

all the relevant documents. This was all necessary to qualify us for the conferences which we have had to hold amongst ourselves and which have themselves occupied several weeks.

13. Mr. Commissioner Bell was occupied for about six years in investigating all these land claims under the Land Claims Settlement Act, 1856. Writing of the task that he had performed, he referred to it as "a task which has turned out to be incomparably more difficult and responsible than I thought, and which I may say I should certainly not have undertaken if I had known what it was." We have had to survey the effects of Mr. Commissioner Bell's decisions and carry out, as it were, an extension of his work. That has been a lengthy task, not nearly so lengthy, it is true, as Mr. Commissioner Bell's, but sufficiently lengthy, difficult, and responsible to make us sympathize with him in his somewhat plaintive observation.

14. During the various sittings held by the Commission, Mr. V. R. S. Meredith and Mr. F. McCarthy appeared for the Crown, while the Maoris were represented by Mr. H. O. Cooney and Mr. C. A. Herman, who were assisted by Mr. Lou Parore; and certainly it will not be open to either side to complain that its case has not been presented with very great care and ability. But, while giving every credit to counsel for their very competent presentation of their respective cases, it would be ungracious on our part if we failed to express our deepest sense of indebtedness to Mr. Darby, of the Lands and Survey Department at Auckland, and Mr. Blane, the Secretary of the Commission. It was freely admitted by counsel on both sides that, without the great assistance that was given to them by those gentlemen, a proper presentation of the matters which the Commission has to consider would have been impossible. We have much pleasure in joining with counsel in their appreciation of the service which Mr. Darby and Mr. Blane have rendered, and we have no hesitation in saying that, without their help, our inquiry and investigation, if possible at all, would have taken a very much longer time. We would also commend the work of Mr. Healy, who worked in conjunction with Mr. Darby, and was a very useful and able coadjutor; and we would add a word of praise to the stenographers, Misses Hill and Cooper, of Auckland, for their excellent work in reporting the proceedings of the Commission.

15. Concisely stated, the task committed to us by Your Excellency's Commission is in substance to make inquiry regarding the position and history of what are known as the "surplus lands," and to report whether, having regard to the circumstances in which the lands of which those surplus lands formed part were originally alienated or disposed of by the aboriginal owners thereof, the surplus lands or any part thereof ought in equity and good conscience to have been returned to the former aboriginal owners thereof. If it be reported that the surplus lands or any part thereof ought in equity and good conscience to have been so returned, then we are directed to recommend what compensation in money or money's worth should now be granted to the representatives or descendants of the aboriginal owners who were parties to the original alienation or disposition.

16. We are also directed to inquire into and report upon the claims and allegations made in the petitions referred to in the Schedule to the Commission so far as such claims and allegations are not covered by the preceding general paragraphs of the order of reference (that is to say, by the paragraphs relating to "surplus lands" generally) and to recommend what relief (if any) should be accorded in respect of the prayers of the several petitions. We shall directly explain these petitions more particularly (though it will not be necessary to do so at very great length), but they may all really be disposed of in a few words. Not one of them raises the question of surplus lands as such, nor do the petitioners base their claims on considerations of equity and good conscience to "surplus land." What they do is to claim on other and altogether different grounds.