

was on Christmas Day, two years before we took the appointment. Sir Julius Vogel was then the Ministerial head of the department. I think it must have been 1885 or 1886. I had just been back from England for about six weeks. Then I myself was appointed, not the firm.

4333. I find a letter dated Christchurch, 29th January, 1885, from Acland, Barns, and Co., accepting the appointment. What communications had you previous to that?—My recollection of the matter is, that on Christmas Day—a very hot day I remember—Mr. Leonard Harper sent over a message to me to say that he wished to see me particularly. I was then living at Riccarton. When I called on Mr. Harper he said, “Here is a telegram from Sir Julius Vogel, asking if you would accept the trusteeship.” That would be in 1884, about a month before the letter to which you have just referred. I said that, so far as I myself was concerned, I would accept it, but I would have to consult my partner. I said, “Better let it be a partnership business.”

4334. When did your partnership commence with Mr. Barns?—About 1882.

4335. Then, had you any communication from the Public Trustee between 1884 and 1885?—None beyond what I have referred to about the end of 1884.

4336. Then, you accepted the offer. I observe by a telegram from the Public Trustee that the offer was made to yourself?—Yes.

4337. And afterwards accepted by the firm, you having a partner?—Yes. We resigned, however, almost immediately after getting the appointment, in 1885, because Colonel Lean felt aggrieved at our having accepted it.

4338. Please state your reasons for giving up the appointment so soon after accepting it?—Colonel Lean, whom I had known ever since 1865, represented to me that he did not consider he had been properly treated, and I said, “If you think you have been badly treated I am not going to step into your shoes, and put any one out of a billet.” I explained my reasons for resigning the appointment to Sir Julius Vogel and Mr. Harper, and they were satisfied with the course I took in the matter. Subsequently to that I found out, or was told rather, that the Public Trust Office was going to supersede Colonel Lean, and that he had been given proper notice. Then the appointment was offered to me again. The Public Trustee told me that he did not intend to continue Colonel Lean, and, under those circumstances, knowing that some one else would be appointed if I declined, I accepted the renewed offer of the appointment.

4339. How long was it after you resigned in the first instance that the appointment was offered to you again?—About two years. They said that if I did not take the appointment the Government had determined on making a change, and it would be given to somebody else if I refused it. Under those circumstances, I accepted it. That would be about 1886 or 1887.

4340. I perceive among the papers the following telegram from Acland, Barns, and Co. to R. C. Hamerton, dated February, 1885: “Circumstances will prevent our accepting for the present the appointment you have done us the honour by giving; letter by mail.” That was the time that you, in deference to Colonel Lean, gave up the appointment?—Yes.

4341. Then Mr. Hamerton sent an urgent telegram to Colonel Lean to this effect: “Please continue to act as agent for the present.” That was the result of your telegram?—Yes.

4342. In 1886 or 1887 you were again communicated with, and asked to accept the agency?—Yes. We then arranged that the firm should act, and not one individual member of it. That was my expressed wish. I think the appointment came to me personally, and I desired, as I had a partner, that the firm, and not myself individually, should be made the agents. That was agreed to. I have acted continuously since until the 1st March last, when I handed it over.

4343. Now, will you explain fully what were the reasons given to you by the Public Trustee for severing your connection with the agency?—I came up to Wellington about the 20th February last. I came to the Public Trustee, and saw him on various matters of detail connected with the agency. We had a long interview in the afternoon. He said, “We shall not be able to finish our business this afternoon, and you will please come again to-morrow.” Amongst other things I was speaking to him about was a mortgage for £35,000, the particulars of which I brought up to him. The next morning I saw him again, at his express wish, at half-past 9. When we finished the office business Mr. Hamerton said, “I have got some other business to speak to you about. What I am going to say may perhaps be disagreeable, but it has been resolved to make changes in all the principal agencies—Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin. We intend to appoint men from the office—men who are in touch with us, and specially trained for the purpose.” I said, “Might I ask you when you are going to make the change about our agency?” “Yes,” he said; “the change will be made on the 1st of March.” I said that was a rough proceeding, to say the least of it. He said it was determined to make the change long before Mr. Barns and I parted. I said, “It is your business, and I must accept it.” I went and saw the Hon. Mr. Buckley, and told him about it. I also saw the Hon. Mr. Reeves, and then I went to the Premier, and told him I thought it a most shabby transaction. After seeing the Premier, I saw the Public Trustee again, and I told him that I did not want to seek the office or to keep it: I only asked to be relieved, for my own convenience, at the end of the quarter—the 31st March. I told him we made up our statements at the end of the quarter, and that it would be much more convenient to give up the agency then. He said, “I will see what I can do.” I saw him again next morning, and he said, “I cannot do anything for you.” I apologized for losing my temper on the previous day, when he told me he intended to make the change at the short notice I have referred to, and he said he could do nothing to alter it.

4344. How many days was this before the 1st of March?—Either six or seven days before the 1st of March. I said, “You are treating me rather worse than a decent master would treat his housemaid.” He first let me tell him all about the Public Trust Office business, allowed me to propose the loan the particulars of which I have spoken of, and, when I had done all those things, he told me that the change was to be made on the 1st of March. In justice to him, I must say that he said he would give me the first refusal of any business, and would give me the valuation work in the future if he could.