

W. J. HAINES examined.

339. *The Chairman.*] Do you appear here in support of a petition sent in to the Commissioners?—I do.

340. That petition objects to the use of Polhill Gully as a rifle-range?—It does.

341. Will you tell the Commission upon what grounds you object?—The only grounds are those embodied in the petition—that is, of course, that the recreation reserve adjoins the rifle-range, and it is the only piece of ground we have for recreation purposes in the neighbourhood. Another thing is that there are a large number of inhabitants about there. The danger increases as the place opens up. The new road going through the gully to Karori will also add to the danger. As regards accidents, as stated in the petition, a piece of the target on one occasion flew off while the men were practising, and settled in Mr. Mitchell's whisker when he was in the recreation-ground. A little girl also, while she was on the recreation reserve, had her pinafore struck with a slug off the target. Mr. L—— also informed me that one of the Volunteers took a little boy about five years of age up to the range to mark for him. Mr. L—— asked me to inform the Commission about that. He told me it was not the first time by a good many that the same thing had been done. They just go up there and shoot whenever they like, without an officer of any description. They also go up without the sound of a bugle. I have been living there about fifteen or sixteen years, and I have not heard a bugle for many a year. I believe the regulations enforce them to sound a bugle when they go to fire.

342. Would not what you say about the boy be neglect on the part of the persons using the range?—It is a great deal due to neglect. The people lately have complained about looseness. That is what brought this trouble upon the Volunteers. This trouble is not one of just now only—it has been going on for some considerable time.

343. Are all the persons who signed the petition adults?—Yes; they are inhabitants of Street and Mitchelltown. There is one man who is a resident of

344. Did you find a general inclination on the part of the inhabitants to sign the petition?—I think we had about three objectors. I just took the paper outside the door in the street with a box and pen and ink, and people simply asked what it was for, and when I told them they signed without questioning it.

345. How long were you getting these names?—I was from about half-past 6 to about half-past 9 in the morning.

346. All got within about three hours, then?—Yes, I think about that. Had I known the Commission would last so long I could have got a great many more signatures; in fact, they were asking me about it last night.

347. Personally, you strongly object to the range being kept in use?—Yes, most decidedly.

348. Even if the regulations were carried out?—Yes; I have land adjoining, and I intend to build upon it this coming spring. I have already got it planted with fruit-trees and garden.

349. *Mr. Baker.*] You spoke of recreation reserve: what reserve was it?—It is a piece of land that lies to the right-hand side of the range.

350. Immediately adjoining the range?—It is.

351. I understand this is not a recreation reserve, but a plantation reserve?—Well, it is the same as a recreation reserve.

352. I do not see in what way the fact of its being planted would interfere with the rifle-range?—Most decidedly it would. Supposing all that ground were planted and made a recreation-ground right up to the target—in fact, it comes within a very short distance of it now—if you get it planted with fir trees and make gardens the public will use it. It is the only piece of ground we have for the purpose, and we intend to petition the Council to have it all planted during the next year. Another thing is that young children will always be about there. We cannot stop the children coming up from the Willis Street School to pick up bits of lead and things.

353. I suppose you consider the range would be more dangerous if more planting was done?—Yes; of course, it would take a few years for the trees to grow. Even now it is overgrown with furze; you cannot see who is knocking about there.

354. What were the names of the people who were taken up to the target by the Volunteers to mark?—Mr. Brickley, who lives in Street, will be able to tell you about that. There is also a piece of ground belonging to Mr. Mitchell close to the butts, which I believe he wishes to see you about. So there are a good many things we have to face in this matter. We never thought it lay in our power to take any steps in this matter until lately.

355. And what leads you to take steps now?—We heard that the inquiry was being held, and, besides, it is only lately that the working-men have come to the front, and they think there is no occasion for them to put up with these kind of things. Unless some one takes a leading part in these things they are never done—the people's time is too much occupied.

356. *Mr. Macdonald.*] I suppose your evidence goes to show that the whole of the people in that district are unanimous in their desire to have the rifle-range abolished?—Yes, altogether.

357. How many people are there in the district?—I should think there are not far short of two hundred. I could get another petition filled up with new names. Mr. Foster will be able to give you any further information on the subject.

358. *The Chairman.*] And from that two hundred people you obtained seventy signatures within three hours?—Yes.

359. Is the neighbourhood growing more or less populous?—It is rapidly increasing in population.

360. Lately?—Yes.

361. And has done?—Yes, since the Native leases have fallen through.

362. And is likely to do?—Yes, there is nothing to stop it.