

four months, and then I should have done so without much thought of getting it for less than £17,000.

1260. Even with all the knowledge you possess?—Possibly now I might think differently; but at that time I knew nothing about these alleged offers.

1261. Now you think there might be some hope of getting it cheaper?—Possibly, if it had been dealt with before the men were put on it, it might have been got for less; but now it was a compulsory sale.

1262. You do not seem to consider that it was a cash sale?—Yes; I do.

1263. *Mr. Barron.*] You say you were only about a fortnight in the district before you were asked to report on this matter?—I had only been that time in Auckland.

1264. You were not in a position to have any knowledge of the value of property at that time?—No; I had it all to learn.

1265. You were only a fortnight in the immediate district before you were asked to enter on the work of valuation?—Yes.

1266. Did you feel that it was necessary for you to hurry?—The Minister came up very hurriedly.

1267. Did he seem to be pressing for a decision?—Yes; he left me on the Monday without making any arrangement for a future meeting.

1268. Had the matter been left to yourself, and you had not been hurried, you would have thought it necessary, in the public interest, to take a much longer time over it?—Yes.

1269. You were informed that the property was valued at £18,000 by an Auckland agent: did that information reach you in such manner as would justify you in believing that it must be true?—I simply heard it in some way through the office.

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FRIDAY, 16TH JULY, 1886.

Mr. H. M. BREWER further examined.

1270. *The Chairman.*] You received a letter from Mr. Stark the day before you wrote your report, and he says he agreed to accept the offer?—No; I received the letter on the 20th.

1271. In the letter you wrote to the Minister you say you recommend that the sum of £17,500 be offered to Mr. Stark, but that you did not think that he would accept it. I was writing officially then. [Letter read.]

1272. Can you explain why you stated that you did not think that Mr. Stark would accept £17,500?—I wrote it simply as an official letter, not being supposed to know in any way that the transaction was completed. The Minister had not informed me that it had been completed. I wrote the letter the first thing in the morning, before I received Mr. Stark's letter.

1273. *Mr. Barron.*] We are to understand that your relations with Mr. Stark were of a twofold nature, one of a friendly and another of an official character?—He was not a friend of mine. He was a mere acquaintance; I never met him till a few days before this.

1274. You did not think that it would be right for you in your official capacity to notice a letter like the one you received from Mr. Stark?—I wrote my report to the Minister before I received Mr. Stark's letter.

1275. Had you no opportunity afterwards to correct your report?—I did not think that there was any necessity to do so.

1276. Will you tell the Committee where you were engaged before you went to Auckland, and in what capacity?—I have been engaged as Land Purchase Officer for the Government for the last fifteen years. I bought all the line of railway from Taranaki to Wanganui—part from Wanganui to Foxton, and part from Napier to Woodville, and a great deal on the Masterton line, and the first thirty miles of the North Island Main Trunk line.

1277. How was it that you were removed to Auckland?—It was owing to the death of Mr. McFarlane, my predecessor. I was sorry to be removed from a district where I was thoroughly acquainted with the value of property to one where I was totally unacquainted with it.

1278. You had no one to consult with when you went?—No; and there was no office even.

1279. The Minister knew that you had really no experience in Auckland?—He must have known so; for he was in office at the time that I joined the service twelve years ago. I was removed rather suddenly to Auckland as there were a lot of things that required my immediate attention; and I was therefore sent up at once.

1280. The Minister says that he saw Mr. Stark on the 8th; is that the case?—I could not say the date.

1281. What passed at the interview?—I introduced Mr. Stark to the Minister and they went through the plans together, and he explained to the Minister what Major Cautley had said. He said that he would require a large amount of compensation for the small piece proposed to be taken, and suggested that it would be better for the Government to take the whole property. The Minister appeared to agree to this, and said, "I cannot say anything about it now; but I will confer with my colleague, the Minister for Defence."

1282. Did this interview take place on the property?—No; it was in the Star Hotel.

1283. Mr. Stark was a stranger to the Minister?—Yes.

1284. You say in your report that negotiations had been "conducted entirely by the Minister for Public Works, and I have had nothing to do with the settlement," &c.?—What I meant was that I never saw the Minister till the 20th, when he asked me to write what I considered a *pro forma* report. I never sent an official report down.

1285. The Minister has said that he had several long interviews with you?—He only had two, to the best of my memory.