

The Maoris now have the first opportunity which ever has been given to them of having a voice in the disposal of their own lands. I was here eight years ago, and was then the guest of Taonui, who is here present, and who I may say was very hospitable towards me. I was then interviewing Wahanui, Rewi, and Taonui about their lands. The Government of that date did not see then as far as all the political parties see now. Now, both the past Government and the present Government, and all parties, are anxious that we should give assistance and advice to the Maoris, and get at their minds and their own wishes, and so report to Parliament that their wishes, if reasonable, may be carried out. This Commission, therefore, does not represent any one party or any one Government; it represents all the people of New Zealand, who want to know from the Maoris and to act with the Maoris. Now, that map hanging on the wall just over there is a plan of the Rohe Potae territory, stretching from Aotea down to Mokau, and thence over to Taupo. Other Maori tribes own lands from Taupo away to the East Cape and Wairoa. From sea to sea, therefore, right across the Island, the bulk of the land belongs to the Maoris. Now, let the Maoris give the Parliament assistance and advice at this time. They must speak, because this is an important time. On looking at the printed paper, copies of which have been circulated among you, it will be seen that the Commissioners have many subjects committed to them for investigation, and on which we are to speak to the Maori people. But we have decided that, as regards the people here, it is not necessary for us to enter into some of the subjects. For instance, the people in this district, happily enough, have not been involved in disputes with Europeans about the titles to land, as have the Natives at the East Cape, Poverty Bay, and Napier. Nor have they had so long experience of the Native Land Court as the Natives in other districts have had. But, on the other hand, they are better off than most of the Maori tribes, because the bulk of their land yet remains to them. Unless, therefore, they desire to tread in the steps of the other Maoris, and lose the whole of their lands, we must find some means of preserving their land for them and their children. Now, if they desire to have that done, they must give assistance to the Parliament and to the Government. What has happened heretofore has been this: the Maori lands have passed through the Court, and particular owners have been put in for the various blocks, and the Europeans come and purchase the lands. This European, that European, and the other European—gradually they get their fingers on all the blocks, and gradually and surely press the Maoris out. The value of the land has been swallowed up in surveys, in deeds, in expenses of various sorts, so that very little remains to the individual Maoris who sell. The result is that in Hawke's Bay, Poverty Bay, the Waikato, and in the Wairarapa, and in other places where the Maoris have sold their lands, their lands have gone, and the money has gone also. They have neither land nor money. Many of the Maoris have no land left at all, and have to become burdens on their friends. Now, the Commissioners would ask the Maoris to advise them upon this point: Would it not be wiser, instead of the tribal lands of the Maoris being sold, that whatever land they could not use for themselves, or did not use for themselves—the waste lands, in fact—should be cut up and leased for their benefit to Europeans. Among all the Maoris there would be found some persons of intelligence and skill who are able not merely to cultivate a piece of land, but to manage a farm or a sheep-station for themselves. In such cases the Commissioners would like to ask the Maoris whether they would not consider that persons of that sort should be assisted to become purchasers in that way. But, even after all such cases are provided for, there will yet remain large areas of these lands not used. Now, the Commissioners would like to ask the Maoris whether they do not think it would be wise, instead of each individual being enabled to sell a piece here or a piece there of his interest, whatever it may be, that the waste lands should be cut up so as to be profitable to Europeans, and then leased to Europeans for the benefit of the people, and for the best terms that could be got. That is, to stop individuals in these large certificates of title going on selling or leasing, and to enable the whole of the people, together tribally, to deal with their lands in public. Of course there may be valuable lands near the townships, owned by people of considerable skill, where it would be proper that they should be cut up, and that each individual should have his own portion. But, in regard to the large areas of these waste lands that the Maoris themselves cannot use, we want them to express a decided opinion whether they should be divided among the individuals, and the individuals be left to deal with them, or that the whole of the tribes through their head chiefs should deal with them in conjunction with a Government Commissioner. The Commissioners, of course, would wish the Maoris to remember that there is a growing feeling among the Europeans that all the Maori lands ought to be taxed. That is the Europeans' feeling. Take the lands here, for instance: The Europeans say the Maoris consented to the railway coming here. That railway was made at a cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds, and the Europeans bear the taxation entailed by that expenditure, while the Maori lands escape all taxation. And at the present time various burdens are being heaped upon the Maori lands, the extent of which I do not myself think the Maoris are aware of—Government surveys, for instance. They are expensive, and, besides that, they bear interest, so that year after year the amount grows. Then, in many places, the Government have paid rates and taxes, which are a charge upon the land. If, now, additional taxation comes upon the Maori lands, and they still lie idle, and they produce no rent or no profits of any kind, gradually they will be eaten up. All this country which we can see from these windows, after the Maoris have taken out all they can use, could be let on good terms, and many of the Europeans would come and settle upon it after the reserves have been taken out. The Europeans would pay all the taxes and the rates; the lands would yield a revenue to the Maoris now, and their children after them. And if the causes which have led to disputes in other places—that is, individual dealing with the lands—were avoided here, there would be no dispute in the future. Then there is the question of the education of the Maori children. The Commissioners wish to ask the Maoris—especially the heads of families and hapus—whether it would not be a good thing to set apart lands on which schools could be erected and farms established, where the Maori children would be taught to plough, reap, manage sheep and cattle, make boots and shoes, carpenter, shoe horses, and do