

169. There have been numerous fires in your plantation, have there not?—Yes, and this particular summer was a very hot one.

170. What was the first serious fire?—The one in 1890.

171. How did it commence?—It commenced near Mercer. The fires for some time started near the workmen's houses, and I told Mr. Jackson it seemed as if the engines fired up when leaving Mercer. Two or three fires originated there.

172. How many acres were burnt on that occasion?—Five. It crossed to the north end of the plantation and burnt 5 acres completely.

173. Did you send in a report at once?—Yes, and I said that if the wind had veered round we might have lost the whole plantation.

174. What would be the value of the 5 acres?—They were young trees; they were about 1½ in. in diameter.

175. You could not appraise the value?—No, not at that age.

176. As to the fire in 1896, you remember it, I suppose?—Yes, on the 15th December, 1896.

177. You were in the district on the day?—I was down the road and about the house.

178. What did you notice from the house? Did you see a train go past about the time of the commencement of the fire?—I saw the down goods-train passing about half-past 4, and shortly afterwards—I cannot say how long—I saw smoke arising from the point we visited this morning. It seemed to me to be nearer Whangamarino.

179. You would be about a mile and a half from the fire?—Yes. I watched its progress right across the swamp until bedtime—10 or 11 o'clock. It died down as it crossed the plantation. It seemed to go round the bay off the peninsula.

180. Do you mean to say that the fire had gone out?—No. Any fire in the swamp would not go out immediately—there is such a body of fire.

181. The fire was apparently ready to start with the next wind?—Yes, the next morning it started again. I saw no fire that morning. I looked out.

182. Well, you saw the fire up to 11 o'clock at night, and next morning you saw the same fire?—No. My men were carting in bark, and they saw it about 12 or 1 o'clock. It was about that time I saw it too. I got on my horse and went down, and it was coming roaring towards the bark-shed. It had crossed John and Robert Patterson's paddocks, burning down everything before it.

183. Can you connect that fire with the fire of the previous day?—Yes, I think so. There was a large fire on the previous day covering a mile or more of the swamp. It went into the bay behind the peninsula, and there is no doubt it smouldered there all the night, and that the wind started it afresh next morning.

184. Did you afterwards go to the bay?—I am not sure. Mr. Macdonald and I visited the place. My son wrote to him.

185. You say then that it was a continuous fire extending from the railway?—Yes.

186. How many acres were burned over on this occasion?—A rough estimate would be about 500 acres.

187. Was it a good plantation in full profit?—There were two of the sections with first-class, good trees.

188. What area would be on those two sections?—Robert Patterson had 200 acres, and John Patterson 120 acres—I am not sure of the latter from memory.

189. There would be about 320 acres of good plantation, then?—Yes.

190. What do you value the loss at?—I did not take that upon myself. I allowed my son to compute the value.

191. I suppose that plantation has been destroyed ever since? You have had no returns from it?—No returns from it.

192. How many years' growth had it in 1896?—Fifteen.

193. When did the plantation commence? I think we have it in evidence that it was in 1884?—Yes. Well, that would give the trees twelve years' growth.

194. What height were the trees?—From 30 ft. to 40 ft.

195. You reported that fire to the department?—To my son.

196. And Mr. Macdonald came up shortly?—In a few days, with his assistant, and I took them over the burnt plantation and showed them the damage done.

197. Do you remember the day when you were assisted by some of the Government employés in putting a fire out?—That was on the 16th. Four of the men came up, and with great difficulty we managed to suppress the fire.

198. Did these men speak of a fire caused by the same engine on the same day in the Government plantation?—Yes; they were all engaged in putting out that fire, and they mentioned it.

199. Was there another fire of a serious nature?—Yes, but I did not see it, although I saw the effects of it. It went across the swamp.

200. When was that?—It was in the summer following, I think. I had a much larger one than that in 1893, that went over 50 acres; and I went in personally to see Mr. Hudson. The thing was alarming.

201. What did you say to Mr. Hudson?—He called in the engineer, and I told him how much I was afraid of losing the whole plantation. The engineer was very good, and said they were doing all they could, and recommended me to apply to Mr. Jackson, who was in charge of the department. I wrote to him, and got a curt reply.

202. That fire destroyed 100 acres?—No, 50 acres. It scorched the bark.

203. In reference to the fire of 1897, what do you say about it?—I was told about it. Mr. Slade told me about it. The fire started close to where the fire of 1896 started and left a black