

As regards the further alienation of Territory, the received interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi recognizes rights in the Native proprietor which must be respected, however inconvenient those rights may prove. But it would not be politic, or safe, or right, to submit to the usurpation of a power of obstructing the settlement of the country which the admitted interpretation will not warrant. The treaty secures to the Native proprietor the right to part with to the Crown, or to retain for himself, lands which are his own. The King party would assert a National property in, or Sovereign right over, the remaining Native Territory, and are ready to support all opposition to Land Sales, without nice inquiry respecting, and even without reference to, the merits of each particular case. In this they infringe, at once, upon the rights of the Crown and of the Native proprietor.

It is by no means meant to assert that all who have joined, or who favour, the party of the Maori King propose to themselves ends so dangerous and unjustifiable. Potatau himself is probably sincerely averse to any proceedings hostile to the Government. It is, however, uncertain how far he may have power to restrain his people, and it is undeniable that sentiments quite as strong as those above described are freely expressed throughout the districts South of Auckland, and may be expected to shape the action of a large part of the powerful Tribes of Waikato.

Such then, is the party to whom William King, of Waitara, is looking for support, and it is to be feared, with some prospect of success; and it now becomes necessary to give some explanation of the origin of the present disturbance at Taranaki.

The Settlement of New Plymouth was founded in 1841 by the Plymouth Company of New Zealand, which subsequently merged in the New Zealand Company. There were at that time scarcely any Natives in the district. Some had fled southward to Cook's Straits, to avoid the invading Waikatos. Many others, who had been captured on the storming of the Ngatiawa stronghold, Pukerangiora, still remained slaves in the Waikato country. The New Zealand Company's agent had purchased of the resident Natives, with the assent of some of their relatives at Port Nicholson and Queen Charlotte's Sound, a tract of country extending from the Sugar Loaf Islands to a place called Taniwa, between three and four miles north of the Waitara River. The block extended about fifteen miles along the coast, and contained 60,000 acres. It included the land now the subject of dispute. After the arrival of the settlers, the refugee Ngatiawas, and manumitted slaves from Waikato, began to return in great numbers, and disputed possession of the Block with the settlers. So completely was the Waikato right of conquest admitted, that their permission was sought, and obtained, by the returning Ngatiawas before they ventured to set foot in the district. The Waikatos had, however, previously transferred their rights to the British Government by the Deed of Cession, which will be presently referred to.

In 1844, the Land Claims Commissioner, Mr. Spain, investigated the New Zealand Company's title and reported in favour of their purchase. But Governor Fitzroy took a different view of the rights of the absent and enslaved Ngatiawa, and refused to confirm Mr. Spain's award.

In consideration of an additional payment, the returned Natives consented to surrender a small block of 3,500 acres, comprising the Town site; and within these narrow limits the British Settlement was for some time confined. Other small blocks were subsequently, from time to time, acquired, and the Settlement now extends for a distance along the coast of about five miles in each direction, North and South, from the Town. The European population amounts to upwards of 2,500 souls, greatly outnumbering the resident Natives.

The Northern boundary of the Settlement is little more than four miles from Waitara. But on this side of the Town the Crown Lands are intermixed with territory over which the Native Title has not been extinguished. A singular spectacle is here presented of peaceful English homesteads alternating with fortified Pahs, which command the road to the Town at many points; unpleasantly reminding the spectator that the savage law of might still rules in this fair district.

It need scarcely be said that the occupants of these Pahs do not regard themselves, and practically are not, amenable to British jurisdiction. Since 1854, they have been in continual feud amongst themselves, and there has been a succession of battles, and of murders, in close proximity to the settled territory. A chief has been slaughtered on the Bell Block; skirmishing Natives have sought cover behind the hedge-rows; and balls fired in an encounter have struck the roof of a settler's house.

These feuds have arisen out of disputes as to the title to land. One Native faction has been steadfastly opposed to the alienation of territory to the Crown; the other party has been not less passionately determined to sell, and the contest has been as to their right to do so. The sellers naturally carry with them the sympathy of the colonists, who feel, that an extension of the Settlement would bring, not simply a material prosperity, which this unfortunate place has never known, but also the far greater blessings of Peace, Security, and the prevalence of British Law.

It is obvious that, in such a state of things, the relations of the two races, thus closely intermixed, must be full of peril. The embarrassment to the Government is extreme. But without some knowledge of the Native character its extent will not be fully apprehended. When a Native has offered to cede land to the Crown, his pride (perhaps the strongest passion of a Chief,) is committed to carry the sale into effect against all opposition; and it may be equally dangerous to the peace of the country to accept or refuse the offer. If the offer be accepted, the Government becomes involved in difficulties with the opposing party; if refused, the seller will seek to revenge himself upon his opponent, or become disaffected towards the Government that has put a slight upon him. If his passion does not turn in either of these directions, he will probably persevere in his attempts to induce the Governor to purchase—thus keeping open a source of agitation and peril. Taranaki is by no means the sole seat of such difficulties. At the present juncture in the affairs of the Colony the Government is, in other quarters, placed in a similar dilemma, and is in the greatest danger of alienating those Chiefs who are friendly by the rigid scrutiny to which it is requisite to subject their offers of land. The truest policy would be a fearless administration of justice between the con-