

50. But he had been employing other solicitors?—Some time previously. Just at this time Mr. Campbell's firm had been acting for him in this transaction, but matters became so complicated between the three parties concerned that he had to get some one else.

51. When he applied for the removal of the caveat, it was only a few months before he came to you?—Yes.

52. It was the same year, at all events?—Yes.

53. A few months before, he had employed another firm?—Yes. I was at the time acting for him in other matters than Mokau.

54. You were his solicitor in other matters?—Yes. I think almost every solicitor in Wellington has acted for him in one way and another.

55. With regard to the first sale to Mason Chambers, Douglas McLean, and Sir Francis Price, who were Messrs. Moorhouse and Hadfield acting for?—For Carlile, McLean, and Wood, of Napier.

56. Mr. P. S. McLean's firm?—Yes.

57. Simply as agents for them?—Yes.

58. They were the agents for the purchasers?—Yes.

59. £5,000 was paid down, of which Mr. Lewis got £700?—Yes.

60. And £4,300 was left?—Yes.

61. Were you acting for Mr. Lewis at that time in this matter?—No, that was all prior to the transactions. I came in after the tangle had arisen.

62. You said that Mr. Bell was wrong with regard to the Government employing Mr. Skerrett?—Yes.

63. You knew that in this case Mr. Skerrett had been employed by the Government before the Native Land Commission?—A considerable time before, yes.

64. The Commission was not defunct at the end of 1908?—I think Mr. Skerrett did not act for some time before this.

*Hon. Mr. Ngata:* I think he ceased to act about the middle of 1908. That was the only time he was with us—at Te Kuiti in 1908.

65. *Mr. Herries.*] It was common knowledge that Mr. Skerrett had been acting for the Natives before the Commission?—Yes; but this was about two years later.

66. The Commission was still in existence?—Not at the time he was employed here. He was not employed in this matter until 1910.

67. That is what I want to get at. When was Mr. Skerrett first employed? Have you any idea?—Yes. He was employed after the Native Commission reported. That would be about May or June, 1910, I should think.

68. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] You mean 1909: the Stout-Palmer Commission reported on this block in March, 1909?—Yes, it was in that year: it was the year in which the Stout-Palmer Commission reported. It was when their report was published—a considerable time after the sitting.

69. *Mr. Herries.*] It was well known that Mr. Skerrett had been employed by the Government before the Commission, and it is quite possible that people might understand he was employed by the Government in this matter?—Yes. I have no doubt at all that Mr. Bell made a simple mistake.

70. Do you know who employed Mr. Skerrett in this case?—I do not know how he became employed in this case. What happened was that the Natives came down to consult Mr. Carroll, and the final result was that Mr. Skerrett was employed.

71. *Mr. Massey.*] When you say "the Natives," you mean Pepene and his section?—Yes. All I know is that Mr. Skerrett came to me about it on behalf of the Natives.

72. *Mr. Herries.*] On behalf of a certain number of the Natives?—On behalf of all, I understood. I did not know till the 6th January about his not representing all.

73. While you were acting for Mr. Lewis, did you make any offer to the Natives to buy the freehold, or did they come to you?—Mr. Lewis rather endeavoured to get them—they were down in Wellington from time to time, and he was negotiating with them for the purchase of the freehold.

74. What was the price?—At that time he was offering 5s. an acre, but ultimately a man named Andrew Pepene wrote him a letter in which he said they would sell for £15,000.

75. There was a definite offer made?—Yes. That was before the Commission reported.

76. Well, then, did you advise him not to give the £15,000?—No, I advised him to give it; but the difficulty was that he could not get the title.

77. Could you not have applied for an Order in Council under the old Act?—No.

78. I mean, an Order in Council to remove the restrictions?—No, the law did not permit it. It was only when the Act of 1909 came into force that this thing became possible, I think.

79. Surely you could have applied for an Order in Council to set aside clause 117?—Yes. It is very complicated. The reason we did not would be that we were then in negotiation with the Government for the purpose of carrying the thing through by getting special legislation.

80. At that time—when the Natives made the offer to sell for £15,000—you were in negotiation with the Government for special legislation, according to one of those letters?—It is difficult to gather all the reasons that prompted one; but my conclusion, after going into the matter as fully as I could, was that we could not carry out the transaction except in the way that was ultimately determined upon.

81. You were proposing to have legislation introduced to bring it under the 1907 Act?—Yes.

82. And to waive the conditions about dividing it into two portions—one for sale and the other for lease?—That is so.

83. Had the Government agreed to that?—No. The difficulty was that the Government did not care to interfere in the matter pending settlement of the dispute between Mr. Jones and Mr. Lewis.