

272. Is there anything in the records of your office to show that the Government have agreed to any such proposition?—No, I am not aware of any.

273. Do you remember a letter containing an offer to dispose of either of the two blocks, including sheep, for that sum?—I remember the letter offering the blocks, but not for any sum.

274. You remember, Mr. Smith, a conversation between yourself and the late Minister of Lands upon the question of these blocks, which resulted in your going up to this district?—Yes, I do.

275. You remember what the Government had in contemplation in visiting the district?—Yes, I do. My object was to visit the district with the view of reporting to the Government as to the advisableness of taking some of the blocks, and as to the value the Government might be justified in giving for them.

276. And as to the suitability of the various blocks for the purposes of settlement?—Quite so.

277. Mr. Rees, in his evidence, states that the value placed upon the land by Mr. Connell was a ridiculously low one?—The fact is that Mr. Connell's valuation varied. Sometimes it was above and sometimes it was below the others.

278. Did you authorise the District Surveyor, Mr. Williams, to make a valuation prior to your visiting the district?—Yes, he was authorised.

279. You have the valuations of all these blocks?—We have the valuations of some—most of them, probably.

280. You have also the valuation made by Mr. Grant, who valued for the Property-tax Department?—Yes.

281. Have you any idea as to Mr. Grant's capabilities as a land-valuator?—I should say that he is a very capable man indeed.

282. Did you understand, Mr. Smith, that the Government at the time had in contemplation these valuations being made to enable them to come to a conclusion as to whether, the offer having been received, portions of these lands could be acquired for settlement purposes, and that after defraying the whole cost of the ground they would still leave a portion for the Natives?—Yes, I certainly did. The only object the Government had in going in for the land was to preserve the interests of the Natives. Certain lands were to be reserved in the interests of the Natives. It was only on that condition that the Government could consider the matter at all.

283. You considered the valuations of Messrs. Connell and Grant reasonable?—I certainly consider them reasonable. Evidence of that is to be found in the fact that the three valuations agree fairly well on the whole.

284. As far as my recollection carries me back they agree tolerably well with Mr. Williams's too?—I think so. I cannot trust my recollection, but I think they do not deviate very materially.

285. You think the prices as worked out by yourself were the utmost that the Government could give to carry out the object in view—to return a portion back to the Natives?—Yes; they were calculated with that view.

286. To give a larger sum would entail loss upon the colony?—It would have done, certainly.

287. Mr. Rees gave no evidence upon the valuation made by yourself; he only alludes to Mr. Connell's. But, seeing that we have other valuations which approximate to his, the statement he made cannot be borne out by fact. He states (Mr. Rees) that the Paremata Block, when cut up, would realise in the district £30,000?—Yes. None of the valuations go near that amount—none of the three. I do not think the statement could be sustained.

288. Are you aware that the Paremata Block at one time had been offered to Mr. Ormond by the company?—Perhaps I ought to say No. I have not a clear recollection.

289. You are quite clear that the price at which you recommended the Government to acquire the Paremata Block was the very utmost to enable the Government to cut it up and hand a portion of it back to the Natives after recouping the cost?—Quite clear.

290. And you are quite clear that the object the Government had in view was to conserve the interests of the Natives as much as possible?—That is the only reason I heard for the Government entering into the matter at all. It was simply to conserve the interests of the Natives.

291. I think you have stated that you consider Mr. Grant a capable valuator?—I consider him one of the most capable men in the colony. Questions of valuation are constantly coming before me as a member of the Government Insurance Board, and I look upon Mr. Grant as a capable valuator. That opinion is supported by people as competent to give an opinion as I am.

292. Was he not a valuator for the Property-tax Department?—Yes; and I think he is still.

293. Can you remember that a number of people were not quite satisfied with his valuations for the property-tax, and that Mr. Sperrey authorised a special valuation upon your report?—A special valuation was made, and that is the valuation I refer to when I say that the three valuations taken together come very close.

294. In your opinion, the valuation placed upon the blocks was not a ridiculously low one?—No; I do not think so. The fact is proved by his valuation being so near to the other two. In some cases they are in excess and in some cases less.

295. In your opinion, were the valuations put upon the Paremata and Pakowai Blocks very low?—I do not remember at the present moment what Mr. Connell's valuation was. I am under the impression that it did not differ very materially from the other two valuations; and I am quite certain that my own was not a ridiculously low valuation.

296. Mr. Rees.] Do you know, Mr. Smith, what Mr. Connell's valuation was for Pakowai?—His price in the case of Pakowai is about one-fifth less than the others.

297. What price is it?—£2 per acre for Pakowai.

298. Have you been on the block at all?—Yes, I have.

299. Can you form any idea as to the amount of flat land upon it?—I could not tell from recollection; from my notes I could. At a rough guess there may be from 1,000 to 1,500 acres.

300. Do you know the quality of the land?—I was able to judge the land by riding over it.