

*Native Land Court.*

A sitting of the Native Lands Court sat at Wairoa this year, but only a portion of the claims were heard. Some of the Wairoa lands were adjudicated on at Hastings; the Natives complain bitterly at this mode of taking cases out of one district to be heard in another. They say they have no means to go such a distance and support themselves while the Court is sitting. They frequently have to send a few men to represent the tribe; these have often, through necessity, to partake of the hospitality of the local Natives, who, in some cases, assert a claim to the land, which would never have been raised had the case been heard in the district where the land is situated; that, being under obligations to them, they have not resisted the claims as they otherwise would have done; that the old people, who are unable to travel, owing both to infirmity and want of means, are the best and most reliable persons to give evidence of the traditions of the Natives and of the ownership of the land, according to Native custom, are frequently shut out, and that a great injustice is thereby done. I may state that formerly these Courts were held as near as possible to the settlement where the land was situated, but that the Natives now have often to travel a hundred miles to attend the Court in a district where they are entirely dependent on the generosity of the local Natives for maintenance during the sitting of the Court; and if these Natives trump up a claim to the land, these applicants are at a great disadvantage, and prefer to admit their claim rather than to oppose it, owing to the fact of being under an obligation to them for support.

In the month of December last, the Mohaka Natives, who have always been noted for their loyalty and good behaviour, having heard that the ex-rebel, Te Kooti, was about to pay a visit to Wairoa, and pass through Mohaka (one of the scenes of the massacres of 1869), communicated with me, and desired that the Government should interfere to prevent the threatened visit, as they were determined at all hazards, to stop him. A large party of ex-rebels passed through the district to Wairoa at this time, and, notwithstanding the fact that I assured the Natives that Te Kooti was not with them, they fortified a pah, and armed themselves, with the determination of preventing him passing if he was with the other Natives; but, after ascertaining he was not with them, they allowed the party to pass unmolested, but held no communication with them whatever. A bitter feeling still exists amongst the majority of the Natives in this district against this man. I think it would not be advisable for him to visit this district; no possible good could come of it, and it would only stir up an angry feeling on the part of the Natives who object to his presence, and who have always been loyal to the Crown.

*General Remarks.*

A Native Committee, under "The Native Committees Act, 1883," was elected last year; but the Act remains a dead letter as far as this district is concerned. I am of opinion that any further special legislation for the Natives is unnecessary; the provisions of "The Resident Magistrates Act, 1867," are ample for all their requirements. With regard to the powers under the 14th section of the Act, I think it might be useful if a Committee of, say five men, were taken from one district to another to make an enquiry, and report to the Native Lands Court the result in certain cases, at the request of a judge of the Native Lands Court. Under the section as it is now, it would be almost impossible for Native members of a Committee to hear a case in their own district, without being more or less directly interested in the result of the enquiry.

*Disposition of Native Lands.*

In my reports of 1882-1883, I suggested the advisability of some change in the mode of dealing with Native lands. I still think that it is advisable that Native lands should be dealt either by resumption of the pre-emptive right of the Crown, or by the Crown acting through the Waste Lands Boards of the Colony, as agents for selling and leasing Native lands in the same way as Crown lands are disposed of. The land to be cut up into sections, and roads made or laid off at the discretion of the Board, the Government charging a small commission for acting as agents for the Natives, such commission to include expenses of the sale and survey, and the land to be sold free of the present Native lands duty. I feel sure this mode of disposing of lands would be acceptable to the Natives, and it would most certainly be of great advantage to the colony in opening up settlements in the country. The Europeans would get their titles direct from the Crown, and it would be the means of preventing the endless trouble in the acquisition of Native lands which now exists. I think that the Natives should be allowed the option of selling their lands direct to the Crown at a fixed price per acre, or to put it into the hands of the Board to cut it up and get the best marketable price. Great care should be taken to make ample reserves for the use and occupation of the Natives in each district, the reserves actually required for their occupation to be made absolutely inalienable, and other reserves to be alienable for lease for a term not exceeding twenty-one years, and either to be dealt with by the Board, or under the provisions of "The Native Reserves Act, 1882." I think the Natives should be represented on each Land Board by one or more Native members, either elected by the Natives within the Land District for two years, or appointed by the Governor for the same period.

The Natives are always suspicious of any change in the mode of dealing with their lands, and will perhaps be adverse at first to take advantage of dealing with their lands in this way; but it is a feeling which will soon wear off when they find they can get a better price, and get their rents regularly paid. I feel sure that they will see that the change is very much to their advantage, and that after a short time they will be very ready to dispose of their lands in this manner.

*Wairoa-Rotorua Road.*

A flying survey is now being made of a road from Wairoa to Rotorua, *via* Lake Waikaremoana, the whole distance of the road which requires to be formed is about sixty-four miles. I would suggest that this road be commenced at both ends, and that the Natives through whose land it passes be employed, during the ensuing summer, in the construction thereof. This road will be of great benefit to the settlers in the Poverty Bay and Wairoa Districts, as it will give them a means of driving their cattle through to