

unless they got the next. Having secured one with such a boundary as I have described, they must go for the next. You could not tell who might bid against you, and it was quite safe for a malicious person to run you up. While on this subject I would like to say something about the auction sales. They were conducted in a most unfair manner to *bonâ fide* bidders. I know a case where a run was knocked down to a *bonâ fide* bidder. His name was called, and he was asked to sign the conditions of sale. He left his seat and walked up to the auctioneer's desk. I was standing in the body of the hall; several minutes had passed after the fall of the hammer. Some one near me bid another £5, and the auctioneer made the purchaser go back again to his seat. Mr. Martin was the auctioneer.

188. Who was the person who bid the £5?—I did not know him.

189. Who was the other?—Mr. Francis Fulton was the other man.

190. Who became the purchaser?—Mr. Fulton. There was another instance in my own case in 1879. There was a sale of runs in 1879; all high runs. I attended the sale to bid for a piece of country which I had occupied for seven years, at a rental of £50. This run comprised about 10,000 acres of very high country, ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 feet, well grassed for three or four months in summer, but quite useless for the remainder of the year. When the sale opened, Mr. Driver bid for a run. He was run up by one person from £50 to nearly £300. It was knocked down to this person, who however said, "That is not my bid." Every other person present said it was his bid. He then said, "I will not take it," showing that he was not a *bonâ fide* bidder. Eventually the run was put up again at the upset price.

191. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] Do you know who that was?—Yes; Mr. Mervyn was the name of the person. The run was put up again. The auctioneer wanted Mr. Driver to take the run at his last bid.

192. Did Mr. Driver take it?—No; Mr. Driver protested that the bidding was not genuine, and claimed that Mr. Mervyn should not be allowed to bid, being a defaulter. It was eventually knocked down to Mr. Driver at the upset price. When my turn came, this same man, notwithstanding my protests, was allowed to bid, and ran me up from £60 to £234. Now, I think that was an unfair thing to do. I wanted the country, because it was useful to me; but it was not worth what I gave for it. That was in 1879, before the other leases expired. I had to pay £234 a year, nearly five times as much proportionately as to value, for that high country as for the best low country. I think that was not a fair thing to do.

193. What was the object?—I do not know what his object was.

*Mr. McKenzie:* He wanted to do the State a service.

194. *Mr. Brown.*] Did he buy the country?—No, he did not. I do not see what he could have wanted with it, for it could have been of no use to him, being fully twenty miles from where he was settled.

195. *Mr. McKenzie.*] Who were present?—I do not recollect.

196. *The Chairman.*] Was there a complaint formally made?—Mr. Driver complained that Mervyn, being a defaulter, should not have been allowed to bid again during the sale. I also protested, but in vain.

197. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] You say that Mr. Martin, after the fall of the hammer, put it up again?—If you refer to Mr. Fulton's case, yes. That was in 1882. It was so not only in that case but in several others.

198. Was it stated in the papers at the time?—Some reference was made in the Press to the peculiarity of the bidding.

199. *The Chairman.*] Was it not the duty of those present to make complaint?—What redress had you if you did. It would be said that you were interfering with the auctioneer.

200. *Mr. McKenzie.*] The fact was that people were so anxious to get a run that there were twenty bids the moment he lifted his voice; but I understood you to say, Mr. Fraser, that it was store stock being so low which was one of the causes that led to the depression of the pastoral tenants?—Yes.

201. Does not that equally apply to the freeholder?—Yes.

202. Is it not a fact that the runs were cut up so that an ordinary person might get a run at a low figure?—I do not think so.

203. They could not offer in one block a larger area than 5,000 acres?—The area had nothing to do with making the subdivisions; it was the carrying capacity that was limited to 5,000 sheep.

204. The Waste Land Board's surveyors had to apportion it out so that each subsection should not exceed that area?—I quite admit it, but it could have been done in an intelligent manner, and not by straight lines.

205. Does not that cut both ways. Suppose you were a bidder for one subsection, and you got it: Did not that give you a better opportunity of getting another one; did it not apply both ways—the other man was in the same position as you?—Yes; if he was a *bonâ fide* bidder.

206. We are not supposed to know that he was anything else; but is it not the fact that people's own agents were bidding against them for these runs?—It may have been so.

207. You knew the value of the runs?—No; we were all mistaken in that.

208. Now, in regard to taking off so much low country, has that depreciated the value of the stock?—I could not tell you the effect on values in all cases, but I can tell you the effect upon the working of the stock. I will give you an instance in my own case. A good many years ago I put up a fence cutting off a piece of the low country, thinking I could work the higher country alone; but after two years I found that it was detrimental to the condition of the stock, and I had to remove the fence.

209. Are you aware that many of these persons were very anxious to go into these runs but did not get them?—I heard of such cases; I think that very many who did get them wish they had not, and that the others had. If a man could not make enough profit to pay interest on borrowed capital, to say nothing of his own capital, he was certainly losing money.