

1286. The first one was that you refer to when you introduced Mr. Stark, and the last was when he asked you to write a report?—Yes.

1287. He took the whole matter out of your hands?—Yes; the mere fact of his getting Auckland land agents to value the property was taking it out of my hands.

1288. You have been land purchase agent for a number of years?—For fifteen years.

1289. The present Minister has been in office during your term?—Yes; he was in office when I first joined the office.

1290. You must have been officially connected in the same capacity with other Ministers. Have you had any other case where the Minister has taken the whole matter on himself?—No; I have never had a similar case. I have often referred to the Minister, but I have had no case like this. In one case, in connection with the Patea Boiling-down Company, I consulted with the Minister a great deal. It was a complicated case and took twelve months to settle; and it was eventually settled satisfactorily.

1291. Have you any opinion as to why this exceptional course was followed?—The claim was a very large one, and the Minister got the valuations to protect himself and ascertain the value of the property. He probably did not wish to leave it to me, as it was too big a thing.

1292. It has been stated that Mr. Stark has declared that he was a candidate for the Waitemata seat in Parliament. Do you know if it is true?—I saw it in the papers.

1293. Do you know if Mr. Stark interviewed any of the other Ministers?—I do not know.

1294. With reference to the valuations, there is one point that you have not made clear. Did you make any distinction between cash value and speculative value?—I did not look at it in that light. I looked at it in this light: that a man whose property was taken from him in a very arbitrary manner, as was the case here, was entitled to more than if he sold his property in the ordinary way.

1295. Did you not take into consideration the fact that most of the values brought under your notice were nominal or speculative; and that this property, the purchase of which was being negotiated for, was to be purchased for cash?—I do not understand that any of the properties I have reported on were sold on terms. I have had no means of satisfying myself.

1296. For instance, we have it on record that for this property there was offered by Mr. Allison (whether it was a *bona fide* offer or not has nothing to do with the question) £16,000—£2,000 cash, and the balance in five years at 5 per cent. Would you have considered that this offer, had it been reported to you without the terms on which the offer was made, was similar to an offer of £16,000 on the terms I have stated?—I do not quite follow you; but I think that you ought to get a property much cheaper for cash than on terms. But I have heard nothing about any of these offers. As to Mr. Allison's name, I never heard it mentioned in the whole transaction. I do not know him.

1297. In your report of the 12th April to the Under-Secretary you say, "In conclusion, I would refer to an absurd report," &c. This was brought under your notice before the purchase was concluded. The name of the person to whom Mr. Stark offered the land was given to you, and you had ample opportunity to ascertain whether the report was true between the date of the opening of the negotiations in January and the date of your writing this letter in April, and still you do not seem to have taken any steps to ascertain whether it was true or not?—I was assured by Mr. Stark that the offer was never made, and I did not see, after the matter was settled, how it would affect the question. The report was written three months afterwards.

1298. You said yesterday that you thought Mr. Ross was not in town. Here is a report, written months afterwards, in which you take up this ground: "Mr. Stark is not here to deny the report." Why do you take up that ground?—I meant that if Mr. Stark had been there at the time I wrote I should have got a letter from him to that effect.

1299. It seems to me to require explanation why, in the face of the fact that Mr. Ross was there, you did not communicate with him?—I did not think that it was necessary to do so. I thought that the object of the report of the 12th April was more for the purpose of showing how the property should be treated in the future. I considered that the question of compensation had been settled, and that it was therefore not necessary to go into all these details.

1300. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.* With regard to your letter of the 20th January, you say you were simply writing officially. What do you mean by that?—I wrote an official letter in reply to a request from the Minister.

1301. Is this letter correct?—Yes; those are my own opinions.

1302. What do you mean by saying that you were simply writing officially?—I was asked to write a report, and I wrote it.

1303. For what purpose did the Minister ask you to write a report?—I presume to support the valuation.

1304. Had you expressed opinions to him similar to those contained in your report?—Not exactly those opinions. I stated to him that the claim was a difficult one to settle. I did not use figures previous to the letter, to the best of my knowledge and belief. My opinions as to the price were expressed only on the 20th January. I expressed my opinion to the Minister; but no particular amount. I told him that Mr. Stark's claim was £20,000, and that I thought it would be a difficult claim to fight in the Compensation Court. I do not think I fixed any amount at our first interview as to what was the value of the property.

1305. Did you not advise the Minister to offer £17,500?—Not before the 20th. On that date I did formally, and by this letter.

1306. Will you state what is in this letter that you did not express to the Minister?—I do not think there is anything that I did not express. Ten minutes previously I might have expressed other things, but not days previously.

1307. When did you first receive instructions to inquire about the property?—I think it was on the 31st December.