

1560. Under the modern system, and running contemporaneously with this deterioration of the Native Land Court, can you say whether the character of the Natives themselves, as they appear in the Court, has improved or deteriorated?—It has deteriorated very much, as some of them show a great disregard now for the truth. All their aim seems to be to try and make up a case that will beat the other side, and attain whatever ends they may have proposed to themselves.

1561. Are you aware of the existence of any cases of dispute as to titles between Natives and Europeans? Are you aware that there are such cases?—Not in this district. I know of disputes as to titles, and incomplete titles, but not in this district.

1562. Do you think it would be wise to establish a Commission or Court which should have full power to finally decide all such cases?—I think it would be very advisable. I think that the Court should have power to inquire into all such disputes, and to finally decide them on equitable grounds, giving then an absolute title.

1563. That would be for the public interest?—I think it would be for the public interest.

1564. Now, from what you know of the Natives in this district and in Ōpotiki, do you think that a person like yourself, knowing their habits and customs, would find much difficulty in meeting with the Natives in public, and getting them to talk among themselves, with the view of fixing their tribal and hapu boundaries?—I think that there would be difficulty in that way; but I think that the Court should encourage the Natives in settling the preliminaries of their cases before bringing them into Court. I think that would help the Court very much, and that they might take into Court a report of the points they had agreed upon. They should proceed with the settlement as far as they could, and then, if any disputed points remained, they could be brought into Court for settlement.

1565. Do you know of any cases, whether of original investigation or of subdivision, in respect of which the Natives have been put to great expense for maintenance and payment of fees?—Yes; very great expense is entailed upon Natives who are brought from long distances—as, for instance, Wairoa or Nuhaka—in connection with cases which are advertised to be heard before the Court sitting at Waipawa or Hastings, without any idea in their minds as to when these cases will be called on, or as to what cases would be taken first; and perhaps when they appear at the Court they learn for the first time that their particular cases will not be called on for two or three months, and perhaps will not be taken by that Court at all.

1566. And thus their time and outlay of money go for nothing?—Yes.

1567. You have known of such cases?—Yes.

1568. They are not uncommon?—No. A long list of cases is published—sufficient, perhaps, to keep the Court engaged for months—and perhaps a lengthy case of original investigation will be commenced while several other cases have to wait their turn, the Natives interested in which are all in attendance; and all the time, trouble, and expenditure of money which this involves are wasted. That would not take place if well-defined districts were formed, and that the Judge of each district should simply gazette what he would be able to get through within a specified time.

1569. Especially if he could go as near as possible to the land to be adjudicated upon?—Yes.

1570. Do you think it would facilitate a settlement of the tribal and hapu boundaries if the Judge could go upon the land, see the old people upon the land, and settle the boundaries in that way?—Very largely, and it would prevent the Maoris from making false statements—swearing to things which do not exist. In fact, it would stop false swearing to a great extent.

1571. Do you think it would be an advisable thing for the Natives to set aside substantial reserves of land for the education of their children?—I think it would be a good thing if they would do it. But I may say that there is rather a feeling against setting apart land for the education of the children amongst the Natives.

1572. You think it would be advisable if they could be brought to do it?—I think it would.

1573. In relation to the case of large blocks, especially when situated amid rough country—not rich land like that immediately around Napier—and when such blocks are held by large numbers of Native owners, do you think it would be a good thing for the owners to choose Committees from amongst themselves to take out their reserves, letting the balance of the land be cut up for settlement, titles to be given on their behalf by some one appointed by the Government?—I think they would be too suspicious.

1574. I do not mean that. Do you think it would be advisable if it could be done?—Yes, it would be advisable if it could be done; for there is no doubt it would facilitate the acquisition of the land.

1575. It would give good titles?—Yes.

1576. And at much less cost?—Yes, much less.

1577. It would cost much less, and the European who wished to take up land would not be harassed by litigation?—Just so. At the same time I think the Natives would be opposed to that, because they cannot trust themselves.

1578. That is not our own experience. The Natives would want a Government officer appointed to assist them in the conduct of these land-transactions. You are the Government official here. Now, supposing there was a large block of Native land to be dealt with, and you were chairman of the Committee, and that the Government would be responsible for your due distribution of the proceeds, do you not think that it would be of advantage?—Oh! I think if it were carried out it would be very much to the advantage of the Natives, the Europeans, and the public generally.

1579. So far as you can speak from the knowledge derived from acting as Trust Commissioner in this district, would you say there is any considerable amount of land being alienated for the purposes of settlement at the present time?—There is a fair amount—that is to say, in large blocks, but practically nothing in small blocks.