

and at Whakatane, 20 miles further on. In fact, at the request of the Natives there, I drafted a petition for them to the General Assembly. The Court, without in any way completing its work, had been shifted from Opotiki to Whakatane, and from there to Maketu, further on, and therefore a more inconvenient place for all attending the Court.

1223. You drafted for the Natives a petition in relation to this method of shifting about from place to place, and the delay and annoyance it caused?—I did.

1224. Do the Natives make any other complaints concerning the operation of the Native Land Court?—Yes; they complain of the holding of the Court at stores and public-houses. There is general complaint on that score.

1225. Taking away the people from their homes and cultivations to distant places, I suppose?—The desire of the Natives has been, and is, to hold the Court, in the Native settlements.

1226. Near the lands to be adjudicated upon?—Yes. But they are nearly always opened at stores and public-houses. I have known no sitting in the north that was not held in an hotel or its vicinity. Judge Maning held one in his own house at Onoke, which he adjourned from a public-house at Mongonui—a distance of over 60 miles—where there were not roads. But since his time there has been no such sitting, so far as my recollection serves me just now.

1227. Do you think that the Native Land Court has improved in its operation since you first became cognisant of its operation, or has it not improved?—I do not think I would be justified in giving an opinion upon that, but I know that the position of the Natives has not improved through the operation of the Native Land Court.

1228. The Natives have lost the land, and have lost the proceeds of it?—They lose the land through having to stop near public-houses and stores. The first Court held at Hokianga lasted three months, during which time the Natives were kept hanging about the place, and, although they were paid £13,000 for their land, they went away without the money. That is to say, they lost the money and lost the land, and were worse off therefore than when the Court began. I myself gave them a great deal of credit at the time, and have not been paid yet.

1229. Then, has the present system of dealing with the Natives in regard to their lands generally such a result, as far as you know?—As far as my knowledge goes, certainly.

1230. That they lose both their land and their money?—Yes. Their horses too, are worse, their saddles are gone, and their fences are down when they get home again, and if floods come they are literally ruined.

1231. And I suppose their morals do not improve in consequence of their attendance at these Land Courts?—They could not, sir.

1232. I suppose they contract drinking habits and demoralisation of all sorts?—That is so.

1233. Now, do you consider that the Native Committees, and public meetings and runangas of the Natives, could in many cases settle the tribal and hapu boundaries?—Yes; I know of cases in which they have done it. In 1879 I bought a block of land of 6,000 acres at Otawa, and I paid a good deal of the purchase-money in advance, and got Mr. Percy Smith to appoint a surveyor (Mr. Harding), who went down and commenced the survey. The party began cutting the lines on Monday morning, and at dinner-time, when they went to get their dinner, another party of Natives came, and four men were shot dead and four others wounded. Of course under such circumstances the survey did not go on. I now have a letter in my pocket stating that the trouble has been arranged amongst themselves; that the land has, moreover, been surveyed, and is open for sale now.

1234. When was that?—In 1879. I brought the matter under the notice of the House of Representatives when Mr. Bryce was Native Minister; but as there was a murder in Nelson requiring his attention, he said that as soon as he could get away he would go up North and settle this other matter of which I have been speaking. But he never did, and the Natives settled the whole affair themselves. I have their letter now, and I have communicated on the subject with the Hon. the Native Minister, Mr. Cadman, who is willing to buy the land on behalf of the Government.

1235. From your knowledge of the Natives, do you consider that without this cumbrous and slowly-moving procedure connected with the examination of Natives in the Native Land Court, the Natives themselves, if they met in public meeting, with somebody to direct their deliberations, would settle the tribal and hapu boundaries peaceably amongst themselves?—Yes, they have done it at Whangape, and in that other instance at Otawa, where the four were shot dead and four wounded. Marsh Brown collected the Natives together, and got them to arrange the whole matter satisfactorily.

1236. Is that Marsh Brown Kawiti, of whom you now speak?—Yes; in that instance the Natives elected a Committee of their own, and had the whole matter satisfactorily arranged. It was the same at Whangape in respect of a large block of 22,000 acres.

1237. *Mr. Mackay.*] Is that the block that Mr. Calcutt had to do with?—Yes; he got a lease of the timber rights over it.

1238. *Mr. Rees.*] Then, in relation to dealings with the Native land, do you consider that this system of every man, woman, and child having to sign the deeds in cases where there is a large number of owners is a good system?—It is not, because it leaves the land practically valueless both for the Natives themselves and for the purchasers also. There is a case in point of a block of 2,000 acres of valuable land at Motuwera, in the Hokianga district, which, if subdivided, would give each individual owner about four acres, and bush land especially is not worth the cost of the registration deeds.

1239. Nor the cost of the survey?—It cannot be done. They have not the money where-with to defray the cost of individualising the boundaries. It involves any amount of trouble; while the expenditure of money that is entailed runs away with the entire value of the land. The Natives themselves know that it is an injudicious proceeding; but the reason why it was done in the case to which I have referred was that the Natives wished to establish their rights to the franchise, and the thing was done solely for that purpose.