

MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS RESPECTING THE RUNANGA, &c.

No. 1.

REPORT BY MR. HANSON TURTON RESPECTING THE RUNANGA MAORI.

At the instance of the Government, I proceed to note down a few of the observations which I made illustrative of the working of the Maori Runanga, in some of the places which I lately visited in the capacity of District Magistrate.

In the Runanga Maori we observe an institution of very ancient date; and in its revival at the present day is easily to be seen an ill-assorted mixture of European with Native customs, though generally asserted by the Maoris to be of purely Aboriginal origin.

In old times the term *Runanga* seems to have been chiefly used for Councils of a grave and political character, to which all men, women, and children, except slaves and their offspring, were frequently admitted. Meetings of a more private and select nature, and generally held in the night time, were used by the head Chiefs for the discussion of the more important questions, especially such as related to peace or war. In 1832 we find the term "Council" in the prayer book, translated by the word "Runanga," and so on since; but in ordinary use it speedily became absorbed in the more diluted form of *komiti*, to which even slaves were admissible, but which from the Natives' incomplete notions of Christian duty, became very irregular in its proceedings, and very undecisive in its action. The term *komiti* was taken from the "Committee" meetings of the Missionaries, which were held periodically at the various stations; the terms "whare-hui-hui," or assembling-house, and "whare-korero" or talking-house, were also sometimes heard, and the word "runanga" fell into general disuse. Even in 1846, in Sir W. Martin's short paper on law, the term does not occur once: but "Court" and "Supreme Court" are rendered by the words "komiti," "komiti-whakawa," and "komiti-nui." It was in the following year that the expression was revived amongst the Natives, by the publication of the "Rongo Mau" (a treatise on peace by the Rev. J. Whiteley), in which they were strongly recommended to establish general and local "Runangas" under the superintendance of the Government, for the better management of their internal affairs, in preference to arbitrament by the sword. But it was not till 1856, that the term *Runanga* became common in Waikato and the word *komiti* disused; and since then its thoroughly Native origin has caused it to be extensively adopted, both North and South, though some of the tribes (such as the Arawa of Rotorua, and the Lower Whanganuis) seem to think that the Runanga is somehow or other connected with disloyalty, and so continue in the use of the word *komiti*. And now at last, as the height of perfection, a single man or woman, old or young as the case may be, is generally allowed to constitute a runanga; and it is not an uncommon thing to hear a man exclaim, "*E! ka runangatia au e te rutuhi nei,*" my case is being judged by an old woman.

Ever considering the *komiti* Maori, from its very constitution, to be the weakest form of local government which could be devised, and almost entirely useless for the attainment of those great ends for which all government is adapted, I have from the beginning looked forward with great hopes, to the re-establishment of the stronger and more definite form of runanga wherever it could be placed under English supervision. For I hold it as a truth, from the history of late years, that in many cases where this very powerful engine has been left to the sole management of the Natives themselves, the mixture of evil with good has been so strong, as to render the plan anything but desirable as a permanent institution. Not perhaps that we could expect otherwise, under the circumstances: but for all that, it appears to be a *sine qua non* that European guidance is absolutely necessary to render such a scheme the means of civilizing those who adopt it. But with such guidance, and a submissive people, there is every reason to hope for the best. It is quite true that the Maoris generally look with suspicion at the introduction of our Representative form of Government, being especially fearful that their interest would not be consulted so much as if left entirely to the Crown. I have heard Chiefs repeat this objection, over and over again; but I must add, that I have always thought the suspicion to have been implanted by people of our own race. But when they find in practice that this very Legislature is so willing to advance their best interests, even to the voting of large funds for that purpose there is nothing in the Maori mind, when properly trained, to preclude the hope that they will not only acknowledge the obligation, but also cheerfully assist in the attainment of such benefits. Only let them see where their interest lies, and that such benefits will really accrue, and their co-operation, I think, may be depended upon. Perhaps their establishment of the Runanga at the time was partly in consequence of ours; and partly, because they desired to do that for themselves which they did not wish us to do for them.

Apologising for this long introduction, I now proceed to describe the Runanga Maori, as I found it in operation in some of the various districts which I visited. Wherever I went, I endeavoured, possible, to meet the Runanga and advise with them on general matters, calling their special attention to such as were of the greatest importance; though I fear with very little success. In fact, the spirit of litigation and covetousness had risen to such an extent, that nothing would serve them but the constant trial of offences, whether real or imaginary, at which substantial damages were frequently awarded by the Runanga, and one individual or family enriched at the expense of another; the sum of £60 having once been actually paid at the Thames, for a trivial offence. A feeling of revenge or recrimination was at once aroused, and no little part of their happiness seemed to consist in raking up their clanish grievances, though of ancient date and of trifling importance, and thus endeavouring to recover their