

Land Court. I have recognized the great loss and inconvenience to which the Native people are put by the Native Land Courts sitting only in the large centres of population. I think, therefore, that it would be wiser that the Land Court should move about and hold its sittings more on the land where the title is to be investigated. I have, by representations made to the Judges, tried to urge upon them that they should hold their Land Courts in more convenient places for the people whose titles are to be ascertained. As to the relations between the Committee and the Land Court, I should like to make these as clear as possible. It may sometimes happen that the Committee, in ascertaining the title to land, may themselves—the members of the Committee—be interested in having the title ascertained in a given direction. It is right, therefore, that there should be appeal to a body above suspicion, who will have no interest in the question of title. Therefore, I think that, after the Committee has ascertained the title, there should always be an appeal to the Land Court; and then it will be necessary, of course, that the Court should give legal sanction to the decisions of the Committee. You ought therefore to recognize that the Land Court still remains to decide ultimately the question of title amongst you. Now, with regard to the third subject introduced by Paori, I should like to say this: Paori has referred to the question of putting a steamer on the Wanganui River. It is not for the Government to build steamers and put them on rivers, that is a question for private individuals, and I am glad to inform you that there are a number of people in Wanganui who are thinking of forming a company for building a steamer and placing her on the Wanganui River. I have no doubt that many of you will be glad to assist in that enterprise, for it is one which will confer great benefits upon you all. There are difficulties in the way—not great difficulties, perhaps, but difficulties in the way of steamers passing up and down the river. These rapids will have to be made so as to allow the steamer to pass up and down; and I think it is likely that the Government will come to their assistance and vote money for the improvement of these rapids. I trust we shall find you all assisting in this work. A steamer would give greatly-increased value to your lands, and it would make the Wanganui what it was intended to be—a great highway for the people into the interior; it would make it more convenient to get down to Wanganui and get up again. Your wool and your produce would be sent down at a cheaper rate, and you would be able to get up and down with much greater facility, and, I think, at a less expense, than by means of canoes. Now, with regard to the survey of the land—the fourth question—Paori thinks that the Committee should deal with this question, and I agree with him that the Committee should have a large control in the matter; but the greatest of all questions is the question of money for the surveys. Will the Committee find the money? No; I do not think the Committee, in the first instance, can find the money for the surveys; and I think it will be necessary, therefore, that the Government should come to their assistance, having some security that when this is done the cost of the survey shall be repaid from the proceeds of the land when it is disposed of. Now, with regard to the sales by the people and the leases of land, though these are put down as separate subjects, they are really only one. Paori thinks the Committee should deal with these questions, with the sales and with the leases. Well, now, I have certain views upon this question, which I will bring before you; and they differ somewhat from the views that have been expressed by Paori. I think the people themselves should have the principal control in the leasing and sale of their lands. That is the first principle that I would lay down; but I am not sure that a Committee over a very large district would be the best body to deal with this subject. And now I will tell you what I propose should be the legislation next session upon this subject. Last session, as you are aware, the Government determined to run a railway through this Island, and they knew that, if they fixed the railway, there was a probability that certain speculators would come and acquire from the Natives large blocks of land along the line of railway, to the injury of both the Natives and the Europeans. I would like just now to remove a wrong impression that has prevailed in the minds of some of you as to what we have done respecting this land. It has been said we have taken land along each side of the railway five miles in extent. That is a mistake; we have not done anything of the kind. What the Government have done is this: they have taken in all the land that is likely to be increased in value by the railways in the schedule to the Act. The whole of the King country is taken in along the line of the Wanganui River, through Lake Taupo and Rangitikei. The extent of land in the schedule to the Act is 4,500,000 acres. Now, what has been done by the Bill is this: the Bill says that no private individual shall touch the land. The Bill does no more than that it saves the land to the owners. That land is absolutely the property of the Maoris, and more so than it was before. I also put in the Bill, when it was first introduced, a means of settling the land for the benefit of the owners, but it was thought better to hold over that portion of the Bill until the object had been carefully explained to the Native people. Now, what we propose is this: that, when the title to a block of land has been ascertained, the owners themselves of that particular block of land shall have the power of dealing with it. Much harm has arisen through some people who are put in the deed of title exercising rights for all, and to the great injury of the owners. For instance, in some cases there are ten people put in the grant, but there may be a hundred owners; and these ten people have exercised the right of ownership, selling the land sometimes and appropriating the money to their own uses. We propose for the future that the whole hundred people shall have a voice in saying how their land shall be leased and disposed of, and we shall carry out our object in this way: the hundred people (owners of the land) shall meet together and elect a Committee; this Committee shall remain in existence for two years, and at the end of that time the people shall have the right of appointing a fresh Committee. All dealings with the land shall be managed through that Committee. Now, in order that the land shall be sold and disposed of for the interest of both races, we propose to have a Board for a large district; that Board shall consist of three persons—a Commissioner appointed by the Government, and two persons elected or nominated. Now, this Board shall have the power of leasing and of selling all lands whenever the Committee wish the Board to do so, but not before then. The land shall be sold and leased as Crown lands are sold and leased; it shall be sold, as Major Kemp has expressed