

on the state of the land-purchase question in Hawke's Bay. In reply, I have to state that there is no land-purchase question. These reports are contained in a Blue Book. When the system was recommenced in 1872, under Proclamations which excluded competition from private purchasers, difficulties began to display themselves, and the Government officers were compelled to resort to the system of getting individuals to accept deposits, affording a remarkable contrast to the publicity of the old system. In most cases the Government have not succeeded in getting whole blocks, but have been compelled to employ the Court to cut off portions of blocks equal to the money paid. In other cases the land is still locked up. Deposits paid in 1872 or 1874 remain as they were: the Natives refuse to complete, the Government refuse to withdraw." It was my duty subsequently to sit as Judge on that Waitara Block.

*Hon. Mr. Bryce* : Your explanations make more clear to me what I already understood.

648. *Mr. Locke.*] Do you go much amongst the Natives now-a-days?—No.

685. Are you in the habit of talking about these matters to them at the present time: have heard them discuss the Bill?—I think not.

686. Have you had no conversation about it?—Speaking generally, I have had no conversation at all about it. I remember when last here a copy was given to me, but that copy was not given to me to give to any one else or to talk about it.

687. Have you read the amendments proposed by the Native Minister and Mr. Wi Pere?—I did not know there were any amendments proposed by the Native Minister.

688. Were they not mentioned to you some time since?—You gave me some paper, that is all have seen.

689. You have before you Wahanui's amendments and those of the Native Minister: will you tell the Committee whether these alter the principle of the Bill at all?—Generally speaking, they are inartistically drawn, but, if I gather the meaning of Wahanui's and Wi Pere's amendments, they make a new Bill of it.

690. *Sir G. Grey.*] What is it you say?—I say that the principle of the Bill is destroyed by these amendments.

691. *Mr. Locke.*] Do they go towards the improvement of the scheme or the contrary?—I see that both Wi Pere and Wahanui have taken many of the points of objection that I have taken, that is, in respect of the very large powers—the legislative power—that is given to the Governor in Council. They have substituted for "Governor in Council" the word "Board." They have also attempted to patch up the Board, and to make it more in consonance with their own notions. In my judgment it ought to be eliminated from the Bill altogether, all but the Commissioner. But I really think that if that Commissioner were made an important officer he might do duties that would be immensely valuable. The duties of that Commissioner should, in my judgment, be confined, so far as land is concerned, to simply seeing that the moneys are fairly dealt with. He should have no jurisdiction about the land at all. Their mana of the land, and the management and entire disposal of it, ought, in my opinion, to be left to the Maoris. I strongly think that no other system will produce any results. If Parliament will also set up this Commissioner, as an independent officer, that is, holding office during good behaviour, only responsible to the Crown, it would be his duty to go through the country and see the most desirable places that should be left as a reserve for every hapu in the Island—places that should be absolutely inalienable. Another most important duty which I thought that officer should discharge, and I think so still—I felt the necessity of it in my office as Judge—power being given to him for that purpose, would be to appoint temporary or permanent representatives, such as Resident Magistrates, if only for a short time, whose duty it would be to follow the sittings of the Native Land Courts, to keep an eye upon them, for they sit a long way off in parts of the country where there is no public opinion—an inconvenient word indeed to apply to a Court of justice—but still I am of opinion that where there is no public opinion there should be, somewhere near, an agent or officer on the part of the Crown. I consider that such an officer as the Commissioner is essential in view of the lot of Government work which is really going on. In view of that, at the same time I propose that it should be his duty, in cases including land at the mouth of a river or the conjunction of two rivers, which ought not to go into private hands, that he should have the right to interview, as representing the Crown, and demand some restriction for the protection of the public. I, therefore, should be very glad indeed to see this Commissioner established, with as much power and authority as Parliament can be persuaded to give him.

692. Would it be an improvement to transfer the Land Court branch of the Native Department to the Minister of Justice?—I would rather not answer that question, for it simply depends on the man. I had considerable experience when I was Chief Judge, I will not say "under," but when I corresponded with, the Minister of Justice. That was a very pleasant change.

693. Would it be an improvement that a portion of the department should go to the Minister of Justice?—I think it would be consonant with constitutional principle; but, then as I said, if the Minister of Justice had been somebody else it would not have been so pleasant as it was.

694. Now, I am going to the land side of the question, that is, to purchase and dealing with lands. If that were placed in the department of the Minister of Lands, you would have nothing left but the Commissioner, and the reserves to be reported on to Parliament?—Do you mean that the Native Minister should be abolished: there is an enormous amount of miscellaneous work that comes before that officer? I have seen it stated that the day was come for abolishing that office, but it has not come, and it will not come for some years yet.

695. Would you mind stating something about the reorganization of the Native Land Court?—Do you require me to do so? I used merely general words. You will understand how distasteful it is to me to say anything on that question. I do not think "reorganization" was the word I used. I think the words I used were equivalent to "setting it up on its legs." I endeavoured to avoid all allusion to any confusion that may be alleged to exist in it at present, or I tried to do so.