

All these negotiations were confirmed by Parliament by an Act called "The Thermal-Springs Districts Act, 1881," and the amending Act of 1883.

Thus far, then, all matters were arranged to our mutual satisfaction. The sections were advertised and leased by public auction, and the lessees entered into possession. But from henceforth a change came over the spirit of the Administration. The benevolent intentions which formed the basis of the arrangements were clouded over. After the first payments, from which survey, advertising, and auctioneers' expenses were rigidly deducted, rents fell into arrears; the Government neglected to collect them. When the Ngati-Whakaue saw that not only were written agreements left unfulfilled but verbal promises valued by us as sacred and as valuable as the gifts we had donated to the public use were disregarded or repudiated, our previous filial respectful faith wavered and engendered suspicion that all was not well. The Government came down with proposals to purchase the township land. They proposed to buy from us that which had been expressly covenanted should only be leased for our benefit for a term of ninety-nine years. The proposal found us in a position of despair and disgust. There were back rents owing and not accounted for by our trustee and agent; and there were rents which were apparently not collected and possibly not collectable. We estimate that at the time of the negotiations for the purchase of the township land there were payable to us about £13,000 rent-moneys. But the price offered and paid for the freehold of the township land was only about £7,500. On the day that the leases of the township sections were offered there was paid to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland District, one half-years' rent, amounting to £1,353 5s., or at the rate of £2,700 a year. This was due, of course, to the splendid administration of our trusted agent and administrator, and fully justified the hopes originally held out to us. But the freehold, when acquired by our all-powerful trustee, was only worth the net rental for three years. Not being versed in the mysteries of arithmetic, we could not allege as against our benevolent agent that it had taken advantage of our ignorance and confidence.

During the year 1881 the Thames Valley Railway Company asked us for an endowment of land for their railway, and because we thought that such a work would enhance the value of the town we donated 20,000 acres of land of what was known as the Rotorua-Patetere Block. Later the Government bought out that company and its endowment, and a few of our chiefs thereupon insisted that, since the original compact had collapsed, the 20,000 acres should be paid for at the rate of 7s. 6d. per acre. The Ngati-Whakaue, who owned the land, received 5s. 6d. per acre, 2s. per acre being deducted, so it was said, as a consideration for the railway being brought to the town. This land, we understand, is now loaded with £1 5s. per acre for timber rights alone, and has been withdrawn from selection perhaps because of this valuable timber.

We were taught to regard "The Thermal-Springs Districts Act, 1881," as the Magna Charta of our liberties, and as the declaration of the respective position of ourselves as the landowners, and as having vested interests in all that pertained to our ancestors from times past, and the Government which stood for the mana and dignity of the Crown. Subsection (3) of section 5 of that Act empowered the Government, among other things, to "treat and agree with the Native proprietors for the use and enjoyment by the public of all mineral or other springs, lakes, rivers, and waters." This assumed in us a right to the properties enumerated, for which the Government had to treat with us. We are not aware that we have ever parted with our rights to any of our main lakes. In these lakes, streams, and waters we have from the old times drawn a large part of our food-supply. There were our relish preserves of fish, inanga, toitoi, koura, and kakahi, which we had been accustomed to draw upon. The koura was used by us in barter with the Maoris of the outlying districts in exchange for sea-fish and valuable mats, &c. In order to make more attractive to tourists and the public at large the lakes and waters of our district, the fish of the pakeha was introduced, and after years thrived and multiplied, so much so that the indigenous fish have been almost destroyed. In the lakes and waters which we assume were thoes referred to in the Act above quoted, and which are generally referred to in the Treaty of Waitangi, where we were accustomed to fish at will, and where our native fresh-water-fish supply has been destroyed by imported fish, we are compelled by the Crown to pay a heavy license fee for the privilege of taking food. We do not fish for pleasure. It is not the custom of our people to go long distances for the mere pleasure of catching fish which we do not eat. If the foreign fish have supplanted our native fish in the waters we have not ceased to regard as belonging to our Native domain, we claim the right—perhaps we should say we throw ourselves on the "mercy" of our one-time trustee and agent, who has not treated with us for the aforesaid lakes, streams, and rivers, except over lands we have deliberately sold to the Crown—we appeal for the due and sympathetic recognition of our claim to take fish for food in these lakes and rivers. It is not a privilege we have any desire to abuse by the indiscriminate taking of fish.

You have come amongst us to inquire into the position of our lands. You have not found us easy to deal with, because we have grown suspicious of the pakeha law and justice. We have grown very suspicious of schemes emanating from the Government, and we have shown why. What guarantee have we that in the future our lands that we may offer to you for settlement may not be dealt with as the Rotorua Township land was, as the Whakarewarewa land is reported to have been dealt with? If it is the aim of the Government to secure for us as against the designing pakeha the highest price for our land, why should that Government be allowed to dictate to us whatever terms they choose for the very valuable lands and other natural resources that we hold? In giving us compensation for any springs or lands that may be taken for public purposes, why should the element of contempt be imported into the consideration of the fair value to be given for the land? Why should land belonging to a Maori and needed for a railway-siding—land which in the hands of a European the Crown would have to pay through the nose for—why should this land be contemptuously assessed at its value for, say, carrying sheep, when other considerations usual with the pakeha in such cases should weigh with the Crown? Is it because we are weak? Is it because we have been accustomed to take the ill deeds of the Government lying down?