

It must be admitted as a fact, that generous, mild, and humane as the conduct of the British Government has been towards the Aborigines of this country, yet it has hitherto but partially secured their confidence; being unable to remove suspicion and jealousy, and enforce a due observance of law and order, and thus establishing unity and harmony not only between the two races, but among the Maori tribes themselves.

This failure does not appear to me to have arisen altogether from any want of solicitude on the part of the Government, nor from the independent and lawless character of the Natives, but from other causes. For nearly half a century the Natives have been seeking for a better mode of government than their own, being deeply sensible of the inefficiency of Maori usages and customs in preserving the peace and prosperity of the country. This want has been felt by the Natives more or less throughout the Islands, and without doubt the King movement originated principally from this source.

I am now more than ever convinced that the Maori race can never emerge from their present condition without the helping hand of the British Government; with that assistance, I feel assured, much good will be effected.

The present scheme for the better government of the Natives, based as it is upon Maori usages, has every prospect of success; and as the whole of the policy of the proposed organization is to be founded upon the Runanga, an ancient and cherished usage, I shall here venture to speak of its character and powers, in order to enable the Government to form a correct idea of the present organization of this District.

Native Runangas are usages from time immemorial; they are meetings called by the Chiefs, who are bound to provide all things necessary for the assembly, even to the erection of public buildings for the shelter and entertainment of the guests. They may be divided, and are so by the Natives themselves, into the great and small Runanga.

The great Runanga is a meeting of a powerful Tribe, consisting of a number of smaller Tribes and Hapus in connexion with the great Tribe. For instance, Ngapuhi would be represented by every Tribe and Hapu living on their territory, namely, from Wangarei to the North Cape; and if called together on any great occasion, there would be Chiefs or Deputies from every place of importance.

Such a meeting could only be convened by the most powerful Chief in connexion with other Chiefs. It must be by one who has the "Mana" (*delegated authority*), its power unlimited for the protection of the Tribe or its revenge, the "Iho ki Wainga," (*Declaration of war*), "He kai Arahi Ope," (*the leader of an army*), who consulting with other Chiefs of Hapus, agree upon the time and place of meeting, and the amount of provisions to be provided for the occasion, in which it is expected that every individual belonging to the Tribe and Hapu should furnish his portion.

The custom is to associate with this Meeting or Runanga, religious observances, then it is termed a Hakinga. An immense feast is provided; the bones of deceased Chiefs and Warriors are laid out in state, over which their friends make their last crying and wailing, previous to their being for ever removed and deposited in their resting-place. If any of them had been killed in war, or were renowned for other excellencies, advantage would be taken thereof by the different speakers to give effect to their subject, and to attain their object whether for good or for evil.

The powers of this Runanga extended to making war or peace, and making regulations for Hapus; but of this they are very cautious, offering them more as suggestions than making laws; confining themselves and their rules to matters connected with contemplated plans of operation. If of war, the plan of the campaign; suggesting energetic means for procuring arms and ammunition; prohibiting the disposal of property, otherwise than to procure munitions for the campaign; and even preventing the waste of powder and shot in pigeon shooting.

Their powers may be defined as follows:—

Determining on war or peace; selecting the leader for the campaign; regulating trade in reference to arms and ammunition, contributing all property to this object; and of late years they decide on what land may or may not be sold by Tribes, Hapus, or Individuals.

The powers of the Runanga, about being introduced by the Government in the Native scheme, under regulations securing unity and co-operation with the Government, appear calculated to meet the wishes and wants of this intellectual race; and being based upon their own customs, will I trust not only be acceptable to them, but secure peace and prosperity to both races. It would have been hailed as a boon in the earlier colonization, but may now require much time, patience, and labour fully to establish it, owing to the many projects of self government being tried by the Natives themselves in different parts of the Island.

The minor Runangas of Hapus deserve consideration; they exist, and, however inconvenient, they cannot at present be got rid of, but doubtless may be used under skilful guidance to accomplish the great object of the Government, without offending the Natives.

They are convened much in the same way as the Great Runanga: namely, by the leading chiefs of hapus, with the approval of other chiefs of their connexion.

They, when assembled, claim the right of settling all local matters affecting the people or hapus which they represent. Like the Tribal or Great Runanga, a feast is essential, at least plenty of food for those who are invited and expected to attend. They are accompanied with the same religious ceremonies as the other Runanga; and as autumn is the time when they most abound in food, as well as the most leisure time, they generally fix upon it for their feasts and for the settlement of the difficulties which have taken place between hapus in the course of the year. The autumn used to be termed by the earlier settlers "pay day," being universally the time of their *tauas* for avenging the insults of the year.

As the chiefs calling this Runanga have to provide for the meeting, they must be men of property as well as influence, to meet the expenses; and they are careful never to call a meeting