

In my Report from that place, I find the following remarks on the general subject which I will beg to quote:—

“Throughout my journey, hitherto, I think it would greatly surprise and please your Excellency to see the extreme desire which these people manifest, of having just laws properly administered amongst them. The imposition so frequently practised upon them by their own Runangas, is steadily working out its own effects; and wherever real justice can be had (no matter by whom supplied), to that point I believe the native mind will soon be directed, to the entire merging of all other considerations. But the great result, I apprehend, will only be effectually secured in those Districts where the people are supplied by the Government with ready means of comparison. With reference to their present practice of bringing up all offences at once to judgment, however trivial their character, on this as on some other points, their minds have actually gone mad, and it would be amusing to hear of some of the decisions given and penalties inflicted by the runanga Maori. In many cases, it is nothing but a concentrated form of robbery and persecution; and if they will only continue the system for a twelvemonth longer, and work it with energy, I hardly think there would be a proselyte left on whom to practise their imposition or folly. My general plan is, not to notice their proceedings at all, by way of censure or even correction, but simply to leave them to their working, at the same time giving my own opinion freely on all similar bona fide cases submitted to my judgment.”

And on a general review of this journey through the Bay of Plenty and Waikato districts, I had to report of the Natives thus:—

“Their desire for law is at the present time very great, and accompanied with this is their general submission to European authority. Taking example from those places where English Magistrates and Native Assessors have been working together for so many years, I found the Runangas or Councils established at every important place, and acting for the general benefit, according to their several abilities.

These runangas they willingly reduced to a more manageable shape, themselves selecting the best men for that purpose, and leaving out the more inexperienced or incompetent. Thus, in the Bay of Plenty, a good working staff has been secured for carrying out the provisions of the Native Districts Regulation and Native Circuit Courts Acts, which for the present will have to be done by one set of men. I met with no final reluctance on the part of any, to adopt this system, nor with a single case in which a ready acquiescence was not accorded to the decisions given.

“The diminution of crime amongst themselves is very observable since the establishment of these Runangas. For though in many cases they acted with strange impropriety or great injustice, yet had they not failed to impress a certain amount of fear on the people at large, which resulted in better behaviour. At the same time, a reaction was beginning to take place, owing to the want of authority in carrying out the awards of the runanga: so that my official visit by your Excellency's appointment proved to be very timely, and much required in preserving them from a state of confusion and variance into which their own experiments would very soon have thrown them.”

At Tauranga, as in other places, I could not but observe the extreme inconvenience of having two different systems—the Maori and the English—at work, at the same time; for neither party will submit to the other, and all are thrown into confusion. And as the Natives plead, on Government authority, that they can either accept our English system or reject it, as they think proper, so it is merely a matter of interest or convenience with them as to whether they submit to our jurisdiction or not. In such a state of affairs, the total inefficiency of any system whatever is fully manifest. It seems desirable either that our own plans (whatever they may be) should be carried out, in all their integrity, or that the Natives should be left to themselves,—an alternative destructive to their own interests.

At Maketu, there were but few Natives, and no runanga; our Assessor, Tohi te Ururangi, managing everything in his own person. Besides which, all the people seemed under the personal influence of the Rev. Mr. Chapman, who exercised a paternal authority over them. At Otamarakau, until break of day, the talk was all about the runanga; and at Matata it was found flourishing with great authority. At Whakatane, they suspended its operations until after they had done fighting about the land. This broil originated in a slight quarrel about the site for a mill, and was said to be beyond the power of runanga, or Government influence, or anything but the force of arms, to decide: and so they were left to finish it, having lost seven on one side (Ngatiawa) and fifteen on the other (Ngatipukeko). At Ohiwa they had certainly gone stark mad on the subject. One man was fined a foal for carrying a pistol with him on the beach. Another was fined £5 for stating his opinion that the runanga of the place had in a certain instance acted improperly. Indeed the runangas are as bad as the Star Chamber, for not allowing their acts to be evil spoken of. I have heard of their going about the houses, eaves-dropping, and afterwards citing the husband or wife before the Council for some tart remark or reply which one of them had used to the other; and then when both parties naturally joined forces, and complained of the inquisitorial character of the runanga, the latter body has fallen back on its dignity, and fined each of them severely for “contempt of Court.” In another case, a man was fined 10s. for properly correcting his own child. It is from this kind of thralldom and perpetual interference, that so many of the middle and lower classes of Maories, would, I believe, delight to be liberated. Another man, at Ohiwa, was informed by his wife that a youth of the village had taken the liberty of tickling her on the arm; on which he instantly called the runanga, and demanded £150 damages. Not having many friends on the bench, he lost his case, which he then removed to Opotiki, whose Council adjudged him £20, and the offence was at last compounded for by the present of a young