

97. In these village settlements were the owners anxious to get rid of their holdings?—Yes, that was their object in selling them. They had got the freehold, and, of course, by previously paying about £1 an acre and getting so much interest it gave them an opportunity of acquiring larger areas on the Main Trunk line.

98. Were some of the settlers able to milk cows on the small sections and obtain a living without working for any one else?—No, that was never intended. It was intended that the small sections should assist them when out of work.

99. What is the aggregation now?—There are three holdings aggregated into one, and so on. There would be 18 acres in the first three.

100. Would the owner be able to make a living off that?—Yes, because, being so close to town, they could sell the product from the cows, the milk and the butter, and carry sufficient cows independent of anything else and make a living.

101. What class of man is he who has aggregated like that?—He is a man who is in constant employment driving a grocer's cart, and he is living on one section.

102. Was he living on one of those sections prior to aggregating?—Yes.

103. He simply bought out his neighbours?—Yes.

104. And their object, I understand, was to get a larger holding?—Yes. I might point out the serious position in which we are placed in Mangaweka. You can hardly expect a business man or a man who has to depend upon outsiders for his living to get up on a public platform and depreciate what is going on. It would be possible for a man to come along with capital and buy up the greater portion of the town from the railway-station up to within a few chains of the centre of the town, including cottages, at as cheap a rate as they are paying for land in Taranaki. If this sort of thing is permitted to continue—I do not think it was intended by the Minister of Lands or members of Parliament to allow it to take place at the time the Act was passed—it is going to ruin the township.

105. Do you think it is probable under the law that that could take place in a township like Mangaweka, that a man could buy up the whole township?—It is quite possible to do what I have stated.

106. Do you think it is probable?—Yes, I do.

107. As a matter of fact, the Land Act of last year has only had that prejudicial effect in regard to aggregation that you are speaking of in reference to the village sections?—Yes, i.e. village sections. The same applies to the small farms in connection with the i.e. outside Mangaweka.

108. You know that aggregation under the old law was going on all over the country?—Yes.

109. You spoke about Californian thistles, and said it was easier to keep them down on a small holding than on a larger one. What size would you designate as a small holding?—From 150 to 400 acres.

110. Have you ever been in the Otago District?—No.

111. Would you be surprised to hear that it is impossible to keep Californian thistle down on the rich flat lands of the Tairāhiti and Clutha?—I would not, though some negligence has been shown in regard to the large landowners in our district.

112. Do you know they have been trying for years to keep Californian thistle down, and they cannot manage it?—Yes, I have noticed it in the South Island newspapers.

113. Would you be surprised to know that the settlers wish to do away with the Noxious Weeds Act down there?—As far as the big settlers are concerned; but throughout our district the owners of the small holdings would oppose anything of the kind.

114. And the dairy-farmers?—Yes, they would oppose it.

115. Would you be surprised to hear that the dairy-farmers have waited on me to get meetings held for the purpose?—I would be surprised. It is a matter of surprise that a report from the Californian Commission held up in our district months ago has never been published for the benefit of the people there. In Mangaweka there were nine to one in favour of keeping the thistle cut down and enforcing the Act. I know, as far as our own district is concerned, and I can speak of my own knowledge, that where the farmers have taken the trouble to keep the ground clear the thistle has not spread, and yet on the adjoining properties where they have allowed it to go ahead and flourish the places are in a deplorable state.

116. *Mr. Nosworthy.*] You say that you think 640 acres is not too much for a man with a family. You mean first-class land?—Yes, certainly.

117. Then if this district was divided up amongst the people, would it provide more than 640 acres?—No, it would not.

118. Well, as there is no hard-and-fast rule and you cannot map a district out like that, is it not in a better condition to-day than it would be if a lot of places are left as they are—is it not better to produce wealth and allow it to cut itself up by effluxion of time?—No, I do not agree with you, for this reason: take our district, we have lost family after family, and these used to spend their money in our town. The tradesmen have lost the support they used to get, and it invariably happens that where you have large holdings held by men in good positions they patronize very rarely their own local town, but send out of the town for their supplies, and the business people not only lose the benefit of the small settler, but lose the trade that should be given to them from the big man.

119. Are you aware of the fact that there are a good many towns in New Zealand, especially in the South Island, that are not making any progress, but are going back?—I have no knowledge of the South Island, but I know that money is very tight and business is slack everywhere.

120. I mean that places have been in a sense oversettled, and the inclination is for the people to sell out and for individuals to take up larger holdings, because they find they can work