

557. You said that you got this petition sent to you ; it was not sent through the department ?—No ; Mr. Otterson sent me a copy.

558. *Hon. The Chairman.*] It was a written copy you received ?—Yes.

559. *Mr. McKenzie.*] You admitted yesterday that the complaints against you charged you with partiality and gross carelessness ; that is, I presume, what you wish to refute ?—Yes.

560. When did you take charge of this district ?—In October.

561. Who put you in charge of the district ?—The Minister of Lands. I was sent there from Blenheim.

562. Did you go to Dunedin to the head office and report yourself to Mr. Douglass ?—I reported myself to Mr. Douglass at Wellington, on my way South.

563. When you got to Palmerston, what steps did you take to find out about the rabbits ?—I rode all over the district.

564. Did you see many rabbits on your first trip ?—Not a great many.

565. Did you take steps there and then to put them down ?—Yes ; I wrote a number of letters. I was cautious as to how I should proceed, because I did not know the owners of the land, and it took me some time to become acquainted with the district.

566. Did you find an agent in charge when you took office ?—No.

567. Was an application made to you by an agent in charge previous to your arrival ?—About a week after I got there I got applications from two persons—one named Doris and another named Field.

568. Was Field an agent before you arrived ?—No.

569. Was Field a stranger as well as you were ?—He was not a stranger ; he knew the place.

570. Was Field previously employed by the department ?—No ; not to my knowledge.

571. You know that Doris was ?—Yes ; I knew that he was formerly an agent.

572. And you did not think it was necessary to keep the services of Doris, who could give you some information ?—No.

573. I will ask you to state why you decided not to employ Doris ?—I was advised not to.

574. And who advised you ?—Inspector Clifton, the previous Inspector in charge of Otago.

575. What reason did he give you that you should not employ him ?—He said, in his opinion, he was not a man fit for the office, and strongly recommended me not to employ him.

576. And you then employed Field ?—Yes.

577. He was a stranger to the work ?—Yes ; but he was strongly recommended to me.

578. Did you get a circular from the department to the effect that you could take your agent ?—No ; I do not remember getting one.

579. Did you see by a recent resolution of this Committee last year that agents were to be in the hands of the Inspectors ?—I think so.

580. But you did not get a circular from the department ?—I might have got one, but I do not remember it.

581. You felt that you were at liberty to employ any one you liked ?—Yes.

582. When did you take the first action with regard to the rabbits ?—With regard to the Court work ?

583. I mean in giving notices to any of the settlers ?—These notices referred to were fresh notices I sent out. I went first on the ground to see for myself.

584. Will you name the persons you gave notices to in December ?—H. Withy, J. McBain, J. Dean, McBain, Wright, Findlay, and others. These were all Goodwood Bush settlers.

585. What is the distance of these persons' land from Ross's ?—Ten or eleven miles, I should think.

586. Were there any complaints made with regard to these settlers from any one in the district, or was it from anything Quarterly told you ?—I had a complaint made to me from Mr. Ritchie, of Mount Royal. He complained of Anderson, and he got a notice later on.

587. Would you have taken action without Quarterly if you had had no complaint ?—If I had happened to have gone to this country and seen so many rabbits I should have done so at once.

588. Did he leave any note with you in regard to Dunback ?—I do not remember if he did.

589. When did you take the first action in Dunback ?—The first action I took was on 25th February.

590. Who did you serve with notices besides Ross at that time ?—Lindsay was the only other man.

591. And if Duncan had not complained you would not have done so ?—No.

592. And you were not aware of the state of the country before you got the complaint ?—I knew it was getting bad.

593. Does that apply only to Ross and Lindsay ?—They were all about the same.

594. Have you any knowledge of the fact that Duncan and Ross were not on friendly terms ?—I had no idea at that time : I have only heard it since.

595. Now, Mr. Hull, you say you had not at this time served notices on Mr. Bell ?—No.

595A. Did you go and see his country ?—Yes : I did not go where Bell's two men were working on Duncan's boundary, because there was no necessity, Duncan being satisfied.

596. What state was Bell's country in ?—Some portion was not so bad as others. I inspected Ross's land on the 25th, and served notices on the following day on Ross and Lindsay. About two months afterwards I wrote a strong letter to Ross, drawing his attention to the matter. I could not find him, but I saw Lindsay. I saw Mr. Duncan, and told him to let me know if he was not satisfied. When riding through subsequently I called at Ross's, but only saw Mrs. Ross. On another occasion I saw his son, and he knew the position of affairs as well as his father—like most farmers' sons do. I told him I had several complaints from Duncan, and he said there was no one