

answer to that question was, "Yes." I want you to be quite sure about this. Did you have another interview before the 20th?—As far as I can remember I can conscientiously and truly say that I only had two interviews.

1475. And gave him no particulars till the morning of the 20th?—No. At the first interview we had a little conversation, and I told him the amount of the claim, and that I thought Mr. Stark would be able to get a large sum if the matter were taken into Court.

1476. You said, in reply to the Hon. Mr. Ballance, that you gave the Minister no particulars the first day, but only made a statement as to the claim, and after Mr. Stark went out you said it would be a difficult case to settle?—That is so.

1477. Did you then mention no figures?—No.

1478. The first particulars you gave were on the 20th?—Yes.

1479. *Mr. Dargaville.*] You took your report to the Minister on the 20th? What time of the day was that?—About half-past ten in the morning.

1480. When did you receive Mr. Stark's letter dated the 20th?—About one o'clock in the afternoon.

1481. Can you say whether Mr. Stark had an interview with the Minister subsequently to the receipt of your report and before he wrote his letter to you?—I do not know.

1482. It is quite possible for the Minister to have seen or written to Mr. Stark after he received your report—say, at eleven or twelve o'clock on the morning of the 20th—and then for Mr. Stark to have gone home and written you his letter saying that he had arranged with the Minister?—Yes, it is quite possible.

1483. *Mr. Peacock.*] Is it not the case that in Mr. Stark's letter to you on the 20th he says that it was "yesterday" that he had arranged with the Minister?—Yes.

1484. Does not that preclude the possibility of what Mr. Dargaville has suggested?—If you ask me my impression, it was that the matter had been settled on the 19th.

1485. *The Chairman.*] You stated that you had heard Mr. Ross was not in Auckland at the time. Did you make particular inquiries about it?—No, I did not, because I thought I should have plenty of time to see him afterwards. It was before the Minister came up, and I anticipated having more time.

1486. Can you say who told you that Mr. Ross was out of Auckland?—No; I do not remember. It might have been some one connected with his office. I believe he is very often away.

1487. *Dr. Newman.*] Mr. Stark says, in his letter of the 20th, that he settled the matter "yesterday." When you wrote your first letter had you any idea that the property had been sold?—I did not understand that the matter had been practically settled, but that the Minister had practically agreed to give the £17,000.

1488. You understood from the Minister that he had made up his mind to buy before you wrote your letter?—Yes; I understood that he had made up his mind to give Mr. Stark that amount.

1489. Then, after you understood that Mr. Stark would accept, why did you say that you believed he would not accept the £17,000?—I did not say that there was an official settlement. I said that we were willing to offer the amount—not that Mr. Stark was willing to accept it.

1490. You understood before you wrote the letter that in all probability the matter would be settled on this basis?—Yes.

1491. Then why did you suggest that Mr. Stark would probably not accept the offer?—I was simply writing an official letter. Mr. Stark had told me that he would not accept it. I understood that they were negotiating, and that there would be a compromise.

1492. After Mr. Stark had, in his letter, given you to understand that he had practically settled the matter, what made you say that he probably would not do so?—I thought at first that he would not do so, and I wished to show the Minister that he had got the property at a fair price.

1493. Yes; but Mr. Stark gave you to understand that he would take the property before you wrote?—No; he did not state the amount until he wrote the letter next day.

1494. You did not get the letter from Mr. Stark before you wrote the valuation?—No.

1495. Did you have an interview with him in the morning before half-past ten o'clock, or on the previous day?—Yes, on the previous day.

1496. What did he tell you then?—He said "I have practically settled the matter;" but he did not give me the particulars.

1497. Then, knowing that the matter was settled, what induced you to write that Mr. Stark would not accept?—I simply wrote officially. I did not know what amount he had settled with the Minister. I wrote that report very hurriedly, and perhaps did not give it all the consideration I might have done.

1498. Do you think that, when you are dealing in such a grave matter, it is a wise thing to say that a gentleman will not accept such-and-such terms, when he has practically accepted them?—He did not tell me the amount; he always told me that he would not accept it.

1499. The Minister gave you no hint as to the terms?—None whatever.

1500. Knowing that he had practically settled, you wrote saying that Mr. Stark would not take £17,500?—I meant to say that he had all along said that he would not accept that amount, and that if the Minister got the land for that it would be a fair price.