

199. And from Taupo to Waiotapu, or to Rotorua?—Yes.

200. Do you think those lands are capable of profitable settlement?—Of course, I am not competent to form an opinion—I am not a farmer—but all the opinions of the Government experts, and the advice I have been able to get—and I have had to collect a lot of it—is to the effect that two-thirds of that country will be profitable farming country.

201. And would not the remaining third be suitable for timber-growing?—Not necessarily. There are some hills, and you could plant trees on them, but they might not be profitable.

202. You have heard all the evidence given in this inquiry?—Yes.

203. I suppose you would not disagree with Mr. Martin's evidence?—No. I am an optimist about the pumice country.

204. In the event of that country being opened up for settlement, which do you think would be the more economical thing for the transport of the farmers' cattle and produce, the motor or the railway?—I do not know.

205. Well, which do you think would be the cheaper?—I do not know. You have to put money—fixed capital—up for a railway.

206. But the settler is not concerned with that: he has not to pay for it. In the event of this country being settled, which do you think would be the better economic proposition for the farmer—to get his produce taken out and his requirements taken in by road or by railway?—I have had no experience with motor transport.

207. Well, we will put it another way: You are the Chairman of the Taupo Totara Timber Co.: If you had a totara bush within fifty miles of Putaruru, how would you do? I have brought quite a lot of timber from your mill, and built houses with it in the Waikato. Suppose that timber had been brought fifty-two miles by road transport instead of railway, could I have bought it at the same price?—No; it could not be done.

208. Say that you had a bitumen road?—We have had to go into the question of motor transport, and the local bodies are joining with us in an effort to stop it.

209. Suppose, then, that you could sell your railway, as you have tried to do?—Pardon me. That is a popular impression, but we have never tried to sell it. I have explained what happened. We raised capital in London to extend the railway, and we applied to Parliament for power to purchase 200,000 acres of Native land, the whole of which was to be done by private enterprise. The syndicate were to take over the railway, and we took the responsibility, because we guaranteed the traffic. We merely said to Parliament, "If you will not let us settle the pumice country, then use this line for the purpose. All your officers recommend that you should give us encouragement to do the work." The question was submitted to a Royal Commission—whether the Government should buy the line. It was not submitted at our request. The letter to the Prime Minister which I read yesterday formed the basis of the Commission. We did not ask the Government to buy the railway. We said, "Let the timber pay for the railway," and not that the Government should take it over at all.

210. You never tried to sell it?—No. Read the report of the Commission and you will find exactly what happened. Before that Commission I gave evidence to that effect. We did not think it was a practical proposition for the Government to take it over.

211. What I was getting at was the question of the carriage of timber. If you do not know, I am satisfied; but if you do not want to answer it is a different thing. What I want to know is whether I could have bought that timber cheaper from your place if it had been carried by road, or if carried by rail?—It was impracticable to carry it by road.

212. Supposing you could sell your railway at what it cost, and you had the same proposition in front of you again—to start all over again—and you had to consider the question whether you would have the timber brought out by road transport or by railway transport, what do you think you would do?—As matters stand I would endeavour to find out what the public now want to find out—that is, which is the cheapest transport.

213. Then, you have no opinion of your own?—I have no idea. I do not form opinions unless I know the facts.

214. Yet you tell me I would not have bought the timber at the same price if carried by road as if carried by rail?—That is not an opinion—it is a fact. We have ascertained that.

215. Then, you must know. All I want to know is this: you tell me I could not buy it at the same price because it would cost more, yet when I ask you how it would cost more you say you have no knowledge and no opinion?—Pardon me. I said I had no opinion. I was giving my knowledge.

216. Did Sir John Findlay endeavour to get the present Prime Minister to purchase this railway in 1911?—It is all in the printed records. All the evidence before the 1912 parliamentary Committee on our petition was printed.

217. What was your petition in 1912?—It was for the purpose of buying Native land, so that we could develop the pumice country.

218. Sir John Findlay was representing your company?—Yes.

219. Did he in 1911 endeavour to get the Prime Minister to buy this railway?—No. On the contrary, our petition of 1911 asked for permission for us to buy. We could not buy more than 5,000 acres of Native land. To get the 200,000 acres it was necessary to have parliamentary sanction. We petitioned Parliament asking it for that sanction, in order that we might develop the country.

220. Your company has never tried to sell your railway, and never asked the Government to purchase it, under any circumstances?—No.

221. You did not get Mr. Massey to use his influence to get it taken over?—On the contrary, it was Mr. Massey's Government coming in that rather blocked it, because a very important Minister then represented Rotorua.