

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

EVIDENCE TAKEN BEFORE THE COMMISSION APPOINTED TO ENQUIRE
INTO THE ADMINISTRATION OF CROWN LANDS IN OTAGO.

PART I.—EVIDENCE TAKEN AT TUAPEKA.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1869.

No. 1.

Mr John Mouat, M.P.C., having been duly sworn, examined:—

1. *Hon. Mr. Domett.*] What is the present amount of land available for the use of the population of Lawrence and the neighbouring inhabitants?—I cannot state exactly; but, in round numbers, there are I suppose, about 100,000 acres, including the Reserve on Run No. 123.

2. Have not one or two Runs, or portions of Runs, been lately proclaimed into Hundreds?—5,000, acres on Smith's Run, the remainder of Messrs. Pillan's and Maitland's Run, and a considerable portion of Mr. Fulton's Run. But all these Blocks, except Smith's, are remote from any settled mining population; in fact, these Hundreds were not proclaimed at the request of the miners at all. A very large portion of the Tuapeka Agricultural Reserve on the tracing is totally unfitted for agriculture. I allude chiefly to that portion towards Waipori, which is too elevated. I have no hesitation in saying that out of the 95,000 acres, are 50,000 quite unfit for settlement. I can possibly procure evidence that will show more exactly the amount of land unfit for agriculture in this Block.

3. How much is fit for agriculture?—I am inclined to think there may be about 10,000 acres, including the Block of 5,000 on Smith's Run. This is being gradually taken up.

4. Who are they that are taking up this land?—Chiefly miners and trades-people on the Goldfields, who have saved a little money, and are desirous of investing it in agricultural and pastoral pursuits.

5. The remaining land is fit, I suppose, for pasture?—Yes, but it is considerably overstocked, as I am informed. I do not know it of my own knowledge.

6. Do they run cattle or sheep?—Both; but chiefly cattle. I have no doubt whatever that settlement is not only limited by the amount of land available for agriculture, but equally by the limitation of land for pastoral purposes, *i.e.*, I believe additional agricultural land would scarcely be taken up, or rather would not be taken up at all, unless pastoral land could be taken with it.

7. Your answer seems to imply that you would wish the Runs at present held by large holders in the neighbourhood, to be occupied by a greater number of smaller runholders?—Yes, but not as leaseholders, only as licensees. Tenants from year to year at the most. I would not give them any such tenure as would impede settlement.

8. Do you think that would satisfy the persons who are now desirous of obtaining land?—These persons wish for, in the first place, a certain amount of land to cultivate cereals and vegetables, *i.e.*, to make a home of, and also a larger portion to run cattle and sheep upon.

9. Do you mean sheep and cattle as subsidiary to agriculture?—Exactly so. This is precisely what was intended to be effected by the Hundred system, as I understood it.

10. Can you say positively whether the formation of Hundreds out of old Runs, has hitherto had the effect of settling bodies of men carrying on agriculture in this manner?—With respect to Mataura and Waitaki Hundreds, it has not had that effect.

11. Can you account for the failure of this effect? There is one reason particularly with respect to Waitaki. There is no Land Office on the spot. Applicants have to make several long journeys to Dunedin and back before they can get a chance of being put in possession of the land. I know that from my own knowledge and my own observation. For a person wanting 200 or 300 acres, the cost of the journeys required to obtain it, comes to more than the land is worth. These remarks, I believe, will apply to the Mataura Hundreds as well. I only mention this as one reason as applicable to the Goldfields. In former times I have known a gold digger desirous of settling in Waitaki district, give it up, simply on account of that difficulty. He went on foot to Waitaki, selected a piece of land, went down to Dunedin, found it taken up in the mean time, was inclined to go back and choose another piece, but gave it up on account of the expense. Now, however, diggers are more inclined, I think, to settle near the Goldfields. Smith's Block is very fair agricultural land, but I do not think it will be soon taken up, as there is no pasturage with it.

12. What proportional amount of pasturage would you think necessary?—I should say two acres for one of agricultural, at the least.

No. 1.
Mr. Mouat.
20th Feb., 1869.