

The League is anxious only to see national assets of pre-eminent value and importance preserved, and we trust the Commission will also take this view.

2. Is the Patua Range permanently reserved now?—Yes.

3. Is it fenced?—Partly, but the open part of the range is let.

4. Could that open part be fenced against cattle?—It is not fenced between the bush and the open country, but only as between the reserve itself and the surrounding country. We want to prevent any encroachment on the reserved portion of the range. The society has made repeated representations on the subject to prevent cattle destroying this forest, but nothing has been done. When it was attempted to have this made a reserve and inalienable, the objections some years ago came from the very people adjoining the land in question.

5. Are you aware that some of the land fronting the River Mokau is reported to have changed hands lately at £6 an acre?—No. A lot of the land facing the river is of a precipitous nature, and the most valuable from a scenic point of view. There are one or two very valuable flats, and you might allude to those. They were cleared years ago, and do not affect the scenic aspect of the question.

6. A sub-committee has already visited the Mokau, and we recognize that a great deal of the country is precipitous, but when these cases go before the Compensation Court the price put on some of the frontages to the river is very high?—The League recognizes the necessity of giving access to the sections fronting the river and these flats, and I presume the price paid for the flats—£6—can be justified. We do not wish to stop settlers getting access to their holdings, but we do say that land of no value from the point of settlement has been burnt and the scenery destroyed.

7. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] Do you think the people holding that land, and who should know something about its capabilities, would fell bush and grass country that was of no value?—You never know what they will do. I was speaking to a contractor a few months ago on this subject, and he said, "We had a contract to do so-many acres, and we have felled the bush right down to the river; but I admit that the land will not carry a rabbit to the acre."

8. *The Chairman.*] Are there any patriotic people in Taranaki who would be inclined to subsidize any efforts that might be made to preserve the places you mention?—Taranaki is well provided with reserves, to the credit of its people, who have done much in that direction. The recreation-ground was practically made and has since been maintained out of public subscriptions. The expenditure on Mount Egmont Park has been borne by the people of this town, although certainly the Government have helped. I think we have done our share. With regard to Mokau, I submit it is a national matter, the most valuable asset to New Zealand, and should be treated accordingly. The late Prime Minister, Mr. T. Mackenzie, told us that Mokau River contained easily the best scenery in the Dominion. The Wanganui people were not asked to bear the cost of reserving the bush on that river, and why should not the State treat this district similarly? Then, again, the Mokau River is fifty miles from New Plymouth, on the border of the Auckland Province, and the Auckland people might very well be asked to contribute their share to conserving the Mokau bush. It is a national matter and in the interests of settlement that the scenery along the Mokau should not be destroyed, otherwise the river will become a sludge-channel, and the people who are now asking exorbitant sums by way of compensation will be the first to cry out.

ROBERT CLIFTON HUGHES sworn and examined. (No. 66.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Do you wish to make a statement?—With regard to the remarks of Mr. List on the Mokau River, I wish to state that I saw that country before a tree was felled, when it was in a state of nature. I saw it again after a lot of useless clearing had been done, and it was heart-breaking to see how the trees that made the place so beautiful had been destroyed. They were felled on the steep cliffs, and the charred stumps were lying on the cliffs. The country was consequently opened up to the blackberry and other noxious weeds, country which is wholly unsuitable for grazing or reproductive occupations. I sympathize with the Government over the question of funds, but the State should bear in mind that New Zealand stands almost foremost in the world as a tourist resort. I trust the Government will supply the funds to preserve the scenery on the Mokau River up to a reasonable extent. I would not allow another tree on the river-bank to be cut down.

2. Are there any patriotic men in Taranaki who would be inclined to subsidize any efforts in the direction of preserving the places you mention? In certain other districts where the Government have been approached to secure places of interest they have done so on condition that some contribution towards the expense was made by the people in the district, and in several cases that has been agreed to?—We have not many wealthy people here who could put down their cheques for £1,000. It is not a common practice here, but I am sure an appeal to the public generally would be responded to to some extent. I would back my feeling with a small contribution. As to the Everett Road Reserve, some time ago Mr. Bakewell, a farmer living on that road, told me that efforts would be made to have the land there thrown open for settlement, and he was strongly opposed to it. I wish to represent his view on the matter to this Commission. He is an adjoining settler to the reserve.

3. *Dr. Cockayne.*] Is there a considerable quantity of land available for settlement in Taranaki still, and not yet occupied? Is this the last piece that can be settled?—Mr. Collis could perhaps answer that question.

4. *Mr. Collis.* There are large areas in the back country coming in, and in the back districts, if the settlers were to farm their land better, it would be a wiser policy than throwing open fresh areas of bush land for them.