

887. Of course that leaves a hiatus in the title?—Certainly.

888. Then, you would not be in favour of carrying the subdivisions, except, I suppose, in big cases, beyond the hapu?—Unless by common consent of the parties. I may say that I have had one case which has been most successful. It was done by the party themselves. It was a piece of land somewhere at Hokianga, and it was divided into more than eighty sections by the parties themselves.

889. Do you not think that could be carried into effect in other cases if it were put to the parties reasonably?—It might; but that is the only case I have known in ten years.

890. In regard to the disputes between Europeans and Natives, concerning which you have heard, do you think it would be advisable that a Court should be raised having full power to decide in accordance with what is generally known as equity and good conscience, and to give a final decision in such cases, instead of their being dragged to the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal?—To tell the truth, that is a matter that never occurred to me at all, I practically having had no experience of any cases of that kind.

891. We have now dealt with subdivisational surveys, but there is another question with regard to surveys. The surveyors, I believe, allege that there is a great deficiency in the law, inasmuch as they are not able to recover the sums which they have expended and the moneys they have earned in their surveys of land. Can you make any suggestion about that?—I believe that what you have stated is practically true.

892. I believe that great hardship is often occasioned in that way?—Yes; but I do not see how it can be remedied.

893. Do you think, if the Government were to pay for all such surveys, and make these a charge upon the land, it would answer?—That is a suggestion I think I made in 1877—that all surveys should be paid for by the Crown, and made a charge upon the land. Of course, if the Natives choose to repay the money they would then relieve the land from the charge. But it should not be done with the view of acquiring land on behalf of the Crown at some future day.

894. What is your experience, and the opinion derived from experience, as to the Crown's right of pre-emption being enforced over Native land? What effect would it have on the Native mind?—It would not be at all pleasing to the Native mind. I rather think their experience in the past has been that the Crown land-purchasing officers have given as little as possible for their interests, and I think the Natives are now very suspicious.

895. Are you aware that at the present day, owing to the complicated state of the Native-land laws, the transfer of Native interests to Europeans is practically at a standstill; that in the settlement of Native lands there is practically little or nothing doing?—I know that it is much as you say; but whether owing to the state of the law is very doubtful: it may be from the low value of land, and the possibility of taxation being imposed in some form.

896. However, you know, as a matter of fact, that it is practically so?—Yes; people are disinclined to acquire Native land.

897. The expense attendant on the acquisition of Native land is very great, is it not—under the present system, I mean—owing to the signature of deeds by great numbers of owners?—No doubt it is. I should say so.

898. Can you mention from memory any large numbers of Natives as owners of any given blocks? What is the largest number of owners that you know of in a block of Native land before it is subdivided?—There is one block that I remember—Waimarino, in the Wanganui district—in which there were over 1,010 owners; but I think some fifty or sixty of the names were duplicates.

899. How many of these would be children under age, on an average—I do not mean you to state how many there actually were?—Possibly from one-tenth to one-fifth.

900. Then, how many would be married women—what would be an average?—How do you mean, married women?

901. Of course, married according to the law as it stands now?—I am afraid I cannot say. Possibly three hundred of them might be women.

902. And a considerable portion of these would be in some sense or other married?—Yes. The females amongst the Maoris are not so numerous as the males. There would be two women to every three men.

903. Is there any reason for that?—I suppose Providence has not been generous to the Maori as he has been to the European. There are a great many more Maori men than women in a tribe or hapu.

904. Is it practically possible, in a case like that Waimarino Block you mentioned, where there is a constant occurrence of deaths, requiring successors to be appointed, that if all had to sign the deed, as under the present law, one could get a conveyance or lease of that land?—Of course, the greater the number of Native owners who fall out through death, the more difficult it becomes to acquire, on account of successions.

905. Then, for all practical purposes of life, no person could hope to obtain a complete title to that block, or to any portion of it, if every person had to sign?—If the purchaser were a private individual I would say that he would never complete. Of course, with the Crown it is different. It has powers private individuals have not. I may say the block I named has been acquired. It took about twelve months to complete the title.

906. To the whole of the land?—Yes.

907. How about the interests of minors?—They were cut out; in a great many instances they were bought from the trustees. I am afraid there will be a good deal of trouble with this trustee question hereafter. I think that the Public Trustee ought to be trustee for all Native infants by virtue of his office.

908. You do not know the working of his office, I am afraid, or you would not say that?—There ought to be somebody, at any rate.