

vague way the Europeans have always regarded themselves as having an undefined reversionary interest in Maori lands; the Natives, on the other hand, have always failed to cordially acquiesce in the administration of their territorial estates by the various Governments that have from time to time controlled the destinies of New Zealand. And so, for the long stretch of time the Government retained the right of pre-emption over the Native lands, the period was one fraught with many acts of injustice to the Natives. They called to mind the words used to them by Captain Hobson when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed—that the two races had become united under one sovereign; but, in strange contradiction to this harmonious union, they saw millions of acres of their land passing from them, in some instances at a farthing an acre, secured nominally by the Government, but in reality for the more favoured subjects of Her Gracious Majesty. So unjust, indeed, were many of the Government purchases that they were condemned in Parliament by men holding exalted positions, and who were in every way capable of forming an unbiassed judgment.

Parliament at length was no longer able to conceal from itself that great wrongs upon the Native race were being perpetrated. It saw, as it expressed itself in the preamble to the Native Land Act passed at the time, that it would greatly promote the peaceful settlement of the colony and the advancement of the civilisation of the Natives if their rights to land were ascertained, and defined, and declared, and if the ownership of such lands when so defined and declared was assimilated as nearly as possible to the ownership according to British law. With a view to giving effect to the foregoing objects Her Majesty waived in favour of the Natives so much of the Treaty of Waitangi as reserved to Her the right of pre-emption over their lands.

I entirely fail to understand how, as set forth in the preamble to the Act of 1862, the Government of New Zealand, having renounced the right of pre-emption over Native lands, can again acquire that prerogative without the assent of the Natives. Upon equitable grounds alone the Parliament should not attempt to regain the prerogative it abandoned about thirty years ago. Such a proceeding on the part of the Legislature would in my opinion intensify the mistrust the Native population too long have had in Colonial Governments. They would immediately discern an intention on the part of the Government to enrich the European colonists at the sacrifice of the territorial interests of the Maori subjects of the Queen.

To the Native mind, unversed in the subtleties of the law, such a proceeding would be regarded by the present generation of Maoris as simply confiscation. They would feel themselves thrown back in the onward march of progress, hampered and shut out from the many advantages of civilisation that they now look so hopefully forward to, and regard as being within their reach. I think the resumption by the Crown of the pre-emptive right restricting the Natives to but one market in which they could dispose of their lands would retard instead of promoting the settlement of the country. Many of the more intelligent and prudent of the race are turning their attention to sheep-farming and stock-raising generally. They are possessed of the wholesome idea of becoming producers, and laudably desire to emulate their more experienced European neighbours in the art of agriculture and profitable stock-rearing.

To attain this end they fully recognise that it would be wise for them to dispose of such areas of their surplus lands as they are not likely to require for themselves, and from the disposal of such lands to obtain the necessary funds for clearing, fencing, and stocking the land retained for their own profitable occupation. With the Native mind running in this groove, dominated with the desire of becoming thoroughly useful settlers, and adding to the productive powers of the colony, it may be reasonably expected that, with legislation of a judicious character afforded them such as will fairly meet their aspirations, little apprehension need exist as to their willingness to place the lands not needed for their own use in the public market. Evidence adduced before the Commission proved conclusively that, where the Government interposed with its pre-emptive right, as was the case in the King-country, the Natives could not obtain a fair price for their land. The Government offered 3s. an acre: at the same time private purchasers were in constant communication with the owners, and willing to pay them £1 an acre.

Need one wonder that a deadlock in Native-land transactions in that part of the country occurred. The inevitable result arising from such a condition of things is that, if the Natives cannot sell to the purchaser prepared to give them a larger sum than the Government, they will not sell at all; and it will be observed that not even the Treaty of Waitangi itself, or any law passed by Parliament, assumed the power of compelling the Natives to alienate their land.