

tant, in my opinion, when all the Natives of New Zealand will be united as one man in their attachment to the Queen's throne. I believe that even Tawhiao himself has come round to acknowledge the supremacy of the Queen. We may differ on many questions, but there is great hope for us if we can agree on the one question of loyalty and patriotism. Then, again, I take it that your friendly sentiments towards the Government and myself have been created by services which you acknowledge we have rendered to the Native people. We have had great difficulties to encounter, but I am sure that you will all admit that during our tenure of office we have made an earnest attempt to reconcile the different interests amongst the Native people, and to make them feel that the institutions and Government of the country exist for them as well as for the Europeans. I state sincerely that it has been my earnest desire to make the laws so acceptable to the Native people that they could come under them as one man. I know that the land question is the greatest of all questions to the Maoris, and it is right that we should discuss that question fully. Now, I believe that no laws should be made affecting the Native people without being in the first instance brought before them, so that they might discuss them and say whether they would be for their benefit or not. The time was when laws were made by the Europeans for the Native people—and I believe that the intentions of the Europeans in so making those laws were good—but I say this, that no laws can be satisfactory unless, before being embodied in the law, they be approved by the Natives themselves. It was for that reason that I had a copy of the Native Land Bill circulated amongst the Maoris last session before it was submitted to Parliament, and now I have come before you to discuss that Bill in all its parts, and to ask your opinion upon it. Reference has been made to an old custom, observed by the late Sir Donald McLean, of visiting the Natives in their various settlements. I think it a good and wholesome custom, and so long as I have the honour to be Native Minister I shall try to follow that example. It has been said by an English writer that this is the age of discussion, but the age of discussion existed with the Maori people even before it existed amongst the English people. The Natives never came to any great resolution without having thoroughly discussed it, and, in my opinion, that custom of discussing great questions relating to their welfare accounts for the high intelligence of the Native people, which is admitted by every writer and thinker. Well, now this is really a Maori custom that I am trying to observe. I wish to discuss thoroughly amongst ourselves every measure which it is intended to introduce into Parliament which may affect the Native race. I have now only to repeat that it has given me great pleasure to meet you here on this occasion. I thank you once more for the kindly sentiments you have expressed, and I wish you all a happy new year.

*Henare Matua* : I am not addressing myself to the Native Minister, but wish to speak to the Natives. I wish to express my gratification at what the Minister has said, and his promise that the Maoris should be allowed an opportunity of discussing all questions in which they are interested. This is the first time that this opportunity has been afforded us. I wish to express my loyalty to the Queen, and my gratification to the Native Minister and to all the members of his Government. He is the Native Minister in reality, and not only in name. [Song.] Long life to the Queen and to the Native Minister, and may the words you have spoken live for ever.

*Hoani Meihana te Rangiotu* : I also wish to express my gratification to the Native Minister for having come here. I am speaking on behalf of Rangitane.

The meeting was then adjourned to the 5th January.

On reassembling, *Renata Kawepo* said : I wish to greet you, Mr. Ballance, for having responded to our invitation to come here and meet us. I now ask you to make a speech and explain your sentiments to us. We have been discussing the Bill for the last two days, and have not yet come to any conclusion. That is why we are anxious to learn your views on the subject.

*Hon. Mr. Ballance* : My friends, the Native people, I have first of all to thank you for your very cordial greeting. I responded willingly to the invitation to meet you, because I think it the duty of the Native Minister, in matters of great importance, to take the Native people into his confidence. Renata has said that you have not yet arrived at a conclusion with regard to the Bill. It is true that it is not a small matter, as Renata says, because it affects your land, and I am not surprised that you have not yet arrived at a conclusion upon so great a subject. Let me first of all explain what the history of this Bill is. In 1884 the question arose whether the Government were going to bring in some Bill to deal with Native lands. We replied that we were going to bring in such a Bill—that we would bring in a Bill in the following session dealing with the question; and the reason we made the promise was this: we were aware, from the expression of opinion on the part of the Natives in all parts of New Zealand, that the present state of the law affecting their lands was not satisfactory. The session passed over, and during the recess I visited various tribes at their own settlements. I regret that I was not able to visit all, but I visited as many as time permitted. Now, wherever I went I explained the principles of the Bill which we intended to introduce; and I may say that generally they were favourable to the principles. I promised to circulate the Bill before the session. Since the Government agreed upon the Bill I had it circulated. We asked the various Government agents throughout New Zealand to explain to the people the principles and provisions of the Bill. We received from various chiefs in different parts of the colony letters and telegrams respecting the measure. Some of these were favourable to the Bill, and some were not favourable. I read these letters to the House, and explained from whom they came, and I stated then, what I believe is true, that the great preponderance of opinion was undoubtedly favourable to the measure. However, when the Bill was introduced I found that some of your members were not favourable to it in all its parts. And here let me say that the whole of the Native members took the keenest possible interest in the measure. They spent a great deal of time in considering its provisions, and suggested a very large number of amendments. They also informed me that they did not think that justice would be done to the Bill in the House, and, in order that the Bill might be fully considered, I agreed to refer it to the Native Affairs Committee, the four Maori members being on this Committee. When the Bill was before the Committee we summoned witnesses, and took a great deal of evidence. In fact, I may say that