

as a witness. I presume it was pursuant to that desire on his part that I have been summoned before the Committee. In looking over that evidence—which I have done very carefully—one thing struck me which, I think, I ought to make clear at once. I see that Mr. Travers, in his address to the Committee, and Mr. Levin, in his evidence before the Committee, imputed to me a special hostility against the company. I may say that they are under a perfect misapprehension in this respect. I can possibly explain that misapprehension. I have always been opposed, politically and on principle, to grants of blocks of land to any private syndicate whatever. I have always held that the first duty of a Government in a new country is to manage and settle its land, and that it has no moral or political right to abdicate these functions in favour of any company whatever. That, you may observe, would make me hostile, in a sense, to all such companies—that is, where endowments of land are given or promised to be given. I have never had any hostility to the Manawatu Company in any other sense. On the contrary, I have been favourable to the construction for many years. In 1872 I advocated the construction of that railway when no other Wellington member would listen to a word except spoken in favour of the Wairarapa line. I have done friendly things for the company in my private capacity, to which I need not further refer, and of which the company may not be aware. I simply wish to explain the contract as I understand it. I may state that the Government of which I was a member were desirous to do everything possible to promote the objects of the company under the Act which had been passed. With reference to the passing of that Act, I had nothing to do with it except by voting against it in the House. I was not in the Government at the time—it was during an interregnum; but when I came into the Government I found that negotiations had been going on for the construction of the railway, and that the agreement was ready for signature at that time. Now, I had no particular part in these negotiations, for during the first of them I was out of the Government. I do not remember the particular stage which the contract had reached when I joined the Government, but I remember that the negotiations had so far progressed. If it had been suggested—possibly because of my general objection to granting land to a syndicate—that I was prepared to defeat an honourable and legal agreement between the Government and the company, I say absolutely that such a suggestion has no foundation in fact. I was quite prepared to carry out the agreement, as I understood it, that the Government should proceed with the purchase of land according to its declared policy. But I think I ought to point out to the Committee that it was perfectly well known at that time, and had been well known for some time before, that it was no part of the policy of the Hall Government to vigorously pursue the purchase of Native land. On the contrary, when they came into office they found very large engagements on hand, and it was a positive fact, known to the whole colony as well as to the promoters of the railway, that it had become a part of the policy of the Government to curtail these purchases to a very large extent. Indeed, the amount of money voted for the completion of purchases of Native lands would itself show, as well as the speeches made by themselves and other members, that it was a part of the policy of the Government not to purchase land largely from the Maoris—not to proceed vigorously with the purchase of Native lands. If the company had a right to demand that the Government should use what is called “diligence,” or to proceed vigorously with the purchase of land, in such case the company would have the right to demand that the Government would reverse its policy altogether in respect to the purchase of Native lands. But that was not the case. As I have said, I was quite prepared to go on with the purchase of land in the usual way. Certain blocks of land had certain advances made on them by the Government, and in consequence of these advances those blocks had been proclaimed. It was only intended to complete these purchases so far as they could be completed, and then, if necessary, to call on the Court to define the Government's interest; or, in other cases, where the purchase was not desired, to receive back from the Maori owners, where it could be got, the amount paid to them, and take off the Proclamation. As I have stated, the general policy of the Government rendered it very unlikely that large purchases would be made. There were other circumstances also which rendered it still more unlikely that any great success would attend the purchase of Native land in that locality. A quarrel existed between Major Kemp and the Government, or, more properly, between Major Kemp and myself. Kemp was an influential landowner in the district and an important chief. I had had occasion to dismiss him from various offices which he held. I do not wish to say anything against Major Kemp—I think him a very honourable man; but he naturally felt some irritation owing to his dismissal, and he declared, I believe, that he would not sell any land that he had any authority over to a Government of which I was a member, and that he would, as far as he could, prevent any land being sold to the Government. I do not complain of that. I think it natural that he should have so acted in the circumstances; but all this tends to show the unlikelihood of any large quantity of land being acquired, and the members of the Manawatu Company were perfectly aware of this as well as other people. Therefore it seems to me that the prospect of acquiring land to meet this so-called deficiency between the amount of land proposed to be granted and the amount to which they might have become entitled was of the slenderest character. At the same time I wish to repeat again that I was quite prepared to go on in the usual way of purchasing land, and I would not have held back my hand for a single hour to prevent the Manawatu Company having the benefit of any purchase made in the usual way; but I was not prepared to abandon the policy of the Government and propose a vigorous pursuit of land-purchase in favour of this company. There is another reason for the land not being acquired. The Government were closing up purchases not only there, but in other parts of the colony. On the opposite side of the range, on a block of land called Matatainoko, they were offering a certain price for the land. To some extent the same Maoris were interested in this land, and, obviously, if the Government had offered a larger sum for similar land on the western side, it would have stopped their power of purchasing on the eastern side. The company appeared as desirous of purchasing land for themselves as of getting the Government to purchase. The company commenced by giving prices largely in excess of what the Government was offering. Mr. Booth reported that the company's agents were going to give an average of £1 an acre; in some cases £1 15s. and £2, but the