

646. Can you specify what position you bear in reference to Mr. Stark in this affair?—The same position which I would occupy in regard to making an offer for any other property.

647. Was this offer made in connection with him?—I have already stated that I do not know that Mr. Stark knows at this day that I made the offer.

648. You never told him nor had any conversation with him about it?—No. I ought to mention that it is not an uncommon occurrence for us to purchase from him. One property I bought from him for £675, portions of which I sold for £550, £600, and £380 respectively, which transaction left us a profit of £855 in less than two years.

649. The offer of £16,000 was made on your own motion?—Yes.

650. We have it in evidence that you made an offer to Mr. Roberts of ten acres of Mr. Stark's property for a certain sum: is that true?—I can say that it is totally untrue. There is no foundation in any way for such a statement.

651. If it was stated that you offered the ten acres to Mr. Roberts for £3,500, would such a statement be true?—Such a statement is totally untrue. I have never submitted it to Mr. Roberts or to any one else at any price. Mr. Philcox, in making such a statement—which is grossly untrue—must have been actuated by a feeling of animosity towards myself and from a desire to do me personal injury.

652. *Mr. Cowan.*] You have been in the position of receiving compensation for services rendered to Mr. Stark in the way of commission?—Yes.

653. Have you received any consideration for this sale?—No, because I am not entitled to any. I have had nothing to do with it.

654. What did Mr. Stark do with the furniture in his house?—He made a division of it between Mr. Coleman, my brother, and myself.

655. What was the consideration for this?—None at all.

656. Why did Mr. Stark give you a portion of his furniture?—I do not know the reason that actuated him—I was away at the time; but I should presume that it was from a feeling of friendship and regard, and as an acknowledgment for obligations which he felt he was under to myself for assistance that I had given him in making suggestions which led to his going into successful speculations, acting solely on my advice, and in which he had made large sums of money.

657. Can you state the actual value of the furniture?—I have no idea; but it was very good furniture.

658. Can you say whether, in your opinion as a business-man, the action of the Government in taking this site for a battery has increased or depreciated the value of the balance of the property?—It would tend to depreciate it, I should say.

659. To what extent?—Not to any appreciable extent; but it would have that tendency. Many persons would think it injudicious to purchase near a battery-site.

660. Could you state how much per acre it would be depreciated?—I do not value it at per acre, but at per foot. It is the finest property in Auckland, without exception.

661. Do you adhere to your estimate of it at £2 10s. per foot, even with the presence of the battery?—Yes. I calculated it at the time I was offering to purchase, and expected it to fetch a higher value than that. It was with the knowledge of the intention of the Government to erect a battery that the estimate was made.

662. *Mr. Peacock.*] You said that you have been connected with Mr. Stark in land-transactions?—Yes.

663. And that he has consulted with you several times to his own advantage?—Yes.

664. Are you aware that land began to rise in value in Auckland some years ago?—Yes.

665. When did that rise begin?—About five years ago, I should say.

666. In 1833 land had much increased in value in Auckland?—Devonport is a different place from Auckland; and I cannot speak outside of that district.

667. Had it increased in Devonport?—Yes, it had.

668. Do you know Messrs. Ashton and Sons?—I do.

669. Are they a respectable firm?—Yes.

670. If they made a statement with regard to business you would believe them?—I would not say that in regard to this property, as Mr. Ashton is personally antagonistic to Mr. Stark.

671. Are they a firm of such standing in Auckland that you would believe them to state the truth?—Not as regards this property.

672. But, speaking generally, are they a respectable firm of agents?—Not in anything in connection with which I or Mr. Stark would have any dealings.

673. If they stated that in August, 1883, they had twenty acres, with the house and improvements, under offer for £5,000—one-fifth cash and the balance in three years at 4 per cent.; and that the offer came from Mr. Stark—would you have any reason to doubt it?—If it ever happened this is the first I have heard of it.

674. Have you any reason to doubt it?—I could not credit it for a moment.

675. Do you doubt their veracity in making this statement?—Yes, I do.

676. You stated that you made an offer to Mr. Stark for the property, on behalf of some gentlemen whose names you did not know, of £450 per acre, and that he rather laughed at the offer?—I did.

677. That was a year and nine months ago?—I believe it was about that time.

678. Do you know Mr. Kingsford?—Yes.

679. Is he a respectable man, whose word you would believe?—Yes.

680. If he states that, within two months of that time, Mr. Stark offered him his house with ten acres for £4,000, or five acres for £3,500, would you have any reason to doubt it?—No; I should believe his statements.