

speak to them, of two other subjects in addition to that. The first of those two things is concerning the Native Land Court. It is our duty to ascertain from the Maori people whether the proceedings of the Native Land Court are satisfactory to the Natives, and whether not merely they are satisfactory, but whether they really accomplish the work that the Native Land Court is intended to do. For instance, we shall want to know whether the payment of the fees which are now demanded by the Native Land Court is satisfactory to the Maoris; whether the Native Land Courts hold their sittings at such places as suit the convenience of the Maoris; whether the work of the Native Land Court is conducted as speedily as it ought to be, or whether there are adjournments from time to time which are oppressive upon the Maoris; whether the granting of rehearings, which has now become so frequent, is in the opinion of the Maoris a good thing; and whether the Maoris themselves believe that in their runangas and by their Committees they could define and find out the tribal boundaries and the hapu boundaries in a better and cheaper manner than is done by the Native Land Court. Those are the things which we shall have to talk about concerning the Native Land Court. The second subject which we shall have to ask the Maoris to speak about is as to the use, disposal, and management of their lands. In this district the Maoris have sold to the Government and to private individuals large portions of their lands; but they still retain lands, some of which have gone through the Court, and some of which have not gone through the Court. And this question affects not merely the Ngapuhi, but the Rarawas, the Arawas, the Ngati-maniapoto, the Ngatituwharetoa, and all the other great tribes of the North Island. So when we ask the Maoris to speak concerning the management and disposal of their lands, they must remember they speak not merely as members of the Ngapuhi Tribe, but as members of the Maori people, who yet have large estates, and who wish to see these estates utilised for the benefit of themselves and their children. Now, the Commissioners are of opinion, and the Parliament is of opinion also, that the present system of the Maoris passing their land through the Court, and then one selling, and another selling, and another selling—men, women, and children all acting in this way—is a bad system. In the olden times, if a tribe desired to deal with its land, the tribe met in public, and then the heads of the families carried out what the whole tribe desired to do—acting as managers. But under the laws which the Parliament has made, when a long list of Native names is put into a certificate or grant, somebody gets hold of one or two Natives—perhaps of people not living in the district at all, or spendthrifts—and perhaps through the action of these one or two people the European gets his hand upon the land. Then, when the European, whether it is the Government purchaser or the private purchaser, once gets his hand upon the land, he goes on working, step by step enlarging his foothold, until the Maoris are clean out of it. Now, that is not wise work nor good work. We desire to ask the Natives whether they think it would not be wiser to go back to some extent to the old dealings with the lands, under certain restrictions. Supposing the Natives who are here present, with their families, were declared to be the owners of a block of land—we will call it Waimate—of 20,000 acres. Now, supposing the people, their wives and children, numbered a hundred and fifty, and that all their names were to go into the certificate. Would it not be advisable for them to choose the wisest and most honest people amongst themselves—people whom they could depend upon, people who had skill to manage, and honesty to do their work fairly by the whole people—say, seven of such men? Out of this 20,000 acres this Committee would mark off all that the people wanted for themselves—for their own cultivations, burying-grounds—anything they chose. Supposing we take 5,000 acres of the land for these reserves. That would leave 15,000 acres that they do not want for their own use. Now, the Committee, in conjunction with an officer appointed by the Assembly for their district, would cut that 15,000 acres into proper farms to let to Europeans. Then, let that 15,000 acres, having been cut up into proper farms, or small sheep-runs, or whatever else it is fit for, be leased for the best price obtainable from Europeans. And let no one individual of the hundred and fifty owners have power to sign any deed whatever, but let all the leases be signed by the Government Commissioner and a certain number of the Committee. Then, let all the proceeds over and above the necessary cost of management be distributed among the hundred and fifty. The people would meet and draw up a list of the names, and put down how much out of every £100 each family was entitled to receive. Then the officer appointed by the Parliament would be responsible to the Parliament that he would, with the Committee, distribute all the moneys in accordance with the list every year or every quarter. The result of that would be that the 5,000 acres reserved for cultivations, and so on, would always be in the possession of the Maoris; they could not be leased or sold. Then, too, the 15,000 acres could never be sold away from them, but would always, from year to year, bring in a revenue for them and their children. They would thus be safe, as a people, all over the Island; the time could never come when all their land would be gone. But, as things are now going, bit by bit the whole of the lands of the Maoris are passing away from them, and, unless the lands are used so as to carry sheep or to grow corn and fruit, the Europeans will clamour for taxes to be paid out of the land—that rates and taxes shall be levied on it. If, therefore, these great blocks of land are kept idle, the Maoris will have to pay taxes just the same as the Europeans pay taxes. And, unless they get something out of the land itself to pay the taxes, gradually the taxes will mount up to so much as to swallow the land itself. We therefore propose that their land should be utilised in the way I have just indicated, so as to give them a rent in perpetuity, and so as to let the Europeans pay the taxes. And if there were any of the Natives themselves who were skilful enough to have sheep-farms, the extent of the reserves could be increased so as to afford them land for that purpose. That would enable them, also, to establish schools for their own children—not merely schools to which the children would be sent for an hour or two each day, but large buildings, with a large farm, where cattle and sheep might be reared, and fruit-growing and dairying carried on, so that the children could be instructed in all those things, and how to manage similar farms for themselves. I hope the Natives clearly understand the two things we shall be glad to hear them speak about—about their own local matters, and the Government interference with the lands—the sufficiency and efficacy of the