

To the Honourable the House of Representatives in Parliament Assembled :—
The Humble Petition of THOMAS SHIRLEY, and HENRY SHIRLEY, of
Tutaekuri in the Province of Hawke's Bay, Farmers,

Sheweth,—

That for some time past your Petitioners have been carrying on business together as Farmers upon the freehold consisting of 60 acres, the property of Thomas Shirley, and that the principal source, from which your Petitioners derive their humble subsistence is by the sale and purchase of cattle and by a Dairy Farm which such cattle supply. That the river Tutaekuri separates your Petitioners property from the adjoining Native Lands, and that your Petitioners have always endeavoured to keep their cattle, which have varied in number from ten only in 1857, to twenty-nine at the end of last year, on their own side of the river; but in consequence of their being unable to bear the expense of fencing, or of employing sufficient persons to herd the cattle, they frequently strayed across the river and fed upon the Maori Land—to prevent which as much as possible your Petitioners fastened a bell to one of the cows to enable them by its sound to ascertain the position of the herd, and when it warned them that the cattle had strayed, they used to send after them and bring them back. That from time to time the Natives claimed rent or grass money from your Petitioners for such trespass, which they always declined to pay on the ground that they endeavoured to prevent the cattle straying and that it was involuntary on their part. The Natives never insisted on their claim, nor took any means for recovering the same if they were legally entitled thereto. That in the month of October last, the claim was renewed and a demand made by one Paora Kaiwhata on your Petitioners for the sum of thirty pounds for five years grass money due to him, which however your Petitioners declined to pay. That being compelled to sell a portion of their stock they had twenty head of cattle driven into their own stockyard, and advertised a sale by public auction for the 15th day of October, whereupon the said Native renewed his claim and your Petitioners, though not admitting the claim, and to bring peace and to prevent any delay or obstacle to the said sale, offered to pay him the sum of twenty pounds; and not having that sum in hand wherewith to pay, promised to give him an order on the Auctioneer for that amount, who was to sell the cattle on their behalf, which the Native declined to accept; and your Petitioners being otherwise unable to accede to his demands, upon a given signal sixteen Natives armed with sticks and spears, rushed into their stockyard, tore down one of the sides of it, and drove away the cattle collected for the following day's sale—that your Petitioner Thomas, a man of 61 years of age, endeavoured to restrain them but was knocked down with an axe and beaten with a pole whilst on the ground and disabled; and that your other Petitioner Henry, when attempting to assist and rescue his said father was forcibly seized and confined by five Natives, and that the wives of both your Petitioners who were present were also forcibly seized and thrown into a ditch and kept there. That having let loose the said cattle they drove them across the river on to their own land and there detained them three months. That the cattle so driven away consisted chiefly of milch cows, which were daily milked by your Petitioners and were depastured on your Petitioners' property and which were not in the habit of straying on Native Land. That on the evening of the said fourteenth, your Petitioner Henry came down to the Resident Magistrate for redress and protection and requested assistance to recover their property, but the same was not afforded them, and being unable to bear the expense of an application in the Supreme Court, (as well as the uncertainty of success there, where they probably would have been told that their remedy lay with the local Court at Wellington), they were compelled to submit to this violent outrage and were deprived of their chief means of subsistence for many months. That the cattle so taken by the Natives were of the value of £160 at the rate of £8 per head. That in the month of January last, Mr. Crosbie Ward, Postmaster General of the Colony, having visited Napier, your Petitioners mentioned the subject, when he induced the Natives to return eighteen of the cattle, and procured a special sitting of Justices and Native Assessors, to be holden for the purpose of considering the whole matter. That a summons was issued by Alexander Alexander, Esq., J.P., on behalf of Paora Kaiwhata against your Petitioner Henry for payment of £30 for rent, and was made returnable at Puketapu in the said Province, on the 11th day of January last. That your Petitioners attended such Court, and having no other available remedy, issued a counter summons against the said Native for trespass, and for breaking their stockyard, and for damages for the wrongful removal and detention of their cattle; that the Court consisted of three Justices of the Peace (the Resident Magistrate and two others) and two Native Assessors, Tareha and Renata, both of whom, by Native custom, lords of the soil where the alleged trespass took place, and entitled to the larger part of any damages awarded to the Native. An objection was consequently raised by counsel for your Petitioners, that being interested in the result they were disqualified from acting as Judges, or taking part in the decision, but this objection not being allowed the case was proceeded with. The Native asserted that a continual trespass had taken place, and stated that your Petitioner had agreed to pay him rent. He claimed rent as one of the Natives interested in the land trespassed on, and which he admitted belonged principally to the two Native Assessors,