

1415. Do you notice that the date has been altered on the letter?—Yes.

1416. Do you notice that the ink is different?—No, I do not see much difference.

1417. In your letter of the 20th you said you thought that Mr. Stark would not accept the offer?—I said I was not sure that he would. He had told me that he would not accept less than £20,000.

1418. Was this letter written after the Minister had settled the matter?—It was written before I received Mr. Stark's letter. I did not know officially then that he had settled with the Minister.

1419. I have no wish to doubt your statement, but would you be prepared to tell the Committee on oath that you had only one interview with the Minister before this?—I think I should.

1420. Would you be prepared to state that you did not have several long interviews with him before the 20th?—I think I should be perfectly justified in stating it, but I cannot be quite sure.

1421. Did you advise the Minister that the case should be settled by a Compensation Court?—No, I did not.

1422. If it were your duty to get all the information you could before the 20th, how was it that you had no detailed report?—I had all I could get within the time. I was very busy at the time.

1423. But you had sufficient time to write that letter of the 20th?—I wrote it on the morning of the 20th.

1424. You say that Professor Thomas bought a property at the rate of £600 per acre?—So I was informed.

1425. On what did you base your statement?—On information I received when I was making inquiries in the North Shore.

1426. Do you know the acreage of it?—About one and three-quarter acres.

1427. But you never worked it out to find what the price was?—No; I was told it was sold at £600 per acre, and that the house was valued at £450.

1428. Mr. Richardson was asked the question, "It was after you came back from the Waikato, and before you made the offer to Stark, that Mr. Brewer gave you a detailed report?" Did you give a detailed report to the Minister before the 20th?—No, I did not.

1429. Have you reason to believe that the negotiations had been settled before that?—Yes—that it was settled on the 19th. But I had no evidence of the matter at all—it was simply what I was told.

1430. You are positive that you gave the Minister no detailed information before the 20th?—I do not remember, except in general conversation.

1431. Did you see him after he came back from the Waikato, and before he offered to buy the property from Stark?—I do not think I did, but I cannot be quite sure. He was in and out of the building where my office is a great many times. I do not remember seeing him except on the two occasions I have mentioned.

1432. And you gave him no information before the 20th?—No absolute information: all I gave him was in the course of general conversation.

1433. *Mr. Wilson.*] I would like you to tell what the Minister said to you when he asked you to draw up a report on the morning of the 20th; but first tell us what was the conversation with regard to the values of property?—I can scarcely remember the conversation; but he sent in for me and said, "I wish you to write a report on the Takapuna property," and then we had some general conversation as to the largeness of the claim and as to what I thought was the amount which should be offered by the Government. As far as I can remember, I said that I should consider that 10 per cent. over the property-tax valuation was not an excessive price. That is all I can remember of the interview.

1434. Before this time had you no knowledge of the fact that he had bought the property?—None at all officially.

1435. Did you, before writing your report on the 12th, hear from a number of rumours in Auckland that the price was too high?—I saw in the papers that it was mentioned by the Wellington correspondents that it was reported in Wellington that the price was too high.

1436. This had no effect upon you in drawing out your more elaborate report?—No. I considered that the Government merely wanted to get more information than they had.

1437. *Mr. Barron.*] In your letter of the 20th January to the Minister for Public Works you referred to Professor Thomas's property as having just been bought for so much. In a letter, dated the 12th April, to the Under-Secretary for Public Works, you refer to the fact that Professor Thomas gave £1,600 for an acre and three-quarters three years ago. Is this the same property?—Yes.

1438. How do you explain the difference between these two statements?—When I first got the information I was told that the property had lately been purchased, and I understood that it was very lately. When I went into the question more fully I found that it was two or three years before.

1439. So that, really, when you reported to the Minister, as you seem to have done, that if you went into the Compensation Court you were prepared to swear that the property was worth £17,500, your information was not so complete as it would have been at a subsequent period if you had had a longer time?—No; I wrote the report under great pressure, without having had sufficient time to consider the matter.

1440. Mr. Richardson has said, with reference to yourself, "He told me that if he were called into Court his evidence would be in accordance with the details," &c. He further states, in a telegram to Mr. Ballance, that you valued the whole property at about £20,000?—That is a mistake. I did not value it. The claim was for that amount.

1441. Then the Minister makes a mistake in saying so?—He must have misunderstood me. I could not possibly say that the value was that, because I did not know the value of it.

1442. Then, as far as that telegram to the Minister of Defence is concerned, it must be a mistake?—I think it was a misunderstanding—that he took the claim for my assessment.