

3210. You are not speaking of leases outside the Public Trust?—In one case a Native applied to me saying, "The land is unoccupied; I wish to take possession." I reported the matter to the Public Trustee, and suggested that he should be allowed to do so; but the Public Trustee replied that there was some legal difficulty at present, and therefore he could not give his consent.

3211. It was stated that all Natives on the West Coast are poor?—Generally, all Natives are poor. Only one or two of them have money—Manaia, for instance, and Honi Pihama, who died the other day, are said to be comparatively rich. These two men are exceptions.

*Hon. Captain Kenny*: They are not wealthy men, yet they have property, and do not use it.

3212. *Mr. Wilson*.] I have heard that in Honi Pihama's case the succession duty alone will be £1,500?—No Native is decidedly poor, as we understand being poor. They are poor in money as a rule, but they are not poor as regards land. They have ample lands left.

3213. The number of acres under the Public Trustee's leases has been given: have the lessees made improvements?—Yes.

3214. Fair improvements?—Yes.

3215. Have there not been many transactions of a complex character in connection with these leases—mortgages, sub-leases, and the like—for valuable consideration?—No doubt. I cannot speak as to the consideration.

*Mr. Stewart*: Tenancy from lessee to lessee.

3216. *Hon. Captain Kenny*.] You say that large sums of money have been raised on some of these leaseholds?—I am sorry to say it—I think there have been.

3217. You had to do with confirmed leases that from time to time were brought under the Public Trustee's Office?—Yes.

3218. You know about these legislative regulations that have been made?—Yes.

3219. What had you to do with that yourself?—The first thing which I considered my duty was to endeavour to obtain renewals of the old leases under the Act of 1884. Some nine or ten, I think, I got very nearly complete with this exception: The Act said that the consent of the owners must be obtained, but we cannot get the consent of all the Natives, we can only get the assent of the representative men. With that exception, I had got so far as nine or ten confirmed leases in training for surrender, &c.

3220. How do these terms compare with the terms fixed by the arbitrators or umpire?—The circumstances are different. In 1884 the rent was computed on the improved value, in 1887 on the unimproved value. Leaving that out of the question, I do not think there is a great deal of difference.

3221. For what term was the lease you had nearly completed?—Thirty years.

3222. That was about one-sixth of the whole you had commenced to complete?—Yes.

3223. After the Act of 1887 was passed you had some trouble to serve all the persons with notice?—Yes.

3224. Will you state what trouble you found in doing the actual work?—The first thing I did was to send to the Public Trustee for 500 copies of the regulations. I distributed them generally over the district. When, as I thought, they were digested I went to Waitotara and there explained them. I went to two Native villages and explained them. So far I had no difficulty. The Natives I do not think quite understood the matter then. I then went to Hukatere, on the Patea River. Ngarangi and Mr. Williams were there. I think about two hundred Natives were present. It was a very large meeting, at any rate. The first thing the Natives said to me was, "We have read the regulations, and we have all made up our minds not to receive notices." I went into the thing fully again. I asked the Natives to put to me any questions they pleased, and I would give them all the information I could. After I had finished, and asked them all if they had anything to say, I told them I was about to serve the necessary notices. As soon as I got the notices out of my haversack there was a regular rush out of the whare. There were only five natives left inside, who were served. I called to the leading Natives, and told them that if they would come back I would serve no more notices that day. They came back and we reopened the conversation, but without any practical alteration in the result, and when leaving the village they good-humouredly put the notices back in my coat-pocket. I then reported the matter to the Public Trustee, and told him I thought it would be well to instruct me to come to Wellington and have a personal interview with him. I came to Wellington, and explained to him fully the position. I went with him to see the Government. I again explained the matter very fully. The Premier, the Public Trustee, Mr. Wilson, and the Law Officer were present. After explaining the matter the Premier told us the Act must be carried out, and made several suggestions as to the mode of carrying it out. I went back to my district and employed agents for the purpose of serving the notices. I supplied them with copies of the regulations in Maori and English.

3225. What were the furthest distances at which these notices had to be served?—Some had to be served as far away as Mongonui and the Bay of Islands, at Wellington and all along the coast, and some at Chatham Islands.

3226. How many grantees would there be in some of the grants?—One, I believe, contained 190 names, 183 in some cases, and one or two might go up to 200.

3227. What would be the minimum number in a grant that you would be able to get to concur?—In some places two-thirds, in some places three-fourths. It depends very much on circumstances.

3228. There would be all this trouble and difficulty at the time of service?—There was more than this difficulty. They would not accept service, but ran away.

3229. You had nothing to do afterwards with the leases in any way?—With the work of the arbitrators you mean. I took especial care not to interfere. I suggested an interpreter from Opunake in one case, rather than one engaged at Hawera, to save expense; that was the most I did.