

145. In making these advances, had you any view of the firm ultimately becoming the purchaser of this land?—How could I have any view of it; I cannot see into the future. I have no hold on the men at all. They may sell the land to any one to-morrow.

146. Suppose they turned your sheep off after your paying their instalments, would you expect them to pay all the money you had advanced?—Yes.

147. How do you expect them to be able to manage?—I do not do their business; I leave all that to them.

148. It seems to me you do a good lot of it. Do you think any man would take up their country by paying you all the instalments you have paid, and carry them on in the future?—Certainly; especially after five years from the sale had elapsed. I think they could make a capital good thing of it. I think it would double the value of their land.

149. Do you know a man named Charles Dore?—Yes.

150. Was he asked by you to take up land for the firm?—No; I advised him to take up land for himself, but he did not do it.

151. *Mr. J. Buchanan.*] I understand you to say that between three and four acres would be required for a sheep?—Yes.

152. Does that apply to the whole of the land of the Silver Peak Block?—I should think so at the present time.

153. Can you state what was the average price the land was sold at?—It was sold at the upset price of £1 an acre. There was no competition.

154. And, speaking generally, four acres would be required to maintain one sheep at the present time?—Between three and four acres.

155. That is £4 per sheep?—Yes; more or less.

156. In the agreement which you state subsists no provision is made for interest?—None whatever.

157. You said also that if your sheep were turned off you would have the right to reclaim your advances?—That is so.

158. Without interest?—Without interest.

159. And no security whatever exists for those advances?—None whatever. In fact, they can give no security.

160. In fact, then, it is a mere honourable understanding between you and the men?—Well, it is an understanding simply.

161. Speaking generally, what would be the average clip per sheep? Are they merinos?—Yes. A fair average would be about 6 lb., perhaps a little over.

162. And we may take 10d. per pound as the average price of the wool?—Yes.

163. That is 5s. per sheep?—It was more then, but that is near enough.

164. What would be a fair rate of interest for money in that district?—I suppose 8 per cent.

165. Then the interest on the outlay of £1 per sheep would be about the twelfth of a pound?—Yes.

166. Then that is about 6s. 6d. a year per sheep?—Yes; at the present time. But when the rabbits are destroyed the ground would carry probably between two and three times the number of sheep.

167. Then the question is varied by the unfortunate condition of the country as to rabbits?—Undoubtedly.

168. And does that account for the low price of the land?—Well, I do not think so. It is very rough, bad country.

169. Can it be grazed in winter?—Yes. It is not high country. It is fairly good winter country.

170. Then, virtually, the grazing capacity of the country is valuable to you, even as it is—even without the right of acquiring the freehold?—Yes; and the men are working to keep down the rabbits. I have a property adjoining, and if it were not for them I should have to employ six or eight men on my property to keep down the rabbits.

171. Your wool-brand, you say, is a V?—Yes.

172. Are your sheep ear-marked under the Act?—The Act only compels a brand, not an ear-mark.

173. *The Chairman.*] You say you do not remember having had a conversation with any of the men in either case with regard to the future purchase of their land?—No.

174. But you said that if the name was mentioned you might be able to give a distinct answer?—Yes.

175. Well, did you ever have any conversation of that nature with Johnston?—No; I had no conversation at all with the Strath-Taieri men to that effect.

176. With regard to the Silver Peak men, did you ever have a conversation of that kind with the Higginses?—I do not recollect having had any conversation as to taking over the land in any way. I have no recollection whatever of it. Nor with Francis or Watson to take their land over.

177. If the sheep were turned off, how could you recover the money advances under the instrument in existence?—I do not suppose I could recover it, but I should try. I should say that every six months, when I advance the money for the instalment, I take a promissory note as well as the agreement for all the money advanced up to that date. The amount then advanced is added to what has been advanced previously, and one promissory note is given to cover it all, the previous one being cancelled.

178. *Mr. J. Buchanan.*] Do those notes include interest?—No; no interest; merely the bare advances.

179. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] The interest is paid by allowing your sheep to run on the land?—To a certain extent, Yes.