

92. Did you go down when the fire occurred?—Yes, I went down immediately. I went to a tree and got a green bough and took it with me.

93. *Mr. Poynton.*] What do you know about the 17 acres of grass that were burnt?—That fire was started in the same way. The train passed and smoke came up, and away it went.

94. *Mr. Brookfield.*] You went to that fire too?—Yes.

95. You know what was in the paddock and how it was sown?—Yes.

96. How much of the paddock was burnt?—I suppose there were 17 acres.

97. What would be fair compensation to Mr. Wallace for the damage the fire did? Would it be necessary to resow?—Mr. Wallace has resowed since.

98. What would be fair compensation?—I could hardly say.

99. Being a farmer, you can give us an idea?—Well, I would say £2 an acre.

100. Would £20 be an unfair estimate?—I do not think so.

101. It would not be excessive?—I do not think so.

102. On this land of Mr. Wallace's—either that or close to it—have other fires occurred to your knowledge within the last few years?—One occurred on the 22nd of January of this year.

103. But have other fires occurred to your knowledge?—One took place at my own corner. A train went down at a quarter-past 2, and I saw a fire immediately afterwards. It burnt the whole of that corner, but, fortunately, there was a gully that stopped it.

104. What set fire to that?—It must have been the train.

105. Have many fires occurred after the passing of trains?—I have seen two this year, at any rate.

106. And except just after the passing of trains do these fires occur?—No. We have never such a thing in the place. On the 22nd and 23rd of January of this year there were two fires on Mr. Wallace's. The first one took about 20 acres of grass, and the second I put out myself after it had been burning for some time.

107. *Mr. Cooper.*] You have known the paddock for a long time?—Yes, for eleven or twelve years.

108. It was always in grass?—No.

109. When was it last in grass?—It is in grass now; it has been, I think, for two or three years.

110. You have not examined it, have you, for the purpose of giving a particular estimate?—No. I saw the fire, and I have been down since.

WILLIAM McLAUGHLIN, sworn.

111. *Mr. Brookfield.*] You are a farmer at Papatoitō?—Yes.

112. You have been there for—what?—Thirty-seven years.

113. You know something of Mr. Wallace's property?—Yes.

114. Do you remember the fire that occurred there about two years ago?—Yes, I remember the fire Mr. Bailey spoke of, but I did not see it. I know one did occur.

115. And you know the paddock?—Yes; it has been set on fire since.

116. Can you give us an idea of what would be fair compensation to Mr. Wallace for any damage done by that fire?—It is difficult to say that, because I have not been over the paddock to see where the ryegrass and the cocksfoot has been killed out. I have had fires myself.

117. Mr. Wallace says he resowed and had to put in bonedust, but he had not to plough. Would the loss to his feed be great?—I think that if he put on bonedust £2 an acre would not be out of the way.

118. Would £20 be a fair estimate?—Yes, I think so.

119. Can you say whether trains do set fire to places?—I can swear to it. I was on the platform of a carriage from Ann's Bridge, a mile this side of Otahuhu, and between that point and Remuera I saw eleven fires started by the one train.

120. Was there anything except the train to start those fires?—No; I was watching, and I saw fires start 2 chains from the fence. The fire was about the size of your hand. In the paddock next the Ellerslie Hotel it started in three distinct places in the paddock. I was at the station on the following day when the Rotorua train came up. I said to the driver, "What sort of coal have you?" He said, "We have hard coal"; and he also said, "I have set nine fires going since I left Auckland this morning."

121. What was the name of the driver?—I do not know. He is the man who drives the Wai-kato train. It was on the Thursday that I saw the fires, and on the following Saturday I spoke to the engine-driver.

122. *Mr. Poynton.*] Could you tell us the day?—It is either three or four weeks ago. I told Mr. Maxwell about it on that same day.

123. *Mr. Brookfield.*] You reported the matter to Mr. Maxwell?—Yes. Then, some years ago I remember a fire starting in my paddock. I went to look at it, and found little bits of coal there. In one place there were three or four bits of coal about the size of beans.

124. How far from the railway?—About half a chain. I have seen fires start nearly 2 chains away. The railway runs through my place for a mile, and we have had a good deal of trouble.

125. You have had some trouble in your own place?—Yes; so much so that I will not bother with it. I have let the land, and my tenants have been burnt out time after time.

126. The fact of fires starting alongside the railway-line depreciates the value of a farm, does it not?—Yes; decidedly. I would not work a farm alongside the line. My house was too far away, and I could not watch it. The tenant, on the other hand, is alongside the line, and may see any fire. This year one of my tenants had a lot of firewood burnt in spite of all he did.

127. It would mean a considerable depreciation of property, then?—Yes; certainly. I would not work a farm alongside the line. No precautions are taken. The spark-catchers are perfectly