

Efforts are being made, though somewhat tardy, by the tribes to come to an amicable arrangement and adjustment of their ancient tribal land boundary disputes.

Large and important meetings are continually being held, whereat these differences are fully discussed, with the view of an agreement being come to to have the boundaries surveyed, prior to taking the matter to the Native Land Courts for investigation. This question has assumed so much importance of late that the Wanganui tribes have consented to leave all local and family land disputes in abeyance, to prevent an encroachment being made by other Natives upon the tribal estate. A large and important meeting was held last month, at Waitotara, of the West Coast Natives, and a decision come to respecting the survey, next summer, of the main boundary line between Wanganui, Taranaki, and Ngatimaru country, embracing a tract of land extending from the Wanganui to the Mokau River, and stretching far into the interior.

As the main trunk railway may some day pass through this country, the importance of an early settlement of the Native title to these lands becomes apparent; besides paving the way for a further occupation of the interior of this island, to the benefit of both races. Another large meeting will be held at Putiki in July next, to discuss the Murimotu land question, the tribal boundary there being much in dispute.

Owing to recent legislation, much anxiety has been caused to the Native mind, the Native Land Act, thrown out by the late Assembly, being the main cause. A wide-spread apprehension exists that injustice, sooner or later, will be done to them in the matter of forcing them to part with their lands. At a large *hui*, held in January last at Koriniti, on the Wanganui River, one of the topics of discussion which found much favour at the meeting was the desirability of the Maori people combining to send certain chosen chiefs as delegates to the English Government, with the approval of the Ministry, to make a representation respecting their lands, with the view of securing a just administration thereof, in the interest of the present and future Maori generations.

The names of Te Keepa Rangihwinui and Topia Turoa were mentioned as being fit persons to represent this part of the country. The matter was mooted for the first time here at said meeting; but it will come up again for future discussion, and is not unlikely to be carried out, as, if the Natives combine on the question, money could soon be raised to meet the expenses of the mission.

Fresh legislation is urgently required to meet the case—an all-important one,—and every help and facility should be afforded to the Natives to secure a settlement of their conflicting land claims, and a registry of their tribal, family, and individual titles—not with the immediate view of hastening a disposition by way of sale or lease of their lands (which will follow as a matter of course), but with the object of settling a matter, and removing an element, that causes constant excitement and disturbance to the Maori mind throughout the country.

There should be more regular and frequent sittings of the Land Court in all Native districts. And there should be a Court of Appeal, to which dissatisfied Maori litigants could have recourse for a final and exhaustive inquiry into the nature of their conflicting land claims.

With regard to other Maori grievances, real or imaginary, a Council, or third House, under European presidency, comprised of Maori elected chiefs, sitting at Wellington at the same time as the Parliament, and by law connected in some way therewith, would give satisfaction to the Natives, and meet the increasing demand of a larger representation on their part in the Legislature of the country.

Too much effort cannot at present be made to meet the reasonable claims of the Maori population, with the view of occupying their active and restless minds, and thereby preventing disaffection and perhaps overt rebellion. The Native is still a power in the country, and it would be a great mistake to treat his demands and representations with indifference. The country has now arrived at another crisis, and great care, foresight, and tact are requisite to tide the colony safely through this period of its history, so that an amicable solution of the Native difficulty may yet be attained to, after so many years of peace, secured only by the hitherto wise and forbearing administration of the Government of the country as exhibited in its conduct of Native affairs.

Upon the whole, an increasing disposition is shown by the Maoris to appeal to the law for a settlement of all difficulties and disputes; and, where they do not avail themselves of the English Courts, they arrange many quarrels and differences by a recourse to the Maori runanga, a body of men selected by the tribe to investigate any matter brought to them by the people for adjustment; said runangas being an imitation of our Courts of justice, and which are not without a beneficial influence on the mind of the Natives, as, by their arbitrament, strife and contention of a serious nature are often assuaged and prevented.

Sometimes, however, the runanga or committee commits an excess of authority, by enforcing its decisions in an illegal and irregular way against members of the Maori community who do not recognize its authority; and it was only the other day that I fined one of its policemen £5 for distraining upon the goods of other Natives than those of the defendant in the case. I treated the affair as one of Maori *murū* (robbery), and had not the fine been paid by the chairman of the committee, who issued the process to the constable, I should have sent the offender to prison, in terms of the Act in such case made and provided. This is the only time the runanga has come into direct collision with my Court, and it came off second-best in the business, and had to acknowledge a maladministration of its affairs.