

its object to individualise Native title, except so far as to determine tribal rights and boundaries of blocks: after that the work of the Court is practically a dead-letter. I know of no instance where a block of land has been subdivided into allotments showing each owner's portion. Use is, of course, made of the Court by land-purchasers who have acquired shares, and I am quite aware that in many instances portions of blocks have been acquired; but, as to the remainder of the block, belonging to the non-sellers, no individual allotment has ever been made, and, except that the land is no longer under the Treaty of Waitangi, the land is held in block by the owners. I also consider the system of Native-land purchase is degrading both to buyer and seller, and I regret I cannot make exception in favour of the Government. Since public opinion has been enlightened on these matters, mainly owing to the number of cases brought under review of the Supreme Court, the system is doomed, and the question is, what system except such as I have presented to the Commission is to take its place.

2257. I may tell you that the irresistible conclusion which the Commissioners have arrived at, after seeing and hearing both Europeans and Natives—and I use the term “irresistible” advisedly—is, that the principle which you have there laid down must be carried out—that is to say, the corporate action of the many in respect of their lands, for the individual dealings of the Maori have been the root of all the evil; therefore the evil must be dealt with in that way. The details of our plan I am not at liberty to state; they are somewhat different from yours. Nor do we propose to put the whole of the Maori estates in a “pool,” as it were. We propose that a separate account shall be kept in respect of each large block, getting the Natives interested therein to define their interests, and, if they do not do that, leaving the duty to another body—that is most important, although there may be some slight dispute.

2258. On the principle of dealing with the land as if it were for absolute sale?—Of course I am putting myself in the position of adviser to these people. I have thought it my duty, in drafting this measure, to see that there is no complication after they have parted with their lands for the benefit of the colony—not merely for the special benefit of the Maoris, but for the benefit of the Europeans—I consider it my duty to see that there is no complication in the division of the money. If they have, in dividing the money, to determine first of all who has a right to it, it will simply be put into Chancery. I have told them that, if they refuse to agree to an equal distribution of the money, that then it will be locked up, and remain in dispute. I ask the Commissioners to try and help me in that direction. I am willing to assist the Government in every way possible to get the Maori lands opened up for the use of the public, but it is my duty to see that the revenue from the Maori estate is available for distribution and free from all complication. As far as the Ngapuhi are concerned you can deal with them as one united tribe.

2259. They have very little land left?—Then, there are the Arawas.

2260. They have not much good land; but when you go to the East Coast, to the Natives of the Ngatiporou and Ngatikahungunu Tribes, they would be likely to oppose that mode of administration?—I suppose you will have a return showing what proportion of land each tribe has.

2261. What we shall try to do will be in the same general direction that you have gone, although the details may be different. We want the lands thrown open for profitable settlement on the one hand, and for the advantage of the Maoris on the other hand?—And the division of the money without complication.

2262. I do not anticipate much difficulty about that. We have put it to the Natives very strongly and straightforwardly. We do not anticipate either complication or delay?—I think there should be a periodical distribution of the money.

Mr. Rees: We think that also, and it should commence when the money falls in.

2263. Mr. Mackay.] And that it should not all go into one hotchpot. Each tribe and hapu shall have its own money distributed among its own members?—There are many tribes and hapus that overlap.

2264. Mr. Rees.] In that case there must be some arrangement. We desire to have a reserve force behind sufficient to carry out operations, though we want the Natives in the first instance to take the initiative themselves. The reserve force will be utilised when they will not come to an arbitrary and amicable arrangement amongst themselves?—If this were supported by the legislation which I have indicated it would carry all the Natives behind it. Those for whom I speak, and for whom I speak with authority—I am quite certain there is no difficulty; and the influence of these will influence the whole. Sydney Taiwhanga would not have a separate fund for each, nor a separate mode of treatment. He said, “Are we not all Maoris, and should we not therefore act together?” His idea was that they should not go into it unless they all brought their lands into hotchpot. I feel pretty certain that they will agree to it as a whole, but if they get the idea that certain sections and portions of them are to keep their rights and possessions separate from the others, then there will be the same difficulty in acting as in the past. I earnestly ask the Commissioners to try and pool the whole of the Maori lands, and deal with them *in globo*. That is what is wanted—one law for the whole, and not separate laws for particular tribes and hapus. So long as they have a voice in the management they would be quite satisfied to hand over their lands for profitable settlement. That brings me to another subject I wish to speak about, and that is the Thermal Springs Act, and as to the leasing of those lands at Rotorua by the Government. It has been proposed, I understand, that the Maori lands might be taken over by the Government on a system of a sort of perpetual lease, the Government accounting to the Maoris for the revenues arising therefrom. That experiment has been tried under the Thermal Springs Act, and found to be absolutely wanting—in fact, a perfect failure. To give the Commission an idea of the state of things, I may mention that 600,000 acres were brought under the operation of that Act, and the only portion of these 600,000 acres that has been dealt with is 3,200 acres forming the Township of Rotorua. That is the whole extent that the Government has dealt with. The Government certainly brought that portion of the estate into the market under flying colours. These first leases that were sold brought a rental of £2,740 per annum. Under Government management, in three