

54. Then we need not bother to read the report. What is the date of the report?—24th July, 1906. It is Mr J Barron, the Crown Lands Ranger's report, and on the 25th July, the next day after Mr Barron's reply, the Board met at Stratford, consisting of Messrs. A. Barron (Chairman), W C. Kensington, Ivan Simpson, and John Heslop. Mr Simpson is the Crown Lands Commissioner, and the recommendation of the Board is, "The Board recommends the Government to offer Mr. Bayly for the 1,900 acres of Toko B a price not exceeding £11 per acre."

55. What happened then?—The recommendation is sent to the Government on the 27th July, and on the 11th August the recommendation is approved of £11 per acre in Cabinet.

56. Then what next?—Then on the 21st August Mr Barron advised Mr Bayly as follows "With reference to negotiations with you for the purchase of Toko B, containing about 1,900 acres, I am now authorized to offer you at the rate of £11 per acre for this estate, with all the improvements now standing thereon and connected therewith. Payment to be made in cash or in 4-per-cent. debentures having a currency of five or six years. Possession to be given on payment, and a transfer to the King being duly executed by you as soon as practicable. The area to be subject to revision or survey as may be found to be necessary. I hope to hear from you soon, and that possession can be given within, say, one month, otherwise it may be best to wait till next year."

57. Then what happened?—On the 24th August Mr Bayly wired accepting offer and stating, "When will you take possession? Suggest about two weeks. Reply sharp, as I want to arrange stock-sale."

58. Then what next?—The following correspondence is only departmental to the Commissioner of Crown Lands about the survey

59. *Mr Skerrett.*] What was the total area?—1,911 acres at £11, making a total of £21,021
The Chairman Do you desire to ask any questions, Mr Major?

Mr Major I do not desire to ask any questions, Mr Chairman, but I have a statement to make.

Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward I want Mr Ritchie sworn.
(Witness sworn accordingly)

60. *Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] How long have you been Land Purchase Commissioner, Mr. Ritchie?—About a year

61. During the time that you have been Land Purchase Commissioner, has any attempt at pressure or representation been made to you to purchase any estates in this country?—Not the slightest.

62. Either by the Minister in charge of the Department or any other member of the Government?—No, not in the slightest.

63. Has there been any attempt at interference with your duties in any way whatever?—No, not at all.

64. Has any member of the Ministry attended any meeting of the Land Purchase Board when considering any estate under offer?—No.

65. Has any estate been purchased upon the recommendation of the Board at a higher price than that recommended by the Board?—No.

66. *Hon. Mr. Millar*] Mr Myers drew special attention to the fact that the valuation was high as prices usually went. Can you say, during your term of office, what has been the biggest difference between the price asked for an estate and the price at which it is set down in the land-valuation roll?—I have had instances where it has been as much as £9 and £10 per acre.

67. Nothing more?—I cannot very well remember them all. I know particularly of one estate which is standing now in the valuation roll at £9 or £10 an acre less.

68. I think we have had them at as much as £40?—I am referring purely to ordinary farming-land.

69. I mean farming-land cut up for small settlements?—I have not been dealing with very small ones, but ordinary farming-lands. I might say that the valuation was made a good many years ago—it is an old valuation.

70. From your experience of the Assessment Court, where lands have been taken compulsorily, have you found any great difference between the price awarded by the Assessment Court and the price at which it is set down in the valuation roll?—I have not dealt with any lands taken compulsorily in my time.

71. *Mr Massey*] Your evidence is merely with regard to what has taken place during the last twelve months or thereabouts?—Yes.

72. *Mr Allen.*] On the 31st August, 1905, there was a letter from Mr Barron to Mr Arndt asking if £12 10s. was the lowest price?—Yes.

73. Was there any reply to that?—No, there was a lapse in the correspondence for some time—there was nothing done for nearly a year

74. On the 28th June Mr W Symes forwarded a petition, and the petitioner wrote a letter, in which he made this statement: "Over a year ago Mr Barron had valued it at over £14." Is there any record of that valuation?—No, nothing on the file.

75. You are not able to say whether Mr Barron did value 1,000 acres at £14?—No.

76. What Mr. Barron is that?—He mentioned A. Barron

77. *Mr Fraser*] Mr Ritchie, you have had some experience as to the rise and fall of dairy-produce during years past?—Yes.

78. Was there much rise in the value of dairy-produce from 1903 to 1906?—I do not think there was a very great difference there may have been 1d. per pound in butter. It has been higher within the last few years. I cannot remember just now the exact prices. There has been a considerable increase, because it has been rising since 1903 up to the present time.