

private parties, because there were more people competing for the land ; but the difficulty of getting the Native owners together at one time, in order to obtain their signatures, renders it almost impossible under the present Acts to complete a title.

1723. Then, you consider that there would be far more dealings if a simpler system were adopted?—Certainly.

1724. And the settlement of the country would progress more rapidly?—Certainly, especially if you do away with the oppressive stamp duty of 10 per cent., and with the plan of making people pay this duty at the outset on twenty-one years' rent, if twenty-one years should happen to be the term of the lease. I know a gentleman who had to pay £1,700 in stamp duty on two half-interests.

1725. And he would not be certain of his title even after that?—No, he would not be certain.

1726. *Mr. Carroll.*] Do the Natives see at the present time that it would be to their special benefit if all their lands were under lease or were being dealt with?—Most decidedly ; and a great many of them are very anxious to see it brought about. I know of several blocks the Native owners of which are very anxious to lease or dispose of the land ; but these difficulties stand in the way, and people will not take the land up under the present system.

1727. *Mr. Rees.*] They are afraid to do so. One lawyer told us this morning that he would not advise his clients to take up Native land under the present system?—The stamp duty, too, is in the way.

1728. *Mr. Carroll.*] Besides, it is almost physically impossible to get a complete title, in view of the number of owners in a block of Native land.

1729. *Mr. Rees.*] Do you think it better to amend the present law or to sweep it entirely away?—By all means sweep it away, for it has got so full of patches that it will not hold together. There is no doubt it is dreadful. It is certainly quite unworkable.

1730. You think that if a simpler method were brought into operation, cheaper to the Maoris and more effectual to the Europeans, there would be no difficulty in having the whole of the Maori lands thrown open, excepting, of course, what they wanted for their own use?—No, none whatever. These fees that they have to pay at present are very hard on the Natives. There ought to be some way of assisting them. There is the cost of the original investigation, and then there is the cost of the subdivision as well, so that they are paying doubly in respect of the same land.

1731. And then, there is the cost of the rehearing?—Yes, there is also the cost of the rehearing. I feel for the Natives ; and I think we ought to try and bring in an Act that, at any rate, would simplify matters, so that the Maoris should not be put to the expenses that they now are subjected to in dealing with their lands.

1732. *Mr. Carroll.*] I suppose, in some instances very nearly the whole value of the land is eaten up by the expenses the Natives are put to in attending the Native Land Court, and in respect of all these other charges?—There is no doubt that a great portion of the value of their lands is swallowed up by these expenses.

1733. You would recommend a reduction of the fees that are charged the Natives in the Native Land Court?—Certainly.

1734. You recommend the reduction of the fees and the simplification of matters as much as possible?—Yes. In the Waikato a block of land passed through the Court and did not pay the agent's fee, and the Native owners had therefore to sell another block in order to liquidate the agent's fee. That took place in the Waikato during the time that Mr. Bryce was Native Minister. That is when he stopped all agents from appearing in Court in connection with these matters.

1735. That was supposed to be the cause of his action in that respect?—Yes. No doubt, in the case of many of these blocks that have passed through the Court, if the Natives had taken a note of their expenses it would be found that more than half the entire value of the land had gone in payment of the expenses. The rest goes to the Natives who carry on the case.

1736. Do you think that the colony ought to be parcelled into one or more districts?—I was going to say : Let the Island be formed into districts for Native purposes, and for every district let a Judge be appointed. Let him keep moving about his district throughout the year, and if there are twenty succession orders to be heard at one place let him go and hear them. At present it is a common occurrence for a Native to apply to succeed a deceased person, and that by the time the application is gazetted the applicant is dead himself. Two or three years usually elapse before the application is heard, in consequence of the amount of work thrown upon the Court by the Act of 1873 ; whereas, if this Island were parcelled out into districts, and a Judge was appointed for each of these districts, who should visit each part of it within the twelve months, hearing all the applications that the Natives resident there had to make, it would simplify matters very much, and, no doubt, the business of the Court would be much more rapidly advanced than it is being done at the present time.

1737. You say that such Judge should keep his Court moving throughout the entire year?—Yes ; within his particular district.

1738. Do you think it would be more satisfactory if the Native Land Courts were more movable than they are now?—Certainly.

1739. Their investigations should be carried on as near as possible to the lands that were being adjudicated on?—Yes. The want of this practice is another great objection to the present system. The Judge should have power to fix the sittings of the Court at whatever place he pleased, with the object of meeting the convenience of the Natives concerned in any matter that was coming before him. It is now a subject of great grievance with the Natives that they are put to considerable expense on this account. We have had experience of that at Wairoa, from which place Natives came here fruitlessly, and really through mistakes that appeared in the notification