

*Mr. M. Myers:* With regard to the question that Mr. Skerrett put, I apprehend I cannot question the witness about that now. It refers to quite a different matter. I am not objecting to the question—it was quite a proper one; but I may desire to cross-examine Mr. Payne about that, and I presume I shall have that opportunity on the hearing of the other charge to-morrow.

Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD, Bart., M.P., Wellington, sworn.

1. *The Chairman.*] You wish to make a statement?—Yes, I wish to make a statement regarding this paragraph which the Committee are considering—“What was stated in Auckland at the present moment was this: that he had been squared by Mr. Vigor Brown and Sir Joseph Ward at Napier.” I wish to say that I have not at any time, directly or indirectly, by myself or through any other person, offered to square a man in connection with the politics of this country; and the suggested rumour emanating from Napier is absolutely untrue. What I am anxious to do is to find out who started the rumour, so that we may get here upon his oath the person who was responsible for an untrue statement of that kind and who was responsible for the leader of the Opposition mentioning it in the House. I wish also to say that when at Napier I did not discuss the political situation with Mr. Payne. Moreover, just before Mr. Brown introduced him to me I specially asked him not to expect me to discuss the political situation. I have not in any way been responsible for anything that could have started that rumour. It is one of many baseless statements which are circulated about public men, but it is of a dastardly character, and we ought to find out who is responsible for the rumour starting and finding its way to Mr. Massey. I want Mr. Massey to give the Committee the name of the writer of the letter. If I cannot do that to-day in reference to the letter, so far as this order of reference is concerned, then I want to do it to-morrow when the other order of reference is before the Committee.

2. *Mr. Allen.*] You have already stated that you accept Mr. Massey's explanation and retraction?—Yes. It is as follows: “On Friday evening, in giving an account of a conversation between the member for Grey Lynn and myself at the request of the former, I quoted an extract from a letter which I had read to the member mentioned. In doing so I committed a grave error. The terms of the extract suggested that a member of this House was subject to corrupt influences. Some of my own words may have been capable of the same construction, though I did not so intend them. By some honourable members the words I used with reference to the Prime Minister and the member for Napier appear to have been understood as suggesting that the members I have mentioned employed some improper influences. I feel it my duty to the House, to the Prime Minister, to the member for Napier, and to the member for Grey Lynn to express my regret not only for reading the extract, but for the words I myself used; and, further, it is due to them that I should at the earliest possible moment unreservedly withdraw all imputation against those honourable members. I do not believe that a bribe has been accepted by any member of the House, or that any member has offered another a bribe. My statement is made without previous consultation with my party, and I have only been guided by my sense of what is due by one man to another and by a member of this House to the House.”

JOHN VIGOR BROWN, M.P., Napier, sworn.

1. *The Chairman.*] You wish to make a statement?—Yes.

2. Here is the paragraph that we are dealing with [handed to witness]: read it, and then give us any comment you like to make?—“What was stated in Auckland was this: that he had been squared by Mr. Vigor Brown and Sir Joseph Ward at Napier.” That is not true. I never at any time made any offer, either directly or indirectly, by innuendo or in any other way. Any suggestion that I squared Mr. Payne is absolutely false, and I wish to place that on record. That is what I came here for, and I suppose the Committee are quite willing to hear me deny the charge.

3. *Mr. Russell.*] You are aware that the charge, so far as it is contained in this paragraph, has been retracted by Mr. Massey?—Yes.

4. You accept the retraction?—Yes. It is as follows: “Sir, on Friday evening, in giving an account of a conversation between the member for Grey Lynn and myself at the request of the former, I quoted an extract from a letter that I had read to the member mentioned. In doing so I committed a grave error. The terms of the extract suggested that a member of this House was subject to corrupt influences. Some of my own words may have been capable of the same construction, though I did not so intend them. By some honourable members the words I used with reference to the Prime Minister and the member for Napier appear to have been understood as suggesting that the members I have mentioned employed some improper influence. I feel it my duty to the House, to the Prime Minister, to the member for Napier, and the member for Grey Lynn to express my regret not only for reading the extract, but for the words I myself used; and, further, it is due to them that I should at the earliest possible moment unreservedly withdraw all imputations against those honourable members. I do not believe that a bribe has been accepted by any member of the House, or that any member of the House has offered another a bribe. My statement is made without previous consultation with my party, and I have only been guided by my sense of what is due by one man to another and by a member of this House to the House.”

5. You swear that you neither had any conversation with Mr. Payne, nor produced any document, that could contain any offer on your part to influence his vote in favour of the Ward Government on the no-confidence motion?—That is so. The thing was never hinted at or dreamt of in any way whatever.

*Mr. Reed:* Looking over the order of reference, it seems to me that there is a question we have to ask Mr. Massey, and that is, by whom were these statements made in Auckland? The order of reference says we are to inquire into the charges and the subject-matter of the statement, and that we are to state whether a breach of privilege has been committed, and by whom. I think it is necessary that we should put the question to Mr. Massey, by whom were these statements in Auckland made to him?