

1757. In the first instance?—Yes; and I was also permitted to have the assistance of Mr. C. O. Davis, who was the interpreter for them, and matters were progressing slowly; but the Government altered its policy, and I received a letter from Mr. Ormond, as the then Government agent, that I might go on, but that it would be necessary to withdraw Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Davis. Of course, after this it was perfectly hopeless to expect that I could advise my clients to attempt to go on with the transaction. I know the late Sir Donald McLean and Mr. Ormond, who was Superintendent of the Province of Hawke's Bay at the time, quite agreed with me that it was a disaster for the country that these wealthy men, who had been over the ground themselves, should not be able to lease this land, for it had been their intention to take it for a term of twenty-one or thirty-three years. If I am correctly informed, the titles to this land are not completed yet.

1758. How many years ago was this?—It would be nineteen years ago.

1759. If they had completed the lease the term would have been pretty nearly up by this time, and the land would be improved?—Yes.

1760. I would ask you, generally, do you believe that money would be invested and that settlement would advance on Native land if the title could be made simple and certain?—Most clearly so. Unfortunately, the Native agents levy blackmail. Many of these Native agents are scoundrels, who just live and exist by litigation. I have seen one of the most honourable Native chiefs, and an honourable gentleman, who was from the South, disturbed by these agents.

1761. Do you think that such a method of dealing with Native land should be brought into existence as would put it beyond the power of these agents to interfere?—Yes.

1762. There are most honourable and straightforward men amongst the Natives?—Yes. There are, too, people who take advantage of the present position of the Native land laws to interfere between the Natives and Europeans for the purpose of levying blackmail before they will allow any transactions to be completed. In calling them "agents" I was probably wrong. They are not recognised agents, although some of them are called agents.

1763. You say, however, that this is a fact, and that it exercises a deleterious influence in that way?—Yes.

1764. Can you state, in relation to many cases in Hawke's Bay, that people have had to pay very heavily in order to complete Native-land titles?—Very heavily indeed.

1765. Owing to the state of the law?—Yes.

1776. Can you state whether or not people have found very great difficulty and trouble in completing their title, owing to the state of the law?—Yes. That is, in fact, the very reason why there are no transactions now, to speak of, in connection with Native land, and there are men here who cannot get settled on the land that they have dealt for. Their titles were dubious when I came here, and they have not been fixed up yet.

1767. That is, during the last seventeen or eighteen years?—During the last twenty years. In fact, so far as the Native-land laws are concerned, I think that the whole of them should be swept away, and that some new and simpler method of encouraging the Natives to lease or sell their lands to Europeans should be tried.

1768. And so promote the settlement of the country?—Yes.

1769. Does this state of things which you have represented to us cause dissatisfaction in the public mind?—Very much so; especially amongst those who wish to deal in respect of this land. And then there are many men settled on land the titles to which are not clear, and they cannot, in consequence, get money wherewith to improve these lands. While things remain as they are the whole settlement of the country is kept back. If I might suggest any course to you—

1770. Certainly?—Then, I would say that such a course as I heard you mention just now to Mr. Hamlin—some simple and direct method of dealing with the Natives like that—would answer the purpose, authorising the Government agent or representative to act in concert with the Natives. I think it would give confidence to all parties.

1771. Then you were present when Mr. Hamlin was being examined?—Yes.

1772. Do you think, with him, that, in regard to the present difficulties as to the Native title, a strong Court should be formed to settle these matters finally, and that in respect of future dealings there should be some prompt and certain method of dealing?—I quite agree with Mr. Hamlin. It seems to me that there should be a clear, straightforward way of doing these things. It would increase the production of the North Island, at all events, and it would increase prodigiously the settlement of our lands. New Zealand lands are sought for, and some of the best of the lands at this moment are still in the hands of the Natives.

1773. And untouchable?—Yes. I can mention one block of land by way of illustration. Fifteen years ago I was authorised by a gentleman from Christchurch to offer the Natives a liberal rental for a lease of a certain area, as I understood that they would not sell. It was a block of over 1,600 acres. I was authorised to offer a rental of 5s. an acre for the first seven years, 10s. an acre for the next seven years, and £1 an acre for the concluding portion of a term of twenty-one years. The transaction could not be carried out, and—would you believe it!—that land is a wilderness at the present moment; and this took place fifteen years ago.

1774. *Mr. Mackay.*] It must be good land, nevertheless?—Yes.

1775. *Mr. Rees.*] You believe it has never been improved?—Yes. It is situated in the Wairoa district, and is rich and beautiful land. I can assure you that that gentleman represented a lot of farmers who would have followed his example; and he was a grain-merchant himself. I can give you his name in confidence. He saw the lands. However, he is still a grain-dealer in Christchurch.

1776. That land might now have been yielding a revenue to the country and an income to the Native owners, besides being of advantage in the production of large crops and in the employment of labour?—Yes. And the best wheat in New Zealand is grown in that district. In fact, what led up to the contemplated transaction in the first instance was my sending to Christchurch some samples of the wheat grown in that district. The wheat there has the heaviest ears and produces the largest yield in the world.