. You have had dealings in connection with this land?—Yes.
11. The owners, we are told, were Canterbury people?—Yes, the Canterbury people are owning 21,000 acres.
12. Who owns the balance?—I think there is another Canterbury company.
13. It is all Canterbury-owned, as far as you know—the whole 50,000 acres?—Yes.
14. Does this Taupo Totara Timber Company's railway go through the block?—Yes.
15. At a point about fifteen miles from Putaruru?—Yes.
16. So that, so far as the block is concerned, it will not be affected by any extension—it is served already by the railway?—Yes.
17. Can you tell the Committee the purpose of the present owners—is it to cut the land up and sell it?—They have already surveyed it into blocks of from 300 to 1,500 acres.
18. With what view?—To put settlers on it. It is now being roaded. We are putting through twelve miles and a half of roads, and I have had, personally, fifteen Canterbury farmers over it who know the country well. Some of them are retired men, and they are all intensely satisfied with it.
19. It has not yet been actually put on the market?—No.
20. From what you have learned do you anticipate any particular difficulty in disposing of it?—No.
21. In sizes such as you have mentioned?—Yes. I may say, if I take a man over there, each day as he becomes more familiar with it he likes it the better.
22. And they are all practical men who have been over it?—Yes.
23. Can you give the Committee any idea of what you are asking for the smaller blocks of 300 acres?—We are asking from £2 10s. to £3 10s. an acre.
24. And what for the larger blocks of 1,500 acres?—£2 5s., I think.
25. The only improvements will be the roading?—Yes.
26. Whoever takes it up at those prices will have to do the fertilizing themselves?—Yes.
27. Can you tell the Committee whether, from the practical men who have gone over and examined it, you think they can make it pay at those prices?—The men I have referred to are members of the company who have purchased it.
28. Have you had any prospective settlers over it?—I have two now.
29. Those are the prices you propose to fix?—Yes.
30. Have you any objection to saying at what price it was acquired by your syndicate?—I hardly think that would be fair.
31. Do you know anything of the rest of the country in the vicinity of the block you mentioned?—Yes, I spent two months there last year, and, generally speaking, it is practically all the same class of country.
32. As this block you have referred to?—Yes. I noticed that the tussock seems to be gaining ground gradually everywhere and eating out everything else.
33. What do you infer from that?—Well, the lands have been so burned by the Natives at different times that other growths will not stand it, and the tussock is following it.
34. From what you have seen during the months you have been examining it do you think there is any reason why the great bulk of this land lying along the route of the company's line embraced within these borders [map referred to] should not be settled in areas the size you have mentioned, from 300 to 1,500 acres?—I think the sooner the Government assist in opening up that land and putting people on it the sooner we shall have a great increase in the export of butter, &c.
35. That is, if it gets access from the railway?—Yes.
36. Without access what will happen to settlement?—The cartage is too big an item for people to live there. I produce a photograph showing the size of the red clover grown at Lichfield. That was originally 4 ft. high.
37. *Mr. Dickie.*] How many acres of that were growing when you were there?—I think, about 25 acres.
38. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Are you aware that by means of photography you can extend the length and depth of anything indefinitely?—Photography never extended that.
39. You are a farmer?—No.
40. A simple business man?—Yes.
41. Your shareholders in this company—are they farmers?—Yes, almost every one of them.
42. Can you name any of them?—Yes. Mr. Robert Sloss, president of the Farmers' Union, Cheviot; Mr. Mulcock, living on the Cashmere Hills; Mr. Andrew Macfarlane, Alford Forest; Mr. Holland, of Waikari; and Mr. George Wade, of Kaituna.
43. Have they any experience of that class of land?—I do not think so.
44. They went, like yourself, on the land and expressed their opinion as you have stated?—Yes. One other member—a Mr. Millar, from Methven—has a farm, which is known as the model farm. His contention is that willow-trees will grow on the highest points of the hills there.