

354. *Mr. Holmes.*] Did you ever suggest, directly or indirectly, to Sir Julius Vogel that Maling's property was for sale?—I mentioned it, together with the others, in my reply-letter to Sir Julius Vogel.

355. *The Chairman.*] Did you communicate to Maling that the Government were looking out for suitable premises?—No, I do not think I did; but I was aware that Maling had informed the Government that he was ready to sell: and when Mr. Luckie came down my opinion was asked as to whether it was a suitable place.

356. It was not under offer to you?—No; I believe it was offered by Mr. Bell, commission agent, who always transacted Mr. Maling's business.

357. When you get the information you expect as to the disposition of the £1,300, will you communicate that to the Committee?—Yes. I should like to say that, looking at the matter in the light of after-events, if my advice had been asked, I should have recommended Mr. Maling's premises, amongst those that were offered at that time to the Government, as the most suitable. The locality is most decidedly progressing, and it was one of the best positions in Christchurch, and the building is substantial, and well adapted for offices of any kind.

WEDNESDAY, 23RD JUNE, 1886.

Hon. Sir JULIUS VOGEL in attendance and examined.

358. *The Chairman.*] You are Chairman of the New Zealand Government Insurance Association?—Yes.

359. I may explain to you that we are only at present taking evidence with respect to the purchase of the building-sites. We shall be going into the larger question of the management of the association later on, and we shall have to ask you again to attend and give evidence. Will you state when the first idea was entertained of purchasing sites for buildings?—As soon as the Government put the department into a separate association, the idea seized my mind that it would be absolutely necessary to secure good sites and buildings in the chief towns.

360. Were not some steps taken to secure some sites before the association was handed over?—The Wellington and Dunedin sites were bought before the association was handed over.

361. What was done by you?—I made inquiries of an informal nature from persons whom I had opportunities of communicating with, whether there were any choice sites to be obtained in Christchurch and Dunedin. I think I particularly asked whether we could get some land to advantage about the Cathedral Square, Christchurch. To the best of my recollection I also spoke about property in Dunedin to more than one person—amongst others, I think, to one of my colleagues who was about to go to Dunedin. In a private note I had written to Mr. Pym, I think, I put a postscript to the effect that, if there were any good properties for sale in Dunedin, the association might buy one after it became incorporated. I may here say that it did not enter into my mind, after the session was over, to make any definite purchases until the association came into existence. Therefore, when, later on, Mr. Luckie went down to Dunedin and Christchurch, it was on the understanding that he was to try and get properties put under offer to the association within a reasonable time after the coming into existence of the Board. I received a photograph and plans of the property belonging to Mr. Maling, at Christchurch. As far as I can recollect, about the same time I received from Mr. Pym descriptions of two properties in Dunedin.

362. Who did the information about the Christchurch property come from?—I cannot say positively. I am under the impression it was from Mr. Maling himself. I believe the plans or photographs, whichever they were, came from him. The description which Mr. Pym gave of the properties in Dunedin was so very attractive that I decided to send Mr. Luckie down there on the understanding, as stated before, that he would endeavour to get any properties we might desire to recommend placed under offer, so that the Board could decide upon them. I had better go on to speak of the Christchurch property first, as it is the one on which I have fewest words to say. With regard to the Christchurch property, Mr. Luckie, on his return, recommended it highly. I indorsed upon the paper, "Recommended to the Board," or words to that effect. I had nothing more whatever to do with the whole matter; it was entirely settled by the Board. I was away for a considerable period after the Board first met, and before I ever took my seat at the Board the Board completed the purchase. I wish to state that subsequent investigation on my part convinced me that it was an excellent purchase—that we should get fair interest out of it—that the spare piece of ground which we purchased alongside would enable us to build over the building occupied by Mr. Maling, and get an office and a fine building for a low price. Speaking for myself, I am sorry that, owing to the agitation that was got up on the subject, the Board subsequently relinquished the idea of buying the whole of the land which intervenes between ours and the Australian Mutual Provident Office, which would have taken our land alongside the Chamber of Commerce, and given to us the finest site, I believe, in Christchurch. We could have bought the intervening land very cheaply. And, if it comes within the cognizance of the Committee, I really think it is worth their while to recommend its purchase. The street is likely to be an important one, because the municipal buildings are being erected lower down. If we had the site for our buildings up to the Australian Mutual Provident Office, I am under the impression we should have a very fine site, and one which would be very profitable in the future. At the same time I wish to say this: that my opinion about sites is to be taken with the qualification that I have not been able to walk about for the last two or three years, and therefore am not so well qualified to judge as those who are able to do so. With regard to the Dunedin purchase, I was looking through the papers last night, and I consider that that is really the only purchase besides the Wellington one for which I am responsible, or about which I can give any definite information. I find, on looking through the papers, that I was urged in the strongest possible terms by Mr. Luckie to complete the purchase—that if I did not do so the property would be at once taken up by several other persons who were after it; and that, if the purchase were completed, we could at once obtain a profit from it in Dunedin or Melbourne. I should like to show the Committee that I did not contemplate the purchase from a speculative point of view. Mr. Luckie telegraphed to me on the 20th December, 1884, as follows:—