

take a copy of the vouchers, so that when a proper inquiry was made, tampering could be exposed. He was accustomed to see Mr. Fisher nearly every day he was in Christchurch; he supposed he had had conversations with Mr. Fisher every day for the last five or six years. The question of the voucher did not crop up at the time of the Seddon-Taylor case. The first time the voucher was mentioned was some little time after Parliament opened. His principal reason for not making the charge through Mr. McBeth was that this gentleman was the last man in the world to whom he would have taken such a charge; he would simply have laughed at it. As he had said before, he had not made this matter "public." Apart from Captain Seddon's incompetence, he had no reason to suspect the payment. It was other matters, which had arisen later, which had made him take the action he had.

WEDNESDAY, 11TH OCTOBER, 1905.

*Mr. Joynt* appeared for the officers charged, and said he wished to know before proceeding further, whether the Board assumed there was, or was not, a voucher. He held that this was vital to the case, because if it were shown that there was not a voucher, then there was nothing to inquire about—nothing had been divulged.

*The Board* adhered to its decision of yesterday—that this point was immaterial to their inquiry.

*Mr. Rose* informed the Board that he now desired to call counsel.

*Mr. Willis* (continuing, to Board): The first persons with whom he had discussed the voucher were his fellow-clerks. The first outsider was Mr. Fisher, who was then a member of the House of Representatives. He knew of no grievance which Mr. Fisher had against the present Government, or against any member of it. People imagined he had a grievance owing to his actions in connection with volunteering matters. He (witness) did not know that Mr. Fisher had any desire to "throw mud" at the Government. It was not easy to give exactly a conversation he had had so long ago, and in reference to which he had had many subsequent conversations. He knew that Mr. Fisher had first questioned him with reference to this matter. Mr. Fisher had asked witness if he knew of any improper payments made to Captain Seddon. He had seen Mr. Fisher in the street, in his house, at his office, and elsewhere; he could not say where the first conversation had taken place. Mr. Fisher had never asked him generally for information by means of which to attack the Government. He had merely asked witness if he (witness) knew anything about a certain payment being made to Captain Seddon. This was after he had seen the voucher. He had no communication with anybody else, and had not divulged this information to anybody else. That was the first time the matter came up. He had told Mr. Fisher that he did remember a voucher going through for about £70 for Defence Stores. That was the sum and substance of the whole conversation as near as he could recollect. His answer to Mr. Fisher's question was that there was a voucher for the reorganization of Defence Stores, and that the amount was over £70. Those were all the particulars he gave; that was the whole conversation. He would swear that he had given Mr. Fisher the amount and date—that it was some time after he (witness) had entered the Chief Clerk's room. Mr. Fisher did not know what witness's duties were. He saw nothing strange in Mr. Fisher's question. The question was general, but it was evident that Mr. Fisher knew or suspected something about the matter. He could not say whether mention had been made of Defence Stores by Mr. Fisher. The question was simply a general one with reference to a particular amount paid to Captain Seddon. Mr. Fisher had also written from Wellington and asked for further particulars, probably the letter had gone into the fire now. Witness gave Mr. Fisher full particulars (in writing) from memory. He had then detailed to Mr. Fisher the incident of their seeing the voucher, &c. The first time he (witness) had discussed the matter with his colleagues, after seeing Mr. Fisher, was on the morning after the debate in the House. Until then, he would swear, he did not know that Mr. Fisher would bring the matter up in the House. The information he had given Mr. Fisher was merely for the purpose of enabling him to get other information. He concluded that Mr. Fisher would bring the matter up some time. He believed that Mr. Fisher intended to make an attack upon the Government through this payment. He had discussed with his colleagues the matter of this voucher intermittently for months past. They were not particularly "concerned," but they thought young Seddon had got £70 for nothing. He did not take steps himself then because he knew no one he would trust with the information—no one who would handle the matter in such a way that it would not be to his disadvantage. Practically he did not want the public to know how the information came out. He was not "ashamed" or "afraid" to come out, but to have rushed out would have been courting disaster without having a chance of doing good. At that time he did not know he was running any risk in giving information. There was no promise from Mr. Fisher that witness's name would not be disclosed; that was assumed. The other officers knew nothing of his conversation with Mr. Fisher, nor that he intended to help Mr. Fisher in this way. They certainly did not know what was in witness's mind when discussing the matter. He had not deliberately concealed this, but they had not been brought into the matter, and there was therefore no necessity to tell them. At that time he was not anxious to get them to corroborate his statements. After the matter had been brought up in the House of course he did wish this. He had given Mr. Fisher the names of his colleagues as corroborative witnesses. When the newspaper report came out they commented upon it. He had not attempted to refresh the memory of the other men, there was no need. He admitted that all through he had been the leading spirit.

(To the Chairman): There was very little conversation about the newspaper report—practically merely a few disjointed sentences.