

909. That leads up to what is practically the most important question of all—viz., as to the method to be adopted in future for the transfer of land from Natives to Europeans. Now, in answer to questions you have already pointed out that this is practically impossible if there are to be dealings with all the owners in a block—men, women and children?—Yes.

910. Do you think, if a plan were adopted by which a responsible body were set up like the board of directors for a company, or a Council for a borough or other corporate body, to act in a representative capacity and issue titles in the interests of all, that it would work?—I think you would find that it would not work.

911. Why not?—Because the Natives are so jealous of each other in respect of land proceedings.

912. Was that not the way in which the Natives conducted all their earlier dealings?—Very much in that way. They were not elective bodies. It was the chief of the hapu who sold the land, with the consent of the people. They are not the same people now.

913. Is that not owing to the laws?—I think not: it is owing to some great change in themselves.

914. Do you know of any other cause than that?—No, I cannot say that I do.

915. Supposing we could revert to the earlier system. Take this Cambridge district, for instance, and supposing Government Commissioners were appointed for it, and that in respect of every other block of land a Committee were appointed by their own chiefs, and they had to carry out Native-land dealings in concert with the Government Commissioners?—That has already been tried.

916. No; the Act to which you refer went to far in one way and not far enough in another?—I think any scheme such as that would practically shut up Native land; I do not think they would sell any land at all in that way. Of course this is only an opinion.

917. Do you think it would be valuable, supposing that Maori Committees were to act in concert with Boards which would be responsible to Parliament for the proper distribution of the money derived from the land? Would it be a more cheap and efficacious method of dealing with the land than the present mode?—I am not aware that the present laws require all the Natives interested in a block to sign the deeds.

918. *Mr. Mackay.*] In passing the title every person on the record of that title must sign?—If one-half or two-thirds of the signatures can be got you could apply for division.

919. *Mr. Rees.*] No; *Poaka v. Ward* is a case in point?—Surely, if a man has a freehold title he can do what he likes with it.

920. It is practically closed by the present state of the laws, as interpreted by the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. Supposing it could be done—supposing that representative bodies were appointed, under restrictions and safeguards for the due distribution of the moneys, the people themselves consenting, and also determining for themselves how much of the land they would sell or lease, as in the olden times, would that be more economical and simple than the system now in vogue?—I think, if they consented, it would be. I mean by that if they all consented.

921. Of course, there might be one or two dissentients here and there; but we need not pay attention to them, because if we did everything would be stopped. Supposing, if they consented, might not a reasonable scheme be worked out in that way which would be efficacious in giving titles economically?—I do not know about the efficacy of it. There are so many “ifs.”

922. It would be a statutory title at once, so that there would be no question about the goodness of the title?—There are so many “ifs” in the way that it would be doubtful. You will have an opportunity of sounding the Natives on that subject yourself.

923. I know from the Native mind that it would work. I feel persuaded that the present state of things would stimulate them in that direction. There is one other suggestion. It is a thing that has occurred to my mind for a long time past with regard to Native titles. In every case, if possible, the title should be inalienable until the land has been divided. I think, if the title could be individualised without incurring the enormous expense that is at present attendant upon that operation, it would cause the Natives to wish for individualisation of title. At present the cost of the surveys stops them from individualising?—Would that not destroy the very object in view—I mean, without these expensive surveys?

924. How could you individualise without surveys?—That is my difficulty. I think you could find some way to do it.

925. It is impossible. If you could get them to deal tribally, would that not accomplish the purpose of dividing the land cheaply and efficaciously?—Yes, if they assented.

926. Can you propose any other method by which it could be done—that is to say, a method by which land not required for their own cultivations could be utilised for their own benefit and the benefit of the Europeans?—I am afraid that it is an exceedingly difficult question. Of course, it has to be done entirely with their consent?

*Mr. Rees:* Yes.

*Mr. Mackay:* Expressed through their tribal representatives.

927. *Mr. Rees.*] And the runanga meetings?—Yes; these meetings are held to be most conclusive as regards their wishes. I think it has been held so by the Supreme Court. No; I do not see that I can offer any practical suggestion upon that point.

928. Do you think that, in the interest of the Natives, and of the community generally, the constant rehearings which are granted should be allowed?—I think not, as a rule, unless there is something very wrong with the first hearing; because a case on rehearing is entirely different from what it is on the first hearing. There has been an enormous amount of evidence invented in the meantime.

929. In your experience during the last ten or twelve years, has the Native Land Court—I will not say for what reason—increased in the rapidity and efficiency of its duties?—It certainly has