

of that sort, comprising 991 owners, would—even if you made the machinery of distribution the simplest possible compatible with the securing of accuracy and proper check—cost more than the amount to be distributed would justify. And that, I fear, is the difficulty that will have to be met in any general leasing of Native lands. An idea has occurred to my mind as to how it could best be met, and it would be something like this, assuming, of course, that it was land fit for leasing: If the Maoris would consent to give up their land to be leased, having reserves made from it sufficient for their occupation and maintenance, these being in intermingled blocks—which reserves would really be the most valuable part of the consideration, because the general progress of settlement in the neighbourhood would largely increase the value of the blocks they held—and if they were content to leave the rent to accumulate so as to be divided only when it was worth dividing, then a scheme of leasing might be workable. But no scheme that anticipates the distribution annually through a Maori Committee, or in any other form, of the rent derived from general unimproved Maori land, unless the rent was far away in excess of the value of the land, would realise, I think, an amount that would be in any way satisfactory to the Maoris. It would appear, in point of fact, that in many cases where the rent has to be distributed among a large number of owners many of the individual proportions are really hardly worth receiving. I may explain that, not anticipating having to give any opinion on the subject I have just mentioned, the opinion I have given I only submit because I have been asked for it. I do not profess to offer it as evidence, but simply in answer to your question, for whatever you may consider it to be worth.

2105. That must show that the Natives have very little or no land on the West Coast?—On the West Coast a great deal of the Native land is not let at all. I would go further than that, and say that in my opinion, if the Natives could be got to see it, the best system for themselves would be to dispose of their surplus lands, retaining reserves—not too large reserves, but sufficient reserves for themselves. We will suppose, for instance, that the system adopted by the New Zealand Company had been carried out implicitly—that the Natives had retained 10 per cent. of all the lands they had sold in New Zealand—the Natives in New Zealand at the present day would be the wealthiest community, perhaps, in the world.

2106. You would make them simply annuitants, instead of sellers or lessees?—No; on the contrary, I would, by bringing settlement into their districts, make their lands of such value that, together with the example thus before them of profitable occupation, they would very soon assimilate their ways to those of their European neighbours, and become sheep-farmers and agriculturists themselves in the same way as Europeans, more especially as the Maoris are practically cultivators of the soil. Obviously it is not for the advantage of the Maoris that large tracts of land like those in the Waikato district, for example, should remain locked up and unproductive; and if they sold, say, one-half, or even three-quarters of their land, the Crown would immediately open it up for settlement, and the land retained by the Maoris for themselves would be worth much more in money-value than the whole of it is at present, and it would be increasing in value every year. My impression is that the Maoris, if their lands are opened up in this way, would very speedily assimilate their manners and customs, their modes of living and clothing themselves, to those of their European neighbours, and that they would hold their properties individually. And when they do this they will also commence to increase in numbers. That is my very strong opinion, because I have myself noticed frequently that, where the Maori is living and cultivating the land apart and separate from other Natives, after the manner of European settlers, he has a large, and, in some cases that I have known, an unusually large, family. I have one case in my mind, which came under my notice a few years ago, of a Maori man and his wife living in the Wangaeu Valley who had a family of thirteen children. I think this is a very interesting instance to illustrate how they can live and multiply when they are not living communistically.

2107. That communistic habit is dying out and breaking up now among the Maoris, and we have to anticipate, therefore, the future for them. We must not legislate merely for the present time, or simply for the conditions that may obtain now?—Undoubtedly.

Mr. HUGH OWEN examined.

2108. *Mr. Rees.*] What are you, Mr. Owen?—I am a mining agent, and reside at Nelson.

2109. We understand that you desire to make a statement to us in relation to Native lands?—Yes, that is my wish. I desire to refer more particularly to lands at the Mokau, in respect of which A. Owen has been petitioning since 1887. First of all, I would like to draw your attention to a letter from the Hon. the Native Minister to Judge Smith, containing a request for his report upon the Mokau lands generally. I had a short interview with the Native Minister on Monday, the 11th instant, relative to his obtaining from Judge Smith a report with respect to Mokau lands generally. There has been no reply, Judge Smith having been away, and the Minister anticipates getting a reply as soon as he is back. I have turned up the original plan of the Rohe Potae, and I now produce it. [Government plan, printed in September, 1884, and showing the Rohe Potae and the land included in the schedule to the Native Lands Alienation Restriction Act of 1884, produced.] Here is the *Kahiti* of the 1st July, 1886, which describes this land. [Copy of *Kahiti* produced.] There is no corresponding *Gazette* in English. A subsequent plan of this land has been issued in connection with the North Island Main Trunk Railway scheme, but no law has ever removed the original position. Here is a copy of the Native Lands Alienation Restriction Act of 1884, which shows the schedule connected with this land. [Act produced.]

2110. You say, then, that there has been no Act of the General Assembly altering the boundaries of this land?—Altering the position of this land, no. Only a subsequent plan in connection with the North Island Main Trunk Railway has been issued.

2111. But no Act of Parliament altering the Native Lands Alienation Restriction Act of 1884 and the schedules attached to that Act?—No.

2112. Are you aware of any lands having been surveyed since that time in defiance of this Act?—Yes, certainly, at Mokau at the present time. I refer to the Mangapapa Block.