

20. It was continuous from one day to the next?—It died down, and we did not see much of it until the wind came up again from the north-east.

21. And it was one continuous fire?—Yes.

22. You were alarmed about your plantation, were you?—Yes.

23. Tell what next happened?—My mate and I tried to stop the fire, but we could not. We managed to save the shed. Four men from the Government plantation came up and gave us a hand.

24. Did you send for the men?—Yes, we sent for assistance. We saved the house; but we could not save the wattles.

25. And the fire then went out?—Yes, we put it out. In places it died out. That was the last of it.

26. How long did it last?—About a day.

27. Did you follow the fire to see whether it was continuous from your shed, round about the ridge, and round the swamp to the railway track?—Yes; I could see it all the way.

28. Was it blowing a strong gale of wind on the afternoon when it started?—No, the wind was not strong.

29. Next day it was strong, was it not?—Yes, it came up from the north-east—I mean from the north-west.

30. So the wind had changed next day?—Yes.

31. How many acres of the plantation were burned in the twenty-four hours?—About 500 acres. I did not actually measure it.

32. What age were the wattle-trees at that time?—It was all planted before I came to New Zealand. I believe it was planted in 1885.

33. It would be a ten years' growth, then. What would be the average height of the trees?—Between 30 ft. and 40 ft. high.

34. They were just at their prime?—Yes.

35. Have you any idea of the value per acre of the bark obtained?—No, I could not estimate it.

36. When the Government men came up to assist you did they make any reference to a fire they had had that same day?—Yes; it was on the previous day.

37. They mentioned they had had a fire on the previous day?—Yes, a fire near the line.

38. To what did they attribute the fire?—To a spark.

39. *Mr. Cooper.*] Who were the men?—There were four of them. They were the plantation men.

40. *Mr. Oliphant.*] They said another fire had occurred by the same train?—Yes.

41. And that they had been engaged in putting it out?—Yes.

42. Was it a serious fire?—No.

43. They happened to be there to extinguish it?—Yes.

44. How many years have you been on the plantation?—About six years.

45. And during the dry season are the fires frequent?—Very.

46. Can you assign the cause of these fires?—Not the cause of them all.

47. Does the railway-engine cause any of the fires?—A good few of them. Many of them started just after the train passed. That is about as much as I can say.

48. Have you never individualised one fire to see that it actually came from the engine?—No. I have never been on the line or on the train to see that.

49. But just after the train passed you would see the smoke rise?—Yes.

50. And you have been putting them out from time to time?—Yes, for two or three years.

51. Do you remember a serious fire that occurred about a year subsequent to this fire, in December, 1896?—I do not. I was not on the plantation at that time.

52. *Mr. Cooper.*] There are a good many gum-diggers about the district, are there not?—There were.

53. There were at the time of the fire in 1896?—There were before, but not on the day of the fire.

54. But just about that time?—Yes, there were gum-diggers about that season.

55. In the hot season are fires not very frequent, even at places distant from the railway-line, in this district?—Sometimes where there is a road we see fires about.

56. I am referring to this particular district—round about here—where there is scrub?—Yes, in dry weather there are always fires about.

57. This afternoon, you say, the fire had apparently died out, and you did not notice any fire on the morning of the next day?—No. There was a mist and I saw no sign of the fire.

58. But about 1 o'clock you saw fire spring up again?—Yes, when the wind rose I saw a fire spring up again.

59. It was that fire that did the damage—the second fire? You say it was a continuous fire, but we will differentiate and call the fire on the second day the second fire?—Yes, it was the fire on the second day.

60. Was it on the second day, then, that the Government men came up?—Yes.

61. It is rather important that you should be able to identify the men, if you could. Did you not know them at all by name?—Yes.

62. Who were they?—One was Harry Masters, another was Willie Gerrand, another was Caseley, and the fourth man I do not know. I am not certain of him.

63. Which of the four men made a statement about the origin of the fire on their plantation?—It was not made by any one of them; the three of them were speaking about it.

64. Which three?—The first three I have mentioned.

65. Are those men still in the district?—As far as I know they are not.