

any further arrangement in connection with those lands and the Bank of New Zealand or the Estates Company. I told them that I had quite enough on my hands in connection with my private business at the time, and that they ought to select some one else. However, they insisted on my representing them, and as I was their Native member of the district at that time I could not very well refuse. But I made it a condition that Mr. Wi Pere—whom many of them charged with having been responsible for their troubles, but who really had been working in what he thought to be their best interests—I made it a condition that he should be associated with me in the guardianship of their affairs, otherwise I would have nothing to do with it. I did not want to take the whole responsibility on my own shoulders. Well, that condition was agreed to. Then, Mr. Wi Pere and I went to Auckland. We remained there for two or three months before the necessary documents were drafted. Accounts had to be gone into, and here also a lot of time and trouble took place, because these accounts ran back for years. At any rate, after we had been about three months in Auckland the necessary documents were signed. All these properties were then conveyed to Mr. Wi Pere and myself, as trustees for all the Natives interested in all the land that had been dealt with by the New Zealand Native Land Settlement Company. We were to act on their behalf, and the Bank of New Zealand and the Estates Company had to look to us as representing the Natives. We obtained an extension of five years, as I have mentioned. We came back to Gisborne. For a year or two we managed the best way we could to administer those properties. We had no means of finance, and there was a heavy task imposed upon us, as the land required stocking and working in order to produce any revenue. About the end of the year I know I was about £500 or so out of pocket personally. We could get no one to finance us at that time, and we could not allow things to hang; so we had to pledge ourselves here and there for the necessary costs to carry on the work with which we had been intrusted. We had to carry on this work without any commission, fee, or reward. We had to do what we could to help things along in the best way for the benefit of the Natives. I made one or two attempts to be relieved of the responsibility of the trust, but I was told by legal authorities that I could not retire from the trust: I had got into that position, and I would have to stick there. This, of course, applied to Mr. Wi Pere as well as to myself. Well, we had then to arrange with the Estates Company to carry on the working of these lands; the company to submit accounts to us every six months, showing the expenditure and profits. There was a condition in the agreement of 1892, when we took over these properties, that any lands the old company had advanced money upon we would acquire the titles thereto, or some equivalent, and thus improve the security we pledged to the Estates Company. We were pledged to do the best we could not only for the purpose of improving or enhancing the security which was given by us to the Bank of New Zealand or the Estates Company, but also in the interests of those Natives for whom we were trustees. We had to consider those who had lost their lands as well as those whose lands were withdrawn from the sale. Prior to this several attempts had been made by the Legislature to improve the condition of the titles on the East Coast. The Atkinson Government had brought down an Act to set up a Commission to inquire into the titles on the East Coast, and, when it deemed fit, to validate such titles as were entitled to validation. The Act, I think, was very improperly drawn—at any rate, there was some hitch in it, for there was nothing effectually done. Judge Edwards—the present Judge of the Supreme Court—was appointed Commissioner under that Act. For several weeks he sat in Gisborne, and went into the question of these defective titles; but, though the result of his labours was nil, at the same time he made some very strong recommendations in respect to these titles and the desirability of having them set right. Something in this Act—I am not lawyer enough to say what it was—prevented Commissioner Edwards from giving thorough effect to his investigations. Then this evil—the question of defective titles on the East Coast—became more pronounced than ever. In 1893, after Commissioner Edwards's time, further legislation was passed. However, it did not result in very much, except to confirm the investigations that he had made. The judgments that he had given on the investigations made by him were also confirmed by subsequent legislation, but it went only so far as to deal with matters actually dealt with by Commissioner Edwards. In 1893 the Legislature decided to pass an Act with more ample powers, so that the questions involving these large blocks might be dealt with once and for all, and be determined. I will read to you the preamble of the Act of 1893, which will give you some idea as to the condition of titles on the East Coast, and the necessity for dealing with them:—

“Whereas Europeans have for years past held possession of lands claimed by them under alleged purchases and leases from Natives entitled to lands under statutes now repealed, and whose right to lease or sell such lands was regulated by the provisions of such repealed statutes:

“And whereas Europeans have also for some years past claimed to be entitled to lands or undivided shares in lands alleged to have been purchased or leased from Natives entitled as aforesaid:

“And whereas the said alleged agreements, purchases, and leases are incapable of being enforced, either because of some repealed statutory prohibition against the making of such purchases or leases, or because, although not forbidden, they were made not in conformity with the requirements of such statutes, or were rendered invalid through some irregularity or informality, or by reason of some unlawful act of omission or commission by the Native Land Court or some other Court:

“And whereas it is notorious that many Europeans were by various means enabled to obtain indefeasible Land Transfer titles notwithstanding such statutory prohibitions, irregularities, illegalities, omissions, or commissions, while other Europeans similarly situated as to their titles have been hindered and prevented from obtaining similar indefeasible titles, notwithstanding the repeal of the prohibitory enactments aforesaid:

“And whereas Natives allege that they have been and still are deprived of the possession of their lands by Europeans, who profess to hold them under leases or sales to them, and said Natives complain that no Court with sufficient jurisdiction for the redress of their grievances is practically open to them:

“And whereas all these persons complain with justice that the statutes in force from time to time respecting Native lands have been cumbersome and conflicting, and sometimes contradictory in their provisions, so that obedience to them has been always difficult and sometimes impossible:

“And whereas it would be a scandal that such a state of things should be allowed to continue to the public detriment, and it is therefore expedient that a special Court should be constituted, endowed with sufficient powers and jurisdiction to deal with and settle finally all conflicting interests, disputes, and claims of right and ownership in the said lands, and all claims, debts, and demands whatsoever arising out of the said transactions, or out of the occupation of the said lands, or out of any of the wrongs and grievances hereinbefore mentioned: