

1381. It was also the value you placed upon it?—I had placed no value on it. The £17,500 was 10 per cent. in advance of the property-tax valuation. I had not sufficient knowledge of my own to make a valuation. I thought 10 per cent. on the property-tax valuation was a moderate price.

1382. You say it is the practice to take all large properties into the Compensation Court: has it been your practice?—Yes, generally.

1383. Have you not settled any large claims privately?—I settled a claim of £3,000 for £2,000 the other day, and they got land-agents to value the property for the Government. I got it for £500 less than the valuation of three Auckland agents.

1384. If the Government were acquiring the property for less by not going into Court would you not advise them not to go?—I would.

1385. Then why did you advise the Government to go into Court?—Because I felt too great a responsibility in dealing with this property.

1386. In this case the Minister assumed the responsibility and you waived your objections?—I thought, the price being reasonable, that it was not necessary to take it into Court.

1387. Your advice with regard to the amount was acted on?—Yes.

1388. *Hon. Major Atkinson.*] I understand you to say that you only saw the Minister twice?—Yes.

1389. And once was before he went to Waikato, when you gave no particulars of the value of the property?—None, except that the claim would be a large one.

1390. You never saw him again till after he had agreed to take the property?—To the best of my belief not till the 20th.

1391. And on the 19th he bought the property?—I do not know that of my own knowledge; it was what Mr. Stark told me.

1392. Did the Minister tell you on the 20th that he had bought it?—No. He simply asked my opinion as to its value; and I told him that if he got it for 10 per cent. over the property-tax valuation it would be a reasonable price.

1393. And he did not tell you that he had offered the money?—No.

1394. *Mr. Dargaville.*] You know Mr. William Aitken, a land-agent?—Yes, to speak to.

1395. He is reputed to be the principal land-agent there?—I believe he is looked upon as the largest and most competent valuer in Auckland.

1396. I will read you a telegram from him. He says: [Telegram read]: Have you this statement?—It was only a verbal one.

1397. But he says, "I furnished Mr. Brewer with particulars"?—It was only a verbal statement. I took down a few notes on a sheet of paper for compiling my report of the 12th April.

1398. Have you the memoranda you took down at the time?—I do not know that I have; but they are embodied in my report of the 12th April.

1399. He was one of the persons you consulted in making up your report?—Yes.

1400. Which shows that under certain circumstances the property might realize £20,000?—Yes. I think my valuation was £17,300; and £20,300 was Mr. Stark's value.

1401. You were influenced to some extent by the advice of such men as Mr. Aitken?—Yes; I was influenced a good deal by him, because I looked upon him as a responsible man.

1402. *Mr. Peacock.*] In your report, speaking of an absurd report about Mr. Stark having offered the house and ten acres for £3,500, you state, "Mr. Stark is not here to deny it," &c. How do you explain that when you stated to the Committee that you had seen him and he had denied it?—I meant that I should have got a letter from him denying it.

1403. With the knowledge that you have since, would you have written in this way?—Do you refer to all the offers you have told me of?

1404. Yes, or if you made inquiries of Ross?—I did not think it necessary to make any inquiry of Mr. Ross, because I knew that in a new district property varies very much in a few years, and the place had gone ahead very much, and I did not know but that it had increased to that extent.

1405. Do you admit that Mr. Mays asked you to see Mr. Ross and satisfy yourself?—I do not think that he told me to see him.

1406. Would you be surprised to find that he gave you the address of his office?—He gave me the name of the firm.

1407. And you did not make inquiries from the firm?—I did not. I understood that he was away; and I also anticipated having ample time to make inquiries; for I knew that if we went into Court we should have three weeks. I should like to point out that throughout the whole colony all the local Boards use the property-tax valuation. In my own districts, Patea, Wanganui, and Masterton, they use them alone, and I had no reason to suppose that they did otherwise in that district.

1408. *Dr. Newman.*] Do you know Mr. Aitken?—Yes.

1409. Is he a land-speculator?—I believe so.

1410. Is he associated with others in Devonport?—I do not know at all.

1411. When did he give you the information you refer to?—That would be about the beginning of April.

1412. You said that on the 20th January you valued the property at £20,500, partly on the valuation of Mr. Aitken?—I did not value it at that. I said that Mr. Stark could cut up his property so as to come to that.

1413. Now you say that you did not see him before the 12th April?—I did not have anything to do with him before my report of the 20th.

1414. When did Mr. Stark write you the letter saying that he had accepted the offer?—On the 20th.