

from the Under-Secretary for Defence to ourselves. The Minister stated in the House that we had got a cheque from the Defence Department, and, before he could stop it, rushed it through the Audit Department, and implied that we had tried to get undue advantage of the Government. We got a letter from the Defence Minister, with my reply to it on the same day. [Letter read. See Appendix No. 15.] The reply was written by Mr. Atkinson while I was at home ill.

21. *The Chairman.*] You see, in allowing you to make a statement it has been very satisfactory so far, but we must confine the thing within reasonable limits, and we do not wish to go into the matter out of order?—I am entirely in the hands of the Commission.

*The Chairman:* I am much obliged to you, and I think it has been satisfactory so far as it has gone. It will be better, in your interest, that you should be called again, which you will be.

22. *Mr. Baker.*] Is there any great objection to disclosing the name of the third party interested?—It is not at all relevant to the case. If I had the consent of that gentleman, then I might have no objection to disclose his name; it is no mistaken sentiment, but I do not like to do it without his consent. I personally have not the least objection, as a matter of fact.

Captain HUMFREY examined.

23. *The Chairman.*] You are Captain Humfrey, late Under-Secretary for the Defence Department?—Yes.

24. How long did you hold that appointment, and between what dates?—From 1878 to the 31st of March, 1891.

25. As Under-Secretary for Defence it was one of your duties to superintend arrangements for rifle practice?—Well, scarcely. The Officer Commanding the District superintends all rifle-practices. All questions relating to purchase and acquisition of ranges came before me.

26. I mean, your duty to superintend the arrangements?—Yes.

27. Polhill Gully was used as a rifle-range during the whole time you were Under-Secretary, was it not?—Yes.

28. Can you give us any information as to what rent was paid for it at odd times?—Yes; a rental was paid prior to its being leased from Dr. Johnston—I think it was £10 a year, for the use of the range. Before Dr. Johnston went Home he made an offer to Colonel Reader to lease the whole of his right to the range from the Natives—that is, the land at present under inquiry—and it was accordingly leased through Mr. B. Smith, as agent, for £66 a year—that is, the Government took over the interest in the land for £66. It was paid half-yearly to Mr. Benjamin Smith.

29. You do not know what was paid to Mrs. Leech?—I think, about £10 a year was paid for actual ranges. Dr. Johnston leased from the Natives and sublet to Mrs. Leech, and she used rest of land for a dairy farm. Then we took over the whole 44 acres from Dr. Johnston and paid £66 a year.

30. Has the ground ever been fenced or cleared, so as to make it more secure to the public?—Yes. Some fencing had been done and the ground cleared to keep the gorse down. That was, of course, after it had been acquired by Government and leased.

31. Can you tell us who first proposed that this land should be purchased?—Well, it was always my idea, and Colonel Reader's, that, as soon as Dr. Johnston's lease ran out, the land should be acquired by the Government. I think the period of Dr. Johnston's lease was something like fourteen years to run, and it was always, in my opinion, an absolute necessity to purchase the range for Volunteers, as the Officer Commanding District had time after time been instructed to search for another suitable place for a rifle-range within a convenient distance, and reported that there was no better site to be obtained. I considered the range should be acquired by the Government as soon as possible, and that Government should take steps to purchase from the Natives when the lease expired. The original negotiations opened with Kirk and Atkinson occurred in this way: Mrs. Simeon, who owns part of these sections, came up to see me one day about the removal of a fence. She said she had sold a portion of the ground on which the boundary-fence was running. It was agreed by me that the boundary-fence should be shifted the few feet she required. Finding the ground was being gradually sold to Europeans, and, believing it would cost a much larger sum to acquire it from them, I went and saw Captain Russell with Mr Atkinson, who had interviewed me concerning another section which was being sold by the Natives to Europeans, and it was agreed that Mr. Atkinson should endeavour to acquire for the Government the 44 acres contained in the reserve. The reason this was decided on was that he had been in communication with the different Native owners, and had a thorough knowledge of their titles, and everything else, and it was better to employ a gentleman who knew about it—that is, that Mr. Atkinson would start from a point which another man would have to work up to. Mr. Kirk came up, and negotiations were then entered into.

32. Can you tell us the fixed maximum price that the Government would give for this land?—Mr. Kirk, after discussion with me, and going into figures relative to the value of the different sections, said he thought he could acquire the whole 44 acres for £3,000. He was told that if he could get it for that the Government would take it. It was after this was fixed that Messrs. Kirk and Atkinson proposed that they should be the vendors. I cannot say now from memory the reason for the change from agents to vendors.

33. Did you fix that sum on your own responsibility?—Well, you must know that an Under-Secretary could not spend £3,000 of Government money without authority. It is out of his power to do so.

34. Then, you did not do it without authority?—No. I strongly urged the Minister to purchase, which I should do again to-day if in a similar position.

35. Who was Minister at the time—Captain Russell?—Yes; you will find that on the papers. I am positive Captain Russell approved it. To think that I could spend £3,000 without authority is simply absurd.