

Ngaiterangi, of Thames, separate Committees, so that there will be more tribal Committees to perform functions within the tribes. I will now refer to the Native Land Laws Consolidation Bill. That Bill professed to be a bringing together of the laws relating to Native land on the Statute-book. I am inclined to agree with Tomoana that a Bill of that kind should not contain validating clauses, validating titles which were imperfect. Of course, I agree that, where titles were obtained by drink, the Legislature should be very chary in touching those titles at all. I, for one, would not be a party to do anything which would tend to make titles of that kind perfect. But there are titles of a different character, flaws in which have arisen perhaps from some error in the Court or machinery, and these, I think, in all fairness should be validated. But I do not think that validating clauses are related to a Bill of that character, and it is my intention to take them out. With regard to that Bill I quite agree that the Natives should be in possession of the Consolidation Bill, just as much as in possession of the Native Land Disposition Bill. I will have that Bill also circulated during the recess. I hope that, if any objections are made to any of the clauses of that Bill, I may be informed of them as soon as possible. There is just one thing I should like to say before I come to the Bill under consideration, and it is this: It has been said that the Bill giving the power to ten persons to deal with the land was a very wrong measure, and it has also been said that every Bill that has been passed has been worse in the interests of the Native people; but I cannot agree with that, because this Bill putting in the ten persons was one of the first that was passed, and, if that Bill had not been repealed, in my opinion there would have been no land belonging to the Native people to-day—it would have all passed from them long since. Now I have to say that I am very glad of the result at which the meeting generally has arrived with regard to this present Bill, the so-called Native Land Disposition Bill, because I think that a great many of their objections are exceedingly reasonable, and that the course taken has been a very intelligent one, and, in my opinion, a very moderate one. Now, first of all, with regard to title. I do not attach much importance to that. There is very little in a name, and it would not signify much to the Native people whether it is called by this or by any other name; but I am quite prepared to accept the amendment proposed by the meeting. My difficulty is to get a short title that would be expressive. We might call it "The Native Land Bill," or "The Native Land Protection Bill," but at any rate I accept the opinion of the meeting, and if they can think of any name that will meet their views I shall be very happy to adopt it. In the meantime I will agree to call it the Native Land Bill, and explain that it is a Bill to bring prosperity to the Native race, or a Bill for the protection of Native lands. In regard to proposition No. 2, I agree to that; as I stated yesterday, I agree to abolish the Boards, so that is agreed upon. With regard to the Commissioners, I understand that the meeting wishes the district Committees to be brought in. I do not at present know whether they can be brought in, except, perhaps, in connection with proposition No. 6. However, if I can bring them in and make them useful, of course I shall do so. I have not studied the various ways in which they can be brought in. They had the power to select one member on the Board, but now that the Boards are abolished I must have time to consider how they can be made useful. Of course the Committees of the blocks are the main principle of the Bill, because they represent the owners of the land, and of course we are all agreed to retain them. I will now notice a remark made by Mr. Carroll yesterday—I do not know whether he was expressing the opinion of the meeting—that when the number was under eight there should be no Committee at all. Well, of course, when it comes down to one, I think that he should be his own Committee and manage his own land, and when the number is less than eight we might carry out Mr. Carroll's view with benefit, by subdividing the lands, so that each one would hold his own share. At present, of course, if the number is less than eight, the majority forms the Committee. I recognize that there is great force in Mr. Carroll's proposal, and I intend to give it serious consideration. Proposition 4 is that the Public Trustee is not to be introduced into the Bill. I have no particular liking for the Public Trustee being introduced into the Bill. In other matters I know that he has given me a good deal of trouble. I do not refer to the man, of course—I refer to the office; and I shall make other arrangements, and leave the Public Trustee out. Therefore I agree to No. 4. Now, with regard to the 5-per-cent. commission. I listened with great attention to what Mr. Carroll said on the subject yesterday. It is quite true that Native lands pay a very heavy duty in the 10 per cent. and in the duties under the Rating Act; but what Parliament would say would be this: that this money is for a different object, that it is a duty paid by the land for the title which is given to the land by the Courts of the colony. For it is well known that the fees of the Native Land Court do not pay the whole of the expenses of the Court. I do not agree with the rating, as I have told you, and I hope it will be repealed. I refer to rates upon land before it has passed the Court. I think, however, that you ought to agree to this reasonable amount, the 5 per cent. upon the land. I therefore differ from the conclusion at which the Committee have arrived upon that point, and I think that Parliament will expect that there shall be something paid for the management of your business, whether 5 per cent. or less. If you look at the amount which you pay for the management of your business, in any department you like, you will see that a shilling in the pound is a very small amount; but I will bring this matter before the Government, and I will represent to the Government what you say on the point, and it is possible that the Government may agree to make it $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. instead of 5 per cent., in consideration of the money which is paid in other directions. In connection with this subject, I would say, with regard to surveys and roads, that I am quite prepared to put in a clause to give the Committee the power of agreeing with the Commissioner as to what should be paid for surveys and roads; for I am afraid that, if there is no power to agree to pay money for roads to open up the land, and for surveys, the Bill will be a dead letter. I am also, as well as Native Minister, Minister of Lands; and in disposing of lands we do this: we have roads cut to open up the land before it is sold; the roads are merely cut, not metalled, and we find that the land brings a better price when the roads are so