

Before the present protective works were undertaken by the Government the Town of Greymouth was subject to frequent encroachments of the river, causing considerable damage to the property, and threatening, in the course of time, to sweep away all the most valuable portion of it.

The efforts made by the tenants to protect the estate from the river, coupled with the outlay needed for town improvements, has imposed burdensome and oppressive expenses on the occupants. The tenants contend, and very justly, that the increase in the value of the reserve is entirely due to the energy and capital of the European settlers, and that consequently it would be inequitable to apply all the results of such outlay to the future aggrandizement of the Native owners.

It is also urged that, as the Government accepted the trusteeship of the property and allowed large and important interests to grow up, it cannot now relinquish it without prejudicing the equitable rights of persons who have accepted leases under the Native Reserves Act in the full confidence that such mode of occupancy, and the system that gave rise to it, would endure.

Concerning the right of renewal claimed by the tenants as having been promised them, and which has unquestionably conduced to the advantage of the estate, as it afforded encouragement to the occupants to make permanent improvements, we find the following allusion in Mr. Commissioner Mackay's report of 1873, Sessional Papers G.—2A: "With regard to the renewal of the leases no practical difficulty exists, and that fact must be generally known, as assurance has been frequently given that, although a right of renewal cannot be inserted in the leases, that the intention is to let the land in perpetuity for the benefit of the Natives; and that whoever is in possession at the expiration of any of the terms of lease, provided he will consent to pay an equitable rent for the premises in proportion to the increased value of the property, shall have an extension of his lease granted to him."

This principle is based on an old-established practice in England, where it is considered that those who are in possession of leases for lives or years, particularly from the Crown, have an interest beyond the subsisting term, which is usually denominated "the tenant's right of renewal."

This interest, although it is not a certain or contingent estate, there being no means to compel a renewal, influences the price of sales, and conduces to the security of the tenure beyond the fixed term.

There is little doubt that if the rights of the tenants are imperilled by the issue of Crown titles to the Native owners, it will have a most injurious effect on the future of Greymouth, as the uncertainty of the renewal of existing leases will deter further improvements from being undertaken, and the buildings already erected will probably be suffered to fall into decay; as it stands to reason that, if a tenant's interest in his improvements terminate with his tenancy, it cannot be expected that anything would be spent on the property towards the close of the term which would be of benefit to it.

The foregoing remarks clearly indicate that security of possession is indispensable to the improvement of the property. It therefore follows that attention should be directed by the tenants to secure a fair and impartial hearing at the forthcoming session of Parliament, both through their members and by every other legitimate mode of procedure that will ensure a fulfilment of the understanding with them respecting the renewal of their leases on a sure and satisfactory basis.

The sole result as yet of the Native meeting which has just been concluded has been, we understand, to settle the individual claims of the Natives to the several reserves on the West Coast, and in the case of the Greymouth Reserve to determine the proportion of net proceeds to be divided amongst the persons admitted to share in the property.

Some of the ultimate consequences to the tenants we have already discussed, and we intend to keep a watchful eye on the course of events.