

transaction through to the end, and have got it through the Land Transfer Act in some way; but in the Williamses' case their occupation is under leases like mine, with the exception of the freehold that they bought first.

390. *Mr. Hobbs.*] Are these persons spending large sums of money in reclaiming the wastes?—*Mr. Williams*, I heard the other day from his manager, is spending £12,000 a year in wages alone. I have no reason to doubt it; and that is exclusive of many thousand bags of grass seed, wire-fencing, and material of every description. I do not know what they are spending on the other block. It was said to be thirty thousand acres, but I have heard that it measured out less—that is, exclusive of the freehold they have got.

391. Under what tenure do they hold?—That of memorial of ownership.

392. Do you know what rent they pay?—I do not know, but it is commonly said £50 to the thousand acres; that is about the ordinary price—1s. an acre.

393. Are not most of these leases taken up with the object of acquiring the freehold?—In this case they cannot work the freehold unless they have the sea-board country. I do not think they will try to buy that: there is an immense number of Natives to sign.

394. Do you think that this country could be cut up into small sheep-runs?—I think it is already in small sheep-runs. I think the average areas are from four to six thousand acres—that is, of those that are at all near Gisborne. I should say that the country is very difficult to subdivide, for not only are their tribal difficulties in the way, but there is no plan of it, and it is also mountainous; it is a country that the agriculturist could only use in patches where the Natives now have plantations.

395. There are not many blocks of thirty thousand acres?—None other that I know of. I wish to add, if you wanted to improve it that could only be done at the greatest expense, and then it is a hundred to one whether you get the land, so the difficulty about title prevents improvement.

396. Is that "Settlement Company" the same that we have heard so much of in Parliament?—I do not know anything of its history.

397. Is that the company of which *Mr. Rees* was promoter?—I believe so.

398. Does that company hold under the same tenure that you do?—I think not. I think they have their transactions completed. *Mr. Locke*, a member of this Committee, ought to know, for I understand that he is a member of the company.

399. Has the company been a success so far as settling people on the land?—Exactly the reverse: it has made a desert of the country. I judge by Tologa Bay, a place that was once fairly successful and had many respectable men, blacksmiths and tradesmen, and one or two publichouses; now it has three publichouses but no blacksmith, and there is no blacksmith to be found until you come to *Mr. Williams's* private blacksmith, at Waipiro, thirty miles away up the coast.

*Mr. Locke*: There is a gaol there as well as the three publichouses.

400. *Mr. Hobbs.*] I was anxious to ascertain whether that land scheme had been a success?—Well, I do not know; whether it is from any fault inherent in it I cannot say; but there have been no roads made, and there is no means of getting about that country.

401. Did not the Natives hand a great deal of land over to this company?—I mean to dispose of for them?—Yes, they did.

402. They absolutely conveyed to the company the freehold?—Yes, they did, on certain conditions.

403. Do you know what those conditions were?—As far as I know the Natives were to get two-thirds of the proceeds after expenses paid.

404. Has that been done?—The only place they have settled is in the immediate vicinity of Gisborne, across the river; they have settled that.

405. *Mr. Locke.*] That is but a few acres?—It is rather a township.

406. They are all small allotments?—I understood that the Natives were to have a clear profit of £40,000 over all.

407. *Mr. Hobbs.*] Have they got any of the money?—I cannot say. *Wi Pere* would know more about that. I think they must have got some of it; but my evidence is really not worth anything on that question. That has been a burning question on our coast.

408. You are a resident in the district, and, I presume, pretty well acquainted with what goes on there. I have thought it important that the Committee should have the benefit of all the knowledge you possess; it is for that reason that I ask you these questions?—Well, I am not absolutely upon oath, but I do not wish to disguise anything I do know. I am perfectly willing to give the Committee every information about my own transactions. When I say you must take what I have to say on other matters *cum grano salis*, I am simply giving my own ideas from hearsay evidence. I have no personal knowledge.

*Mr. Wi Pere*: I think if the Committee want to know anything about the company they should ask me.

409. *Mr. Hobbs.*] I wished to get information from a person who was disinterested, and not from one who was directly interested. I think that, as we are considering this Native Lands Disposition Bill, it is only fair that we should have all the information that we can get?—I think it is only fair I should say that, since the Native Settlement Company came into existence, there has been an enormous fall in the price of land. There is no more buying by the company. Although I may appear impartial, and desire to be so, it must be borne in mind that they were against me from the first moment they went there. I may therefore not be quite unprejudiced. Six months ago they ceased to buy.

*Mr. Wi Pere*: I think this is going beyond the subject which the Committee was appointed to inquire into.

*Mr. Hobbs*: I maintain that we have a right to get as much knowledge as we can from the witness for the information of the House.