

might not. The question would arise with the tenant whether somebody might not outbid him for the sake of the improvements.

1363. What amount of rent falls due every year to the Natives?—That is a question which I can only answer by making a very rough guess. I should say from £10,000 to £12,000.

1364. That is distributed amongst how many?—That is a question I can hardly answer. But, approximately, I might say between three and four thousand. Of course I may be out considerably. Owing to the uncertainty of the confirmed leases at present, the tenants pay no rent for some half years, and then, again, pay up a full year's rent; hence, so far as these particular leases are concerned, the income is not regular. With regard to the Public Trustee's leases, however, the payment of rent is regular, and we know the amount.

1365. We will take, then, the Public Trustee's leases as an example. The rent from them would amount to how much?—I could not say positively.

1366. Just roughly, then?—I can ascertain pretty accurately by examining my books.

1367. That is, the amount paid to the Public Trustee?—Yes. I can give it you to-morrow by asking how much has been paid on an average to the Public Trustee during the last three years, or by going through my books.

1368. What is the procedure? The rent is paid to the Public Trustee, and he pays it to you for distribution?—I collect all the rents, and pay the money in to the Public Trustee's Account. If there be only one or two Natives to share in it at the end of the month, I generally get the money for them; but if there are a good number of Natives, and several leases over one block, the money is left for six months, and is then divided. The Public Trustee prepares pay-lists and sends them to me, and I pay to the Native owners their shares.

1369. What are the deductions?—At present $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. I can give you an idea of how the thing works by taking the case of one list lately sent me, containing the names of 200 Natives. They have £500 coming to them. It has been withheld for some three months, owing to the land being partitioned, and we did not know where the allocation lay until the land had been properly surveyed. That is now complete, and we have £484 to divide among 200 people. That is especially good land. It is the Hapotiki Block, near Hawera.

1370. What would be the average—£2 odd an owner?—Somewhere about that in this instance.

1371. I suppose some of the Natives receiving that are also entitled to lands in other blocks?—Yes. The highest share in this particular division-list would be £11 19s. 4d., and the lowest about 16s. 3d.

1372. I suppose this is one cause of the objections on the part of the Natives—delay in paying the rent after it has become due?—They imagine there is delay, but there is practically none. Of course it is not the same as if the European tenant came and said, "Here is your money." In the old days it had only to be paid to one man, but now it has to be spread over so many. One man pays as rent £2 12s. 6d., and to divide this small sum among 200 people would cost far more than the rent itself, so that where exactly the same Natives are interested in more than one lease, such as, say, twelve leases on a tribal grant, the division of rent takes place half-yearly, instead of as each small sum is paid in. It costs just as much to divide a small sum as a large one in these cases.

Major CHARLES BROWN, examined.

1373. *Mr. Rees.*] I will just read over, Major Brown, for the information of Mr. Carroll, the letter which you handed to me:—"New Plymouth, 13th April, 1891. SIR,—I have the honour, at the request of Te Waero, Tairoroma, and other Natives interested, to bring under the notice of the Hon. the Native Minister the unsatisfactory state of the Te Ngaere Block. I may explain that the Natives have looked to me in this matter through my having been the Civil Commissioner and present at the time that the block passed the Native Land Court. His Honour Judge Heaphy presided, and strongly urged the owners not to add any other names to those of Hone Pihama and Tukarangatai in the memorial of ownership, as this would greatly simplify all dealings with the block by lease or otherwise, and they would have to rely on the honour of Hone Pihama and Tukarangatai to act as trustees for them; and his wishes were acceded to. For years Hone Pihama and Tukarangatai have drawn the rent and handed it to Te Whiti, against the wishes of the greater portion of the owners. Hone Pihama having died, the owners attempted to get their names in as successors to Hone Pihama; Judge Puckey refused to deal with it unless they came to some arrangement, which Hone Pihama's brother, Patohe, refused to do. Lately the question came before their Honours Judges Trimble and Clendon, when Mr. Sinclair, solicitor, stated that an arrangement had been agreed to that would satisfy all parties, but that it had not yet been signed. The Judges having nothing before them but the fact that Hone Pihama left three daughters, made an order in their favour. When Hone Pihama was alive he had one leg (as Assessor) in the Government boot, and the other leg in Te Whiti's canoe. As things now stand, the three daughters are wholly in Te Whiti's canoe, and will not therefore appear in a Native Land Court or sign anything relating to land, for the rent or anything else; they are supposed to do justice to the other members of the tribe, but not by signing any paper. Under these circumstances the Natives interested pray that the Government may take such steps as will enable the block to be reheard *ab initio*, and such order be made as the Native Land Court may deem just on the evidence. I have the honour to remain, your obedient servant, CHAS. BROWN.—The Under-Secretary, Native Office, Wellington." Have you any reply to this letter?—No, not yet. I thought it might be handed to the Commission. The Natives petitioned the House of Representatives, but, as they had not the means to attend themselves, the petition does not appear to have been dealt with. At any rate they heard nothing more about it. I have written on two or three occasions; and the Natives brought the matter before the Native Land Court, to be dealt with under the Equitable Owners Act; but Judge Wilson said it did not apply. It only applied to certain memorials issued under the Act of 1865.