

company at once placed itself in communication with him, for it may easily be understood that it felt some anxiety about the curtailment, to the extent of nearly 25 per cent., of its intended endowments. It was natural that it should endeavour to keep the matter alive. Some people say that the easiest way to move a Government is to perpetually worry it. Whether this is so or not I cannot say. My own experience does not enable me to form an opinion on the subject; but there is an idea abroad that the more you worry a Government the more you are likely to get. There is no doubt that, acting to a certain extent on this idea, the company kept the matter alive, for several interviews took place between the Chairman and the Minister for Public Works, the results of which are detailed in these papers. I do not propose to go into the whole of this correspondence, though I intend to lay the whole before the Committee. This correspondence, however, shows this fact: that throughout there is, on the part of the company, an assertion of the existence of the understanding between it and the Government to which I have already frequently referred. I propose, now, to call special attention to one or two particular letters in which the company expressed a desire that, if the Government did not care to carry on negotiations with the Native owners, it should be permitted to do so. The first of these letters is from Mr. Wallace, the Secretary of the company, addressed to the Minister of Native Affairs in July, 1882. [Letter read.] The Minister replied as follows. [Letter read.] The effect of this letter is that the Government would release its right of pre-emption, and thus give the company an opportunity of acquiring the land. But that course was not considered desirable by the company, because it would expose the Native owners to solicitation all round from persons who would endeavour to outbid each other in the manner usual in respect to lands which have been released from Proclamation. The company preferred to hold on, with a view to the Government acquiring the land within the period mentioned in the contract. A careful examination of the correspondence will show that the company had reason to suppose that the Government was sincere in its expression of desire to acquire the lands in question; and, relying upon this, it placed the services of one of its own officers, Mr. Alexander McDonald, at the disposal of the Government to aid it in doing so; and I think I shall be in a position to show that, had Mr. McDonald's services been used for that purpose, the lands in question would have passed into the hands of the Government years ago. It was, indeed, entirely through Mr. McDonald that the Government was enabled to acquire any portion of this land, and the company actually paid a considerable portion of his expenses in the belief that the Government would carry out the undertaking to which I have so often referred. Of course, the Committee will understand that my position is that of counsel in this matter, and that if I state unpalatable facts it is not from any wish to show disrespect to a Minister, who may in the discharge of his duty have supposed that he was not called upon to consider the interests of the company. I am not imputing any improper personal motives to Mr. Ballance; but the effect of his acts has been to defeat the rights of the company. I am fain even to believe that, had the honourable gentleman been aware of the nature of the arrangements between the company and his predecessors, he would, so far from doing anything to prevent these arrangements from being carried into effect, have done what was necessary to that end. It was in the belief that the Government was doing its best to acquire the lands in question that the company did not take any steps in the matter between 1883 and 1885. Finding, however, that time was slipping by, and that the possibility of their obtaining the residue of their land was vanishing, the directors, in December of that year, waited upon the Minister of Native Affairs in relation to the matter. Correspondence took place afterwards, which gradually became very curt on the part of the Government, until at last it culminated in a letter in which the company was point blank told "that the Government did not deem them entitled to any consideration at all on its part." In this connection I propose to call the attention of the Committee to a report, written by direction of the Chairman of the company, of what took place at the interview I have referred to. It was written immediately after the return of the deputation, and its contents were summarised in a letter sent afterwards to the Native Minister. In this report this passage occurs: "Mr. Levin stated that from his own knowledge he knew that when the company agreed to surrender its claims to the lands in the Forty-Mile Bush, Sir John Hall recognized that it would be the duty of the Government to do their best to make up the deficiency from the blocks under Proclamation; and it was only from want of funds that no attempt was made to do so whilst the company's affairs were under his care." That was the statement made by Mr. Levin to the Native Minister. Now, Sir, I venture to say that the gentlemen who composed that deputation—Mr. Levin, Mr. Charles Johnston, Mr. Nathan, and Mr. Shannon—were all men upon whose statements credit might be placed. Mr. Levin is a gentleman occupying a very high position in this community. He has been a member of the Legislature of New Zealand, and, I believe, is generally recognised as one whose word may be accepted as absolute upon questions of fact. Mr. Levin made the statement I have read as a matter within his own knowledge, and it will be seen that he was only reiterating that which is to be found throughout the correspondence, from the earliest to the latest date—namely, that there was a distinct representation on the part of the Government, when the land on the eastern side of the Tararua Range had been withdrawn from the allocation-area, that every effort should be made to supplement it out of land to be afterwards acquired. A letter was written immediately afterwards (on the 24th July), by the Secretary of the company, recapitulating what had taken place at the interview. It was addressed to the Hon. the Minister for Public Works. [Letter read.] The answer to that was as follows. [Letter read.] The Committee will again observe that there is no suggestion whatsoever of the non-existence of the understanding referred to at the interview, and in the letter of the 24th July. In answer to the reply to that letter the company wrote as follows. [Letter read.] The answer to this was [letter read]. To that the Secretary replied as follows under date 22nd August last. [Letter read.] The reply deals with the matter finally, distinctly, and curtly. [Letter read.] And that closed the whole correspondence, and closed it in such a way as precluded the reopening of any negotiations whatever. The company was given to understand that the Government had nothing whatever to do with it, and had left it to its fate. I propose to have a fair copy of this correspondence made and laid before the Committee, which