

It is highly important that the Rangitikei dispute should not be allowed to revive. Dr. Featherston's treaty with the Ngatiapa had the effect of disarming the combatants and hanging up the whole question for future settlement. It is very desirable in the present unsettled state of the country that the existing position of parties should not be disturbed.

"The impounding of the rents (by the mutual consent of the parties) was intended to prevent further complication of the dispute, and to facilitate the ultimate adjustment of the question as between the Native owners and the European runholders.

"If the Ngatiraukawa were permitted to dispose of valuable timber belonging to the disputed land, the effect of this restriction would be completely destroyed. I have therefore had recourse to the legal remedy for checking the disposal, by threatening the European purchasers with summary punishment.

"However unsatisfactory to the runholders the present attitude of parties may be, I consider that I shall best serve the Government by endeavoring to preserve it.

"The Ngatiapa have made a direct offer of sale and are content to leave the protection of their interests in the hands of the Superintendent. The Ngatiraukawa and Rangitane are equally willing to leave the decision to his Honor, if the Ngatiapa will consent to an investigation of title, and there are already indications of a growing disposition on their part also to sell the Block. If therefore we succeed in keeping in check extraneous causes of irritation (like the one I have described) the Natives on both sides will, when the time for further action arrives, have settled down into a temper of mind far more favorable to a discussion of their case than when Dr. Featherston visited them in January last.

It was not, however, till September, 1864, that the Ngatiraukawa and Rangitane Chiefs decided on putting an end to the feud by selling the disputed block to the Crown. They then wrote to Dr. Featherston, as Land Purchase Commissioner, making a definite offer, and inviting him to meet them at Manawatu. The meeting took place accordingly, and the leading chiefs formally consented to a sale of the block, subject to future terms as to price and reserves. The following extracts from Notes which I made at the time will show the satisfactory position in which the Superintendent left the question at the termination of this interview.

"When Dr. Featherston visited Rangitikei in January last, in consequence of the hostile attitude of the Ngatiraukawa and Ngatiapa, he succeeded in arranging provisional terms, the principal feature in which was that the Ngatiapa entered into an agreement for the sale of the land they claimed, subject however, to the ownership being proved. The Superintendent, as Land Purchase Commissioner, formally accepted this offer, on behalf of the Crown, obtaining at the same time a pledge from the leading chiefs of the tribe that, pending the ultimate settlement of the question, they should exercise no acts of ownership and do nothing that could be construed by the opposing party into a challenge to assert their claims * * *. The dispute, however, was far from being adjusted or settled, for the Ngatiraukawa and Rangitane, while they expressed full confidence in the Superintendent's impartiality, and unanimously consented to refer the whole dispute to his Honor for arbitration, provided the Ngatiapa also would consent to this mode of meeting the difficulty—steadily refused to remove from the land or to recognise the right of sale on the part of the other tribe.

"As a further precaution against a renewal of ill feeling between the contending parties, the Superintendent made the suspension of the rents accruing from the native leases, a condition of the arrangement with the Ngatiapa. To this the other tribes also readily assented, and thus an element of strife was temporarily got rid of; for the land in respect of which the rents were accruing being in dispute, the payment of rent to either party would necessarily disturb the existing arrangement and re-open the question of title. To ensure the fulfilment of this condition, the European tenants or runholders were warned that if they violated the agreement by paying any rent, pending the final decision, proceedings would be instituted against them under the Native Land Purchase Ordinance. Thus then the whole question was hung up, and the tribal irritation for the moment allayed.

"His Honor obtained from each tribe a promise that the peace should not be broken—threatened with armed interference any violation of this promise—and then left the feud to work its own natural cure. Under this skilful treatment, the sore that had so long festered in the very heart of the settled districts gradually healed, and in the early part of September the Ngatiraukawa and Rangitane made a formal peace with the Ngatiapa and exchanged presents. This was soon followed by a determination on their side also to sell the disputed block to the Government, and it was in consequence of an intimation to that effect, and an invitation to meet them, that Dr. Featherston visited Manawatu. On the 12th October, he met eleven representative Chiefs of the Ngatiraukawa and Rangitane Tribes at the Lower Ferry House, Manawatu River, where a number of Natives and a few Europeans had assembled to witness the proceedings. * * *

"Ihakara, one of the principal Ngatiraukawa chiefs and the leader of the late fighting party, formally offered the block for sale to the Crown, subject to terms of price and the definition of reserves. He stated that it would be premature to discuss the terms at present as the whole subject was still under deliberation—that their object in meeting the Queen's Commissioner was to be informed whether their offer of sale would be accepted. The other chiefs in rotation addressed the Superintendent, and each of them in few words endorsed the statements of the first speaker. The Superintendent replied at considerable length. He sketched the history of the quarrel, adverted to the various meetings at Rangitikei at which he had been present, reminded them of the promises they had not only made but strictly fulfilled, congratulated them on the present satisfactory issue of events, and concluded by formally, on behalf of the Crown, accepting their offer of sale subject to future terms.

"His Honor fully explained to them, however, that he could not conclude the transaction till every member of both tribes had consented to the sale and to the specific terms thereof, and that in his negotiations for the block, the legitimate claims of the Ngatiapa would be rigidly respected and upheld.

"Ihakara, afterwards, on behalf of the tribe presented to his Honor a carved club, possessing some historical interest, as a token of their absolute consent to a surrender of the land to the Crown.

"On the following day the Superintendent proceeded to Parewahi (in Rangitikei), the head quarters of the Ngatiapa. Here about 200 Natives had assembled in the Runanga House and were