

1346. Was it your opinion that at this particular time the case should not be taken into the Court?—I looked upon the matter as settled. I should have preferred it going into Court.

1347. Did you say that £17,500 would be 10 per cent. over the property-tax valuation, and an allowance for compulsory taking of the property, &c.?—Yes, something like that.

1348. Did you say, "I do not think Mr. Stark will agree," &c.?—Yes; I put that in my letter.

1349. Does that mean that the property should have been taken into Court or negotiated privately?—I meant that it was advisable to take it into Court; but I thought that as the Minister was in Auckland he had better settle the matter.

1350. Did you mean that the land should be negotiated privately or not?—That it should be done privately, as the Minister was there. I would not take the responsibility on myself. I thought that the Government would have paid as much by taking it into any Court, taking into consideration the value of the surrounding properties.

1351. That was your opinion at that time?—Yes, and it is now my opinion.

1352. You had only two interviews with the Minister?—Yes, as far as I can remember.

1353. Did you ever express to him an opinion that the land was worth £20,000?—Never.

1354. Nor to any one else?—No. I did not know the value of the property. I was a stranger in the place, and did not know it at all.

1355. What time had you for making inquiries into this matter?—I had, I think, between the 8th and the 20th. But I was very much engaged at the time, and had urgent matters at the time, which I was instructed to proceed with, that were wanted for the House; in addition to which, I was very ill at the time.

1356. When did you receive your instructions?—On the 31st December.

1357. Was it not, then, your duty to commence to make inquiries?—No; for I saw at once that the matter was too big for me to go into, and made up my mind to send it to a Compensation Court, which would have given me ample time to make full inquiries.

1358. What do you mean when you say you were hurried over the matter?—I had a great deal of other pressing work on hand, and could not attend to it all.

1359. Was any of your other work of equal importance to this?—Some of the work was required for the House, and I received imperative instructions to go on with it. I think the valuation of the bush at Penrose was what was particularly required.

1360. Did you explain to the Minister that you were hurried?—No, I did not.

1361. Was the result of the inquiries you made satisfactory to yourself?—Yes. My idea was that the price put on the property was not an unfair one.

1362. What did you mean by stating that you had only one day in which to make inquiries?—I meant that I was so busy that I only went over there one day.

1363. You say that the Minister took the matter entirely out of your hands?—I considered that he did so by getting the valuations and estimates of Auckland land-agents.

1364. Did you think that it was entirely out of your hands when he instructed you to obtain information about the matter?—That was before: it was afterwards that I thought he had done so.

1365. While obtaining information for him did you consider the matter out of your hands?—I had already obtained all the information I could.

1366. Did you not think that a great responsibility rested on you as Land Purchase Officer?—I did.

1367. How can you say that the matter was taken out of your hands?—At my first interview with the Minister I received no instructions to obtain information.

1368. If the Minister stated that he instructed you to obtain all the information possible, would that be correct?—I do not remember that he did so.

1369. I will read what the Minister has said: "I had several long interviews," &c.: is that correct?—I had two interviews with him; I do not remember any others.

1370. He says, "I may say that after two or three conversations I instructed him," &c.: is that true?—I do not remember any mention being made of the Compensation Court. I do not remember any question being brought before the Court.

1371. Did he instruct you to get information?—I do not remember it; but it is possible.

1372. Did you consider it your duty to get all information?—I did, during the time that the Minister was in the Waikato in connection with other work.

1373. Is this the information mentioned in your letter of the 20th January?—Yes.

1374. Was it not in consequence of the opinion you expressed to the Minister in your letter of the 20th that the Minister decided not to take the matter into Court?—No; I cannot say that at all.

1375. In your letter you advised him to offer a certain amount—that is, not to go into the Court?—I advised him to offer that amount because I thought it was reasonable. I did not advise the Minister not to go into the Compensation Court.

1376. Was it in consequence of the information you had received that you recommended the Minister to offer £17,500?—Yes.

1377. Did you say that if you were called into Court your evidence would be in accordance with the details you placed before the Minister?—I cannot say that. I may have said it, but I do not remember it. If I had gone into the Court I should have supported them.

1378. You would have supported the £17,500?—Yes.

1379. Is there any expense in connection with taking these matters into Court?—It depends upon the position. I have had expenses amounting to £300 over the Court in one instance under my own knowledge.

1380. Was it because the Minister was getting the property for £17,500 that you advised him to accept it?—I did so because I thought it was a reasonable amount, and one that the owner would have got in any Court.