

34. At first it appeared to me from the statement you made that when the £2 10s. per acre was first mentioned you thought that was then excessive?—I would not say that.

35. That was the impression you left?—The impression I meant to convey was that I considered £4 excessive. I considered that, looking at the whole of the circumstances of the case, and reading the letter written by the solicitors, and knowing the necessity, I deemed it to be best for the settlers' sake to obtain the land, and looking at the cheap rate at which the Crown had purchased the block, that the Crown could afford to give the £2 10s. per acre for this portion.

36. Were you influenced by the interview you had with Mr. Russell between the 5th May and 17th June in your decision in regard to that by anything Mr. Russell said or did?—No, nothing of the kind—it had not the slightest effect on my decision.

37. When I produced the letter of Mr. Keene's I had no intention of doing anything except clearing up any question there may have been in connection with Mr. Russell's dealing with this transaction, and therefore I desire to put four questions to you. In your opinion was it desirable that the Government should acquire this portion of the Runanga Estate?—It was, in my opinion, absolutely.

38. Was the price paid for it excessive?—Not under the circumstances.

39. Was Mr. Russell responsible for effecting the sale of this portion of the Runanga Estate to the Government?—No, not as far as the Lands Department was concerned. We did not know him in the matter at all. Mr. Statham has raised a question I did not recognize before. It appears from what Mr. Statham says that as Mr. Russell was the person who had agreed to purchase we should have consulted him, but we did not consult him in the matter. We did not look upon him as being the owner. I should have answered that unhesitatingly except for the position put by Mr. Statham.

40. You said that your only objection to dealing with him at all was because he was a member of Parliament?—Yes, I did not want to have anything to do with him in the matter.

41. You do not say that Mr. Russell was not responsible?—Mr. Russell in his statement says he accepts the whole responsibility of closing the bargain.

42. The question I asked was, was Mr. Russell responsible for effecting the sale of this portion of the Runanga Estate to the Government?—No, the owner, Mr. Ballan, was responsible.

43. It is quite evident you were careful in your dealings with a member of Parliament. Did you consider that Mr. Russell was guilty of using any undue influence with the Government for the purpose of effecting the completion of this sale?—I am certain he was not. He had nothing to do with it.

44. *Mr. Statham.*] If you had known that Mr. Russell was the owner of the part you purchased, what steps would you have taken?—If I had known Mr. Russell was the owner or that a member of Parliament was the owner, I should have preferred taking it under the Public Works Act, and not discussing the matter of the purchase of the severance at all, because then the whole thing would have gone to the Court, and the Court would have decided it, but then we could not have acquired this severed land.

45. *Mr. Forbes.*] It has been stated that the matter hung fire for a considerable length of time until Mr. Russell appeared on the scene, when the matter was put through without any further delay. Is that a fair statement of the case?—I do not see exactly what I have to do with that.

46. The inference is that on account of Mr. Russell's connection with the purchase the Crown immediately put it through?—He had nothing to do with it whatever. The delay arose out of the ordinary delays in dealing with a large block of land and the exploration of roads, and nothing else.

47. *Hon. Mr. Buldo.*] Did Mr. Russell's statement that he was either about to purchase the property or had entered into negotiations with regard to the purchase of the property in any way affect your opinion as to the acquisition of the property or the price that was to be paid for it?—Not the slightest effect.

48. Did it in any way affect the date of the purchase of the property?—No.

49. *Mr. Anderson.*] Did the Acting Minister of Lands, or the Minister of Lands, or any member of the Government approach you in this matter?—No.

50. *Mr. Witty.*] I understood you to say that Mr. Russell had left the impression on your mind that it was a syndicate, and not himself, that was purchasing the property—that he used the expression "we"?—Yes, that was my impression. I did not want to discuss it with Mr. Russell, and did not question him at all. The impression on my mind was that he was one of a syndicate that was negotiating.

FREDERICK JEREMIAH TAYLOR examined. (No. 11.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A grazier.

2. Do you know anything about this Runanga No. 1A Block which is the subject of inquiry by this Committee?—I occupied it many years ago, but I am not there now.

3. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] How many years ago?—I first occupied it and put cattle on it in 1891.

4. At what time did you cease connection with the property?—In 1902 I left the Runanga part, but I am still living in the Taupo district.

5. *Mr. MacDonald.*] What is your idea of the value of the land?—I had it for sale for eleven years at 3s. per acre, and I failed to find a purchaser. In the last year of my occupation I was instructed to take half a crown an acre, but I failed to find a purchaser. That is all I know about the value.

6. That is for the whole block?—Yes, the whole block.

7. What is your idea of the value of the small flat portion along the Waipunga Stream?—It is three years ago since I was down there, but I know every foot of the country.