

A MEETING of the Chamber of Commerce will be held to-day, when a report will be presented from a committee in regard to Native lands. The following are the suggestions made :—

*Native Lands.*—The Chamber of Commerce, having had under consideration the desirability of opening up Native lands for occupation, are of opinion that the time has now arrived when active steps should be taken in that direction, and would respectfully suggest that in dealing with such lands the following lines should, as far as practicable, be followed : (1.) That sales of Native lands should be assimilated to the practice now ruling in selling Government lands. (2.) That the Government should not be purchasers of Native lands, but should act only as agents for and on behalf of the Natives. (3.) That the Natives be requested to furnish Government with particulars of such lands as they are willing to dispose of, and price demanded for same. (4.) That as soon as the Government are in possession of such information, the land so specified be advertised as open for selection. (5.) The cost of surveys of such land be made a first charge upon the land, or to be paid by vendor or purchaser, as may be agreed. (6.) That all moneys received for sale of such lands shall be held in trust for Natives until completion of title. (7.) That a percentage of all moneys received should be set apart and applied to opening up the land by roads and bridges. (8.) That a sufficient reserve of land be set apart for the maintenance of aborigines ; also, as endowment for school purposes. (9.) That all present laws relative to sale of Native lands be abrogated, having been found most unsuitable, tending in many cases rather to lock up than to open lands for settlement.

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No. 14.

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 20th May, 1891.

In reply to your letter of the 13th instant I have pleasure in furnishing the following information, though it is scarcely in the form you asked for, for the simple reason that the data does not exist for dividing lands into “ agricultural and rural.”

As a matter of fact, the lands still left in the North Island, and suitable for settlement, are mostly of a mixed agricultural and pastoral nature, and cannot well be separated the one from the other. It has therefore become the practice to refer to such mixed lands as “ settlement lands,” and it is understood that the term includes such country as is suitable for holdings up to 2,000 acres, and are consequently partly pastoral.

Approximate area of Native land still unalienated, but suitable for settlement, in the Provincial District of Auckland : Mixed agricultural and pastoral or settlement land, 1,007,000 acres ; pastoral, 1,580,000. In these areas I do not include the Uriwera country, about which very little is at present known, but the probability is that a large portion of it might be classed as pastoral country—that is, it is capable of being made into pastoral country by clearing and sowing. The area of this country is about 1,500,000 acres.

With regard to the other questions raised in your letter, as to sufficient reserves for the Natives, I am not in a position to offer any opinion thereon.

With respect to the cost of surveys, if Government should revert to the exercise of the pre-emptive right, I beg to say that this could be reduced to an average of 2d. per acre. The mean price at present paid for Native Land Court surveys amounts to about 8d. per acre.

I have, &c.,

J. M. Geddis, Esq.,

S. PERCY SMITH, Surveyor-General.

Secretary, Native Land Laws Commission, Wellington.

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