

40. As far as bringing about closer settlement—aggregation is already done?—Yes, we cannot alter that. The point is now how to get over the difficulty.

41. What could be done to benefit it? Take the provisions of the Land Settlement Finance Act and the acquisition of lands for closer settlement, would that overcome the difficulty?—It would provided a clause was inserted debarring them from going in for aggregation—making a certain limit. I do not think that 650 acres of some of the land is too much for a man and his family to own

42. Speaking generally, the aggregation is not all of recent date?—Oh, no.

43. You said it had been going on for ten years at least?—Yes.

44. *Mr. Witty.*] Are these village settlers in Mangaweka better off on 6 acres than they would be right in the township on a quarter-acre or an acre?—Yes, most decidedly. I think the rent for the 6-acre sections to the Crown comes to about £1 or £1 2s. 6d. per annum.

45. They would pay more than that?—Yes, they would pay 8s. to 10s. a week for a cottage in the town.

46. And the land is suitable for keeping a cow and raising vegetables?—Yes.

47. You have read the evidence given here the other day by Mr. Strauchon, Mr. Brodrick, and Mr. Lundius?—Yes.

48. Have you any wish to examine those witnesses?—I do not think any good could be gained by it. I can quite understand the position. No doubt Mr. Strauchon from the information placed before him gave a fair statement. The same applies to the Commissioner. I do not know that Mr. Brodrick has ever been in the district, and as to Mr. Lundius, he has been so long out of the district that it is a matter of impossibility for him to give a reasonable answer to the statements at all. It is hardly to be expected. The most remarkable thing to my mind is that the Lands Department ever sent him there. They have a Ranger stationed at Taihape, a man intimately acquainted with the district, and that is the man who should be before the Committee to give his report as to what is going on, and to verify or otherwise the statements that I have made.

49. You mean that Mr. Lundius has not been in the district for some years?—No, he has been removed; his headquarters are in Wanganui.

50. How long has he been away from the district?—For five years or more.

51. Who is the Ranger for the district now?—Mr. Craig, of Taihape.

52. You say that the Mangaweka Factory has been closed down on account of the lack of cows?—Yes.

53. Would there be any more cows if there were more residents?—Yes, certainly. Nearly the whole of the Kawhatau Valley is adapted for dairy-farming.

54. And now it is being used for sheep-farming?—Yes.

55. You mentioned that there were six settlers in one place holding twenty-one holdings: were those twenty-one holdings each suitable for any one to make a living off?—Yes, every one of those sections that were cut up.

56. Are each of those twenty-one holdings capable of carrying a family?—Yes.

57. I think you said that one man had six of those holdings?—Yes.

58. Therefore he is holding what would keep six families?—Yes.

59. Another held four and several others had three each?—Yes, that is so.

60. I think you said there is no residence on those 200 acres of Mrs. Wilson's?—That is so.

61. And yet the Ranger has stated that there is a residence there?—There is not.

62. You mentioned that there is Californian thistle growing on some of those large blocks. Are the Rangers carrying out their duties in seeing they are kept in check?—No. I might mention that there is a good deal of dissatisfaction in connection with the leniency shown to the big squatters throughout the Kawhatau Valley.

63. On these aggregated lands is it possible to keep down the thistles as easy as it is on smaller areas?—No. That is the trouble that the smaller settlers complain of. In the Kawhatau Valley my attention has been drawn to the fact on more than one occasion when going through the valley that some of the settlers who have the larger estates have neglected to keep the Californian thistle down, and the Inspectors have been told not to interfere with the large landowners in regard to cutting the thistles.

64. Told by whom?—I understand, by the Department.

65. Can you prove that?—I have letters in my possession written by men in the Kawhatau Valley. I was shown acres of Californian thistles in full bloom, and it was reported that the owners were told that no action would be taken against them by the Department. I am referring to the Gorrings and others. I could bring evidence to prove that it is a fact from the settlers themselves that the thistles have not been cut. They think it is criminal for the large landowners to be allowed to let their Californian thistles thrive when their neighbours have to cut them down. I was taken over two properties belonging to neighbours of the Gorrings where the thistle had started and they had kept it down by cutting it out, while right over the fence you could see the Californian thistle in full bloom and no one interferes with them.

66. How many people work on the estate of the Gorrings?—About six or seven.

67. You maintain that if it was in smaller blocks similar to the original areas that the Californian thistle would be more likely kept down owing to the larger number of settlers?—Yes. The only way to keep it down is by closer settlement.

68. I understood you to state that a man named Harris bought a section which he does not live on, and yet he has plenty of land elsewhere?—The family has. My attention was called to his non-residence by one of the settlers in the district.

69. And he wants to sell it?—It was in the market advertised for sale.

70. I think you said there were only six children at one school?—Yes, the average attendance.