

The indirect benefit to both settlers and Natives through the office management is apparent. In some of these grants two or three hundred Natives are interested. The difficulties in the way of an intending settler wishing to deal with the Natives would in many cases be very great.

First, the owners and the trustees for the numerous infants would have to be found, and all induced to sign the lease. Interpreters' and Native Land Court fees would have to be paid. Having obtained a lease, the tenant would have much trouble in paying the rents. In all probability some of the Natives who signed the lease would be dead, and he would then have to seek the successors. All these obstacles, delays, disbursements, and risks of error would have to be taken into consideration by him when calculating his expenses, and the rent offered would be less accordingly.

Under the present system a lease is obtained from the Public Trustee without any trouble. Even the preparation of the necessary documents is done at the office. The advantages to the settler of having to deal only with a Government official who prepares all necessary instruments, gives a tenure guaranteed by statute, and relieves him from all responsibility regarding the distribution of rents must be obvious. If settlers had to deal with the numerous owners direct, many of the grants would not be settled at all, and those that were could not produce nearly as much rent as they do now. A glance at the Native reserves in Taranaki not under control of the Public Trust Office will convince any unbiassed person of the advantages that accrue from the office administration. Many such reserves, although of splendid land and immediately adjoining good roads, are unoccupied, and covered with furze and noxious weeds.

An agitation is being started by the lessees of these reserves to get the freehold of the land comprised in their leases. The lessees will argue that the perpetual lease dispossesses the Natives permanently, and if the amount representing the value of the land be invested for them a greater income than at present received will be assured to them for all time, so that their interests will be safeguarded. The Natives, however, place a higher value on mana than on mere income, and to do as the lessees ask would be regarded as a gross breach of faith by them. They have been assured in the most solemn manner that these reserves would be theirs, and their children's heritage for ever. To violate these promises would, I fear, have a disastrous effect on the Native mind. The agitation should therefore be discouraged.

I have, &c.,

J. W. POYNTON,
Public Trustee.

The Right Hon. the Colonial Treasurer.
