

FRIDAY, 12TH AUGUST, 1881.

Mr. ORMOND, M.H.R., examined.

76. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Ormond, will you state what you know of this case in the form of a narrative, and any questions which suggest themselves can be asked afterwards?—In the first place, I would say that I was a member of this Committee at the time this case, I believe, was last under its consideration; and a resolution was then come to by the Committee in reference to this case, as far as my recollection goes, to this effect: that Mr. Sutton was legally possessed of the land, but that the Natives had a substantial grievance; and the Committee recommended that the Government should inquire further into the whole case, and endeavour to settle it upon a basis of concession on both sides. As far as I remember, that resolution was unanimously carried by the Committee. The next step that I know of in connection with this matter was when two members of the Government, Mr. Rolleston and Mr. Bryce, the late Native Minister, came to Napier. That was prior to last session of Parliament. I saw these two gentlemen, and conversed with them about various matters; and I understood that their chief object in coming to Hawke's Bay at that time was to endeavour to effect a settlement of this Oamaru case and the dispute at Waipawa; and that the settlement was proposed to be carried out on the basis of the recommendation contained in the report to which I have referred. As I had been more or less connected with the Natives concerned in this matter in my former official capacities, the members of the Government to whom I have referred asked me to assist in bringing about a settlement of this matter of Oamaru. I very gladly agreed to do anything I could with regard to that which was the Native part of the matter; with the part regarding Mr. Sutton, I told them I thought they were the proper persons to take any action. I then, acting upon the wish of the members of the Government, put myself in communication with Tareha, Tomoana here, and other Natives concerned. I had several interviews with them, and represented to them the decision the Committee had come to: that there must be concession on both sides, and that they must be prepared to make concessions; and I told them what I understood to be the decision of the Government as to in what direction that concession should be made. What I told them, and what I understood the particular members of the Government to whom I have referred authorized me to say to them was, that they must make a substantial concession in the shape of land, not necessarily there, but rather elsewhere; that then the Government—if they made a concession satisfactory to the views of the Government—that the Government would then deal with Mr. Sutton; that the law would have to be vindicated in any case by their going off the land, but that the endeavour would be to effect a settlement which would secure them this place in the end. At first there was some little difficulty, but in the end—perhaps after one or two days, but I forget now—they agreed. I strongly advised them, and they agreed to make a concession of land. I may say that Tareha was the principal man who directed the people on this occasion. Several blocks were talked about, but in the end one was pitched upon as the one which they could most easily give, and which had the advantage of the Natives concerned in Ngatihira having some interest in. Then the question arose about the extent. I do not remember very clearly what part I had to do with that. My recollection is that I understood from the Natives they were going to make the best bargain they could about the extent, but that practically they were going to do whatever was required of them. Practically, I had very little to do with that part of the matter—the settlement as to the acreage and so on. As I have said, I knew that was only a matter of bargain, and that the thing was practically arranged. The Government, in the end, accepted the concession of so many acres—I forget the acreage. I understood that acreage represented the same amount in value which the Government had decided was the concession they would require from the Natives. A meeting then took place—there might have been meetings before, I do not remember—a meeting took place with the Government, at which this was agreed to. I was not present at that interview. I was not present at any of the public interviews that took place between the Natives and the Government; but after it was over the Natives came to me and told me it was a settled matter, and satisfactorily, and that they understood the Government would then endeavour to settle with Mr. Sutton. I think they told me also that he was present at the interview that had taken place between the Natives and the Minister. I should say here, I never told the Natives in my communications with them that the settlement with the Government was conditional upon a successful settlement with Mr. Sutton. I have a most distinct certainty that I was never so told during the interviews I had, and the conversations I had with the members of the Government on the subject. If I had been, there was such an important point involved in it that I have no doubt at all I should have made it perfectly plain to the Natives. My understanding, on the contrary, was that Government were going to carry out the decision of the Committee. I had nothing, then, to do with what took place between the Government and Mr. Sutton, but I was informed—I forget now who by, but I think by Mr. Bryce—that the negotiations had failed with Mr. Sutton; that they had made what they thought liberal and sufficient proposals to Mr. Sutton, but that he had declined to accept them. I heard nothing more about this matter until, I think, shortly before last session. I think it was in the month of April, 1880, that I received from Mr. Bryce a telegraphic communication, saying that Mr. Sutton was in Wellington in reference to this matter, and represented to the Government that the Natives were willing to make an exchange of another block, or rather to give another block of land; that this block was called Wharerangi; and that he believed he could make a settlement with the Natives in this matter if the Government assisted. Mr. Bryce asked me to ascertain whether the Natives were likely to agree to such an arrangement. I replied that I would put myself in communication with them and ascertain. I sent for them and was with them, and asked them whether they had proposed or entered into such an arrangement, and they said that was the first they had heard of it. I had, after hearing from Mr. Bryce, made some inquiry as to the position of Wharerangi, and ascertained that the Natives were not getting much benefit from it—that it was leased for a considerable term, and mortgaged to such an extent that the interest upon the mortgage pretty well consumed the rent. I desired to get a settlement of this matter, if possible, and I advised the Natives—I personally advised them—to consider whether they would not see whether some arrangement could not be made with this other block, Wharerangi. But as Wharerangi was a