

1520. In respect of those reserves you have mentioned and known, covered by much the same circumstances, would not the expense of getting the deeds signed swallow up the whole value of the proceeds?—It is a very serious element indeed in the purchasing of Native property. I think the Natives have to pay a good deal of this expense themselves; that is to say—the land passes from them at a trifling price.

1521. Because of these expenses that they have to pay?—Yes. But, even then, I think that many Europeans who dabble in these transactions get dragged reluctantly on and on until they find it cheaper to finish the affair than lose altogether what they have already spent. I think that many of them go in for Native-land purchases with no conception when they begin their negotiations of the cost and trouble that will assuredly be entailed upon them. I had a remarkable instance of this under my notice a very little while ago. I should scarcely care to mention names, however.

1522. You need not mention names if you can vouch for the facts?—It was simply this: A certain person was negotiating for the lease of a considerable block of land from the Natives, and the rental he agreed to give amounted to a considerable sum. As a Justice of the Peace, witnessing the signatures of the Natives, I said to the man, “You will have a pretty figure to pay as duty to the Government for this.” “What for?” he said. I told him that he would have to pay 10 per cent. duty for the full term of the lease in one payment. He was very irate at the idea, and could not see it at all; but this certainly was an element of the affair that he evidently had not calculated upon.

1523. Now, do you think that a system by which the Natives should be enabled to deal as a whole through some appointed body, like the burgesses of a borough or the shareholders of a joint-stock company, would be practicable?—I think that any system whereby the Natives might deal through a Board, or through the chairman of the Board—like the burgesses of a borough deal through their Council or Mayor—would at once simplify proceedings materially.

1524. Do you know whether there is much land in this district held by the Natives?—I do not know about this district—speaking of Palmerston—for my head-quarters are at Wanganui; but there must of necessity be a large amount of Native land still in Native hands throughout the northern part of the district.

1525. *Mr. Mackay.*] That is, the Wanganui district?—Yes, and up the coast as well.

1526. That is, behind the confiscated territory?—Yes; there is a very large area of land there.

1527. Do you think that the settlement of this part of the Island is being retarded through the Native lands not being opened up?—Enormously so. The Government have land in the same locality, purchased by them and Crown-granted, which they themselves do not throw open.

1528. Purchased from the Natives, you mean?—I presume so. It is Crown land, at any rate.

1529. Can you say whether there would be any demand for land if available land were thrown open?—I think there would be a practically unlimited demand. I may say that, as a land agent, I have very numerous inquiries made to me for land. Scarcely a day passes but two or three inquiries are made; and I have made it my business to endeavour to push on the settlement of the Crown lands not for any emolument that is likely to accrue to me thereby, but simply because I know that it would be productive of great good to the district in which I live, and, as a consequence, to the colony at large. Every tract of virgin land that is taken up for *bona fide* settlement of necessity adds to the wealth of the district. I have been the means of inducing settlers to take up some thousand acres of Crown lands which were lying waste and unproductive, and which are now being cleared and considerably improved.

1530. *Mr. Rees.*] And you think that, if a simple method of dealing in Native land were substituted for the present system, the settlement of the country would be advanced at a much more rapid rate?—Undoubtedly. At present the young men living about and around the various settlements cannot take up land for themselves; for, in order to settle upon it, they must have capital with which to clear the land of the bush. The greater bulk of the land in the district of which Wanganui is the centre is good land, and there never was a time when there was so much money in the district as there is now. But there is no outlet for it, and it cannot therefore be invested. I am agent for a good many people possessed of money with which they do not know what to do. In fact, there is a constant cry of the lack of a field for the investment of this accumulated capital. The impetus given to the advancement of the country, if we had a ready method of acquiring Native land, would be enormous.

1531. Would you like to suggest anything more, Mr. Liffiton?—No; except that I may express my opinion that the principle at which you seem to be aiming is really capital. I think, however, that you are likely to have some trouble with the details.

1532. In working with the Natives alone in respect of these land-dealings—is that what you mean?—Yes.

1533. We are very much obliged to you, Mr. Liffiton, for your evidence. Every fresh idea or statement that we get is something material in arriving at definite conclusions. There is a little difference between the various opinions that we elicit, as of course must be expected, but it all tends in the same direction.

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NAPIER, 1ST MAY, 1891.

Captain GEORGE AUGUSTUS PREECE examined.

1534. *Mr. Rees.*] You are the Resident Magistrate of this district, are you not?—Yes, and also Native Agent for the Government, as well as Trust Commissioner.

1535. How long have you had any experience of the working of the Native Land Court, and of dealings in respect of Native lands?—Since 1875 continuously.

1536. In what districts?—In the Opotiki and Tauranga districts and in the Poverty Bay and Napier districts.