

CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO THE MANAWATU BLOCK.

No. 1.

The SUPERINTENDENT, Wellington, to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Wellington, 21st August, 1865.

Till the receipt of your letter of the 13th instant (received on the 16th), I was not aware that His Excellency's Government were waiting for a special report from me in addition to the information already supplied, giving the history and present state of the transactions that have taken place with reference to the Rangitikei-Manawatu Block of 200,000 acres, stated in the schedule attached to my letter of the 21st ultimo to have been formally handed over to me for sale by the three tribes of Rangitane, Ngatiapa, and Ngatiraukawa.

1. In my official report of the 18th February, 1864, giving an account of the mission which I was requested by the Government to undertake to the three tribes engaged in the Rangitikei land dispute at the very time when they were on the eve of a collision, which would have set the whole of the country between Wellington and Wanganui in a blaze, you will find that after repeated interviews with the contending tribes I achieved these results:—The Ngatiapa and the Wanganui Natives formally surrendered into my hands for sale whatever interests they might be found to have in the block in dispute; they agreed that no rents should be paid by the squatters illegally occupying the land to either of the tribes until the dispute was finally adjusted, and they further agreed that they would at once retire from the disputed block, leaving only a few men to look after their cultivations. The Ngatiraukawas and Rangitanes, while declaring their firm determination neither themselves to sell nor to allow the Ngatiapas to sell a single acre of the land, consented that the rents should be impounded till the matter was arranged, and also agreed that they, equally with the Ngatiapas, should retire from the block. Not only was the impending collision thus averted, but terms were arranged with the three tribes, which if adhered to for a short period, as I believe they have been, could scarcely fail to lead to an amicable adjustment of the quarrel.

2. In my official report of the following November (and from sundry letters) you will learn that in September, 1864, Ihakara and other leading chiefs of the Rangitane and Ngatiraukawa, after having first made peace and interchanged presents with the Ngatiapas, addressed a letter to me, in which they placed the block in my hands for sale; that similar letters were subsequently sent me from other chiefs, and that Ihakara, after having made a tour among his people, reported that the proposal to sell the land was received by them with satisfaction. You will also learn that on the 12th of October, I met by special invitation the chiefs of the Ngatiraukawa and Rangitane, and some thirty other Natives, at Manawatu, when the whole of them (including Matini Te Whiwhi) declared that they saw no other way of ending the dispute, than by selling, and then, each one making a speech, formally offered the block to me for sale, subject to terms of price and the definition of reserves;—that Ihakara afterwards on behalf of his tribe presented me with a carved club (which formerly belonged to Nepia Taratoa) which he said represented Rangitikei, adding as he gave it: "as long as I retained this club, Rangitikei could not be sold, but on handing it now to you I hand over Rangitikei; the land has now for ever gone from the Tribe and is now the Queen's." And you will also learn that when I met some two hundred of the Ngatiapas the following day, they expressed their gratification that their opponents had at last consented to sell, and repeated their determination faithfully to adhere to the agreement they had made with me nearly a year before.

So completely had the differences which had hitherto stood in the way of arranging this matter been thus removed, that in concluding my report I felt myself justified in congratulating the Government that this long-pending dispute had been virtually adjusted.

And now I have no hesitation in expressing my firm conviction that the purchase of the Block would ere this have been satisfactorily completed, had it not been for the action taken by the late Minister for Native Affairs, Mr. Mantell.

The only questions to be arranged were those of price and reserves. When I was asked by Ministers in 1863 to undertake the adjustment of this dispute, Mr. Walter Buller, the Native Resident Magistrate at Manawatu, was instructed to afford me all the assistance in his power in arranging it, and also in effecting the purchase of the Upper Manawatu Block—the purchase of which and other minor blocks was completed last October. With what zeal and ability Mr. Buller carried out these instructions I need not now point out, for I have repeatedly admitted that without his assistance I should probably have failed both in completing the purchase of the Upper Manawatu and in settling the Rangitikei dispute. And Mr. Buller not only received the warm thanks of His Excellency's Government for the aid thus rendered, but in a letter conveying those thanks Mr. Fox (then Colonial Secretary and Native Minister), intimated "that in consequence of the very satisfactory manner in which the Superintendent of Wellington had spoken of the services rendered by him in the purchase of land at Manawatu, and the general ability with which he had performed his duties over an extended district, his salary was increased from £400 to £500 per annum.

One would have imagined after such an acknowledgment that His Excellency's Ministers would not only have continued Mr. Buller in his appointment, but would have urged him still to continue to exert his influence in bringing the dispute to a close. But what is the course pursued by the late Native Minister? Mr. Mantell, after joining the Ministry, no sooner arrives in Wellington, than he censures Mr. Buller for having obeyed the instructions of his predecessor; forbids him holding any communication whatever with the Natives on the subject of the Rangitikei, or any other land question; and then knocks off the increase of salary awarded to him, with the express sanction of the Governor, by Mr. Fox;—thus committing an act of very great injustice to Mr. Buller, and depriving me of the services of the man most capable of assisting in finally and for ever closing this Rangitikei transaction.