

166. Was it an exhaustive examination?—Yes; they asked me all particulars about the land and its suitability for cutting up.

167. After giving evidence before the Board, did you do anything in connection with the estate?—That was the last I heard of it.

168. Did the Minister of Lands communicate with you on the matter either before or since?—Not until after the purchase. After it had been surveyed, and plans prepared for opening for settlement, he asked me to meet him at Wain's Hotel to go over the upsets.

169. Nothing to do with the price?—Nothing whatever.

170. Has anything happened since to in any way affect your opinion as to the value of the land?—No; there is a slight decrease in the values of properties within the last six or seven months.

171. But that is a uniform change, and is not peculiar to Pomahaka?—Yes, it is an all round depreciation.

172. Did you know that the New Zealand and Australian Land Company were running their sheep on Pomahaka?—I did know. I knew all the particulars at the time.

173. Mr. Scobie Mackenzie says it was a yearly lease?—I think that was the case.

174. Would the rent that was paid for a yearly license have any relation to the capital value of the land?—Oh no.

175. *The Chairman.*] In reply to Dr. Fitchett, at the commencement of the inquiry, you said that you had been over the estate several times previously. In what capacity was that?—For land-tax and for property-tax valuations.

176. *Mr. Scobie Mackenzie.*] You said you had no communication on any occasion with Mr. Douglas?—That is so.

177. Had you any with Mr. John Ritchie?—No, I never spoke to him. I once saw him when he came into the Lands Office at Dunedin, and on his way up to Pomahaka, which was after the survey of Pomahaka. Some one introduced me to him at Balclutha. I never knew him before.

178. You made an exhaustive valuation?—Yes.

179. Did you go all over the land?—Yes.

180. And you do not think that the rent that is paid for land affects the capital value?—Very little. Land held under yearly tenancy could only be used for pastoral purposes. If the land was fit for cultivation, the rent would be no guide.

181. You think it affects it very little?—If it was land that could be improved by cultivation it would be really of little matter at all.

182. Were you aware of the rent that was being given?—Yes, at several periods. I have heard that sixpence per acre was paid for one year. Every time that I went round I got the rent that was being paid.

183. You are aware what rent has been paid for some years back?—Yes.

184. What was it, say, five years back?—From 1s. down to 9d. per acre.

185. For five years back, do you know the rent paid? How much was it?—It has been 1s. and 9d.

186. Is it your recollection you are trusting to?—It is my recollection.

187. Are you sure of what you are saying?—I am speaking from my recollection.

188. Are you sure that the rent paid for the last five years was 9d. per acre?—I would not like to swear positively to that.

189. Could you carry it in your mind for one year?—I do not get it every year. I do not know; but I can get it by looking at my book.

190. You do not know what rent was paid previous to the sale? You did not look up the records?—No.

191. Now, did not you think that would be to some extent material to the valuation?—No. When going to look at land to value it I would not take the rent into account, because, on account of the price of wool, you cannot afford to pay much for running sheep on tussock-land.

192. Do you know how long Mr. Douglas has had this land—fifteen or twenty years?—I am not sure, but think he will have held it for fifteen or twenty years.

193. Has he ever done anything to it for that time?—Not to my knowledge.

194. The land is in its original condition, only it has been bought by the Crown?—Yes.

195. Did it not occur to you that it was strange for a man to allow his land to lie idle all that time, assuming that he was getting only a nominal rent for it?—No; it did not. I know others in the same position.

196. If you found that the owner was losing considerable sums of money every year, would you think it strange that he should allow his land to lie idle?—If it was mine I certainly would not do it.

197. Under such circumstances, assuming that he only got a mere nominal rent, would you think it strange that he left it lying idle so long?—No.

198. You would not do it yourself?—Only for want of capital.

199. If a man had plenty of capital, would you think it strange?—I would think it strange.

200. You have been valuing for the county and other rating purposes?—Not for county purposes. That is supplied by the Government.

201. What did you value this land at?—£2 3s. per acre.

202. When was that?—Three years ago.

203. How do you account for the increase in value now?—I do not suppose there is much increase in value. In valuing for rating purpose I would rather be a few shillings under than over. For instance, as occurred at the last valuation, I valued a place at £3 2s. 6d. or £3 3s. per acre, and the owner appealed against my valuation, and it was brought down to £3. Well, it would be very unfair if certain parties got it down. That property was recently sold for £3 8s. 6d. per acre, and my valuation was brought down to £3.