

restriction against leasing by private individuals. There was also a fourth proposal, asking the Minister to use his power in getting the present Native land-laws amended, and made more suitable and less obnoxious to the Natives.

Hon. Mr. Cadman promised to lay the matter before his colleagues on his return to Wellington, and to let the Natives know the result when he met them later on. This he did do in the early part of May last, when he again visited them, and told them that he was prepared to accede to their proposals if they could give him any guarantee that the owners of the blocks which the Crown desired to acquire would agree to come forward and sign the necessary deeds of transfer of the same within a reasonable time. This at once brought the matter to a head, and disclosed the fact of the utter inability of any body of Natives, notwithstanding that they may be chiefs and leaders of public opinion, to bind the owners of any block of land to sell the same. Men like Wahanui, Taonui, Henry Edwards, and others had to admit that such was the case, and that they were powerless, now that the owners of the land had been declared by the Native Land Court, to influence them to sell if they were not willing to do so. They, however, promised to use their influence where it was powerful amongst their own relatives in inducing them to sign the Government deeds; and also with a view to do away with the stigma and public condemnation that in the past had been passed upon those who were known to have sold land. This clearly shows that the Native Land Court, in doing away with the old Maori title to land and substituting a European one for it, has almost entirely destroyed the influence that the chiefs formerly had over their people in the matter of the disposal of land. To use a homely phrase, "Jack is now as good as his master;" and the fact of the Native Land Court awarding a block of land to those who it considers to be the owners of it, be they few or numerous, means that each one of those owners has to be individually sought out, and his assent to the sale and his signature to the deed of conveyance obtained, he, at the same time, receiving the proportion of the purchase-money represented by his share. In cases where the owners of blocks of land are numbered by hundreds, it is easy to be seen that to acquire the whole or even a large number of the shares must take, under the most favourable circumstances, a considerable time. During the meeting the chiefs and leading half-castes showed a desire to assist Mr. Cadman in his endeavours to acquire land for settlement, and if the old style of land-purchase was in existence now, by which it was in the power of the principal chiefs to say what portion of their tribal lands should be disposed of, there would be no difficulty in the Government acquiring considerable areas at once. But, unfortunately, the saying that "the old order changeth" applies equally to land-purchase as to other Native matters; but, in the case of land-purchase, the change has brought about a more complicated and difficult system of acquiring land than prevailed in olden times.

Native Land Court in the King-country.

After an absence of more than twelve months, the Native Land Court opened here again on the 19th January last. After sitting here some weeks it adjourned to Kawhia, and from there to Kihikihi, and having disposed of the work that required doing at those places is now back again to Otorohanga, where it is likely to remain for some time, as there is abundance of work here for it to do. It is now presided over by Judge Gudgeon, who has with him, as assessor, a Tuhourangi Native, named Pirimi Mataiawhea. A considerable quantity of the work that this Court has done since it opened has been in connection with blocks that had been before a previous Court; but, although the owners had been declared by that Court, their interests were not defined, which left the title in such an unsatisfactory state that it was almost impossible, and certainly unsafe, for Government, or any other purchaser of Native land, to proceed until the proportionate ownership of each owner was defined. Until this was done the purchase could not safely proceed, and the acquirement of land for settlement was therefore retarded. To give an instance of the risk a purchaser runs in attempting to buy a block of land in which the interests of the owners have not been defined, I might cite the case of the Wharepuhunga Block, of 133,720 acres. The first Court that dealt with that block awarded it to 991 people, without defining the interests of any. The present Court (after a long investigation which would not have been required if the first Court had determined the interests) has declared that out of the 991 names in the original list of owners 37 had no right there at all, because they were either duplicate names or names of some who were already in the list under other names. Of the remaining 954 owners, the Court decided that the interest of 572 of them (or considerably more than half) was so small that they were only entitled to a quarter-share each; that 107 were entitled to a half-share each; that 27 were entitled to a three-quarter share each; and that only 247 were entitled to a full share each. Now, if there had been free trade in Native land within Rohepotae during the past two years, and if any private speculator or syndicate had commenced the purchase of the Wharepuhunga Block on the assumption that all the shares were equal (which they must either have done or let it alone), it is easy to see what a serious loss he or it would have suffered if they had bought out the majority of the owners whose interests were represented by quarter-shares only. The above is only one instance of what is the case in numerous blocks within Rohepotae, a large number of which require to have the interests of the owners defined before the purchase can be safely commenced. The Court now sitting here is doing some of this much-required work, and when it has had occasion to deal with new blocks, or subdivide old ones, where the interests of owners have not been already defined, it is defining them at once, thus leaving a clear and open track behind it in the shape of a well-defined title for those who follow after, be they Government or private speculators, who desire to purchase or lease Native land for the purpose of settlement.

Government Land-purchase in the King-country.

I believe it is the general impression amongst those of the public who are not acquainted with the laws affecting Native lands, and the dealings therewith, that all that is necessary to be done in