

CLEMENT WILLIAM GOVETT sworn and examined. (No. 67.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you please make a statement?—I am a solicitor, and have been in practice here about thirty-six years. At the present time it seems impossible to build small houses suitable for artisans and working-men except at a loss. I am of opinion that to build houses which will not pay at least 8 per cent. on the cost of the building and 5 per cent. on the cost of the land may be philanthropic, but from a business point of view it is madness. I have endeavoured by means of correspondence in the local papers and by interviews with builders and carpenters to endeavour to find out how the object I have in view can be attained, and I thought perhaps that something might be done by way of building houses to stock measurements, but I have been always told that houses cannot be built at the present time at a profit owing to the price of timber, which is notoriously rising in value every year. Under these circumstances it seems to me that with a scarcity of New Zealand timber it is the imperative duty of the Government for the time being of New Zealand to do everything in their power to encourage the importation of timber from every direction possible, and in order to do this to reduce or abolish altogether duties on imported timber. The present policy of endeavouring to stop the importation of foreign timber keeps up the price abnormally high, and encourages the destruction of timber, some of which has not properly matured, and also the cutting of timber at probably unsuitable times of the year when the sap is rising instead of falling. I have no special knowledge about timber, but my professional experience shows me that the houses which have been put up during the last few years will never last like the timber used in the houses built, say, more than thirty years ago. I have had for some twenty-five years a good deal of experience with regard to planting and growing native trees, and am at the present time Chairman of the Pukekura Park Board, one of the main objects of which is to grow native trees in the park. Though the young trees there are extremely well sheltered, and have every advantage, their slow growth shows that it would be quite hopeless ever to think of growing New Zealand trees for the sake of their timber when there are so many exotic trees which grow so much quicker and are also so much hardier. I say nothing about the evil climatic effects which are following the denudation of the forests, and the necessity of making large forest reserves (though I feel very strongly on this subject), as well as regards the loss of beauty.

2. Could you give the Commission the date when the gardens here were started?—No planting was done before 1876.

3. When were the large *Pinus insignis* planted?—About the end of 1876.

4. Is much building done here in concrete or brick?—Very little, for the reason there is such a great difficulty in regard to getting stone.

5. Is the timber used in the town locally grown or imported?—Lately there has been some importation of Oregon pine. Nearly all the timber used is New Zealand timber, but I cannot speak with certainty.

GEORGE HENRY BULLARD sworn and examined. (No. 68.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Commissioner of Crown Lands and Chief Surveyor for the Taranaki District?—Yes.

2. It has been alleged that the Everett Road Reserve is a hotbed for noxious weeds. Is that correct?—Probably you noticed at your inspection yesterday that the noxious weeds were chiefly on the road frontage and along the part of the reserve that had been run through by fire. We let a contract lately for clearing them. I cannot give the exact cost, but sometimes it amounts to about £20. That is the annual cost.

3. Are there many reserves in the district in the same position?—Yes, Pukeraungiora Pa cost us lately £100 to clear of weeds. It is an historic spot on the Waitara River. I will supply a list of the reserves and cost of clearing the same.

4. Are there any climatic reserves in your district or Crown lands back in the ranges that could be set aside for climatic purposes?—We do as a rule reserve the very rough portions in the case of every block of Crown land opened up, but the pressure for settlement land is so great that we have to open every acre that is worth it. Taranaki is well off for reserves. Our policy is to reserve any portion of a block that we think too rough for profitable settlement. As to the quantity of Crown land left in Taranaki, at the beginning of last year there were 250,000 acres, but by the end of this year there will not be 150,000 acres left unalienated.

5. Is Native land being purchased here on behalf of the Government?—Very little Native land is left unalienated, and little is being bought. One or two blocks are left, but they have been leased, and we have no chance of getting them.

6. Have you any trouble in this province over the deer?—No. But we have trouble through settlers putting their cattle into the reserves during the winter. We find it hard to get a conviction against them. We tried, and were advised that all we could do was to impound the cattle. The trouble has been very bad in the Egmont National Park.

7. I understand there are very few timber-mills in this province?—Very few. The Taranaki bush does not carry a large amount of milling-timber to the acre. I had an assessment made of some bush on land at Mangapehe before the land was opened for settlement, and on 1,000 acres the assessment only came to 820 ft. to the acre, and on 200 acres to 6,500 ft. to the acre. On a 1,200-acre reserve there was roughly about 7,000,000 ft. of timber. We borrow the timber expert of the Wellington District for work of that kind.

8. When the timber is sold is it disposed of according to the schedule rates of royalty under the regulations?—Yes; but I have had it pointed out to me lately that these are the minimum royalties, and the Department prefers the timber being put up to auction. We have so little that we have not done so yet, but in one case we will auction it.