

362. Then, at present the land is being used in a rough kind of way by Europeans, they providing the Natives with sheep, and merely getting the usufruct of the land in return. They occupy the land in a species of partnership with the Natives?—Yes; they provide the sheep, and the Natives the land, and they allow the Natives a certain proportion of the produce.

363. *Mr. Mackay.*] Was it in that country that there was scab lately?—No. As a matter of fact sheep have only been there during the last two years. It was just when I commenced survey there that they began to get the sheep. They pay tremendously well, and that gives the Natives a good idea of the value of their land.

364. The Government have withdrawn that area from sale?—Yes. No person can deal with the land either by way of lease or purchase. It is under the Act. That is the only way in which people can deal with it—making these arrangements with the Natives.

365. They do not deal with the land at all, in fact—they deal with the sheep?—Yes.

366. *Mr. Rees.*] Now, coming back to the question of the future dealings with Native lands, do you think that, supposing a reasonable plan were submitted to the Natives by which for every block their own Committee should be appointed, and the people having determined how much they would reserve out of the block for themselves, the Committee, along with the Government officer, should lease the balance in proper terms for the owners' interest, and that the Government officer, along with the Committee, should be responsible for the due distribution of the moneys arising from the lease among all the people—do you think that a plan of that sort would be likely to find acceptance with them?—I am afraid not. I will give you my reason. You know that the tribe of Natives connected with these lands, and particularly with the Kinehaka Block (Mahuki's people), are strong believers in Te Whiti, and pay periodical visits to him, coming back imbued with his ideas. As a consequence, they do not wish the Government to have any power over their lands. Te Whiti appears to have a most extraordinary power over them. Whitinui and Hotu, head chiefs of the Kinehaka Tribe, made arrangements with me to have a subdivision of their block, so as to cut off a small portion for themselves with the view of selling all the balance to the Government, and they were arranging for this until these ideas got amongst them, but they are completely off the intention now.

367. I fully understand that, and the Commission will suggest to them a mode of dealing with their land that may prove satisfactory. They will suggest that they should appoint their own Committees, who will indicate what portions of the block—pieces here and there—they want reserved for the occupation and use of their own people, and that then the balance shall not be sold, but leased in such a method as to avoid expense. The expense connected with the getting of the Natives' signatures to the deeds would be saved by their agreeing to allow their own Committee, in conjunction with a Commissioner appointed not by the Government, but by Parliament, to see that the land was properly cut up and leased, and when the rents are received to see that the various owners obtain their fair share of it?—Are you aware that there are from three hundred to four hundred signatures required for every deed to such blocks?

368. We do not want these signatures. We propose to do away with the necessity for these Maori signatures. It will save a great deal of money if you can do so. There is no doubt whatever that in the future, unless they restrict the number of signatures to each deed, they will never get titles to their land, whether it is to be purchased or leased.

369. You think that the present individual signing of these deeds puts an end to settlement?—It will prohibit anything being done. It will take years and years to obtain the signatures to the blocks I have mentioned. Perhaps it may not be completed until long after we are both dead, and in the meantime the settlement of the country is retarded. It stops all dealings by private parties, because they never can get their title complete. Any amount of the owners live in Taranaki and Wellington. In fact, the Natives interested in these blocks put in the names of all sorts of people. I never saw such a complicated state of things. I think in some cases they do it purposely.

370. You are prepared to say, then, that the present system of dealing with Native land where it is held in large blocks by large numbers of owners is unsatisfactory, and that unless a few are chosen to act in a representative capacity by signing for the whole body, so as to give complete titles, there can be no real settlement?—Certainly that is my opinion; and I know it is the opinion of five-sixths of the whole of the people dealing in Native land. I have heard it expressed over and over again by the best experts, who know all about the subject.

371. Do you consider that, if representative signatures were sufficient to enable the Committee and the Government officer to give titles, the expenses connected with the giving of titles would be lessened?—Most undoubtedly it would lessen them. At present it means the employing of agents for years to obtain the necessary signatures. I know that in one case, in which Captain Mair was obtaining the title to the Kaingaroa Block, in the Maketu district, the incidental expenses came to more money than was required for the purchase of the land. Three hundred and sixty Natives were interested in it.

372. Is it fair to assume, from what you say, that by the plan I have mentioned not only would the expense connected with Native-land dealings be lessened, but that a perfect title would be more easily obtained?—Yes, distinctly so.

373. Then, too, the Natives would get more for their land—and the Europeans more for their money?—I do not know whether the Natives would get more for their land; it depends on what the Government would pay; but it would undoubtedly be acquired at greatly lessened expense.

374. Supposing the land were leased, would not the Natives get more of the rent-money if it did not go in these expenses?—Most certainly. The expenses would be much lessened in that way.

375. Or if it were sold, would it not also tell in the same way?—No; it depends on the price to be paid.