

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY FOR CROWN LANDS.

Mr. MOORHOUSE to the Hon. W. GISBORNE.

SIR,—

Crown Lands Office, Wellington, 9th July, 1872.

Having received your permission, I have now the honor to report to the Government my views upon the present state of the surveys of the Colony, and to make some suggestions on the subject:—

1. The surveys of the Colony, considered as a whole, are very unreliable, without triangulation, and greatly in arrear. The causes of this condition of things are patent to every professional surveyor in the Colony; and my own experience as Secretary for Crown Lands, in addition to the knowledge I have obtained in the discharge of my duties as Registrar-General of Land and Deeds, has induced an anxiety about the surveys which can only be alleviated by urgently advising Government to take early measures for securing such a control as will save the public from the immeasurable evils that must inevitably follow a continuance of the present loose and unscientific survey of the public estate.

It will not be expected that I can indicate particularly the parts of the Colony where the evil I complain of exists in the greatest degree. I may, however, state generally that, in the Middle Island, the surveys of Nelson and Marlborough, and some parts of Canterbury, are very inaccurate.

The same may be said of the North Island generally, the chief exceptions being some work recently executed under the direction of the Inspector of Surveys under the Native Lands Act, Mr. Heale, to whom the Colony is indebted, among others, for very valuable reports, and that performed in the Wellington Province by the Chief Surveyor, Mr. Jackson.

I have, during my personal inquiries, ascertained the unanimous confession, I may say, of the surveyors of the Colony, that the surveys are, as a whole, exceedingly inaccurate. Although not professionally acquainted with the science of surveying, I have had thrust upon me, in numerous instances, the most palpable proofs of not mere inaccuracy, but in some instances the most astounding discrepancies. I append a diagram of one considerable block of valuable land in the Province of Auckland, which is a curious instance of the extent to which gross negligence has been carried. The record maps of the Auckland, Napier, and Taranaki Provinces are imperfect, both as regards the record of surveys performed and the accuracy of such surveys as are recorded. Record maps (where they exist) are not to be relied on for the purposes of "The Land Transfer Act, 1870," and "The Land Transfer Act 1870 Amendment Act, 1871," and the anxieties of the Registrar-General of Land are very much beyond expression. It has been found absolutely necessary to issue an imperative instruction requiring District Land Registrars to decline to register titles to land when the diagram illustrating the survey and the description in the body of the deed are, upon the report of the draftsman of the office, found to be insufficient to enable an ordinary surveyor to find the estate on the ground when boundary lines may be overgrown and survey pegs removed or decayed.

The Colony is liable to make good its contract with Crown grantees, and impliedly guarantees full enjoyment of the estate conveyed. Specific performance of this guarantee cannot in very numerous instances be given, because impossible. But there can be no doubt of the legal and moral claim of grantees to full compensation of damages sustained by the failure of one part of the Crown's contract with grantees—that the land should be surveyed—*i.e.*, properly surveyed by the Government. It is true that the Colony is yet in its infancy, and the present condition of the surveys may be excused on the score of the many and varied difficulties that have existed. But I respectfully submit that a continuance of the present disorder would be entirely inexcusable. As Registrar-General of Land, I pointed out last year in rather forcible language the damage sustained by that branch of the public service. But the political circumstances of the Colony did not then appear to be favourable to an examination of the question. I trust, however, that I shall not be considered presumptuous if I venture to suggest that no further delay should occur. It is perfectly certain that no measure of reform can be expected from the Legislature without full evidence of facts. And the only way in which Government can inform itself or the Legislature is by taking the evidence of the best-informed professional surveyors in the Colony. Gentlemen of undoubted ability may be found, whose long connection with the surveys of the Colony, under great difficulties, would afford full facility for getting at and estimating the facts to be inquired of. I would recommend that they be examined before a Joint Committee of the Assembly during the coming Session, in order that some change may be made under which the Colony may have security that the surveys are exactly, economically, and expeditiously performed. By your leave, I now lay before you what I conceive to be the outline of a proper plan for the future conduct of the Surveys:—

1. That there be a Surveyor-General for the Colony, who shall have the supreme direction of the whole scheme.