

1635. It was, then, written after Mr. Brewer's report to you?—Yes.

1636. Do I understand you to say that Mr. Brewer had given you such information verbally as warranted you in making the offer, apart from his written report?—I considered so, seeing that I had his information confirmed from other quarters. It was not on his report alone that I acted.

1637. You had from him the gist of what he the next day put in writing?—Yes; he put it in writing by my instructions.

1638. You have said in your evidence that you had private interviews with several prominent men in Auckland as to the value of the property, but that the information was of a private nature and you felt it incumbent upon you to withhold their names?—Yes; I had interviews with two gentlemen.

1639. We have since heard from Mr. W. Aitken, the land agent, that he had estimated the value of the property at £18,000. I do not know whether you would still consider it a breach of confidence to say whether he was one of the two you had interviews with?—He was not.

1640. Then these other two gentlemen's valuations were in addition to that of Mr. Aitken?—Yes; I never saw Mr. Aitken's valuation, that I am aware of.

1641. *Hon. Major Atkinson.*] I should like to know whether these interviews with Mr. Brewer that you have mentioned were all before you made the offer to Mr. Stark—that is to say, the verbal offer, because in your evidence you said that the practical offer had been made two or three days previously, but that you did not know whether he had accepted it?—What took place was this: I had a long interview with Mr. Brewer, in which we went over all particulars, on my return from the Waikato; and later on, on the 19th, I saw Mr. Stark.

1642. It was after the interview with Mr. Brewer?—Certainly. I had the value confirmed from other sources, and had satisfied myself that I was right in taking the course that I did.

1643. The verbal offer was after you had taken verbal information from Mr. Brewer?—Certainly.

1644. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.*] Were the statements made in the letter to you from Mr. Brewer the same as expressed by him to you personally?—They were practically the same, but not so full as those he had given me verbally.

1645. You asked him to commit to writing the opinions he had expressed to you?—Yes.

1646. *Dr. Newman.*] How many interviews did you have with Mr. Brewer before the matter was settled?—I do not know whether it is intended to entrap me, but I was asked the question exactly the same three times before, and answered it when I was asked what had taken place. I have no objection to repeat the whole history for the fourth time.

1647. I would say at once that I have no desire to entrap the Minister. But we have had a mass of evidence and I was not aware that he had been asked the question. If he has done so I am satisfied. I can assure him I have no intention of entrapping him?—Well, I have no intention of being entrapped, for there is nothing to entrap me about. I had an interview with Mr. Stark in the presence of Mr. Brewer. I had a second interview with Mr. Brewer by himself in the ministerial office in the Supreme Court-room. The third was on my return from Waiwera, when I gave him instructions what to do in the way of getting information; and when I came back I had a long interview with Mr. Brewer before I made any offer to Mr. Stark. From what I have heard this morning it appears that I had another with him on the following day; and one on the 22nd, before I left Auckland.

1648. I should like to know why Mr. Brewer should be asked to give a valuation after the matter was accomplished?—I am not aware that he was asked to do so.

1649. Yes; he gives one on the 20th, and the matter was settled on the 19th?—I think this has been explained over and over again; it is a case of trap, trap, all round. But I am quite ready to go over the ground again. Mr. Brewer was not called upon to give any information after the offer was made to Mr. Stark. I instructed him to put the result of a long interview that he had previously had with me into writing. The interview had taken place before.

1650. *Hon. Major Atkinson.*] The difficulty is that we have had such positive evidence from Mr. Brewer to the contrary, and that is why I want to be quite clear about your evidence. It has been stated that the interview in which he gave you the information was after you had bought the property verbally?—You had better ask Mr. Brewer what induced him to put that into writing. It seems to me that the Committee has been turned into the worst form of a Police Court, by all this badgering of witnesses. I have repeated my evidence on this point twice in this room already. I have no objection to go over it all again; but I do object to this course of procedure.

*The Chairman:* I may explain to you that the evidence was so conflicting that the Committee decided that whenever it was contradictory it was necessary to put some of the witnesses on oath, and it would be impossible to do so without examining all on oath.

1651. *Dr. Newman.*] I should like to know why Mr. Brewer was asked to give a valuation after the matter was settled?—I have repeatedly stated that he was not asked to do so. He was asked to give it before the matter was settled. As the result of a long interview that he had previously had with me, that he was told to put what he had informed me into writing.

1652. Did he write this report after the purchase was completed with Mr. Stark?—I cannot say. I am told that the report is dated the 20th. Mr. Brewer had a long interview with me on the 19th, and when he left he was told to put his information into writing. Whether he did so on the 19th or the 20th is neither here nor there.

1653. *Mr. Wilson.*] There is a political aspect to this question. It has been freely remarked in Auckland that Mr. Stark was a candidate for Parliament: do you know if that was the case?—I never heard of Mr. Stark before I received a telegram, before I left Wellington, asking what the Government were going to do with regard to the land they had taken belonging to him.

1654. It is freely stated that the whole thing has a political aspect, and I thought I would give you an opportunity of denying it?—I thank you for doing so. There is absolutely no political element