

17. Then, taking the transaction as a whole, do you know of any improper influence being brought to bear in connection with it?—Absolutely none.

18. You asked me for my approval to its being sold, and I put my initials to the document?—Yes.

19. *Mr. Forbes.*] In coming to a decision about the selling or letting of land do you have to get the approval of the Minister of Lands or do you act on your own authority?—I acted on my own, but I make final recommendation to the Minister for his approval.

20. You do not, then, have to receive the approval of the Minister of Lands for altering or for deciding about the tenure?—Not in the ordinary course of procedure until we have fixed the matter up. If the Minister does not approve we do not sell it.

21. You have to get the approval of the Minister finally?—Yes, we take all the steps before we go to the Minister.

22. Do you know personally anything about this piece of land?—I never saw it. I was never on the Cheviot Estate.

23. Can you tell us on what lines you go in connection with letting these pieces of land—what information you take?—We take the Commissioner's. We first of all ask for a report from the Department, and in this case it would be the Commissioner in Christchurch. If we approve of his suggestions we immediately advise him to that effect. If not, we suggest something else, as we did in this case.

24. Do you follow the decision of the Commissioner and the Lands Boards in relation to letting this land?—Yes, as a rule, unless we see something to the contrary.

25. What sized areas of land have you been letting under the renewable-lease system—have you been letting areas so small as 8 acres?—I could not say.

26. With the estates that have been purchased?—I could not absolutely say.

27. You would have the fixing up of those things?—Yes, thousands of things.

28. With the estates that have been purchased recently throughout Canterbury and other parts have there been no smaller areas than 8½ acres let on renewable lease?—I could not say without looking it up.

29. You stated that the reason that this was going to be let on renewable lease was on account of its smallness?—Yes.

30. You had no other information about it?—No.

31. Excepting the smallness?—Yes.

32. Did you take any notice of the recommendation of the two Crown Lands Rangers in reference to it, which is on the file?—I do not remember at the present moment what the Crown Land Rangers say.

33. Would the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Christchurch forward that on to you?—Yes, if it is on the file.

34. I will read it. The letter is dated 13th March, 1913: "Commissioner of Crown Lands, Christchurch.—Sir,—The 8½ acres proposed to be let under renewable lease in Block IX, Cheviot S.D., has no reservation over it, though 3 acres of limestone land adjoining is reserved as a limestone reserve and will be ample for any requirements for lime that may arise in this part of the district, which will not be effected in any way by the leasing of the 8½ acres. At present there is no demand, and no appearance of any demand, in the immediate future for lime-workings. Sections 10 and 22 adjoining, containing 10 acres, now held by Mr. Wilkinson, who is a professional fruitgrower, and for which he paid £300 in goodwill in 1910—the then-existing improvements on the 10 acres being valued at £160. The 8 acres under question is similarly situated and equal in class of soil, being sheltered and close to the sea and very little subject to the frosts; about 5½ miles metalled road to a railway-station. From information received there is no doubt that there are several men who would become applicants for this land if the opportunity were offered to them. Therefore we respectfully recommend that the land in question be offered on a renewable tenure." In view of that report did you think you were justified in refusing to have it let on that tenure?—Yes, I did. I thought I was quite justified and entitled to use my own discretion in regard to obtaining revenue for this land, and another thing which I had to consider was that any one of those men would naturally have a very faint chance of getting it in the ballot.

35. There were three men?—There may have been fifty-three outside, and their chances are simply infinitesimal.

36. Is that the way you look at it in connection with balloting?—Yes, I consider it is a very small chance a man has of winning a ballot.

37. And you think it better to do away with the ballot?—[Question objected to by the Hon. Mr. Massey, and ruled out of order by the Chairman, on the ground that the witness appeared as head of the Department.]

38. Was the fact that you thought those people would have no chance at the ballot the reason that you recommended this piece of land for sale?—That was one of the reasons. I said their chance would be infinitesimal. I declined to answer the question about the ballot before the question was raised.

39. Your answer was that you did that because you thought they had no chance at the ballot?—That was not the only reason—I wanted the revenue.

40. The reason given on the file is that it is too small?—Yes. And there was another reason also in my mind, and that was the limestone.

41. If you go through the file you will find the position is made very clear about the lime. The lime is not on that reserve?—There is lime on that reserve, according to the information I have in front of me. The adjoining 3 acres is reserved for lime, and I thought this would be valuable also for lime. That was one of the reasons.