

average would be about £1. He also pointed out that this would be destructive of the Government's power to purchase elsewhere. It was obviously so. The company did request the Government to go on with the purchase of land for them; but I never thought of giving as large a price as the company were offering. I could not see my way to do it, for it would have disturbed the Government negotiations in other districts. Now, I think that all these matters combined might make it clear that the fact of purchases not being made was not due to any special hostility on my part towards the company. I say absolutely that I was never personally hostile to this railway; but I am hostile, and have always been hostile, to granting large blocks of land to any syndicate whatever. If I may refer to the evidence taken last session, I notice that Mr. Levin says that on one occasion I said to him, "I would not turn my hand to help the company." I have no recollection of saying that; but I am not going to put my negative testimony against Mr. Levin's positive testimony. But if he is sure that I did say it I do not altogether wonder at my having done so: there were things happening at the time of these requests being made by the company which made me very angry. There was one block of land, that was bought afterwards by the company, on which payments had been made by the Government. I had no doubt that the letter of the law had been violated in this case, although afterwards I came to the conclusion that what was done was done under a misapprehension. As I have said, I had no doubt the letter of the law had been violated, for the land was under Proclamation. It was bought by the company's agent. I saw Mr. McDonald in Wellington a little time afterwards, and reproached him somewhat bitterly with what he had done. Mr. McDonald said that the purchase was acquiesced in by the Government, as Mr. Booth had witnessed some of the Maori signatures. I called Mr. Booth to account, and he said that he had been assured by McDonald that the Government acquiescence had been given. I was excessively angry. It was no great matter, as it happened, for I would have taken the advances back; but I was exceedingly angry, and if Mr. Levin were so unfortunate as to come to me just after I had been entering on that question it is no wonder that I should have used the expression he has stated; the only wonder is that I did not use a stronger expression.

59. *Mr. Bell.*] I understand you, Mr. Bryce, to say that it was not the policy of the Hall Government to pursue a vigorous land-purchase system?—No; they found they had large engagements, and it was their policy, instead of extending them, to curtail them: some would therefore be abandoned, others closed up, and some would be completed.

60. Why should you object to the company buying land if they buy lawfully?—I had an objection to their buying proclaimed blocks of land.

61. If you did not intend to do anything under your Proclamation, why were you angry?—I felt angry because they had broken the law. If they were held to be at liberty to break the law without remonstrance, other people would have felt themselves equally at liberty.

62. But you do not understand that the company had broken the law?—In this particular instance the law was broken.

63. But you do not attribute the fault to them?—On the contrary, I believe there was a mutual misapprehension. After my indignation had been somewhat exhausted, I knew that there had been a misapprehension.

64. Can you give any other case in which such a thing was done?—I have not the slightest objection to the company acquiring land lawfully.

65. You say it was the policy of the Hall Government to wind up its engagements?—Yes; speaking generally.

66. Were you aware that there was an undertaking on the part of the Government which you joined that due diligence should be observed to acquire land to fulfil this 11th clause?—If you mean by due diligence that negotiations should go on in the usual way, as if no company were in existence, yes; if it went anything beyond that, no.

67. If you, in ordinary course, had been able to acquire the Horowhenua Block in 1880, within five years, though you did not get your conveyance for some short time after—for a month or two after the expiration of that period—would you or would you not have thought you were performing an engagement?—If, as you say, they could have got it within the five years, I should have thought it would be evading an engagement to purposely delay it. I would not have delayed the purchase for an hour.

68. You have spoken of the policy of the Hall Government, and you said that the only engagement the Government had entered into with the company was to continue purchasing in the ordinary way. Will you look at that letter? [Letter handed to witness.] Does that indicate an intention on the part of the Hall Government to continue its purchase in the ordinary way?—This refers to special circumstances. I apprehend, if you will allow me to speak from memory, not from book —

69. The book is here?—My memory is very good as to the circumstances. On one occasion the Government, in my opinion, could acquire a block of land on that coast with profit. I kept the company always as much out of my mind as possible. I proceeded as if the company had no existence. I found, or thought I found, that a block of land could be acquired on the hills not far from the Manawatu River. I came to the conclusion, from circumstances, that Mr. Alexander McDonald would be a gentleman who could acquire this block readily, or with less trouble to himself and the Government than any one else. I appointed Mr. McDonald an agent for the purpose of acquiring this block. He did successfully acquire the block in a very able manner. After he had acquired the block his services ceased. They were engaged for a special purpose. I do not know what was in Sir Harry Atkinson's mind when he said that I had an intention of making an appointment; but I presume it was to this appointment he referred. I think it must refer to the appointment of Mr. McDonald for the purpose of acquiring this special block of land. I have a good memory as to circumstances, but not as to dates.

70. But why should your Government communicate, in due course, that they would take steps to expedite the purchase of Native lands in that district?—It does not imply that this was expedit-