

1090. Have you seen tried the plan now in vogue with the Native Land Court of allowing agents to appear and conduct the cases? Does that advance the interests of the people?—I think that, except in very large cases, agents would not be wanted if an attempt at conciliation were made. The Court, too, might be a little more careful in the appointment of Assessors. Sufficient inquiry is not made as to their genealogy; and blood, you know, is always thicker than water with the Maoris. There seems to be a dearth of Judges who know the Native language and who have studied Native customs, and to a very great extent the lack of this knowledge throws them entirely upon the Assessors. The position of a man who presides in the Native Land Court without having a personal knowledge of the matters that are brought before him is extremely difficult. It is just like putting a civilian on the Supreme Court bench, and asking him to decide the case put before him.

1091. Then, in relation to the class of cases in which you state there are many titles imperilled by technical defects, and in respect of which there is no dispute as to these errors, you think it but just and right that these titles should be cleared?—I have always maintained that, if no Act is passed to validate these transactions, all our Land Transfer titles could be upset. According to recent decisions there is no Land Transfer title obtained since the Act of 1873 came into force that could not be upset. There is no security of tenure. I am in communication with a great many people who are willing to come here from Australia to take up land if I can but assure them that the Government are prepared to guarantee the title, and in every such case I am compelled to answer "No." But for this uncertainty we should have a very large quantity of land that is now lying euproductive in Native hands speedily taken up and settled upon. There are plenty of people such as I have mentioned who want to acquire farms of 100, 200 and 300 acres from the Natives for the purpose of *bona fide* settlement, but who cannot go to the expense of conducting large negotiations. In fact it is not worth while in the present state of things.

1092. Then, no law would be of use which did not vest all this land in the Crown?—It would not be fair towards some of the Natives, especially those who come in contact with Europeans—a very clever, sharp lot of Natives.

1093. I do not mean unoccupied Native land, but land in respect to which Crown grants and Land Transfer titles have been given, which would be imperilled by these technical defects?—They are supposed to be vested in the Crown or guaranteed by the Crown, I suppose, because the Crown granted them.

1094. They are not absolutely vested in the Crown, because the Crown has only changed the title deed?—Of course every individual tenure is but a Crown tenure.

1095. If the land be vested in the Crown there can be no question as to title unless fraud can be alleged, and where *scire facias* has been issued. Perhaps this is entering too largely into technical law. It is a question of policy for Parliament to determine?—There is one other point that should be attended to—that is the question of minors. Of course, we know as lawyers that no matter when a minor signs for land if it is shown that he is under twenty-one the transaction is not valid. Now, I maintain that there are thousands of minors who have signed, whose lands have passed away from them in consequence and who are not yet twenty-one. There ought to be a rule that if any person interested in a block of land be a minor the fact should appear in the certificate of title, together with the statement that he was so many years of age on the date that the Court issued it; because very few of the Maoris know the date, on which their children were born, although they know the year. There is nothing at present to prevent a minors after he has signed, or his children after his decease, from coming to the Supreme Court and upsetting a title, or obtaining so much compensation, by saying that he was under age when he signed. That is where there is a real danger.

1096. In view of all these things, do you think it would be better that the land should be dealt with tribally by a Maori Committee acting in concert with a Government Commissioner in each district, and that they should give title, like the board of directors acting for a corporate body?—I do not think you would satisfy the Natives: they have not confidence in each other, and resent direct control by the Government.

1097. But, supposing the Natives would be content with that, do you think it would be better in the interests of the public?—I do not think so. I do not think matters would be got through so quickly. I have seen every branch of the land-purchase system of the Government. One man who is personally interested in getting the title through will push the matter far more quickly than will the ordinary Government official acquiring land for the Crown.

1098. That is not my question. This is the question: Taking, for instance, a block of 200,000 acres of land in the King-country, where we are now going, and with 500 owners to it, would it not be better in the interests of the public for reserves to be made for the Natives out of that block, and that the balance should then be thrown open in a manner analogous to that in which Crown lands are thrown open, but that it should be done in the interests of the Natives? Of course the title should be ascertained first, but we would not have the Native signatures?—Then some—in fact, a large number—of the Natives might, and I am certain would, object to their land being dealt with in that way. There are a large number of half-castes—the Hettits, Hugheses, and Ormsbys, for instance—and those closely allied to them, who know as much about dealing with land as you or I do, and they certainly would object. Then, too, the Government would be selling this land as against the large estates which the Crown now holds. Naturally, any Government official would consider that his first duty was to try to dispose of the Government land, and he would take advantage of any demand there was for land by giving the preference to such as the Crown had for sale.

1099. But, supposing it were not left in the hands of the Government at all, but placed in the hands of a Board appointed partly by the Natives themselves and partly appointed by the Government?—I saw the Rotorua Committee working, and it gave dissatisfaction. The Natives had no