

I have in the foregoing only given a bare statement of the progress of the negotiations for the completion of the titles to the blocks now under purchase.

The Inspector of Surveys reported fully last year as to the quality of the lands, so that it is unnecessary for me to go into the subject, as he is possessed of more detailed information on the subject than I am. However, from what I have seen, I am of opinion that these purchases will form a very valuable estate.

The Hon. Sir D. McLean, K.C.M.G.,
Native Minister, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
J. W. PREECE.

No. 2.

Messrs. C. O. DAVIS and HENRY MITCHELL, Rotorua, to the UNDER SECRETARY, Native Department, Wellington.

SIR,—

Rotorua, 24th April, 1876.

We have the honor to transmit, for your information, the following remarks relative to land matters in our district, in the hope that some points requiring elucidation may be made clear to you. And although this report may be considered diffusive to you, being well versed in Maori feelings and opinions, yet the points mooted may not be superfluous or devoid of interest.

By way of explanation, we may observe that, prior to the decision of Government relative to purchasing and leasing lands in the Arawa country, extensive runs were taken by Messrs. Tetley, Seymour, Beaumont, Cox, Grace, Young, and others; but, prior to our services being secured on behalf of the Government, we had become the agents of Messrs. Millar, Buckland, and others, to secure in the whole of the Arawa District every available block of land by lease, &c., at high rates, considerably in advance of those we subsequently paid on behalf of Government.

The Arawa country, as a whole, has been cried down as a "desert of pumice;" and those who profess to have great knowledge of soils, and their adaptation to grasses, speak loudly against the runholders for taking up so dreary a country, and some of the local newspapers have criticised the action of Government for "wasting," as they say, "money on such deserts." It never has been proved, however, that these poor-looking pumice soils will not grow grasses, for the simple reason that no attempt has been made to try their capabilities. Some persons indeed, in their fool-hardiness, ploughed up certain places at Taupo and scattered grass seed, forgetting at the time that the plough-share should not have touched the soil, as it did not require to be made more porous by ploughing, but more compressed by rollers. One thing is certain, that, in many localities where no plough-share has been introduced, fine clover and various other English grasses have embedded themselves in the pumice soil, and on some of the despised runs sheep are thriving remarkably well, the runholders sending yearly their wool to the Napier market. The late William Buckland, whose practical knowledge in agricultural pursuits was most extensive, often expressed his conviction that the very worst-looking pumice land of Taupo would be productive of English grasses some day, should the work be intrusted to competent and skilful persons.

In relation to Maori feelings with regard to land matters in the Arawa country, we may state that long before the origin of the famous land league of the Waikatos, which led to their election of the Maori King, the Arawa tribes came to the unanimous decision that no lands should be alienated to either Government or private individuals; but that their country would be opened for lease, a determination they seem to have adhered to, with little or no variation, up to the year 1872. The wonder therefore is that we succeeded in buying Otamarakau, 28,000 acres; Kaikokopu, 17,000; Paengawa, 25,000; Te Puke, 30,000; and Te Rotohokahoka, 20,000, in the Maketu and Rotorua districts, all of which are known to be suitable for special settlement.

Up to the year 1871 the various attempts made by the Judges of the Native Lands Court to investigate the titles of land at Maketu and Rotorua signally failed, and the proceedings of the Arawas were of so violent a character as to preclude the possibility of further action being taken in their country, a circumstance which induced the authorities to transfer from Maketu and Rotorua to Tauranga the sitting of the Lands Court, in the hope that the spirit of turbulence in regard to the Arawa land matters would be subdued; but even here, to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, Sir Donald McLean was compelled to order the closing of the Court, and the withdrawal from the district of all surveyors.

From the year 1866 up to 1872, various private individuals from both the North and Middle Islands, anxious to obtain runs in the Arawa country, treated directly with the Natives, and paid large deposits to the professed owners, contrary to law, so determined were they to gain possession, if possible, of the lands in question, notwithstanding the oft-repeated assertion that the whole of the country is a "silent, barren desert." In some instances sheep were placed on runs, but were driven hither and thither by antagonistic Maori claimants; and when any attempt was made to survey the lands, the surveyors were at once expelled by the Natives, and more recently, when De Thierry, Dalton, O'Mera, Fitzgerald, and other Auckland speculators, ventured to commence surveys at Rotorua and Taupo, hostile Natives appeared in armed force, and, to prevent the shedding of blood, the military authorities were obliged to interfere, unarm the Maoris, and warn the surveyors to move off. By this judicious interference of the military in 1873, the belligerent Natives were quelled and peace restored to the district.

The leading chiefs of the Arawas, having discovered that no settlement of land was likely to be effected by the lawfully constituted Court, and dreading that the Maori heartburning, keenly felt by the Hawke's Bay Natives in consequence of their entanglement by runholders, mortgages, &c., would extend itself to the Arawa country, forwarded petitions to Government in 1871 and 1872, praying that some system be adopted by which the long-pending vexed question of Arawa titles to land might be settled; and when land agents were authorized by Government to buy and lease Arawa territory, the tribes unanimously declared that this decision of our rulers was the granting of the Arawa request