1537. Have you been conversant at all during that time with the method of dealing for the alienation of Native lands?—Yes.

1538. That is to say, leasing, selling, and mortgaging?—Yes.

1539. And you have also been conversant with the actual interior working of the Native Land Court?—I have seen a great deal of it.

1540. Do you consider the system at present in vogue of holding Courts in distant places from the land that is being adjudicated upon, and where the people dwell, is advantageous to the Natives?—I think it is very disadvantageous to them.

1541. In what way?—I should hold the Courts as near as possible to the localities in which are situated the lands that are passing through the Court, and I should have well-defined districts for the various Courts. Let each Court travel regularly right through its particular district, and let the presiding Judge in each instance be confined to his district, for by changing him you lose the benefit of the local knowledge he has gained in previous cases. I would add that the Natives are very often placed at a great disadvantage through the Courts being held at distant places, as their old men, who have the Native-land custom at their fingers' ends, cannot travel to these places, whereas the younger men can travel, and very often get an advantage over the old men in this way.

1542. Are you aware at all that a system has grown up among the Natives of taking into Court regularly-concocted stories alleging titles to lands that really do not belong to them?—I have heard of it from the Natives.

1543. Do you consider that the present system of exacting large fees from the different parties in the Court is fair or advisable?—I think the costs should be made as light as possible to the Natives, and that they should be encouraged in every possible way to put their lands through the Court, and that the system of administration pursued by the Court should be altered to a certain extent.

1544. In what direction?—I should make the Natives conduct their own cases, and not allow Native-land agents to appear at all, giving the Judge discretionary power to do away with them, excepting in cases of sickness and so on—that is to say, in cases where it is impossible the individual claimant can conduct his own case, either through sickness or through inability. I think the proceedings of the Court would be considerably shortened if this plan were adopted.

1545. Has not a new profession—that of Native-land agents—sprung up of late years?—Yes, and they have practically taken the position of solicitors in the Court.

1546. Is any training exacted from them?—None that I am aware of.

1547. Or any examination?—No. They pay a license-fee to the Chief Judge.

1548. *Mr. Mackay.*] Five pounds, is it not?—Yes.

1549. *Mr. Rees.*] Do you think that the system of employing Native-land agents is advantageous to the Maoris?—I do not. I think, however, that the system is largely on the increase, and that the cost of putting the Native land through the Court has considerably increased in consequence.

1550. Is it part of your experience that applications for rehearings, and rehearings, have been on the increase for the last ten years?—Yes, very largely on the increase. I may say that such a number of rehearings is granted now that scarcely a case comes before the Court in which there are not several applications for rehearings—not merely one application.

1551. In your experience, Captain Preece, is the system which has been in operation since 1873 of making every individual owner appear on the title to a block and sign every lease or conveyance—men, women, and children alike—in the interest of the Maori race?—I think it would be very difficult to alter that now.

1552. That is no answer. I will put the case of a block for which there are 150 owners, and I ask you is it possible to get a lease if all these 150 signatures are to be obtained to it?—It is almost impossible to get such a lease, or, if you do succeed in getting it, the cost of the operation amounts almost to the value of the land.

1553. *Mr. Mackay.*] And that also applies to the case of a purchase of Native land?—Yes. The cost of either of these transactions is far in excess of what it should be. The Natives suffer in consequence of this excessive cost, as they get a smaller price, or a smaller amount of rent, as the case may be, owing to this expense of obtaining a title.

1554. In your experience, is not the title, even when so obtained, very liable to be attacked?—Very liable indeed.

1555. *Mr. Rees.*] Is the system pursued by the Native Land Court of granting adjournments and postponements advantageous to the Natives?—I think not, excepting where the adjournments take place when the cases are first called upon, for the purpose of affording opportunity for some settlement between the parties concerned.

1556. It is only, then, when they are made with a view to amicable settlements, that you consider they are advantageous?—Yes.

1557. Can you state, as a matter of fact coming within your own knowledge, that very often in these cases the Natives settle their tribal and hapu boundaries by agreement among themselves? In former years they used to do so, but latterly they have not done so.

1558. In former years, then, this sort of settlement prevailed more than it does now?—Yes.

1559. Then, can you state from memory, and by a comparison of present times with the past, whether the procedure of the Native Land Court has improved in efficiency or deteriorated?—I think it has deteriorated considerably within the past twelve or fourteen years. Formerly the Natives conducted their own cases, and there was no question of law for the Judges to consider. They had simply to consider questions of Native custom, and decide accordingly. Now a system has grown up of employing Native agents, who act and practise as advocates for the Natives. They go in for long cross-examinations, which was never the custom formerly.