

the purchase by the Government of a portion of the Runanga No. 1A Block. Apparently, as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, that honourable member had obtained access to certain public documents, and gave a chronological statement of the records. According to the records read by Mr. Hine, the negotiations for this purchase began on the 7th August, 1909, and the first time my name appeared on the records was that on the 5th May, 1911, I wired to the Under-Secretary inquiring if anything more had been done towards taking the road up the Waipunga Valley to give access to Pohokura, to which he replied that the intention was to take the necessary land under the Public Works Act. I may say here I have never seen the papers *in re* this matter, and am quoting from Mr. Hine's speech in *Hansard* No. 15, 30th August, 1912. My name next appears on the papers in a letter thus stated by Mr. Hine: "On the 5th March, 1912, Mr. G. W. Russell wrote to the Under-Secretary for Lands intimating that the titles to Runanga No. 1A and 2A were now in his name, and that any future correspondence should go to him." A little later in the speech this interjection occurs: "Mr. Hanan: What's your charge? Mr. Hine: I make no charge." Further on—"Mr. Hanan: What is the charge? The Hon. Mr. Massey said there was no charge," &c. In my speech on the occasion I said, "The honourable member for Stratford appeared to think there was something wrong and improper in this matter. Well, the answer he (Mr. Russell) would give to that was, let there be an inquiry, and if he was the person charged with having done anything improper he should be present at it." In due course, on the motion of the Prime Minister, the papers in the matter were referred to this Committee, and the Chairman (Mr. Newman, M.P.) courteously informed me personally that notice would be sent to me of the date of the meeting. I then told him that as no charge had been brought against me I had no intention of attending the meeting or taking part in the proceedings. On the evening of the 10th September, however, I received the attached letter, marked "A," as follows:—

"SIR,— "House of Representatives, Wellington, 10th September, 1912.
"I am instructed by the Chairman of the Lands Committee to inform you that a sub-committee will meet at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, the 11th instant, to consider Paper No. 226/C, details in connection with the purchase and fencing of part of Runanga No. 1A Block. The Committee meets in Joint Room, Old Parliament Buildings.

"I have, &c.,

"W. COLLINGS,

"Clerk, Lands Committee.

"G. W. Russell, Esq., M.P., House of Representatives, Wellington."

To this letter I forwarded the following reply:—

"DEAR SIR,—

"Parliament House, 11th September, 1912, 1.20 a.m.

"I am in receipt of your letter of yesterday's date informing me that a sub-committee of the Lands Committee will meet this day at 10 a.m. to consider Paper No. 226/C, details in connection with the purchase and fencing of part of Runanga No. 1A Block. I am unable to clearly see at present why this intimation has been sent to me, as I am not a member of the Committee, and have no *locus standi* at any inquiry the Committee may make. I also observe that whilst informing me of the meeting you neither invite me to attend nor indicate in what way I am interested in the work of the Committee.

"I have, &c.,

"The Clerk, Lands Committee."

"G. W. RUSSELL.

I have, however, been informed that since this inquiry opened a certain letter not on the file has been brought into evidence—namely, a letter written to a Wellington newspaper by a man named Keene, and that he and his solicitor, Beere, have both been examined in connection therewith. These facts have satisfied me that in the minds of certain members of this Committee there is an undiscovered and undisclosed charge against me, and that in my absence and without making any formal charge against me I am really being tried for an alleged or supposed breach of something not yet made clear. The position having been thus disclosed, and being able now to see exactly what is being aimed at, I consider the time has come for me to make a statement which may shorten the work of the Committee, and put my exact position before it. I visited Runanga in February, 1911, with the view of examining it as a possible field for settlement. I determined to buy it, as a result of my visit, if terms could be arranged. On that occasion, to the best of my recollection, I did not visit the Waipunga Valley. If I did the question of a road up it did not impress itself upon my mind. On my return to Christchurch I entered into negotiations with Mr. Ballan, the then owner, as a result of which I purchased the property on the 13th March, 1911, under agreement on the terms therein set out. I at once entered into possession, and from that date onward I accept full responsibility for everything that was done regarding the property. On my second visit to the station, having been informed by Mr. Ballan that negotiations were on foot for the sale of a portion of the land to the Government, I visited the Waipunga Valley with the manager, and made a careful inspection. I then discovered for the first time that a road had actually been surveyed through the property for about ten miles over what was shown on the maps as a Maori horse-track. I found that the portion under negotiation was a strip varying in width from 30 to 40 chains, and lying between the Waipunga Stream and the Runanga fence on the hills at the eastern side of the valley. The pegs for the road were in, and nothing more had been done. I did not on that occasion closely examine the road-line as it would affect Runanga Station. Having thus obtained a grasp of the general situation, I wired asking what was being done about the matter, as stated by Mr. Hine, and received the reply that it was proposed to take the road-line under the Public Works Act. This I thought would place me in an awkward position in being brought into direct conflict with the Government. I therefore considered the proper course would be to reconsider the price and