

Stark told me that he had had an offer of £16,000 for the property, and I found that it was Cochrane and Sons who had made it.

1049. Then Mr. Stark knew that you were making inquiries as to the value of the property?—I believe so; but I did not tell him so. I got information from him about various properties.

1050. Can you remember the date of this? Is that the information you refer to in your report of the 20th January?—Yes. It would have been about the 18th that I went over to the North Shore.

1051. Did you hear that the property was in the hands of various agents for sale?—No.

1052. Did you hear that offers had been made of the property to various persons?—No. I only heard that Mr. Stark had had an offer of £16,000. I heard that from himself.

1053. When did he tell you that?—When I went over to see him, acting under instructions from the Under-Secretary.

1054. Will you give a statement of the part you took all through in this transaction?—Shortly after my arrival in Auckland I received notice to go and see Mr. Stark for the purpose of arranging the matter of compensation for the piece of land to be taken by the Government for defence purposes. I met him at his house, and explained the object of my visit. He said the piece taken by the Government came right up to his drawing-room window, and spoiled the whole of his property, and that he should require a large amount of compensation. He produced some plans, and said that the original survey by Major Cautley took in a larger area than that now taken. The original area is that marked in red. He also said that Major Cautley told him that the Government would require a larger piece of land, and must have it some day. He also said that another officer had pointed out that a piece at the point would be required, to protect the landing at Shoal Bay. It was also pointed out to me by Mr. Stark that if the property was cut up and sold it would cost the Government a much larger sum of money if they wanted it hereafter. He asked me to represent this to the Government, and I did so. I then left. On my way back I called at the office of Mr. Seaman and got the property-tax valuation of the property from his clerk. Before I had time to communicate with the Government the Minister for Public Works arrived in Auckland, and I decided to lay the case before him. I sent over for Mr. Stark, who came and brought his plans. I introduced him to the Minister, and handed him the property-tax valuation of the property, suggesting that he should go over and see it. The Minister had some conversation with Mr. Stark and myself, during the course of which Mr. Stark said that it would be the best plan for the Government to take the whole of the property, instead of having at a future date to purchase at an increased rate. The Minister replied that he would communicate with his colleague the Minister of Defence on the subject. I heard nothing more about the matter, except that the Minister was getting estimates of the value of the property from various land agents. On the 19th January Mr. Stark told me that he had settled with the Minister for Public Works on the basis of 10 per cent. over the property-tax valuation. He asked me to forward the voucher as soon as possible, as he wanted to go South. I told him I would do so as soon as I was officially informed of the matter and had got full particulars. He afterwards sent me an official letter, giving figures and amount. I had seen nothing of the Minister since our first interview, but that day he instructed me to make a report, which you have amongst your papers. I looked upon that report as a *pro forma* report for departmental purposes, but I do not wish to shirk the responsibility of it. I should have written it if he had applied to me a week earlier. The next day the Minister again sent for me, and showed me a telegram, stating that the property could be taken by conveyance, and that a Proclamation was not needed; and instructed me to have the conveyance made out, the title searched, and the voucher made out. My report of the 12th April was in answer to a letter which I received from the Government, and which I hand in to you. That is about all I know of the matter.

1055. You state in this letter of the 20th that you did not think that Mr. Stark would sell for the price offered?—His claim was for £20,000, and I did not think he would let it go for less than that.

1056. What were your reasons for so thinking?—Because he intimated to me that he would want £20,000, and would not take anything less.

1057. When was that?—In the course of conversation at our first interview. He said that it was a valuable estate; that he had been offered £16,000 for it; that he would not sell; and that he would go in for a claim of £20,000.

1058. On the 22nd January you wrote to the Under-Secretary stating that you had nothing to do with the settlement, and would have no report to make?—Yes; the reason was that when I make compensation awards I have to make a very exhaustive report. This goes to the Minister, and if approved of it is forwarded back to me; and until that I cannot settle the matter.

1059. *Mr. Dargaville.*] When you said you had no report to make, you mean no "official" report of this description?—Yes. In this case neither the agreement was signed nor a report sent in by me.

1060. You took the property-tax valuation without any further inquiry?—Yes; I was new to the district, and therefore thought it the safest thing to do. In my own district, I could have given the value for hundred miles round; but I had only been a fortnight in Auckland, and I felt safer in taking the property-tax valuation than in going about it myself.

1061. In a subsequent report you speak of the supposed offer to Mr. Ross as being an "absurd report"?—I thought it was when I looked at the property. I thought that if Mr. Ross had had such an offer he would have jumped at it and taken it. I should have liked to have the chance myself.

1062. That was what you meant by using the phrase "absurd report"?—Yes; I did not think there was any truth in it.

1063. *Major Atkinson.*] You did not go to Mr. Ross to find out?—No; I think he was away from Auckland at the time.

1064. *The Chairman.*] Do you know who he is?—No; it was only in the course of conversation