

327. If the liquidators had been willing to accept a reasonable price, was it the intention of the Government to submit proposals to Parliament to acquire these blocks?—Yes; most decidedly it was. The Government considered the whole question after receiving the reports of the Surveyor-General, but, seeing no chance of dealing or making sufficient reservations for the Natives, they decided to make no recommendations to the House.

328. Then, it was not, as stated in Mr. Rees's evidence, that Government took no action on account of being afraid of the Opposition?—No; certainly not.

329. Do you remember our being told that the Paremata Block had been offered to Mr. Ormond at £2 per acre?—Yes.

330. How did the values we put upon the land compare with the values supplied by the Government valuers?—I forget the exact values we put on the lands, but I recollect there was very little difference between my own valuations and those of the Government valuers.

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TUESDAY, 11TH AUGUST, 1891.

Hon. J. D. ORMOND in attendance and examined.

In reply to the Hon. Mr. Mitchelson, witness made the following statement: I was in occupation of the Paramata Block for six years, having bought the lease for the balance of a term. A short time before the lease expired the New Zealand Native Land Settlement Company offered to sell me the block, the price quoted being £2 per acre. After some deliberation I accepted, and agreed to give the price mentioned. The company had the land valued by two or three persons, one of whom, I think, was Dr. Pollen. When I accepted, the chairman of the company informed me that it was necessary to get the formal assent from the Natives. About three weeks elapsed when the chairman wrote me to the effect that the Natives had refused to give their assent. The transaction was in consequence declared off. I visited the district of Paramata within twelve months after the expiry of my lease, and the Natives interviewed me to explain the reason they would not consent to the sale, their reason being because they were not to receive any of the money themselves. But for this circumstance alone they stated they would have been quite willing to give their consent. At the end of my term I gave up the lease, and, as litigation was going on, I gave up all idea of purchasing the block. I consider the price (£2 per acre all round) was quite the outside value, and I certainly would not have given more. The block had a special value to me because I held a small run adjoining, which could have been worked in with it, and also because at the time I wished to get the property for the purpose of making provision for a son lately out from Home. The Paramata Block contains, roughly speaking, 7,800 acres, besides considerable reserves, which would, I think, increase the acreage to about 9,000. The frontage of the block, say, 3,000 acres—is a very good hill, but fit only for pastoral purposes, none of it being fit for the plough. Of the remainder of the land under offer, I should say about half could be ploughed. I consider the whole block a good one, but under present circumstances I do not think more than £1 per acre could be realised on it.

*The Hon. Mr. Mitchelson* here explained that Mr. Rees had stated in his evidence that if the block were cut up for settlement it would realise £30,000.

*Hon. Mr. Ormond*]: It is difficult for me to give an opinion, but I very much doubt if it would. The greater part is quite unfit to be cut up for settlement, being only suitable for sheep. No doubt some portions might be worked into settlements. (To Mr. Carroll): I should say the Maungahae Block is much better for settlement than Paramata. Of course, the Committee is aware that the best of Paramata was withheld from sale.

*Hon. Mr. Mitchelson*]: I understand the best portion of the Maungahae Block has been under offer at £1 per acre.

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