

Walter Buller, Esq. brought before the Runanga, and, if not always brought to a satisfactory issue, are at least freely discussed and ventilated.

While it must be admitted that in these Runangas much time is wasted in talk, and oftentimes an act of unjust oppression committed in their rude attempts to administer law, yet they are not without their corresponding advantages. They are useful as a means of maintaining peace and order in the villages; and, under proper control, might become an effective instrument for promoting the civilization of the people. They invest the commissioned Native Assessor with an influence which he could not otherwise command, and by their manner of proceeding give to his acts the authority of the public voice. It is through the medium of the Runanga, and by the co-operation of its leading men, that I have been enabled to carry out so successfully the individual partition of the Kaiapoi Reserve; and it is by the aid of the same means that I hope, when the survey is completed, to be able to induce the Natives to adopt a plan of systematic settlement, with other improvements in their social and domestic economy.

The Resident Magistrate here has admitted (in a private letter to myself) that "these Native Runangas are absolutely the only means and mode of preserving themselves from anarchy which the Maoris of this Province possess." In the absence of any other tribunal for the redress of wrongs as amongst themselves, we cannot be surprised at the Runanga usurping judicial functions; nor can we wonder that, in administering what they take to be law, the claims of equity are often overlooked. The judgments of the Runanga are too often characterized by undue severity. I have heard of cases where a person, for a comparatively light offence, has had his horse and all other property seized and sold for the benefit of the Court! Some check should be put upon this Maori custom of *muru*.

Upon the whole, however, these Runangas do good. At the same time, they afford a proof that this kind of organization (now becoming so general among the Maoris) does not of necessity contain the elements of disaffection, or indicate an unhealthy and dangerous excitement in the Native mind. On the contrary, wherever I have been, a strong desire has been manifested by the leaders of the Runanga to have a magistrate stationed here to instruct them in law, and to preside at their meetings. "Why does not the Governor," they have said, "give us a *pakeha* magistrate, even as he does to the people of the North: we are few in numbers, but we are the children of the same parent, and we desire to obey the same law."

I am well aware that there are other more populous districts in the North island still unsupplied, and yet I cannot but recommend to the best consideration of His Excellency the request of these Natives to have a Circuit Magistrate stationed among them. The Resident Magistrates here and at Timaru, have both of them directed my attention to this great want of the Natives, and have expressed an earnest hope that ere long it may be supplied.

The Native settlements of this Province are (with one exception) so remote from Christchurch that access to the only R. M. Court having an interpreter attached to it, is virtually denied them. On the one hand it would probably cost a plaintiff *five pounds* to recover *one*, while, on the other, it would be almost impracticable to enforce payments in the remote settlements without the aid of police, and, consequently, not without considerable expense. The only means, therefore, of obtaining redress as between Natives, is by appeal to the Runanga; whilst as against Europeans there is no redress at all.

I would respectfully submit that the Canterbury Natives have claims upon the Government of a peculiar kind. Surrounded as they are by an overwhelming majority of Europeans, they have actually no guarantee that their individual rights and privileges will be either respected on the one hand, or protected on the other.

The gold discoveries in this Island will in all probability lead to a large and rapid influx of mixed populations, and in proportion thereto will the disadvantages of the Natives' position be augmented. The only way, as it seems to me, of meeting this difficulty, is to appoint a Circuit Magistrate to this district: who shall make periodical visits, in his judicial capacity, to each of the settlements in rotation, and shall, at the same time, have the general supervision of Native affairs in this Province. Such an officer would be useful to the Government in many ways, and would, if possessing the confidence of the Natives, soon acquire the most complete influence over them. It is needless to point out how instrumental he might become in raising them to a higher condition of civilization, by assisting them in the management of their reserves, by encouraging them in their industrial pursuits and so forth.

It might be found desirable to include the Otago Native settlements in this officer's circuit, and then his charge would number not far short of 1000 souls.

If in the above observations I have digressed somewhat from the proper subject-matter of this report, I can only urge in excuse the fitness of the opportunity (as it appeared to me) for bringing this important subject under His Excellency's notice.

I have, &c.,

WALTER BULLER.

The Native Secretary.