

reduction of the rents these men are paying to such a sum as represent the real value of this land. From 3s. 4½d. per acre, average, they should be reduced to 1s. 6d.

I have only to thank the Committee for the patience with which they have listened to me. I dare say I have taxed their patience somewhat through this inquiry. It would be wrong of me to pretend that this Committee was a proper tribunal to inquire into a matter of this sort, for I do not think it is—not from the character of the men who compose it, but from its inherent character. But I hope some good may come from the inquiry. I may say that I made no charge of any sort against the Minister, and I have nothing to do with the inquiry. It was not of my seeking. The Committee first invited me as a witness, and afterwards invited me to ask questions, and I complied in both instances. That is all my connection with the matter.

DR. FITCHETT'S ADDRESS.

Dr. Fitchett: Mr. Scobie Mackenzie tells us that this inquiry is in no sense desired by him. If it had not been for him, it is needless for me to say that no inquiry would have been held. He demanded it; so did the *Otago Daily Times*. The inquiry is due to his speech and the newspaper correspondence, in which he took the principal part. And let me say, at the outset, that the business of the Committee is to determine, not whether the price paid for the land was a reasonable one, but whether the persons acting for the Government have been guilty of any moral wrong. Has there been corruption on the part of the Minister, or on the part of the department? The price is only remotely relevant, as showing a motive for fraud if an excessive sum were paid. Sir, if a parliamentary Committee is to be set up to ascertain, as to every Crown bargain, whether it is a good or a bad one, parliamentary Committees would have their hands full. The question is whether the persons who acted for the Government exercised their judgment honestly. I certainly fail to gather what Mr. Scobie Mackenzie's position really is. Does he make a charge or does he not? He says, on the one hand, "I make no charge against any one."

Mr. Scobie Mackenzie: I made no charge.

Dr. Fitchett: Do you make charges now?

Mr. Scobie Mackenzie: No.

Dr. Fitchett: He says "No," and yet the whole trend of his cross-examination and his speech has been directed to suggest fraud. As the Minister said in his evidence, he has not the moral courage to charge him openly, but he insinuates it. All Otago rang with these indefinite charges, and he still suggests them, though he does not formulate them; and herein lies the difficulty in meeting them. With specific charges the prosecutor would be called upon to prove them. But here the Minister and his department have to meet they do not know what. All they can do is to tell the Committee everything that occurred, whilst Mr. Scobie Mackenzie stands by to pick up anything he can give a colour to. Hence the length of the inquiry; and the responsibility of it rests with him and not with me. Now, he tells us that the statements contained in the speech are true—every word of them. Sir, he has confined himself almost wholly to half-truths. He first says, "I make no charges." That is the usual way when a man means to hint what he is afraid to speak out. He says, "I make no charges; but, but, but"—and the charges lie in the "buts." Then, as to the half-truths. He says Douglas is a large landowner, but he omits to say, not in the electorate.

A Member: It is in his constituency.

Dr. Fitchett: My instructions are that Mount Royal is not in the Waihemo constituency. Then he says the land was let at 6d. an acre; but he omits to add, on three-months tenancy. He says the rent represents a capital value of 10s., as if a quarterly tenancy could have any reference to capital value. And so of the rest—half-truths, every one of them. The real facts are concealed and false inferences suggested. And yet he tells us that he neither conveyed any insinuations of jobbery, nor could anybody draw that inference from his statements. He declared that he never heard that imputations on the Minister were drawn from his words, and yet I showed conclusively from the paper that when one correspondent stated specifically that he and others inferred that the Minister bought this land wickedly and corruptly, in order to buy Mr. Douglas's vote, Mr. Scobie Mackenzie, so far from contradicting it, treated it as correct.

Mr. Scobie Mackenzie: You must give the man's name; it was an anonymous letter.

Dr. Fitchett: He says it was an anonymous letter, but he replied to it. He wrote four letters to this anonymous writer's five, and he protested against his anonymity only when he found himself in a corner, and could not escape. The whole burden of that correspondence on the part of the writer "Watch" was that the Minister was accused of corruption, and that Mr. Scobie Mackenzie had failed to prove the charge. He told us that he never mentioned the Minister's name in the correspondence. That is quite true. He had put Mr. Douglas and the Minister on the same footing as conspirators in the first instance. That done, he attacked Mr. Douglas by name, knowing that the public would construe every thrust at Mr. Douglas as a thrust at the Minister. Once establish the conspiracy, and evidence against one conspirator is evidence against the other.

Mr. Scobie Mackenzie: I invited them to meet me, and they would not.

Dr. Fitchett: Well, I will leave this point now. The Minister, as a public man, is open to the keenest criticism; but his complaint, and mine, is that Mr. Scobie Mackenzie lacked the courage to attack him openly, and sought to injure him by insinuation. He now comes to the Committee and coolly says he never intended the Minister to be blamed at all! Why that long cross-examination of Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Barron, if not to suggest corruption? His position is to me inexplicable. If he had a charge to make one could understand it; if he said he had not a charge, I could understand that; but, by innuendoes of all sorts, he repeats the charge whilst he disclaims it. He makes a great deal of capital out of this petition. He says it was hatched in Wright, Stephenson,