

1187. Did you ask any one else's value of it?—No.

1188. Why do you say that it was absurd to say that the house and buildings were worth £3,500?—Because the contract price of the house was £2,555, and to this has to be added a cottage, a great deal of tile-draining, a concrete cistern, and a lot of other improvements; and I know what these things cost.

1189. You adhere to this value in the face of the fact that Mr. Stark offered this part of the property on four different occasions for £3,500?—If he did so I cannot understand why the offer has never been accepted.

1190. Are you aware that the people to whom the offer was made went so far as to prepare the deeds, and afterwards withdrew?—I did not hear anything about it.

1191. Are you aware that Mr. Stark valued his improvements at £800?—No.

1192. Did you consider that you had sufficient data to go upon to recommend the Ministry to keep out of Court?—I would rather have had more evidence, but I understood that the Minister for Public Works was collecting evidence himself.

1193. Did you consider that, on the 20th January, you had sufficient data to justify you in quoting the property at £20,000?—I had the property-tax valuation.

1194. What was that?—£15,600.

1195. Then, how do you make out that it was worth £20,800?—I did not say that it was.

1196. But, in your opinion, the property is worth £20,000?—I consider that it would be worth £17,000 if a sale were forced, but by waiting to sell it would be worth £20,000. I consider the property a very valuable one; from its position.

1197. Do you know of any land close to Mr. Stark's that has sold for £600?—Yes; Professor Thomas's.

1198. How far away is it?—The properties are divided from one another by a three-acre paddock.

1199. Has it a sea-frontage?—Yes.

1200. Would all Mr. Stark's property have a sea-frontage?—Yes.

1201. Has any other land been sold at this price?—I have been told so, but I do not know of my own knowledge. Had I been taking the case into a Compensation Court all these things would have been brought in evidence.

1202. Before coming into this room had you any idea that Mr. Stark had made the offers that have been alluded to?—Not the least.

1203. And you made no inquiries at all to verify your evidence?—No; I have explained my position.

1204. Did you get the figures in your report from Mr. Seaman?—I never saw him or spoke to him before meeting him on the "Hawea."

1205. When did the depression in Auckland begin?—It has been during the last six months. The papers, at least, generally, say so, although I cannot see much of it.

1206. Then it began about the time you say the property was worth £20,000?—Apparently.

1207. *Mr. Wilson.*] Did you absolutely recommend the Minister for Public Works not to take the matter into a Compensation Court?—Certainly not. I never made any recommendation to him at all. I saw him one day, and never saw him again till he called me into his office and told me to write a report. I heard that he was taking evidence himself, and considered that in doing so he had taken the matter entirely out of my hands.

1208. Then he acted entirely on his own motion?—Yes.

1209. He did not ask your advice?—No. But I always try to keep matters out of Compensation Courts when I can. I do not like them. But I never lost a case in one yet.

1210. Previous to the Minister's going up to Auckland you intended to take the matter into Court?—Certainly. I never give any valuation over an amount of £2,000.

1211. Did the Minister tell you that he was not going to take it into Court?—No. I simply left the matter in his hands; I never heard from him at all. I consider that a Government is very much handicapped in Compensation Courts.

1212. When was the first intimation you received that it was not going into Court?—I never received any intimation that it was not. The first I was told of the matter was on the 20th January.

1213. That was the day you wrote your report?—Yes—the day that Mr. Stark called.

1214. Up to that time you thought that the case would go into Court?—I did.

1215. Will you state, as far as you recollect, the exact number of times you saw the Minister?—Only twice, so far as I remember. I do not remember his mentioning anything at all about the Compensation Court.

1216. You are not clear as to when it was decided not to go into the Court?—No; I never received any instructions at all except on the day the report was drawn up.

1217. The Minister states that had you been called into Court your evidence would have been that the property was worth £17,000. Is that so?—I said to him that I thought he would get something like that amount.

1218. At which interview was that?—On the morning of the 20th.

1219. *Hon. Major Atkinson.*] After the property was bought?—I believe so. The times on which I saw the Minister were when I took Mr. Stark to him first, and on the morning of the 20th.

1220. *Mr. Wilson.*] What was the date of the purchase?—The 19th.

1221. And you saw the Minister on the 20th?—Yes.

1222. *Hon. Major Atkinson.*] To give him this information?—I did not tell him that I would have valued it at £17,000.

1223. Are you quite sure this was after the property was bought?—Quite sure.

1224. And you are quite sure that these were the only two interviews you had with the Minister?—Quite sure, as far as my memory serves me.