

you?—No, they partly talked over the matter themselves. I had some conversations with Seccombe about it. I was his agent from 1869 up to the time I was employed by the Government. Mr. Seccombe's case was one of those to which I drew Mr. Ormond's attention.

*Mr. Mackay.*

12th Aug., 1875.

79. *Mr. Rolleston.*] I am not asking whether this agreement was just, or calling in question your position, but I wish to know what has been the course of the Government from the first. Was this agreement made with the sanction of the Government?—The agreement was drawn up and signed in the Native Office in Auckland.

80. The Government has been persistent in a long course of years in acting without any law at all?—It became a custom; everybody bought timber, and I believe the Government winked at it. The Government could not enforce the law; the people must have timber. Until "The Native Lands Act, 1873," such transactions were not recognized by law. I should say the dealings were illegal, except where the lands were held under Crown grant.

81. It was in 1872 that this arrangement in which Mr. Russell and others are concerned was made?—No; it was made in 1868 or 1869. Mr. Russell's agreement was made before the land went through the Court.

82. *Mr. Thomson.*] I have a question to ask respecting Mr. Crippen. You say you are not a salaried officer of the Government. Do you do work for private persons?—I do not work for any private persons now. I have not taken in any new work since I commenced to purchase for the Government.

83. You say that your clerks' expenses amount to £1,000 a year?—Yes. In addition I frequently share my commission with others whom I employ to assist me. I shared a large amount with Messrs. Preece and Graham for assisting me.

84. The business of your office must be altogether connected with Government business?—I do not transact business for private persons. The other day Mr. Firth came to me and said he wanted a signature procured to a deed, and offered me £100 to get it. I said I did not take any private work, as I had been accused of various things. I said if I saw the Native I would ask him to sign, as he said he would deal only with me, but I would take no remuneration.

85. Under these circumstances, are you justified in speaking of Mr Crippen as your private clerk?—He is paid by me privately, not by the Government.

86. You say his work is altogether connected with the Government?—I am in the same position as any private land agent employed by the Government to buy certain lands. Certain limits are made as to price, and of course I purchase within these limits. The Government do not interfere with me whilst making these purchases.

87. But you objected to take an interest in this claim on the grounds that your position might be prejudiced?—Yes, because in that question I was acting as Agent for the Government. I was not acting in my capacity as a land-purchase agent when dealing with the Tairua affair.

88. Do you not think that Mr. Crippen was open to the same objection as yourself?—No, because he was not my clerk as Agent for the General Government. I have never charged the Government for clerical assistance in my office at the Thames.

89. Do you think that young men placed in that position, being really to all intents and purposes Government clerks doing Government work, and at the same time acting as private clerks, have advantages in becoming acquainted with the Government proceedings, at the same time that they are in the position of private individuals?—They very seldom know what I am doing for the Government as their agent. I sometimes occupy two positions. When acting as Agent for the Government I am not transacting land-purchase work. When I buy a block of land there are probably a number of signatures to be obtained, and I leave my clerks in the office to get the signatures, or to pay to the Natives their share of the money. They do that sort of work, as my business takes me all over the country. I was fourteen months Government Agent in the Waikato, and during that time Mr. Crippen was one of my clerks; he was then paid by the Government. When I left he became one of my clerks, paid by me out of commission. At the time the Tairua block was proclaimed, I was asked to act for a few months as Agent for the Government, which I did.

90. I am referring to the share given to him in this gold mine?—I do not know whether you have been acquainted with gold mining; but diggers have a habit when they find a claim, of behaving like men-of-war's men who have just been paid off, giving shares to Tom, Dick, and Harry. I have frequently, between 1869 and 1872, had my name put down for shares in mines when I knew nothing of it.

91. *The Chairman.*] When this share was offered to you, you were sitting in your office as General Government Agent?—I do not know whether it was offered to me in my office. It was offered me two or three times, and I think once in the Pacific Hotel, and once in the street. It might have been offered in my office.

92. Mr. Graham said it was in the office that he waited upon you. It was offered to you as Agent for the General Government?—No, not as General Government Agent, but when I was acting as Government Agent.

93. You knew it was very valuable?—I did not know it was particularly valuable. I have been bitten so often about mines, that I have little faith in things of that sort.

94. Did you not think it became any agent of the General Government, when such an offer was made to him, to ask the gentleman making it to walk out of the office?—It was not offered to me as a bribe. I was simply asked to take a share in a claim. Anything I had done about the prospector's claim, had been done long before. Sir D. McLean had told me to tell these people they would get a claim. I was once offered a share in Hunt's claim, which was worth £26,000, and refused it.

95. Did the shares being offered not leave upon your mind the impression that a wrong state of affairs was likely to spring up?—No. Miners ask a man to take a share—especially if they think he is a man of influence—and think that it adds to the value of a claim. People seeing my name amongst the shareholders would say that it must be a good claim.

96. I was asking about the General Government Agent, who had great powers in this case?—Well, I declined it.