

MONDAY, 23RD JULY, 1888.

WILLIAM HENRY GRACE, having been duly sworn, gave evidence as follows:—

I am a licensed interpreter. In June, 1882, I was employed by Wetere te Rerenga to get the Poutama and Mokau-Mohakatino No. 1 Blocks through the Native Land Court. I acted for the Natives, and the land was passed, and an order made for the Mokau-Mohakatino No. 1 Block in favour of Wetere te Rerenga and others. At the same time I understood that Jones had been in negotiation with the Natives for a lease of this block, and I was asked by Jones if I would go to Mokau and help him. Jones wanted that the Natives who were attending the Native Land Court at Waitara should be got to execute a lease at once, but Wetere said, "No; let us take the matter to Mokau, and settle it there, as there were other people who would have to be consulted, and who were not present at the Land Court." Accordingly, Jones, Dalton, and I, with Wetere te Rerenga and other Natives, started overland for Mokau; the women and some of the men who had no horses went round the coast by steamer, which was chartered by Jones. As we passed Pukearuru we arranged with Captain Messenger, who was stationed there, to come to Mokau Heads to witness the deed. When we reached Mokau some of the Natives were sent up the river to bring Heremia and others down from Totoro. Before we left Waitara I had indorsed on the deed in Maori the statement which now appears on it, and when I reached Mokau I made a copy of the deed, which I gave to Wetere, but there was no plan on the copy. The plan on the original deed was a plan of the whole block. The order of the Native Land Court had made the land inalienable, but with power to lease for fifty-six years. Before that order was made, which was on my application, there had been a discussion between Jones and the Natives as to how long the lease should be made for. Jones wanted it to be for ninety-nine years, but the Natives thought it was too long; Jones then came down to sixty-six years; and in the Court Wetere finally agreed to fifty-six years, and the order was made accordingly.

We remained at Mokau Heads several days, and during all that time the Natives had the copy of the lease, and had a great deal of discussion amongst themselves as to the terms of it. At last Heremia arrived. He arrived in the evening, and nothing was done that day. The next morning there was a meeting of the Natives and ourselves. That morning Te Oro and Epiha said to Jones, in my presence, "If they ask you for the old lease do not give it up." That was a former agreement which they and two or three others had signed. After breakfast the meeting took place. Heremia asked who made the arrangement that the land should be leased up to Totoro, and whether it was an old arrangement. Jones said, "It was under an old agreement?" Heremia then said, "Where is that document?" Jones did not produce it. I do not know whether he had it with him or not. This meeting took place in the open air at Te Reinga. The meeting broke up, and then the Natives adjourned to the whare. None of the pakehas went with them. They must have had some disputes in the whare, because Te Oro came out angry. I asked him what was the matter. He said, "Heremia says I do not own any of the land beyond Matapuruarua," or somewhere thereabout. When Captain Messenger arrived Heremia had not yet come down. I do not know what took place that night. I know that the Natives were there all night discussing the matter. Next morning one of the Natives—I think it was Wetere—told us that he thought matters were pretty well arranged.

Captain Messenger, Jones, Dalton, and I went inside the whare to the Natives. There was a great crowd of them collected. I then read over the deed to them in Maori. At that time the lease was expressed to be for the whole block. Heremia said, "I do not agree that the boundary should be at Totoro; but we have agreed that the lease shall extend as far as Mangapohue." Jones said he would not agree to that, and walked out. I went after him, but he was angry and would not come back. I returned to the whare, and said, "If you are determined that the boundary shall be at Mangapohue, and Jones will not agree to that, there is an end to the matter." I went out again and met Jones, and told him that the Natives were determined that the lease should not go beyond Mangapohue. After a long talk with him and a great deal of persuasion he agreed to the alteration of the boundary. We then returned to the whare; Captain Messenger and Sergeant Gilbert were still there. We told the Natives that the alteration was agreed to, and the deed was then altered accordingly; the alterations were initialled by Captain Messenger and myself. The deed, as altered, was then read over by Mr. Dalton as interpreter. Heremia, Te Huia, and Wetere were the first to sign. I have a distinct recollection that Te Huia was present, as I had seen him at the Land Court at Waitara, and also previous to that at Totoro. Heremia and Te Huia had never been favourable to Jones, and it was necessary to get them to sign first. After these three signed a number of others came in and signed. If any one came in whom we knew had not been present when the deed had been read over before, Mr. Dalton explained it to him again. One of those to whom it was read over again, to my recollection, was Te Oro, because he had not been present on the first occasion. Another Native to whom it was separately explained was Te Ianui. There were several Natives who would not sign the deed, and whose signatures, so far as I am aware, have not been since obtained. There must have been nearly eighty who signed at Mokau. A few signatures have been got since at Rangitikei and other places. When the objection was made by Heremia about the boundary no other objection was made by any other Native to anything that was in the lease, so far as I am aware. Had it been made at that time I must have heard it. I did not see any drinking going on, but we were in the whare nearly the whole of the day. I am certain that no one signed who was visibly under the influence of drink.

I did not know all the Natives who signed personally. Those I did not know were named to me by Wetere or some one whom we did know. I could not say positively whether or not there were any cases of personation. There were none that I was aware of. I think we must have been there altogether about a fortnight. Nearly all the signatures were given on one day. I have read over a report which was furnished to the Government by Captain Messenger. Captain Messenger was present when the deed was read several times. The deed was read over in Maori; but I be-