

1551. Were you in connection with Stark as a partner?—No; there was no partnership existing. He held lands in undivided moiety with us. All lands sold I received commission for.

1552. When you made this offer of £16,000, were you in a position to carry it out?—I was.

1553. You were in a position to carry out the offer?—Certainly; I would not have made it if I had not been.

1554. Before that offer was made did Stark in any way intimate to you that this land was likely to be required by the Government?—Yes.

1555. He did so?—Yes.

1556. Was that one of the reasons why you made the offer of £16,000 for the land?—Yes; I would not have made the offer if it had not been for that.

1557. Then did you, directly or indirectly, intimate to Stark that you were going to make him an offer for the land through these agents?—Certainly not. What would be the use of intimating it to Stark, and then putting it into the hands of an agent? That would be an absurdity. My object in dealing with an agent at all was that Stark should not know from whence the offer came.

1558. Do you keep books in your office, or records, containing details of transactions?—Yes; we conduct our business on as good business lines as we can.

1559. Can you get from your brother a telegram giving extracts from your books as to whether this property was placed in your hands for sale in the ordinary way of business?—Yes.

1560. Will you do it?—Yes, if you wish.

1561. *Mr. Wilson.*] I suppose you know this land very well?—Yes.

1562. So well that you would hardly need to take any instructions for selling anything?—That would be Stark's business, to give me instructions.

*Mr. Cowan:* One of these telegrams says there is no record of the offer in Alison's office.

*Hon. Major Atkinson:* None, except the offer from Vines of eight acres of land, and house.

1563. *Mr. Holmes.*] Did property increase in value there between 1883 and the end of 1885?—Certainly. I was asked that question the other day, and I did not answer it as fully as I ought to have done. My reply that the increase of value was from year to year was correct; but I ought to have answered that there were special reasons for advances in value in 1884 and 1885. These reasons were: (1) That the Russian-war scare had taken place, the Government wanted the land, and were urgent in requiring it; (2) a tramway scheme had been promulgated, which would advance the value of property; and (3) because the demand for sea-frontages had increased.

1564. To what extent—did it double or quadruple the value, or what?—It increased the value very largely.

1565. To what extent, in your opinion?—I cannot carry my mind back so as to give you an exact idea; but I do know that the increase was very considerable.

1566. *Mr. Barron.*] Are you clear that in the telegram you sent you asked for particulars of the property in writing?—Yes.

1567. Why use the words "in writing"?—I asked because I knew they had offered the property in writing.

1568. If you had not used the words "in writing," I presume he might be able to tell you of a great many properties placed under offer; but you limited him by using the words "in writing"?—My object was to obtain from him evidence to show you that offers had been made in writing, and have his own acknowledgment for it.

1569. You might have made him an offer of many properties, although not in writing?—I have no knowledge of making any offer to him, or anything of the kind.

1570. You see the distinction: if you were sure you never made any offer, why use the words "in writing"?—I showed the telegram to the Chairman before I sent it, asking him if he would frank it for me. The reason was simply to obtain information to show that the offer was submitted and carried, as a business, so far that when he wanted it submitted in writing he had it in writing.

1571. Do you know Mr. Aitken, an agent?—Yes, I know him.

1572. Is he altogether an agent or is he a speculator in property?—I do not know that he speculates very much; I do not think he does.

1573. Do you know whether he has any direct or indirect interest in lands in Devonport?—I do not think he has at present; he used to have at one time.

1574. How long ago?—I think he sold his last piece to Roberts.

1575. Was it before this question arose about the value of lands?—Just about the time that Roberts was negotiating for this piece of mine on the beach he bought that piece from Aitken.

1576. Of your knowledge is Aitken interested in any syndicate or company of owners of land there?—I think not.

1577. Or in a company of owners of the ferry?—No; he has nothing to do with the ferry.

1578. *Mr. Holmes.*] What was the last transaction in land-buying that you had with Stark? How long is it since the last transaction?—I do not recollect the last date—it is within the last two years.

1579. Is it more than one year ago?—Certainly: I have bought some property of Stark recently.

1580. Before Mr. Stark went away, had you any interest in common with him?—I bought his interests before he left. Two months subsequent to the offer made for this property we purchased his interest in the Melrose, Roslyn, Belmont, and other estates, for some thousands of pounds. He sold out because he had decided on a trip to the Old Country as soon as he could make satisfactory arrangements in regard to his business.

1581. *Mr. Barron.*] Do you know where Stark is?—I got a letter from him from America.

1582. From where in America?—From San Francisco.