

and they found out that the lease could be cancelled. Another thing I should say: I never got any notice that this lease was going to be cancelled. I did not receive notice that it was going to be cancelled until three days after it was cancelled. They cancelled my lease at the 31st December last, and I did not get notice from the Commissioner of Crown Lands until the 4th January following. If I had got anything like reasonable notice I should have known a little more about it. I was not certain that the Land Board would take the section from me and put it up on renewable lease.

16. Do you think that was fair treatment to mete out to a man who had occupied the land for seventeen or eighteen years?—No, I thought not. I thought that somebody might have told me about it, anyhow.

17. Has the land been taken away from you?—The lease has been cancelled. If I do not get that land it will cost me about £25 to lay out now on the alteration of the fencing. The little paddocks that I have got about there will all have to be altered.

18. Have you any reason to believe that Mr. Gibson was assisting in the arrangement to take the land from you?—Oh, I think he helped them, because Mr. Sidney Smith is a great friend of Mr. Gibson and he often goes there.

19. Who is Mr. Sidney Smith?—He is a great friend of Mr. Gibson. He is a settler there, and has about 750 acres not far off at Port Robinson.

20. Quite a large man, by the way?—Yes. He had originally about 600 acres there, and there was a section that was never taken up down at the mouth of the Hurunui, and he and a Mr. McGillivray applied that this section should be divided between them. There were other applicants for the section, but the Land Board decided to divide this section of 400 acres between Mr. Sidney Smith and Mr. McGillivray. That made his holding up to 750 acres.

21. Is not that what they call "aggregation" nowadays?—They might call it "reaggregation" of estates.

22. How long ago is that?—Fourteen years.

23. The section that you occupy is not a particularly good one from what you have said?—No, it is a very rough and broken section—40 or 50 acres of it will not keep a sheep: it is a very rough section.

24. Will it average a sheep to the acre?—That is what it carries. It will not carry more.

25. What rent do you pay?—2s. 9d. an acre.

26. I suppose you felt very keenly the taking-away of this little section?—It will make a great difference to me: it will mean an expense to me in the alteration of my fences. There is a little bit of flat land, about an acre and a half, which I have got there alongside the other flat land, and that added on to the 2½ acres on one side of the spur make a little square patch of land. If the 2½ acres is cut off by a fence it only leaves me an acre and a half of flat ploughable land. It will take away a certain amount of flat ploughable land from me. It is only sheep-country; it is not rich and fertile land. And we have made it what it is. When we went there it was covered with stunted manuka and wild-irishman and all sorts of rubbish: it had never been touched. We cleared perhaps thirty or forty cart-loads of stones off it, too.

27. I suppose that a good deal of attention has been directed to this section in Cheviot during the last year or so?—Only during the last few months we have had strangers up there. They are under the impression that there is something very remarkable about this land. But I do not think anything will come of that. Some men who had an idea of going in for it have said to me—Mr. Tweedy, for one: he said, "It is ridiculous putting the land up at 12s. an acre. I am not going in for it."

28. I suppose it has become a sort of Naboth's vineyard in Cheviot?—It made people think there was something very wonderful about it.

29. Certain individuals were casting covetous eyes on it?—Yes.

30. Have you a family?—No, there are only my son and myself there at present. There were five of us when I first went to Cheviot. One is dead. We could not all live on the section, and one boy had to go back to England. Then my daughter married: that left myself and my son, and we are "baching" there.

31. Your son and yourself are quite competent to manage the section?—Yes.

32. I mean the holding as it was?—Yes.

33. Have you had a considerable profit to show at the end of each year?—No. I am still in debt. I have been working it off slowly.

34. I suppose the taking-away of this piece of land will make it more difficult for you and your son to make a living?—Yes, it will make £20 a year difference to us.

35. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] What reason had you to think that the Land Board was going to carry through secretly the taking of this section from you?—Because it was kept secret. I was not told anything about it. I was told it was to have been kept a secret.

36. That was a rumour, was it not?—Yes.

37. You said that the Land Board decided to cancel in December, and you were not given notice till January of the cancellation?—That is so.

38. How long had your lease to run from the date you received notice?—It was an annual lease.

39. When did it terminate?—I paid the rent on the 1st January in each year—£1 3s., I think.

40. At what date in the year does your annual lease expire?—31st December. It says it shall go on from year to year: "The rent is to be paid on the 1st day of January in each year, and so on from year to year."

41. So you were just given notice at the time you paid your rent?—No. I paid my rent twelve months before that.