

The Commissioners appointed under the Act (the Surveyor-General, Judge W. J. Butler, and five Maori chiefs of the Urewera Tribe) met at Whakatane on the 1st February, and proceeded to consider how they might best carry out the provisions of the Act, which combine the two objects of ascertaining the ownership of the large block of land included within the boundaries described in the schedule to the Act (656,000 acres), and, secondly, of dividing the country into areas which are to serve as the basis for the local government of the tribes.

It was soon found that practically there are no such things as defined hapu boundaries such as were acknowledged by the people as belonging to any given hapu to the exclusion of others. As a matter of fact, nearly the whole area is subject to overlapping claims, sometimes three or four claims one on top of the other with discordant boundaries; and the hapus are so mixed by inter-marriage that it is difficult to say to what hapu any particular individual of the tribe belongs. As the work progressed it became apparent that the title to the whole area would require investigation before any boundaries could be determined suitable for a division into districts.

In order to facilitate this, the Commissioners adjourned from Whakatane to Ruatoki, and from there to Te Houhi, Te Whaiti, Ruatahuna, Maungapohatu, finishing up at Waimako, near Lake Waikare-moana, on the 6th April, having obtained the lists of claimants in fifty-seven blocks, and learned approximately their boundaries. This work is preliminary to what is to follow in the investigation of the title, which will take considerable time, and prior to which some sketch surveys of the most intricate and disputed boundaries will have to take place. Practically, the owners of the Urewera country are now known by name, subject to, perhaps, some few names omitted from the lists. Their number cannot, however, be stated at present, until the completion of the work of arranging them all alphabetically, and the elimination of duplicate names.

The Commissioners were received most hospitably by these wild mountaineers, who are most anxious to see this great work finished. They were found to be very tractable and amenable to discipline. The Commissioners sat in any convenient place where shelter could be obtained, generally under a slight booth or the shade of a tree.

It is proposed to put in hand the surveys so soon as the season allows, but it is not contemplated to do more than make such sketch surveys as will allow the Commissioners to decide boundaries in dispute. And, moreover, it is proposed to do away with many of the smaller claims, throwing them into large divisions whenever this can be accomplished.

LANDS FOR LANDLESS NATIVES, SOUTH ISLAND.

A special report has been presented to Parliament on the above subject, but, as the Lands and Survey Department has had much to do with the matter, a brief notice of the progress made may be given here. It is unnecessary to refer to the origin of the lack of land amongst the Natives of the South Island, suffice it to say that the claims of a large number of landless Natives so forced itself upon the attention of successive Governments that in December, 1893, the Cabinet decided to appoint two Commissioners (Judge A. Mackay and the Surveyor-General) to deal with the matter.

Up to date the investigation has proved that there are about 4,233 persons—Maoris, half- and quarter-castes—who were more or less landless—that is, not having sufficient land to live on—whilst very many had none at all. Out of this number, 2,415 have been provided with land in five different localities in the South Island, leaving about 1,823 yet to be allocated.

To meet these wants a total area to date has been withdrawn from selection and set aside, of 169,289 acres, some of which will probably prove on survey to be unsuitable; indeed, already, in the Waiau Block, 30,000 acres have turned out to be too mountainous to be used for settlement. During the coming summer about 57,600 acres will be explored and, where found suitable, surveyed prior to the allocation of land to the remainder of the people.

NATIVE TOWNSHIPS ACT.

Under the above Act, which provides for the laying-out of towns on lands owned by Maoris in places where such towns are necessary, but where the owners are not able to deal with the lands in a comprehensive manner, three towns have been laid out and offered to the public since the Act came into force—viz., Pipiriki, Tokaanu, and Kaimakau. The latter township was laid out at Kennedy's Bay, Coromandel County, but not a single allotment was disposed of. The following shows the towns that have been proclaimed, of which Te Puia has not yet been offered, but will be shortly:—

			Proclaimed.	First offered for Lease.
Pipiriki	...	366 acres	2nd October, 1896	27th July, 1897
Tokaanu	...	490 "	11th March, 1897	17th June, 1898
Kaimakau	...	190 "	14th July, 1897	14th October, 1898
Te Puia	...	497 "	13th July, 1898	...

In addition to the above, arrangements have been made with the Natives for the following towns: Potaka, between Mangaweka and Taihape; Tautini, at Tokomaru Bay, Cook County; Waipiro, Waiapu County; Araroa, Kawakawa Bay, Waiapu County; and Parata, near Waikanae.

ASSISTANCE TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MEDICAL MEN IN OUTLYING DISTRICTS.

Under Vote 71, Item 76, "Miscellaneous Services," a sum of £400 was voted last year for the above object. The results up to the 31st March are shown below.

A petition was forwarded by European residents at Tolago Bay (where there is a large Native population) for aid to induce a medical man to settle in the locality, and £50 has been granted for the purpose.

In response to a petition from settlers at Raetihi a grant of £75 per annum for three years has been promised for a doctor to practise in the Waimarino district.