

country between Taupo and the Waipunga Stream has to look for its access from the north. Now, of course it is known that I am interested in a block of country there, but I might say that when I was considering the purchase of that country the final fact that decided me to enter upon a settlement scheme there was the information I received that the railway had been surveyed from Mokai to Taupo, otherwise no man would think of touching a block of country there with a view to settling it. Now, sir, I should like to refer to some land that is lying between Taupo and Tarawera, a distance of fifty miles. Passing from Taupo you go through by the coach to the Tauhara Block and pass the Pahautea Native reserve; you then cross the Rangitaiki, and you pass through portion of the Runanga Station, area over 60,000 acres. Now, referring to the map here, I will deal somewhat with the areas. The block called Wharetoto, which, I might say, is not quite accurately coloured, is Native country, and comprises 56,000 acres. It was formerly owned by Nelson Bros., of Napier, but is now occupied by Mr. James Carswell. The whole of that country is capable of being cut up into grazing-runs, and would carry a fair population. The most easterly red patch is Pohokura, consisting of 56,000 acres, which the Government at the present time is having surveyed for settlement. On the northern portion of the largest white patch is a block of 9,000 acres belonging to the Government, which was purchased from the Natives also for settlement; and past that is Pukahunui Block, 41,000 acres. Further down is another station belonging to Mr. James Macfarlane, of about 40,000, called Taharua. I can only give second-hand evidence on this point, but quite recently the manager of Runanga Station was visiting Mr. Macfarlane, when Mr. Macfarlane assured him that the people were dairying in the Waikato on land that was not as good as his block. Now, sir, putting those figures together, there are 270,000 acres of that country, all of which is adapted for settlement. One reason why I say that this country is admirably adapted for settlement, if I may show you on the map, is this: that all this southern portion of Runanga is beautiful bush. It has on it large areas of rimu, matai, kahikatea, and a sprinkling of totara, and on the other portion is a magnificent forest of red-beech. [Witness explained the eastern portion of the country shown green on the map.] Where the bush is it is mostly hilly country, and directly you enter the hilly country you find yourself up against the rocks, with beautiful waterfalls, and that kind of thing. To show the adaptability of all this country for settlement, the waterfalls shown in the photograph [produced] are the Waipunga Waterfalls, and are within seven minutes' walk of the Napier-Taupo Road. I want to show there is all the power required there for settlement, and unless that country can get access by railway it is quite impossible to develop it. It has the timber, it has the water-power for a hydro-electric system, and it has all the country that is necessary to provide a huge settlement scheme for hundreds of settlers if the country can get access to the north line. Now, here is the position: I may say I know the country very well indeed between Rotorua and Taupo—I have gone over it both by coach and motor-car on a number of occasions. I have not been on the country between Putaruru and Mokai or Taupo, so I cannot speak of that country; but I am satisfied that while there are good plots of land lying between Rotorua and Taupo, it is not the same class of land that can be settled to the south, nor, from what I have been told, of the land in the vicinity of Putaruru. The position, therefore, is this: that if this country is to be settled there is only one way to do it, and that is to complete this line into Taupo, and then the people in the south country, having a good road, can with motor-wagons get all the access that they want. One point I should like to mention is this: that from, say, the Rangitaiki River, which is the beginning of the Runanga Station (and the beginning of all this block of country I have spoken of) is twenty-three miles away from Taupo; from there to Mokai is nineteen miles—that is, forty-two miles. Reaching Mokai we at the present time have to strike the company's railway, on which the freight is £1 2s. 6d. per ton, and then to get our produce down from Auckland it costs in 5-ton-truck lots 6s. per ton. But supposing a man gets it in a smaller lot it costs considerably more; so that the settlement of all this country is being blocked for want of access. If we have to wait until the line is made from Rotorua to Taupo the land on this route—and I am speaking now with some knowledge of the country—is not the same class of country like that between Mokai and Putaruru, and is not likely to be settled for a number of years, because it is not likely to give an immediate return. For one thing, I do not remember seeing any bush on the country between Rotorua and Taupo, and consequently the whole of the timber for fencing, &c., would have to be hauled on to that country. On the other hand, on the district to which I am referring (Runanga, &c.) the Maoris will cut fencing-posts for £1 per hundred, and all you have to do is to sleigh the posts out; and you can use the same class of posts for £1 or £1 10s. a hundred which would cost elsewhere from £6 to £7 per hundred. I do not know that I have much more to say. I have an interest in this country, but my interests are the interests of the country.

3. The object of your interest is to show that if this line is carried through to Taupo it will benefit all that 250,000 acres towards the south?—Yes, very greatly; and the country would, directly that land is being cut up for settlement, draw a very large increase in land-tax from it. It would draw all the money that was paid upon transfers of properties and sales in the way of stamp duties, and it would have the benefit of providing an entirely fresh field for settlement where settlers could go on the land and get an immediate return. I do not know whether I should say anything about the quality of the country, but I may say that all the experiments that have been made indicate that it is country that is adaptable to immediate cultivation and use. Last year I grew oats upon the country without manure.

4. How many bushels to the acre?—It was a poor return, for the reason that it was put in by the Maoris, and the farming was of the most indifferent class. Through being put in very late the results were not satisfactory. We did not put in any manure at all; but this year we have sown 20 acres for our own feed, and have put in 2 cwt. of superphosphates to the acre, and expect a good return.