

344. You purchased with the object of adding to your property in the district?—Yes: I have property there with a small frontage to the road, and I purchased in order to increase the area around my house at Pukewhau. I purchased from the Native owners the adjoining small blocks. I have purchased there Native land which is under memorial of ownership, but I am afraid to go on with the subdivision of it for fear of losing it in the process. In this last block there were forty-four Native owners, and the interests of forty-three of these owners I purchased. The forty-fourth man died, and fifteen successors to his share were appointed. I was then afraid to apply for the cutting-off my portion, lest the certificate should issue in the names of the forty-three Natives from whom I had bought.

345. You say, then, that from your knowledge of the present state of the law in regard to dealings with Native lands it is calculated not to do justice or to facilitate the passage of the land, but to work injustice?—Yes. I applied to the Native Land Court to take notice of my deeds of purchase, so that persons purchasing the fresh title issued to the Natives might be notified of my claim. The Court declined to do so.

346. Then you are confident that the present laws do not facilitate the passage of land from the Natives to Europeans, but that they have the contrary effect?—They are premiums on swindling. In fact, if they were made for the very purpose of facilitating swindling they could not be better devised for that end.

347. *Mr. Mackay.*] Do you know of your knowledge any case where Natives had entered into transactions regarding the disposal of land to Europeans, received money on account of it, and afterwards repudiated these transactions?—I understand perfectly that why they do not is just because they cannot. Of course, there may be informal arrangements with the Natives.

348. You do not know of your own knowledge that any one has acted dishonourably—received money on account of certain land-transactions, and then repudiated these transactions?—No.

349. *Mr. Rees.*] Have none of your Natives repudiated their transactions with you?—No.

OLIVER MASON CREAGH sworn and examined.

350. *Mr. Rees.*] What are you, Mr. Creagh?—An authorised surveyor.

351. Have you had any experience in the operation of the Native Land Courts, and of the operation of the Native Land Court laws?—In so far as my surveys went, and also in the purchase of Native lands in the Tauranga and Waikato districts.

352. Are you aware of your own knowledge whether or not the present state of the Native-land laws is favourable or inimical to settlement of the Native land?—I am sure it is not favourable. There is very much dissatisfaction with it through the great delays caused at the Court, and the fearful expense to those engaged.

353. Do you know of cases of Natives being drawn to the Court a long way from their places of residence?—Oh, yes! For instances I need not go beyond the King-country, where Natives have been taken away from their cultivations to attend the Court at Otorohanga, where it has been sitting continually for nearly two years. During that period Natives were called away for lengthened periods from distant places to attend that Court. They were brought from Tuhua, Mokau, and Kawhia, places forty or fifty miles away.

354. What provision have the Natives to make for their own sustenance when carried away such distances from their homes?—As best they can. They carry food with them. From Kawhia they used to pack fish and other food all the way to Otorohanga. Fifty or sixty of them would have packs with them. These men complained most bitterly of the inconvenience.

355. They complained not merely of the delays at the Court, but at their being dragged away so far from their homes at such an expense?—Yes.

356. Would that include the Native Land Court fees?—Yes; although it may be said that these fees are necessary to enable the Court to get through with its work.

357. Do the Natives object to the delays and adjournments of the Native Land Court?—They object generally to the great delay caused to them before they can get their titles. There seems to be general dissatisfaction among the Natives in that country with the whole dealing with their lands. They put a different value on their lands from what the Government do, and their idea, therefore, is free trade in Native land. They say that the Government virtually confiscate the land in only paying them 3s. an acre for it. They know that they can get £1 an acre from private parties. The land I am now engaged in surveying is very valuable, for instance—viz., Hangatika, Pukeroa, Kinehaka East, and Te Kuiti. It is all of limestone formation, and beautiful soil.

358. You say these are good lands?—Yes.

359. Are the lands along the line there fit for settlement if they were thrown open?—Certainly. I recommended that in my report to the Government.

360. If they were thrown open like Crown lands, and Crown titles were given, do you consider that they would support a considerable population?—I am unable to say; but you would have difficulty in getting the consent of the Natives.

361. Do you think, if there was a certainty of obtaining the title at a moderate expense, they would support a large population?—Certainly they would. I have stated that in my report to the Government. I feel so satisfied about it that I do believe that, if the Natives had free trade in their lands to-morrow, within two years they would not have an acre in their possession. In my capacity of surveyor I have had hundreds and hundreds of Europeans at me about the land, asking for information, and I know that the Natives are willing to deal with the Europeans if they could. Their great idea, however, is to lease. At the present time they have a thousand sheep in one place, and in another case a European contracts with the Natives to provide them with sheep to stock their land, and to allow them half the wool.