

184. There was one letter to Mr. Ritchie written by you, the contents of which you have given us some insight into, in a letter to the papers on the 14th December, 1893, in the *Otago Daily Times*. You remember the words: "In writing Mr. Ritchie I mentioned that the petition had been sent to Thomas Mackenzie, and expressed a hope that legislators would be able to spare as much time from worrying each other as to consider the petition; that I was anxious to learn their decision respecting this, because I found I had plenty of buyers were I to sell in largish-sized blocks; that I believed I could make a better price in this way, and would try this mode if the Government did not bite at once; my object in desiring a speedy answer being that I might make financial arrangements in selling privately, and on terms sufficiently long to suit buyers." Now, you have not kept a copy of that letter?—No.

185. Did you get an answer from Mr. Ritchie?—I got an answer, but I do not think it was very speedy, a few days after. It was a telegram.

186. Where is that telegram?—I have kept no record of Mr. Ritchie's things.

187. Can you recollect what was in the telegram?—As far as I remember it was just that the thing was going on, and it would take some time. He was not in a position to give me a definite answer.

188. Did you understand Mr. Ritchie to say that it would take some days?—Yes.

189. That he was not in a position to give a definite answer?—Yes; that is the real gist of it.

190. Did Mr. Ritchie say he had mentioned to the Government that you had plenty of buyers?—No; the transaction was closed by this time. You are speaking of that?

191. No; it was at the time the Government "did not bite"—before the Government had decided to purchase the land, because you were urging Mr. Ritchie to ask the Government to "bite." Had you plenty of buyers who would give you a high price at the time?—I had several applications, Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Begg had applications, and I found that if I cut the land up in thousand-acre blocks I could sell it at a better price. This resolution I came to because of the applications that I myself had had, the applications Mr. Begg had had, and that Mr. Turnbull had had.

192. What are these applications, Mr. Douglas? Were they written applications?—Yes, some of them. Some of them were from men I met when I was down there, and some were written.

193. Can you show me a single written offer for the land at this period?—There is a letter that Mr. Begg sent me from Mr. Murray, to lease with a purchasing clause.

194. I am speaking of this particular period, the year 1893?—While I was down at Clinton several people spoke to me about it, and Mr. Turnbull told me that he felt certain, from the people he had met and who had spoken to him, that I would do far better by cutting it up in thousand-acre blocks than by selling it to the Government, unless I got a good price.

195. Then your statement to Mr. Ritchie, intended for the Government—that you had plenty of buyers prepared to give a high price—rested upon your conversation with Mr. Turnbull?—It rested on the conversation of Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Begg, and the men who had spoken to myself.

196. You had no written applications at all at this time, in 1893, in the month of August?—I do not know whether I had on that particular date. Not very long before that I had.

197. Now, Mr. Douglas, at a previous time and in a previous letter, and in evidence here, you said you were accepting a nominal rent from the lessees in the continual expectation of a buyer?—Yes.

198. *The Chairman.*] What were your reasons?—The ground was not fenced, there were no buildings upon the land, and no yards upon the ground, so that it was not fit for occupation except by one of the two adjoining neighbours. After the land was fenced, or at the time the land was fenced, I was in treaty with some English buyers, so could not give but a temporary occupancy of the land, which would not justify me in putting up buildings for a fixed tenancy; consequently, I had to take what my neighbours offered me.

199. *Mr. Scobie Mackenzie.*] Then there must have been other reasons. In a letter of yours of the 14th December, 1893, in the public prints, did you write to the press the following letter: "Being in continual expectation of selling the land, I was not so exacting about the rent of the land as I should otherwise be." Is that so?—Yes, that is so.

200. *Hon. Sir Robert Stout.*] The reason why you did not seek a higher rent was because you wanted a tenancy that would allow you to sell?—Yes.

201. *Mr. Scobie Mackenzie.*] Then how was it, when you wanted to sell to the Government, you were able to offer it to them, as an inducement, that you had plenty of buyers. If you had been accepting since 1887 a merely nominal rent because you were in the continual expectation of a sale, as you put it, how was it that when you wanted the Government to buy, you had plenty of buyers at hand?—I was anxious to sell to a "Home" buyer, because he would have taken the lot. When I went down to Clinton, and found I had buyers for 1,000 to 2,000 acre blocks, I thought that would be more trouble, and I kept this mode of selling in reserve. Mr. Turnbull had two buyers from "Home."

202. *Dr. Fitchett.*] I suppose you did not want the eyes picked out of it?—No, I wanted to sell in globo.

203. *Mr. Scobie Mackenzie.*] Are we to understand, Mr. Douglas, that you had no buyers while you were accepting a low rent, but had plenty of buyers when in treaty with the Government?—I had buyers of parts when receiving the low rent, but would not accept the terms they offered for lease or purchase. As I have already stated, when at Clinton I found a demand for the land if offered in 1,000 to 2,000 acre blocks.