

was then confident that he did, and until I told him that some had consulted me he did not know that any one else acted for any of them. That after the first meeting Skerrett met me and said, 'You were right, the large majority is with you. I shall do nothing further, and you must go on with it.' That Skerrett and I were neighbours and friends, and that I was not sure whether he meant me to understand this as information for my personal use, or whether he meant it to come as from one counsel representing a party to another claiming to represent most of the same party. I then asked you, 'Will you tell me whether Skerrett gave the same instructions to your office?' You replied, 'Yes, he said the same to me after the first meeting, and I have done nothing further.' You, Chapman, and I then had a discussion as to who it was who actually instructed Skerrett, and the conversation broke off in the middle of that discussion. This conversation took place so recently that I cannot understand the difference between us, which Dalziell's evidence seems to indicate. I shall be greatly obliged if you will (1) ask Chapman whether in this letter I have not correctly set out what took place between us in his presence; (2) read and put in this letter when you give your evidence.—Yours faithfully, H. D. Bell." I promised Mr. Bell that I would do that if the Committee had no objection. I will put in the letter. This was my reply to Mr. Bell, under date 15th September, 1911: "H. D. Bell, Esq., K.C., Wellington.—Dear Mr. Bell,—*Re* Mokau: I have your's of to-day's date, and I am very sorry indeed if Mr. Dalziell is making the use the newspapers say he is making of a conversation he had with me. He told me they proposed to call me, and I thought and would very much prefer that he should have left the matter to be deposed to by me rather than himself depose to it. I remember the conversation in the library when Mr. Chapman was present. I did not understand that you were discussing the matter with a view of making formal use of any statements that I then made, although I do not want to indicate in the slightest degree that you were not free to make use of them. I have not any objection on this head. I mention it only as an excuse on my part. I have read the *Times* report, and I do not agree with Mr. Dalziell that he had my authority to use any statement I made to him. I was under the belief that I myself would be left to make such statement. Now, as to the conversation in the library, my recollection substantially agrees with yours. I remember you saying that Skerrett had told you after the first meeting that the majority of Eketone's following had left him and joined the party which was being advised by you. I told you also that Mr. Skerrett had said something to the same effect to me, which is a fact. I did not understand, however, that you took it from anything I said that he had completely retired from Mokau, but I certainly am not prepared to deny that I said what you say I did. It is quite true Mr. Skerrett would probably not have done anything further in the matter without fresh instructions. The Mokau matter was one of a number of other matters he asked me to make myself familiar with before he went away, and at his request I read through the papers for this purpose. He then told me that our clients might settle the matter by selling to Lewis, in which case there would not be anything further to do except possibly to look after the Natives' interests on settlement, but that if it were not settled I was to see that the time within which further contemplated proceedings against the Assurance Fund had to be taken did not expire. It is true, as Dalziell says, that he asked me to go to Te Kuiti towards the end of February. I also see from the letter-book that we telegraphed to Pepene Eketone on the 18th February requesting him to advise his party that the meeting of owners of Mokau Blocks had been adjourned to the 10th March. My recollection is that this was done either at Mr. Dalziell's or Mr. Watson's request." (Mr. Watson is a partner of Mr. Dalziell.) "Shortly before Skerrett went away Dalziell saw him, and I was there at the time, and Skerrett then told him I would be looking after the Mokau matter if anything had to be done. From the above you will see that, although Mr. Skerrett after the meeting at Te Kuiti did realize that you and not he represented a majority of the Natives in Mokau, he was apparently under the impression that he was still acting for Pepene Eketone's party. I would like you to understand that I do not in way suggest that your recollection of the conversation is not the correct one. I am afraid that I did not attach to the conversation in the library the importance it deserved, and I blame myself altogether for your being left under the impression that Mr. Skerrett had completely retired from Mokau affairs. I propose to take the opportunity when called by the Committee of altogether taking the blame for an apparently wrong impression, which probably loose expressions I used led you into. I will be glad to read your letter to the Committee. I have asked Mr. Chapman if he recalls the conversation, but he tells me that his recollection of it is of the vaguest description, and he cannot assist us in the matter.—Yours faithfully, A. W. Blair." [Letters put in.] That letter of mine really embodies what I desire to say. It is correct, as Mr. Dalziell says, that my convenience was consulted about going to Te Kuiti some time about the 20th February. My recollection is that they wanted me to go. I also have an entry in my diary that I had a discussion with Mr. Dalziell on the 20th January. That was subsequent to Mr. Skerrett leaving. He left on the 13th. We telegraphed to Eketone later on again, advising him of the meeting which had been adjourned, and I was also asked to go to Te Kuiti. In the meantime the meeting was adjourned, and then the sale took place, and, of course, no further action was necessary so far as we were concerned; and that was the end of the matter. That is all I desire to say.

8. *Hon. Sir J. Carroll.*] Mr. Bell in the course of his evidence said that in his opinion Mr. Skerrett could not possibly have been serious in making a claim on behalf of the Natives against the Assurance Fund?—I read that.

9. He had no other reason for saying it than his knowledge of Mr. Skerrett, and he said that Mr. Skerrett could not possibly have been serious in making it—in fact, Mr. Bell suggested that it was a bogus claim?—Yes.

10. What do you say about that?—I do not pretend to have gone into the matter; but I know that Mr. Skerrett did advise the Natives that they had a claim against the Assurance Fund, and he also issued a writ, and told me to see that the time did not expire for the issue of the subsequent writs if the necessity for the issue of those writs arose.