

Report from Commissioners at New Plymouth.

New Plymouth,
26th June, 1858.

SIR,—

Referring to your letter of 22nd March acquainting us that His Excellency the Governor had been pleased to appoint us, with Mr. Cutfield, at present in Auckland, Commissioners of Native Reserves in this Province under the "New Zealand Native Reserves Act, 1856," we have now the honour to transmit for the information of His Excellency's Government the enclosed list of Native Reserves, shewing a total of 2329 a. 3 r. 8 p., and a list of the number of Natives, as nearly as can be ascertained in each district, together with the following Report.

1. The Native Title subsists over nearly the whole of the Reserves, only 37 acres having been alienated to the Government, viz.,

No. 10. Exchanged for Military purposes.

No. 21. Purchased for Mr. Richardson.

No. 25. Purchased for Mr. Smith.

No. — Rawiri's Reserve at Bell Block Town Sections were given for the two former, which sections are considered as re-purchases from the Government and not as Reserves; so that the only Reserve which will at present come under the supervision of the Commissioners is that of the late Rawiri's at the Bell Block.

2. In accordance with the terms of the Act, we have the honor to suggest that an Officer be appointed to ascertain the assent of the Natives to such lands becoming subject to the operation of the Act, and in the mean time every exertion will be made by us to recommend the Natives to give such assent.

3. We have reason to fear that the Natives who may be personally interested in the respective Reserves will object to the proceeds being left to the disposal of the Commissioners, and shall therefore be glad to be informed whether, in the event of such objection being made, the Commissioners would be justified in taking measures for the beneficial occupancy of the land, and thus secure one of the objects of the Act, even though the rents or proceeds may be claimed by the Natives.

4. It appears from enquiries made, that about 205 acres have already been let or leased by the Natives to Settlers, who have been in possession for several years, the Natives receiving the rents. It will be our duty to enquire into these arrangements, not with a view to interference with tenants, for we submit that such a course might not be prudent, but rather for the purpose of bringing such lands under the operation of the Act, and placing the occupants on a legal footing. In some cases the common interest of a family or tribe, for whom the Reserves were made, is monopolized by a few members who by exercising an arbitrary authority over the land, nullify the interest of the less influential members of the tribe or family.

5. The quantity of Reserve land under cultivation by the Natives themselves may be estimated at 450 acres, the rest is unoccupied and waste.

6. The position of the Reserves is mostly eligible and the quality of the land good (land in this Province is not so variable as in other parts of the Island) about two-thirds forest, the rest fern; the former is considered to be the richest soil but the most expensive to cultivate, the latter most suited to the practical agriculturist.

7. We are of opinion that the Natives may be anxious to sell some of the Reserves, but at present we consider it objectionable (except in particular cases) believing it would be the means of creating claims in the unpurchased districts either for Reserves or re-purchases at a nominal price, and of increasing the difficulties of negotiations.

8. The Reserves have as yet yielded no fund for Education or for Medical relief; these are supplied by the Grey Institutions and Colonial Hospital. Much more might be advantageously done in the way of Education if funds were available.

9. We have the honor to state that the appointment of two or three influential Chiefs as Commissioners, would be likely to secure the confidence of the Natives and facilitate the working of the Commission.

10. In transmitting a list of the number of Natives in each District of the settled portion of the Province, we regret our inability to report favourably of their condition. For nearly 4 years they have been engaged in the feuds which have prevailed in this Province, and have been living in Pas, in confederate bands, and melancholy results have followed; habits of industry have been relinquished and their means expended in the acquirement of arms and ammunition, and themselves reduced to a state of indigence. Happily there is now a cessation of hostilities, and this we hope will afford us opportunities of seeing those who are interested in the Reserves, and trying to induce them to avail themselves of the advantages of the Act.

11. In addition to the lands enumerated in the enclosed list, there are also Reserves in the Wainakaiho Block to the extent of 2080 acres, out of which 400 acres are to be purchased at 10s. and 500 at 5s. per acre; but these Reserves and allotments have not as yet been laid out because of the fact that 1200 acres included in this Block, being withheld by Te Puni's Natives. It may also be mentioned that the Natives have re-purchased from the Government at 10s. an acre, 1800 acres in the Hua Block.

12. With regard to Rules of procedure as required by Section 4 of the Act, we have the honor to suggest the following for His Excellency's consideration:

1. That the Commissioners meet at stated times for the transaction of business.

2. That three, exclusive of the Native Commissioners, if appointed, form a quorum.