

463. Committees of chiefs to be chosen by themselves or by the Government. Do you think that if the owners of the block chose such a Committee, and that Committee acted in concert with an officer of the Government in each district to complete the titles, the Government to arrange the thing in public with the people, and the Committee along with the Commissioner to give titles, that it would work?—I think it might work. There is something I am about to suggest in that connection. It is this: First of all, that every Act whatever relating to Native land be repealed. The next thing is that the Native Minister and the four Native members of the House be left to themselves to draft a Bill enabling them to dispose of their lands on the perpetual-lease system—not by sale. That is very important. And, if possible—although it may be highly improbable—that such a Bill should be allowed to pass through Parliament without any amendment. That is my suggestion—to leave it to the Natives themselves and the Minister.

464. You suggest the absolute repeal of the existing Native laws, and the formation, with a fresh law, of an entirely new system of dealing with Native land—that is, by way of perpetual lease?—Yes. In that case, I suggest that the applicant for the lease survey himself his own individual piece. He may employ the Natives in doing so, and, just as in the early days, there would be no more disputes. It would follow the same system, and an allowance should be made in the rent for the survey. It will cost the colony nothing. Rents would then have to be paid, and they would be paid regularly.

465. Yes; it is a law to enable the Natives to recover for their rents?—As to your question about the Committee of chiefs nominated by the Natives and working with a Crown Commissioner, I think that method would work, but I prefer my own plan.

466. Do you think that the Natives generally regard the Native Land Court with disfavour or with favour?—With disfavour certainly. I have never heard one of them speak of it approvingly.

467. Do you think there would be any difficulty in leaving to the Natives themselves the settlement of tribal boundaries and the tribal ownership of large blocks? Would they not be able to settle such questions in their own way?—I think they would if they were given time, and were offered no encouragement to quarrel. At the present time there is great encouragement for tribes to quarrel. When a capitalist came from the other side or elsewhere, to purchase large blocks of land from a certain tribe, another tribe would hear of it, and the report would go about that So-and-so wanted to purchase 20,000 or 40,000 acres. Then they raked up all their old stories about their fathers and grandfathers and their tribal quarrels. That sort of thing removed, I believe the Natives would settle these matters amongst themselves in peace and quietness. Of course, you cannot altogether prevent quarrels among a fighting people like the Maoris. There is the recent case at Whangarei, where they were half-mad when the dispute culminated. My idea has always been to allow the Natives to settle their own disputes.

468. Is it your opinion that the present locking-up of Native lands is inimical to the welfare of the colony?—Yes.

469. *Mr. Mackay.*] That is to say, the difficulties connected with getting the land through the Court and the claims settled?—Yes. Some time ago Mr. Bryce, who is well acquainted with the subject, said that out of 10,000,000 or 11,000,000 acres of Native lands there were only 2,000,000 fit for agricultural purposes. I think Mr. Bryce might have added another 1,000,000 to that, and called it 3,000,000. Out of that 3,000,000 you have to leave enough for the support of 40,000 people.

470. If 1,000,000 acres were left for them?—Then there would be only 2,000,000 acres of Native land which Europeans would be desirous of purchasing for settlement; the rest would be mountain-tops and stony and broken land.

471. *Mr. Rees.*] The Natives on the East Coast have over 2,000,000 acres of first-rate pastoral country?—That is very likely.

472. I suppose you cannot form an idea of what quantity is fit for pastoral purposes?—No.

473. Are there not amongst the Native land tracts that are very valuable for mineral purposes? and I suppose there is splendid timber land?—Yes; the timbered country on the West Coast will be worth an immense sum in twenty years' time.

474. *Mr. Mackay.*] Have you considered the question of the Government having the right to lease such lands as the Natives can afford to lease without crippling themselves, sufficient reserves being made for their sustenance now and all time to come, the Government undertaking then to pay them a rent to be fixed by an expert and the Native owners themselves?—It is a good plan in my own point of view, but it is a bad plan for the Native character. It deprives the Native of his manhood, and reduces him to simply a landlord, who gets his living and has nothing else to do, and idleness is the most besetting sin of the Maoris. When he has got to look after his own interest he has something to do.

475. True; but then, having sufficient land reserved for them by their own choice for their cultivations, for their settlements, and for their burying-places and fishing-stations, all these being reserved for them absolutely, you see, not only would they have lands for their own sustenance, but they would also have a fixed rent divided equitably amongst them according to how their Committees would arrange, and this money would be paid to them regularly, according to the shares decided on in runanga, either half-yearly or yearly as might be considered best?—I should think it would act favourably for the settlement of the land.

476. They would be free, too, of the expense connected with the subdivision of reserves, surveys, and roading. You cannot expect the settlers of New Zealand of the present day to go into a country to settle where there is no road by which to find their way to it. The Government would then, of course, sub-lease this land to the European settlers?—I should be in favour of something of that kind.

477. It would simplify transactions in so far as the Native owners are concerned?—It would.

478. And then the land, having been leased in that way from the Native owners, could be dealt with in the same way as Crown lands, and be handed over to the administration of the Crown Lands Board in each district?—And would therefore be rateable.