

helpful. It is probably on their file, sir. I have a copy; it is dated the 18th April, 1902. I recite here a good deal of what I have already troubled the Committee with. I will not read it all to you, but in it I say to the Commissioner: "It seems to me that there are two courses open to me. First, to wait for the expiration of the term, and then trust that my equity to the improvements would be recognized in the new term of years then to be offered to the public; second, to ask the Board now to permit me to surrender the portions of the two leases which the Crown has acquired the fee-simple of, and in offering new leases of years to the public to protect me as to my present improvements, which I have either bought from the bank or created since by further heavy expenditure. I respectfully urge that the second course may be permitted, for this reason: that upon 5A, out of 1,153 acres, there are still 621 acres in bush unimproved. I do not think I ought to be asked to expend a further sum of £1,242, which at least would be needed to improve that area, on my present tenure. Yet if I do not so improve it I shall be paying rent for twelve years on land which will produce me nothing." That seems to me to fix that at that time my estimate of the unimproved country was 621 acres. I think, in addition to that—but I speak with doubt—there was 100 acres of bush that was not intended to be felled or dealt with, which included the 60 acres that really has been left. I do not speak with certainty, but I do not think that 100 acres was taken into account in my estimate of the 621 acres. However, taking it against myself, there were 621 acres at that time unfelled and 500 acres more or less partially improved. You gentlemen who are practical men will appreciate it better than myself—the first fall in that country was under very difficult circumstances. It was very difficult to get satisfactory fires in that district. It is, I suppose, one of the wettest parts of New Zealand—in volume of water, at any rate and most of our burns have been unsatisfactory. Well, that means that subsequent to 1903, to make that 500 acres what it is now, we have had to go over it more than once, at very considerable expenditure. What ought to be the allowance for the complete improvement of the land on the first felling to make it into the country it is now is a practical question which members of the Committee will be able to appreciate better than myself. In addition to that there is the actual expenditure on the house. Although we knew our house was on a Government piece of land, we had sufficient confidence in the arrangement made in Wellington in 1904 or 1903 to justify us in putting £200 more expenditure into that house. And the fences—the original fences—were all matai. My experience of matai fencing is that after fourteen or fifteen years there is not very much of the original fence left; it all has to be redone, repaired or renewed. The evidence on the map shows that there are seven paddocks here, with subdivisions in each of them; and all have been created during the last eleven years, and the improvements give metes and bounds and measures. The expenditure on the fencing of that block could not have been less than £500 since 1903.

*Mr. Blair:* Before your son's return from Wellington, what portion of the block as a whole was being improved?

*Mr. De Lautour:* Of course, we were not improving the Government pieces; all our improvements were being made on the other portions of the block, and on other lands acquired by me or my sons since. May I say, without striking a false note in any way, that I have eight sons to provide for, which accounts for what might seem like land-greed in this matter. I seem to have a little more perhaps than I ought to have had, but there are eight of them. We had other country, and of course we were putting what money was available on the other country rather than on the Crown land, till we could make some arrangement.

*Mr. W. D. S. MacDonald:* I know this land pretty well, and I think I had better make a statement when the other witness has done.

Mr. W. C. KENSINGTON examined. (No. 2.)

*Mr. W. C. Kensington:* I should like the Committee to understand that I am not here in the position of a private witness for Mr. De Lautour, as I filled the position of departmental Under-Secretary for Lands at the time this transaction took place, and I think the Committee will get a very good idea if you will allow me to read a memo. I wrote to the Minister. This gives the whole position of the case before the interview with Mr. De Lautour's son.

*The Chairman:* Before you proceed, I should like to make it clear whether you are called by the Committee or by Mr. De Lautour.

*Mr. Kensington:* Oh, I was called by Mr. De Lautour, who asked me to give evidence as I did last year; but what I want the Committee to understand is that I am giving evidence as the head of the Department at that time. The letter is as follows:—

"Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 3rd February, 1903.—The Hon. the Minister of Lands.—Blocks 5 A1 and 6 B1, Whakaangi.—Mr. De Lautour, of Gisborne, has asked to be allowed to surrender the lease he holds from the original Native owners of 1,153 acres of the above-named blocks, which lease has still twelve years to run, the reason being that the fee-simple of the land has now been awarded to the Crown by the Native Land Court, burdened with his lease. One of the arguments he advances in support of his application is that out of the 1,153 acres there is still an area of 621 acres in bush, and unimproved, and he does not feel inclined to spend a further sum of £1,242 which would at least be required to improve that area under his present tenure. In the event of his being permitted to surrender, he asks that the land may be opened again for selection under the optional clauses of the Land Act, burdened with the value of his improvements. The Land Board have recommended that the application be granted. The Government Ranger has inspected the blocks for which Mr. De Lautour is paying an annual rent of £72 16s., and he finds that the area cultivated out of the 1,153 acres is 707 acres, which he values at £2 an acre, or a total for the grassed area of £1,414. He finds there is a dwellinghouse and outbuildings worth £325; that there are 375 chains of fencing; that there are yards and a concrete sheep-dip worth £40; and an orchard worth £20: being a total of £760 for the further improvements, or a total value of improvements on the 1,153 acres