

The Committee's terms of reference were to enquire into the whole subject of land acquisition from the Maori owners and particularly into Wynyard's recommendation that active negotiations should be suspended for a period. It was to report also on 'what shall appear to the Committee the best mode of acquiring native lands for the future', as well, of course, as an investigation into the 'authorship of a certain publication which had anonymously been put into circulation'.¹⁹

Meanwhile the Central Committee of the Church Missionary Society continued its own investigations. Vidal apparently called on Grace three days after the appearance of the article. What then transpired can only be inferred from the later charges and countercharges of both parties. Until that week the Committee's dominant worry was Grace's vigorous and forthright insistence on adequate financial backing for the establishment of his Taupo station. The local resources of the Society were unable to meet the level of support which Grace expected and Vidal's firm but not very perceptive method of handling the problems in the manner of a twentieth-century Treasury investigating officer was causing marked tension. Now amid the tumult of this new and quite unsuspected storm, Grace's role as a fractious trouble-maker was to them the more apparent.

At the initial interview Vidal apparently made a tactical error in over-emphasising the displeasure of 'certain members of the Government'—unnamed—rather than concentrating on the quite proper and more specific anxiety of the Society to clarify responsibility. Grace, viewing Vidal more as an agent of Government 'and as a matter of course not acknowledging such authority, gave no satisfactory information upon the subject'.²⁰

Next day he received a letter from Messrs Kissling, Wilson and Vidal 'which carried on the face of it an evident desire to entrap me' showing to Grace a wish 'to commit me for what you all apparently suppose a most unpardonable crime'. He felt 'indignant' at their proceedings to which he gave the same reply as before—admitting nothing, denying nothing. He was unwilling to accuse himself 'before such a tribunal', considering the remarks in his colleagues' letter to the parent committee in London which he had apparently seen, 'as absurd as they were uncharitable'.²¹ But he did now concede that if Vidal, as a C.M.S. agent, felt it his duty to interrogate him he was prepared to give the Secretary 'such information so far as I am concerned'. Vidal in his reply the following day the 27th defended his references to the views of Government officers, 'the case having assumed a most serious nature . . . affecting the Government of the country and the peace and welfare of the whole population'.²²