

less country. It is estimated that 15,000,000 acres still remain in the hands of the Natives, and, if the same proportion holds good in regard to the Native lands as to the Crown lands, the Native lands consist of about 6,600,000 acres of open grass or fern country; 4,400,000 acres of forest; and 4,000,000 acres worthless for agricultural or pastoral purposes.

The Native lands are scattered over the North Island, but the largest continuous block is situated between 38° and 40° south latitude and between 175° and 177° east longitude, a large portion of which is called the King country.

The Natives number about 40,000 people only, so that this large area is quite beyond their power either to occupy or employ. One of the objects of the "King" movement was to prevent the sale of Native land to Europeans; but every effort of the chiefs to restrain the sale of land has failed, and their property is fast melting away, and no provision is being made for the future sustenance of the race.

Land Courts, presided over partly by European and partly by Maori Judges, have been established by the Government for the investigation of titles and the settlement of land disputes. These Courts are not popular with the Maoris, but, in the absence of any other means of procuring a Government title for the purposes of sale, they are compelled to use them.

The process by which land is acquired from the Maoris is as follows: As the land is held tribally, no individual has a right to sell without the consent of the tribe, although by arrangement amongst themselves the land is most minutely subdivided amongst families and individuals. The land speculator begins by advancing money in small amounts to men well known to possess land, either directly or through storekeepers, who make it easy for the victims to run up scores. This proceeds for a time, until the Maori becomes hopelessly involved, when pressure is brought to bear, and he is often obliged to sell his land for one-fourth of what it would realize if it were first passed through the Land Courts, and then sold in the open market with a perfect title. A similar process is brought to bear on his co-owners, and, although it often occupies a very long time, the various interests are ultimately secured. The land, after survey, is then brought into the Land Court, and, in conformity with the Act, notice is formally given in the *Government Gazette* to all who may be interested to appear and establish their claims.

Frequently the determination to sell is not unanimous on the part of the owners, and it often happens that some of them are absent in other parts of the colony or in adjacent islands, and it is not unusual for members of the tribe to deny the legality of the Land Courts; while it not unfrequently occurs that one or more absent themselves by arrangement, at the instance of a class of unscrupulous lawyers, and what are called "pakeha-Maoris," who abound in the colony, with the object of creating subsequent complications and levying blackmail on the purchasers. It often happens, too, by means of intimidation brought to bear by the unscrupulous and strong-willed men on the weaker minds, the most important owners are left out of the Crown grants, and the names of others inserted who have little or no claim to the land.

Thus a sense of wrong and ill-feeling is engendered, and, as the money received for the land has either been forestalled by the processes named above or is quickly squandered, there is much room for a comprehensive scheme which would put a stop to the existing conditions under which the Native race is being preyed upon, and which, whilst furnishing an abundant return to capitalists who may engage in it, would protect the Maoris in the administration of their lands, and give them a permanent interest in the development and settlement of the country.

For many years the Government maintained a right of pre-emption over all Native lands, on terms favourable to the colony; but this policy was abandoned for financial reasons, and also on account of the irritation it excited amongst the Maoris owing to the low price received by them for the land, and the dependent position towards the Government in which it placed them. Their position has not been improved by the alteration of this policy, as, whilst there is now no pressure on the part of the Government to buy, there is pressure on the part of the Natives to sell, and, owing to the difficulties connected with their tribal ownership and the consequent impossibility of selling in small blocks to actual settlers, they are forced, as it were, into the hands of the land-shark.

The condition of the Maori mind at the present moment is considered, by Europeans who are well acquainted with the race, to be such as to afford every inducement to take active measures at once for the carrying-out of such a scheme. The chiefs and patriotic men amongst them are represented as deploring their own declining influence, and looking forward to the rapid disintegration of the race, without knowing how to stem the tide. The three New Zealand chiefs who are at present in this country strongly urge the scheme, and declare that it will be welcomed by the Natives at large, and that there will be few practical difficulties in the way of its application to the whole of the Native lands in the colony. They say that the chiefs look with suspicion upon local suggestions, and would welcome a scheme based upon just principles, and advocated by prominent men in this country, whose motives would be above suspicion, and whose names and position would be a guarantee, both to the Maoris and to the well-disposed Europeans, that the interests proposed to be committed to them would be properly conserved.

It is urged that it is the duty of such men to respond to this call, and that a debt is due to these noble semi-civilized people, who have been brought into contact with our civilization, and have hitherto suffered thereby, not altogether by our intention, but by the force of circumstances. It is admitted that, on the whole, no other Native race has been treated with the consideration and forbearance they have met with at the hands of our governing class, and it, therefore, may be expected that, when the proposed scheme is promulgated in the colony, it will be welcomed and assisted by those in power.

In making this call the Natives do not ask for our charity, except perhaps in the highest sense of the word; for, in helping them in this matter, it can be demonstrated that those who respond to the call will vastly benefit themselves, not only by the sense of good performed, but by the important financial results which will accrue.