

1225. *Mr. Wilson.*] You state very distinctly that you asked Mr. Stark most distinctly whether he had ever offered part of the property to any one for £3,500?—I did.

1226. And he absolutely denied it?—He did. He said that that would not cover the cost of the buildings.

1227. It would change your opinion of Mr. Stark if you found that he had done so?—Yes; but I have no reason to doubt his word at present.

1228. Did he give you any information as to when the property was surveyed?—No.

1229. Did you not inquire as to whether it was after the report about the Government wanting the place for a battery?—No; I was only there a short time, and had no time to spare.

1230. You say that you understood that Mr. Stark had had an offer of £16,000?—He told me so.

1231. Did you inquire as to the terms of the offer?—No.

1232. Did you not think that it would have been wise to do so?—If the case had been going into Court I should have done so; but, as I said before, I had not much time.

1233. If you were told that the terms were that only £2,000 in cash was to be paid, would that have altered your value?—Those seem very easy terms, but I would scarcely like to offer an opinion as to that.

1234. It would not make any difference to the cash value?—I do not think so, as one would have to pay interest on the money. You always expect to get a property cheaper for cash than on terms.

1235. What do you consider the actual cash value of the property at present?—I should scarcely like to say. I have not thought over the matter. Speaking without thinking, I should say £17,000 or £18,000. I was told that it had been valued by Mr. W. Aitken, a land agent in Auckland, at £18,000.

1236. Who told you?—I forget. I heard it in the course of conversation.

1237. Did the Minister give you any information as to the trouble he took with regard to obtaining evidence on the matter?—No, he did not.

1238. You have no knowledge of what he did?—No; I was told that he was getting valuations and estimates from several agents.

1239. Suppose he had asked you distinctly your opinion whether you would advise that the case should be taken into Court or not, what would you have advised?—I should have said that if it could be sold for a reasonable price I should not take it into Court.

1240. And you considered £17,000 a reasonable price?—I think so, as being 10 per cent. over the property-tax valuation. In many cases we allow 20 per cent. over, because the property-tax value is supposed to be under the selling value.

1241. I should like some more specific information about Professor Thomas's property. It contains an acre and a quarter, I believe?—I think that is in my report; £600 an acre was the price, and the house is worth £450.

1242. Have you carefully examined the house?—No; I have not been over it at all. I have simply seen it from the outside, and I inquired as to the number of rooms. I was told that there were nine rooms, some of them small ones.

1243. What other improvements are there?—There is a garden, and it is planted with trees.

1244. What do you consider to be the value of the land without the house?—I should think that it is at least worth £600 an acre, according to the price at which land is selling. I am only speaking from prices that have been quoted to me.

1245. Would you be surprised to hear that Professor Thomas would take £1,800 for his land, with the house included?—I should think that would be untrue.

1246. Would you be surprised to hear that the improvements are very large indeed?—No; I should not.

1247. We have been informed that it was very highly improved, and £1,000 has been stated as the value of the house and improvements?—I believe that the house is valued at something like £450, and it does not appear to me to be worth more than £500.

1248. Suppose the Minister had asked you to state at the time of going into the matter your opinion as to taking the case into Court, you would have told him that he ought to have done so?—Certainly, if I had the matter to settle myself I should have done so.

1249. But had he asked your opinion as to what he should do?—I would have said that he was the best judge of the matter.

1250. It has not struck you that it was injudicious to hurry the matter?—I think the mistake, in the first place, has been putting the unemployed to work on the property before securing it. The whole matter has been too hurried, and the unemployed were rushed on to the property too soon.

1251. Did you feel that the Minister was doing you any injustice in asking you to value the property so hurriedly?—No; but I thought that he had taken the matter entirely out of my hands.

1252. And you did not feel the same responsibility?—No; I did not feel any responsibility at all in the matter.

1253. Did you expect that you would have to draw up a report?—No.

1254. Nor to get the usual agreements signed?—No. When I make an award I have to fill in a printed form of report, which I had not to do in this case.

1255. The Minister instructed you to make your report on the 20th?—Yes.

1256. Is that sort of thing usual?—I never had an instance before.

1257. What is the largest transaction you ever did?—About £4,000 or £5,000, I think.

1258. You took more care over them than in the present case?—I took twelve months over one matter of £3,500, to get all the information I could.

1259. Then, you would imagine that, seeing that this is so much larger a transaction, you would take still greater precautions over it?—I should not have taken it into Court under three or