

199. Can you give an estimate of the carrying-capacity per 100 acres if the pumice country were brought in?—First of all you would only graze your stock in a sort of way, but it would require about 4 acres to a cow.

200. Evidence has been given that on 2½ acres you could easily carry a cow and make her produce up to £17 and £20 worth of butterfat. Would that be an exaggeration?—I think that is the theory, but it is one thing to expound a theory and another thing to put it into practice.

201. Would you agree to a statement that has been submitted that the average Taupo land is ten times as good in carrying-capacity as blue-papa country?—I do not think that statement has been made. It would be a preposterous statement to make.

202. Do you say that there is no comparison between the carrying-capacity of blue-papa country and pumice country?—Absolutely none. In the pumice country whatever carrying-capacity you get has to be built up; in the papa country you go on without top-dressing.

203. With regard to water-supply, are there not blocks of 10,000 and 20,000 acres without any display of surface water?—As a matter of fact I think that is an underestimate. I know one block of 54,000 acres on the east of the Rangitaiki River on which I have never seen a spring.

204. Has the land to which you refer as being worth experimenting upon any available water-supply?—Water there is fairly scarce. I think that before taking on any experiment scheme the water question must be determined.

205. From your knowledge of the country, would you say there may be a great difficulty in getting a satisfactory water-supply, owing to the heavy deposit of pumice?—That applies to boring. I think there would be great difficulty. I would not like to be dogmatic about the question of boring, because it has not been tried.

206. It has been stated that 50 acres of the flat country, properly brought in, would maintain a family in comfort: do you agree with that statement?—I think it is impossible.

207. Would you consider it an exaggeration?—An absolute exaggeration.

208. Can you give any estimate as to the approximate cost of bringing in this country?—As I have said, it would be hard to measure it in pounds shillings and pence. It is only by a succession of pastures that you will eventually establish a good sole of grass. How many years that will take we do not know.

209. We had very interesting evidence from Mr. Parsons, who has land at Guthrie. That land would not be of the same class, would it?—No; it is in a different valley.

210. Have you any knowledge that he is of opinion that the land is practically worthless, and would really be a liability instead of an asset?—He told me that when petitioning the Lands Committee the other day. In fact, he and I always agreed on that point in discussing the matter.

211. Do you know that he has applied to the Lands Department to have the freehold of his land given to him for nothing?—That is the subject of the petition, on which I appeared.

212. From your knowledge of Mr. Parsons, would you consider that he is an up-to-date farmer?—I think he is a good farmer, but I am sure that he went in somewhat of an optimist, and I am afraid his original hopes have not been realized.

213. Is that a reasonable term—that he is an up-to-date practical farmer?—I should say that he is not a successful farmer.

214. Can you produce evidence as to the successful settlement, apart from land speculation, of any land within the pumice area?—No. On the contrary, as to the little I do know—I do not want to disclose any private business, but at Tokoroa, land that has been held there has been offered to the Crown. I would like to know a case where a man has made an outstanding success of the pumice country.

215. Do you consider that the petitioner is a *bona fide* pioneer settler?—With all due respect to Mr. Vaile, he strikes me as a great land-salesman, but his ability as a land-salesman probably over-shadows all other sentiment.

216. *Mr. Vaile.*] Would you look at me and say that?—I would.

217. *Mr. Lye.*] Have you come to any conclusion as to what is at the back of the demand for this railway—whether it is prompted by a desire for settlement, or by the desire to sell land, or what?—That is a question I would prefer not to answer, for the reason that I am valuing these properties. As far as the railway is concerned, I do not approve of it. What inspires it I do not know.

218. But you come in contact with the railway?—I do, but I did not know the railway was to be started before it was actually started. I do not know what was behind the movement.

219. Do you believe it is absolutely essential for the settlement of the country that a railway should be built along the proposed route, to carry fertilizers and for transport?—While the question of successful settlement is so problematical, I cannot see that the railway is warranted. There may be some reasons that I cannot see, but from the experience I have had that is my opinion.

220. Have you any knowledge of farmers' finance, from the State Advances point of view?—No. I have only read the local controversy on the alleged difficulty of obtaining finance from the Department. I would rather be guided by those who lend money on good security, and want to be assured that the security is there. If the farmer applying is already loaded with private mortgages, the Department would probably be reluctant to advance money to him.

221. Do you agree that the difficulty of finance, and the difficulty of getting fertilizers, have been the prime causes of keeping back settlement, or would you say it was the quality of the land?—I think it has been the quality of the land mainly.

222. *Mr. Massey.*] You say that Mr. Parsons has not made a success?—That is so.

223. Why was that: Was it shortage of capital, or what?—That is a question not easily answered. Out of his 1,400 acres he has kept 300 acres. Some of his pasture is not too good to-day. He went in with £600 capital. On top of that he has spent £3,000 of a State mortgage, and he is still struggling. I think he was assisted for a long time by money that he earned through the Agriculture Department.