

265. *Mr. Mackay.*] Are you of opinion that the Judges of the four Native districts of the colony—Auckland, Poverty Bay, Wanganui, and Wellington—should be each confined to a circuit, as it were, within which he should reside, and not remove to any other?—I believe that that could be done if the Judges could be permanently appointed for each district. It would be a very good idea, but I do not believe it could be carried out, because the Chief Judge would be changing the other Judges about to hear and rehear various cases.

266. *Mr. Rees.*] That could be avoided by having a Court of Appeal—by having certain Judges to rehear cases, so as not to interfere with the ordinary Judges at all?—Yes; if what you suggest could be carried out it would get over the difficulty at once. The Judges for these four districts should be stationed there for two or three years, but no longer, as they might contract associations which would operate in a wrong direction.

AUCKLAND, 11TH MARCH, 1891.

LAURENCE MARSHALL GRACE sworn and examined.

267. *Mr. Rees* (having explained in detail the various subjects comprehended within the scope of the Commission, and upon which the fullest information was desired).] I would ask you first of all during what periods of your life have you had opportunities of acquiring knowledge in regard to the working of the Native Land Court, and the operation of the Native-land laws?—In answer to that I may say that I obtained a license to act as Native Interpreter—in 1872, I think it was. At that time I was connected with the firm of Mr. W. H. Kissling, solicitor. He had a very large amount of Native work, and it largely fell to my lot to attend to it. About 1874 I left the firm, and entered the Native Department, where I was engaged for three years as clerk and interpreter; and during this time also I had a good deal to do with Native lands. I was, too, sent up the Coast to act with Mr. Booth and the late Mr. John Young, afterwards Judge of the Native Land Court; and on another occasion I was sent up in the direction of Gisborne. After that I joined Messrs. Sheehan and Rees, in Napier; and subsequently I was connected with the Government as Native Land Agent in the Waikato for about a year, having been appointed by the Ministry of Sir George Grey. At the end of 1880 I was connected with the Patetere Land Company, being employed by them in their Native-land transactions; and also being employed in similar transactions by the Rotorua Company. That continued until the end of 1884, when all transactions in Native land were stopped. Practically I have done very little since that time. Of course you wished me to give you an idea of my connection with Native-land dealings?

268. Your answer has directly afforded me the information I desired to elicit, which was the means you have had of making yourself acquainted with these matters. You have been intimately connected with the Maoris, have you not, and, through personal knowledge of them, have been able to ascertain their feelings and wishes ever since you were a young child?—Yes, I have had a good deal of experience, and I have been able to form a very good idea of the feelings and wishes of the Natives on these matters.

269. Where are you residing now?—At Pukawa, on the western shore of Lake Taupo.

270. Are you ordinarily conversant with the minds of the Native chiefs and people through that district—the King-country?—Yes.

271. I suppose you know the whole of the principal chiefs personally?—Yes.

272. Are you aware that complications of a very serious nature have arisen in the form of disputes between Natives and Europeans in various parts of the North Island with regard to the titles to land?—Yes, I am aware of that, but more particularly I may say with regard to cases on the East Coast—not so much at Taupo: that is to say, in the interior. Since 1884 there have been very few land-transactions, but prior to that time any amount were carried out in that part of the Island.

273. Are you aware of cases in which the dealings themselves have been fair as between the Natives and Europeans, but in which technical irregularities have come to light, such as omissions in the signatures to the deeds, and so forth?—I cannot mention any particular case, but I am aware that such cases do occur.

274. Do you think that the Natives as a rule would object where the dealings have been fair between the Europeans and themselves—that where these technical irregularities exist they would object to such irregularities being overruled and rectified?—I think they would be quite willing to carry out such contracts, and to have them put on a legal footing.

275. Are you of opinion that the Natives desire, in cases where there are real disputes existing between them and the Europeans, to obtain a powerful Court for the purpose of finally settling all such disputes?—Certainly that would meet their wishes.

276. As regards the Native Land Court, do you think that, as at present constituted, it is satisfactory to the Natives?—I think it is; but I may say that in Taupo I have heard complaint made of the heavy fee that is charged, and of the length of time it takes to settle a case, and of the Natives being taken away from their homes. The people now in attendance on the Court sitting at Cambridge live on the western side of Lake Taupo, and have been dragged down all that way.

277. What is the distance?—A hundred miles; and they are now dependent upon Europeans for their food; and they were telling me the other day they were very badly off for food, having only a few potatoes and a little meat, although the people of Cambridge were doing their best for them. They complain of this sort of thing, and I have heard them say sometimes that they think a Native Committee composed of a number of the leading chiefs would do just as good work as the Court. Of course that is a statement from their own point of view, with which I do not quite agree, although I admit they might do a great deal in the preliminary work of ascertaining the true owners of the land.