

community. If we contrast for a moment the Native Land Court and the Native-land laws with our own Courts, and our laws with respect to difficulties arising between Europeans, and the dealings with our own titles, we shall see at once that, as regards the former, all the experience of past years, and all the experience which we can gain from the working of English tribunals, is completely put on one side and lost, and that, instead, we have a tribunal set up and regulations made by a sort of rule-of-thumb, and in the manner in which the investigations are carried on, all accepted rules for managing judicial investigations are completely disregarded. I feel strongly that these continual amendments of the Native-land laws, instead of removing the evils that those laws have produced, really create more evils than they remove. I say this with the full consciousness of the fact that as a member of the House of Representatives I have been connected with such legislation; and I repeat that although these Amendment Acts were passed for the avowed purpose and with the intention of doing good to the Maoris and Europeans, yet each successive Act, instead of doing good, has only created greater confusion, and probably produced greater evils than existed before. Although of course this is a question of policy, I hope it will not be deemed impertinent in me to say that it does seem to me that the Native lands ought to be, as quickly as the financial part of the question will permit, acquired by the Crown, with the exception only of such reserves as the Natives are already settled on, or are suited to be settled on, by the Natives for the purposes of residence and cultivation. I do not think that, taking as an example the West Coast Settlement Reserves, and then estimating that under new management they may be managed so as to give much greater satisfaction to the Natives and Europeans than at present, it can ever be satisfactory to the Natives or the European settlers to have land-owners of a particular race who will for all time be landlords, and that must be the case if these lands are to be held for years in trust for the Natives, and if the Natives are not to be allowed to sell under proper supervision. On the other hand, it cannot at the same time be satisfactory from a colonial point of view that private individuals should be enabled to step in and obtain large tracts of land at what, after all, must be frequently only a nominal value. It seems to me therefore, in the interest of the State and in the interest of the Maoris, that these lands should be acquired by the Crown by some means, and dealt with by the Crown as a part of the landed estate of the colony for the good of all, and not merely for the advantage of the few. There is another argument which seems to me also to apply to the necessity of doing this, and that is, if it is not done, there will always be the distinct interest of the tenant of Native land as against that of the owner of Native land. You have found, or will find in the course of your investigations in this district, and some of you already know—and this is a cause of great irritation between the Maoris and the tenants of West Coast Settlement Reserves—how of late years political pressure of the strongest description has been going on, and notably during the progress of a general election, to prevail upon the representatives who rule this colony and make its laws to from time to time change the terms of the leases, to the detriment of the Maori owners. Whilst not wishing to express any opinion as to whether these changes are fair or otherwise, I must say that it cannot serve the ends of justice that the question of changing the terms of any arrangement that may from time to time be entered into between landlord and tenant should be made the subject of political influences, especially at election times. I think, also, that it would be very desirable indeed that these lands should not be left permanently as special lands held by Native owners and occupied by European tenants. I do not think it would be in place for me to suggest means by which possible funds might be obtained on the security of the lands themselves for acquiring these lands, and by which the payment of some annual sum of money should be made until they could be disposed of, and the proceeds either paid to the Natives, or to those of them who were able to manage their own affairs and who were not likely to dissipate these funds, or invested for others in other settlements especially suited to them, where they could cultivate the land and settle with their families. It will doubtless have suggested itself to yourselves, and to those who have to do with these matters, that some sort of arrangement like that would be possible. I should like to add, that wherever the interest of the individual to whom the Courts find from time to time there belongs Native land of any considerable extent—we will say 100 acres and upwards—I do think that full individualisation should take place as quickly as possible,—individualisation in the fullest sense, and not merely in the restricted sense in which I have previously used the word. There are large blocks of Native land in respect to which I am satisfied that through the interests of the Natives not being individualised they sell to anybody, because they are left without any idea of what they are selling, or what their interest in the land is worth. A man wishing to obtain land—I speak from recent experience in acting for the Natives—goes and finds a certain number of Natives—we will say from thirty to forty—who have been found to be the true owners of that land, and then he goes to the man who is the highest in the hapu, or who has the most influence, and makes a bargain for the purchase of that land for a certain sum, and that man frequently agrees to get the other owners to sign the necessary agreement to sell. The others are scattered throughout the district, or even in other parts of the colony, and are communicated with one by one, and are bargained with in an off-hand and jocular manner. Each man signs his name as he is got hold of, and very frequently he does not know at all what his interest is: whether he has got a couple of acres in the block or a couple of hundred; and when the matter comes before the Court to inquire into the transaction, the Maoris are not present, and the representations are not such as represent fairly the negotiations that have taken place. I do not think that any dealings between Europeans and Maoris for the sale of lands belonging to the latter should be recognised unless the Maoris thoroughly understand what are the interests that they have individually got, and what it is they are selling. They should clearly know that they are parting with so many acres of land, and that they are to receive for them so much money. Subject to this, I would submit with respect to land vested in the Natives and which is not required for their support freedom of contract should be secured as far as possible. Subject, of course, to every