

512. *Mr. Cooper.*] On this occasion you were a mile and a half away?—Yes.]

513. With a team?—Yes.

514. And you did not notice the fire until twenty minutes after the train had passed?—About twenty minutes.

515. So you cannot say whether any one was there to set fire to it?—Well, of course, a man might have been there and set fire to it with a match.

516. You were as far from it as from Auckland to Newmarket?—Yes.

517. The fire on the Government plantation was on the other side of the line, was it not?—No; it was on the same side of the line. I was further away from it. It was up above Wairangi Station about a mile—between Wairangi and Rangiriri.

518. Maori gum-diggers have been digging all along there between Rangiriri and Whangamarino?—They have been digging about Wairangi in the swamps.

NORRYS KENSINGTON, SWORN.

519. *Mr. Cooper.*] You are in charge of the Government wattle plantation near Wairangi, are you not?—Yes.

520. And you were so during the whole of 1896?—Yes.

521. Do you recollect a fire occurring on the Glasgow plantation?—I recollect that there was a fire.

522. Have you been over the property for the purpose of estimating the damage?—Yes; I rode over it with Mr. Clifton once.

523. Can you give us any indication of the damage done?—I could not say. It is too vague. The fire is all in patches. I could not give an idea unless the ground was surveyed.

524. Can you say what price wattle-bark was in 1896?—I could not say positively. Mr. Clifton has the selling of the bark. Of course, the price varies.

525. The whole of the trees were not burnt off the two sections?—Yes, where the fire went through.

526. But did it sweep the sections clear?—It swept right through the swamp and on to another swamp, burning in patches.

527. And you think it is impossible to estimate the patches unless a survey was made?—Yes, I should decidedly say so.

528. *Mr. Oliphant.*] How long have you been manager of the Government plantation?—Thirteen years altogether.

529. Since it first started?—Yes.

530. From the time the seed was put in?—Yes.

531. When did it commence: in 1886, was it not?—Yes.

532. About fourteen years ago?—Yes.

533. In that time I suppose you have seen a good many fires from the railway?—Yes.

534. And it is difficult to remember any one fire, seeing there are so many?—I have seen three or four on the Government plantation this year.

535. Started from the railway?—I do not know where they started from, but we had to beat them out.

536. They commenced near the railway-track?—Yes.

537. It is in evidence that some men were kindly sent by you to the big fire in 1896. You went yourself, did you not?—Yes.

538. How many men did you take?—Three or four, I think.

539. Do you remember that the day previous to the big fire you had a fire in the Government plantation? It was shortly after the afternoon train had passed down?—I have no recollection of it.

540. It would be a minor fire, and you would take little notice of it, I suppose, seeing fires are so numerous?—I do not remember it.

541. Can you say that these fires start from the ashes or from sparks, or from both causes?—I could not say.

542. Have you not been near enough on any of the occasions to see whether the fires were caused by sparks or by ashes?—It might or it might not be for all I know.

543. You are aware that ashes are thrown from the train along the line?—Yes.

544. Frequently? In fact, it is a common occurrence, is it not?—I could not say whether it is common. I have seen it done once only.

545. At what point was that done?—It was going through a portion of the Government plantation. It was in the cutting.

546. It was not near any water-stand for an engine?—No.

547. Did a fire arise from the ashes on that occasion?—Yes.

548. On an average, how many fires did you have to put out in a year—we will not say the causes, but I refer to fires alongside the railway-line?—I could not say. Of course, the Natives might have been the cause of some of the fires. They walk up and down the line, and they might set a fire going.

549. How many were there, on the average, that you have had to put out near the railway-line?—There might be two or three.

550. How many were there in 1896?—I do not know.

551. You had a big fire last Saturday in the district, had you not?—I do not remember.

552. Did you see any remains of it near the Whangamarino Station when you were coming down in the train?—I do not remember seeing any fire. There are fires all over the country. It has been enveloped in smoke lately. At every point of the compass there is smoke.

553. And you did not see a fire on Saturday, covering about 1,000 acres? You do not know if it commenced at the railway?—No.