

of the assembled owners Skerrett and I had had a discussion as to which of us represented the majority of the Native owners—he 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.

A. W. Blair, Esq., Wellington.

No. 52.

DEAR MR. BELL,—

Re *Mokau*.

15th September, 1911.

I have yours 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 10th March. My recollection is that this was done either at Mr. Dalziell’s or Mr. Watson’s request.

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 any 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 apparent 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 recollects 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.

H. D. Bell, Esq., K.C., Wellington.