

103. When did the balloting you referred to take place?—Within the last month or two there were one or two sections.

104. You said that some already on the land were going in for more?—Every ballot in the last three or four months has been all the same.

105. When was that?—About a month or so ago—the last section.

106. What do you consider it would cost per acre to bring in the land by employing men in the way suggested by Mr. Semple?—The same as in any other way—about £5 an acre for the first breaking in. I have had it done by contract and by day labour, and the result has always been about the same.

107. It has been stated that it would cost between £6 and £7 an acre to bring in the land?—That is the permanent second pasture.

108. Do you think it would be brought in for that?—I think so. I have used largely Native labour.

109. Leaving out the question of development, do you think the railway, as a railway, would pay working-expenses and 4 per cent. interest?—I do not say it would pay immediately it was put through. It would certainly be a paying proposition from the settlement it would induce and from the service it would give for the forests.

110. You say you have put some men on the land on the closer-settlement principle?—I have a man working now on the land, and he is doing well.

111. How far are you from the railway?—Thirty miles.

112. If that man can do well without a railway, why cannot others?—Perhaps he had extra good terms. Any one can do better with a railway.

113. Is he not thirty miles from the railway?—I do not say it is impossible for one to do without the railway. One man can make good where another will make a failure.

114. Could you get your fertilizers any cheaper from Rotorua by rail than now? Is it possible to get them better than you are now getting them?—We get them as cheap as we can.

115. Suppose you purchased them in Rotorua?—But they would have to come from Auckland, anyhow.

116. My point is that a railway already exists: you get the benefit of the railway from Auckland to Rotorua?—Certainly.

117. You have told us that you were doing very well when you were paying £4 a ton on your fertilizer?—I have said that we managed to keep going.

118. Kept going all right?—Well, I have kept going all right.

119. My point is that the fertilizer is there—that you have got what you expected?—I have only started to use fertilizers.

120. Is the fertilizer factor a very big one, seeing that you did all right when you were paying £4 upon it, and now it is costing you £1?—I do not know about it being all right. We kept going, anyhow.

121. *Mr. Semple.*] As to the question of the railway paying, I suppose you know that very few railways pay at the start. The question is whether the railway will pay the nation later on, by settling a multiplicity of people on the land?—It would pay the country in that respect. We want the country settled.

122. Do you not think it would reduce the cost of preparing the land if you employed teams of men on certain areas, and gave them the modern equipment for doing the job, such as tractors, and that sort of thing?—Certainly it would cut down the cost. It would depend upon the management.

123. Would not mass action, well organized and well equipped, bring down the cost, as against men struggling on their own?—Certainly it would. Mass settlement would make it cheaper, of course.

124. How much did you say your land cost you per acre to prepare?—£5 an acre, first furrow.

125. And you agree that the methods I am suggesting would bring down that cost?—Yes.

126. As to the road, I understand that one of the main difficulties of the farmer is getting his stock to the market. Would the establishment of a bitumen road increase his difficulties?—Very much so. It would be necessary to have a stock-road as well as the bitumen road, I reckon.

127. Is not that going to interfere with the value of the stock, and add to the difficulties of getting it to market?—Yes; it will be very dangerous.

128. And the farmer would be the loser all the time?—Yes.

129. Is it not desirable to put the railway in so that not only one farmer will make good, but that every farmer will be assured of success?—Yes, from the start.

130. If, then, farmers in general make good from the start, will not that have a corresponding influence and benefit to the nation?—Yes.

131. Because the farmer will be producing to his full capacity “from the jump”?—That is so.

132. *The Chairman.*] Are there any farmers who have been in the district for a considerable number of years?—Only Mr. Vaile and about half a dozen others.

133. Have many gone off because they have failed?—Only one or two soldier settlers.

134. It has been a case of every one doing well?—Yes; and when they do go away they come back again.

135. *Mr. Semple.*] If the majority of the men who have gone on the pumice land have done well under difficult circumstances, surely that argues in favour of giving facilities for many thousands to make good?—Certainly. They will get their land cheap in the first instance.

136. Even if they pay more for the land than you did when you went on, with the increased facilities they can afford to pay more?—Yes. I do not see how mass settlement on pumice land can be a failure, if it is properly managed.

137. *The Chairman.*] Irrespective of the railway, it would be a success under good management?—I should say so.