

23. Then when it was sold to Russell what happened?—The mortgage still remains upon the property.

24. You as solicitor for Keene would be notified when the sale was made from Ballan to Russell?—Yes. We would be asked to produce the title so that it could be registered.

25. Do you remember the date?—I think it was about June of last year. The Register-book in Auckland would show the date exactly.

26. You think it was in June of last year?—Yes.

27. *Mr. R. W. Smith.* Have you any idea what the property is worth now?—It is worth a little more than it was worth then. A certain amount of fencing and ploughing has been done—some slight improvement.

28. Have you been on the property?—Yes, I have been all over it.

29. What do you value it at now?—I am not a land-valuer.

30. *Mr. Coates.* If you are not a land-valuer, how do you come to the conclusion that it is a little more valuable now?—I know the property, and am acquainted with the amount of grassing done.

31. Are you acquainted with the piece marked purple on the map?—The whole of that valley is the best part of the run. There is bush on the Runanga side. The whole of the Crown land is bush, all that can be seen from Runanga. Down in the valley is tussock land, and there is about a ten-mile strip of bush a mile and a half wide.

32. *Mr. Statham.* Have you been acting for Keene all through the transaction?—Yes, the firm. My brother acts principally for Mr. Keene.

33. When did you first hear of the sale to Russell from Ballan?—About June of last year.

34. Then do you remember when Mr. Keene first consulted you about releasing? Did he come to you and tell you he proposed to ask them to release a certain portion?—Yes.

35. And did you go into the merits of the question or did he decide?—He decided how much he would reduce the mortgage by.

36. He did not ask you to advise on that?—No.

37. I think the title went through on the 23rd December. Did you have any agreement to purchase in your hands at any time?—I do not think so. It would not come near us. All we would be asked to do would be to produce the title so that they could register the transfer. We were simply holding the title on behalf of the mortgagee.

38. *The Chairman.* Were you aware that the Government were negotiating for the purchase of this land?—When I was up that way two or three years ago I heard that the Government were going to cut this [Pohokura] block up, and they might require some of that [Runanga]. It was only the gossip of the country up there.

39. Did you have any information as the legal adviser to Keene that the Government were negotiating for the purchase?—No, there was nothing said about it. The surveyors had been cutting up the land, and they seemed to think the Government would take part of it. It was only reasonable, because it was the only place where the road could go.

40. Do you know the run?—Yes.

41. Do you say that there is bush on Pohokura?—Yes, it is all bush.

42. And bush up the valley on Runanga?—Yes, not in the valley, but on the hillside. It is a low hill and it is all bush.

43. Does the standing bush go down to the creek?—No, not quite.

44. Does it go down to the road-line?—No.

45. Then do you say that your client, Mr. Keene, was asked by Mr. Russell to release this 1,400 acres?—He said so.

46. Did you prepare the transfer?—We perused the release, and Mr. Keene signed it.

47. At the request of Keene did you take the necessary steps?—We perused the release of that part, and he signed it, and we handed it over on payment of so-much.

48. Who was the land transferred to?—That we did not know.

49. Was that done at Mr. Russell's request?—That I could not say: it probably was.

50. You were instructed by Mr. Keene?—Yes, and by the solicitors in Christchurch who sent up the release. I think they actually prepared it.

51. Who were the solicitors in Christchurch?—I think the firm was Russell and Anthony.

52. You know nothing about the value of land in the district?—I know what prices have been paid for the land round about there, or what the Natives are asking.

53. What price was paid for Runanga?—The whole block?

54. Yes?—£12,500.

55. For the 66,000 acres?—Yes.

56. You say you know the value of other land: what is Puhukanui land worth?—I would put it down at about 2s. 6d. per acre. For the other strip of Runanga No. 1b the Natives were asking 2s. 6d. an acre.

57. What do you value Pohokura at?—I do not know. That has never been on the market.

58. Is it the same class of land as the other?—It is a very high hill—a portion of it.

59. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.* The land that the Government is cutting up is composed of high hills?—Yes.

60. *The Chairman.* Then the Natives valued Runanga No. 1b at 2s. 6d. an acre?—Yes.

61. Would Runanga No. 1a be worth more?—Yes, it is worth more, because it is much nearer the road.

62. Would you consider 10s. an acre a fair value for Runanga No. 1a?—Well, if you take the whole lot, yes, possibly.

63. *Mr. Guthrie.* What names appeared in the release sent up to you?—The mortgage is from Ballan to Keene, and it would be, "I, Richard Keene, hereby release certain," &c., &c.