

1116. Is it within your knowledge that property in that district is advancing in value?—I believe it is, for the reason that there is a smaller quantity of it. There is only in that district about four hundred acres, exclusive of reserves. I only put a greater value on Mr. Stark's property because I thought it would be difficult to get such a property in times to come. I look upon it as one of the nicest properties in Auckland.

1117. *Mr. Peacock.*] You state that you had only been in Auckland two weeks at the time you made your report?—Yes.

1118. And that you had no knowledge of values in that district?—No; except from hearsay evidence.

1119. Under these circumstances, would you not feel it your duty to call in the best available talent in the way of land-valuing?—Yes; if the case were to be taken into a Compensation Court.

1120. But, in view of the fact that you made a recommendation to purchase the property for this sum, did you not think it desirable to fortify yourself with the opinions of land agents?—No; because I was not authorized to employ and pay land agents.

1121. So, for the sake of saving a land-agent's fee, you made the recommendation that the Government should purchase the property for £17,000?—Yes.

1122. You acquainted yourself with Mr. Stark's statements and the property-tax valuation?—Yes.

1123. When Mr. Mays advised you to see Mr. Ross, in order to satisfy yourself about the offer made to him, why did you not accept his advice?—I believe that he was not in Auckland.

1124. What reason had you for believing so?—I think I inquired.

1125. Where did you inquire?—I do not remember; but I did inquire, and I think I was told he was not in Auckland.

1126. Did you not go to the office of the firm in which he is a partner?—I did not know the firm of which he is a partner.

1127. How did you find out that he was away?—I believe I was told by some friend of his.

1128. But you cannot tell who told you?—No; I cannot.

1129. Do you not think that, if you had inquired at the office of the firm in which he is a partner, that you could have ascertained?—I do not know the firm with which he is connected.

1130. You were satisfied, without inquiring what firm he belonged to, that he was away?—I repeat that I believe I was told that he was away.

1131. Did you accept Mr. Stark's statement that it was not true about the offer, without inquiring of Mr. Ross?—I had no reason to doubt his statement. He pointed out that the buildings alone were worth the money, and that land was selling at £500 an acre all round him.

1132. Is it your custom to take a seller's statements to guide your actions?—Certainly not.

1133. But you did so in this case?—To a certain extent.

1134. You accepted his denial without further inquiry?—The statement seemed absurd, to my mind, and I did not think there was any truth in it.

1135. Are you aware that the Committee have it in evidence that ten acres of this property in March, 1884, when land was at a high value, was offered to Mr. Roberts for £3,500. I never heard of it.

1136. Or that, in addition to its being offered to Mr. Ross in the same year, it was offered to Mr. Kingsford—five acres for £3,500, or ten acres for £4,000?—I never heard of it.

1137. Presuming that it was made, that would be at the rate of £100 for a lot of five acres?—Yes.

1138. If you had known these facts, would you have advised the Government as you did?—No; I should have suggested to take the case into a Compensation Court.

1139. Then, you find that you had not made sufficient inquiry to make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the value of the property?—My inquiries were as to the present value of the property, not as to the past.

1140. Are you aware that land reached its maximum at the end of 1884?—No; but I heard that it had increased three or four times in value during the last three years.

1141. Can you state when it reached its maximum?—No.

1142. Would you accept the statement of competent authorities if they stated that land reached its maximum at the end of 1884?—No; I should not. I should think it is about at its maximum now.

1143. Do you know whether property in Auckland is equal in value to what it was six months ago?—No, I do not.

1144. Upon what do you ground your opinion?—From various small properties that have been sold.

1145. In your opinion, is this land of equal value to what it was a year ago?—I should think so; but I am not in business in Auckland, and have had very little to do with land there. My district has been a hundred miles from Auckland, so I cannot speak positively.

1146. You stated, in speaking of the absurdity of the report that the house and ten acres were offered for £3,500, that the house and improvements cost more than £3,000?—Yes.

1147. Are you aware that, if you had inquired of Mr. Ross, you would have found that the house and improvements were valued at £2,000 in that transaction that has been referred to?—No.

1148. With the knowledge that you have now acquired, would you be still prepared to write to the Government recommending them to offer the same sum for the property?—No; I should advise them to take the case into the Compensation Court.

1149. And you think that, if they had taken it into a Compensation Court, the valuation would not have been sustained?—I think it would have been.

1150. On what grounds do you think so?—On the present price of property surrounding Mr. Stark's property.

1151. In view of four different offers having been made by Mr. Stark in the year 1884 at the