

I proceed now to other features of the inquiry, and, as it appears to me that in a limited sense some of the parties involved are practically placed on their trial, I need not hesitate to refer to the personal motives and actions of persons connected with it.

I have already pointed out that Mr. Lundon's apparent object in getting up the Maori claims was to render the electoral roll more favourable to himself. With that object in view, it is clear from his own evidence that the questions of whether the claimants were qualified, or whether they signed the claims, or whether the claims were duly attested, were matters of complete indifference to him so long as the supreme object was gained. Mr. Lundon has himself permitted a Native in his presence to sign the names of twenty absent persons to electoral claims, and has caused the forms so prepared to be taken away to a distance to be signed by another person as attesting witness. Very many of the claims preferred were certainly never signed by the persons purporting to have signed them, and false attestation has been the rule, not the exception. Raneira Warerau's name appears as the attesting witness on 203 of the claims made in 1878, and he admitted in evidence that he had not seen more than ten of the claimants sign their names. Isaac Williamson is the attesting witness to ninety-nine claims, and he admitted in evidence that not more than five or six had signed in his presence. In addition to this, Williamson made the extraordinary statement that he had authorized another person to sign his (Williamson's) name as attesting witness because he was too busy to travel around for the purpose himself. Passing now from these circumstances, upon which I feel that it would be useless to dwell, I regret to have to say that I consider the official conduct of the late Registration Officer, Mr. Williams, open to grave censure. Many of the disclosures elicited by this inquiry, and which might have justified objections, were quite unknown to Mr. Williams, and were not indicated in his formal objection. His reasons, I think, must be sought elsewhere. The wholesale objections made by him in his official capacity, and which certainly included names which ought not to have been objected to, were made, as it seems to me, on very inadequate information. Mr. Williams is an excellent Maori scholar; he has resided in his district for more than forty years. Yet his personal knowledge on which his objections were founded only extended to twenty-two names out of the total number objected to. In all other cases he seems to have relied almost absolutely on general statements by the Resident Magistrates of Hokianga and Mongonui respectively, that the claimants were not entitled to a vote. Mr. Williams in his evidence repeatedly and deliberately says, in speaking of his objections, "I objected to all names I had a doubt upon." This is by no means my conception of the duty of a Registration Officer in this respect. Where he objects he ought, I think, to have no doubt at all. For it must be remembered that the burden of proof lies on the person objected to, who, moreover, has no claim for costs against the Registration Officer in case he establishes his right to the franchise. Practically in these cases the claimants do not appear, and the objection therefore, if wrongfully made, amounts to disfranchisement. The extreme view which Mr. Williams took of his duty as Registration Officer must, I think, have grown up out of the political situation which I have already described. Moreover, there is no doubt that many names were left on the roll of persons whose qualifications were similar to those objected to, and it happens that the persons so left on the roll resided for the most part in districts over which the influence of Mr. Williams's family might be supposed to extend. It is not surprising, therefore, that a suspicion of bias should be excited in the minds of the political opponents of Mr. Williams's family. I have already intimated, the information on which Mr. Williams founded his objections was derived in great part from Mr. Von Stürmer, the Resident Magistrate of Hokianga, and Mr. White, the late Resident Magistrate of Mongonui. In the case of Mr. Von Stürmer, the memorandum containing the information was not produced, but Mr. White's memorandum was read in evidence by Mr. Williams on the 6th of March, and I beg to refer your Excellency to it. I have no hesitation in saying that it was not a memorandum on which any Registration Officer ought to have relied, as it contained the strongest internal evidence that it was the production of a partisan. Yet Mr. Williams seems to have relied on it with more implicit faith than the writer expected, or even desired. I can only account for such conduct, on the part of a gentleman whose character for honor and integrity stands high, by supposing that, unconsciously to himself, he had suffered his judgment to become warped and his official acts influenced by personal or political antipathy to his brother's opponent, Mr. Lundon. That being my deliberate opinion, it is, I think, a matter for great regret that, when Mr. Williams found his feelings enlisted in local political questions, he did not retire from a position where his honor might not unreasonably be called in question.

I have already alluded to the extraordinary ruling given by Mr. Lawlor on the 6th of June last on the technical point raised by Mr. Tole. That decision seems to me to have been almost childish, but its effect was to place on the electoral roll all of the names objected to by the Registration Officer, including the names of dead, absent, and obviously-disqualified persons. Mr. Lawlor was probably impressed by the fact that Mr. Tole, a gentleman of the legal profession, and a member of the House of Representatives, seriously raised the point; but he ought to have reflected that Mr. Tole might think himself at liberty to urge a point as an advocate which as a Judge he would deride. The decision was undoubtedly unsound, and was unfortunate in its effects, directly and indirectly. Taken in connection with other circumstances, it gave an appearance of probability to the suspicion that the Government had become a party to a design of placing Maoris on the roll without that proper examination into the merits of the claims provided for by law. Other circumstances were not wanting to strengthen the suspicion. Mr. Williams,