

*Wairoa District.*

The Natives in this district maintain their character of good and orderly behaviour. They do not cultivate as much as they used in former years. Numbers of them are employed at the different stations shearing and working for Europeans during the shearing season.

The Natives on the borders of the Waikaremoana Lake have joined with the Wairoa Natives in making an application to the Native Land Court to adjudicate on a large block of land extending from Waikaremoana to the vicinity of Te Papuni, including the Waikareiti Lake. The survey of this land has hitherto been opposed by the Urewera Tribe. The land is of poor quality, being principally black-birch country; but the Natives are very anxious to settle the title by passing it through the Court.

At Mahia a number of Natives have been engaged whaling: they caught eight sperm-whales, valued at £1,200; also thirty-two whales of other kinds, valued at £1,400. At Nuhaka the Natives have planted small quantities of maize for sale. They have lately taken to sheep-farming, and own a flock of 4,000 sheep, which belong to the tribe, and are managed by one of themselves. The profits are divided; they realized £700 this year.

The following are cases heard in the Resident Magistrate's Courts at Napier, Waipawa, and Wairoa, in which Natives were concerned:—Civil cases: Sixty in which Maoris were defendants; amount sued for, £758 11s. 4d.; recovered, £381 19s. 8d. Fourteen in which Europeans were defendants; amount sued for, £129 8s. 6d.; recovered, £50 3s. Five in which both parties were Maoris; amount sued for, £32 10s.; recovered, £9 4s. Summary cases: Assault, dismissed 1, convicted 6; Vagrant Act, dismissed 3, convicted 6; railway by-laws, dismissed 2, convicted 7; malicious injury, dismissed 16, convicted 1; larceny, dismissed 4, convicted 5; Impounding Act, dismissed 1, convicted 13; Dog Registration Act, convicted 2; Public Works Act, dismissed 11, convicted 12; Lunacy Act, committed 1; municipal by-laws, dismissed 1. Committed for trial: Escape from prison, 1; forcible entry, 2; forgery, 1; cattle-stealing, 3. With the exception of the cases committed for trial, the above were all minor offences, and the number of persons brought before the Court is not great considering that the Native population of the two districts is over 2,600 adults.

*Native Schools.*

The schools at Pakowhai, in the Napier District, and Waihirere, in the Wairoa District, have been closed owing to non-attendance of scholars and the general want of interest taken in them by the Natives. It is probable that an application will shortly be made by the Natives for a school in the northern part of the district.

*Poverty Bay and Waiapu Districts.*

I handed over charge of these districts to Mr. Booth, Resident Magistrate, on the 1st March last (who will probably report fully on them). I would merely state, with regard to Waiapu District, that the obstruction to the survey mentioned in my last report has been overcome and the work completed. I visited the district on the 1st January last, and had to make a special trip on the 19th February, in consequence of a reported murder of a Native chief at a settlement ten miles inland of Te Awanui. Immediately on my arrival I held an inquest on the body of the deceased, when a verdict of wilful murder was brought in against the accused, Te Naera Wheru, who was then at large in the bush. I issued a warrant for his apprehension, and he was captured by some Natives a few days after. He was subsequently tried at the Supreme Court at Gisborne, found guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

In this case I have to thank the chief Ropata Wahawaha for the valuable assistance which he gave by instructing the Natives of the several settlements to capture the accused and bring him to justice.

*General Remarks.*

In my last report I urged that some new system should be adopted in respect to the sale and disposal of Native lands, and suggested that the Government should undertake the survey, sale, and leasing of Native lands, and act as agents for the Natives. I am more than ever convinced of the necessity of a step in this direction. My suggestions were as follow: "I am of opinion that a new system should be inaugurated in respect to the alienation of Native lands. Under the present mode of direct purchase the Natives nominally get more for their land than they would if the Government had the absolute pre-emptive right; but, on the other hand, they have indirectly to pay high fees to surveyors, solicitors, and interpreters, so that by the time the land has passed the Court the expenses in many cases amount to the value of the lands. I would suggest that the Government alone should undertake the survey and sale of Native lands, acting as agents for the Natives, and that the land should be sold or leased in the same manner as Crown lands. But, in order that this plan should succeed, and that the settlement be promoted, the lowest possible commission should be charged by the Government to the Natives, say 5 per cent. on the price realized by the land, to cover survey, commission, and all charges. Even if the Government lost by the transaction, the country would gain by the speedy settlement of lands now unoccupied by Natives. The Natives would also know that they were getting the highest marketable value of their lands, and that the proceeds were not being swallowed up by expenses. I think this system would be better for both Europeans and Natives, as the former would be certain of obtaining valid titles, and would not be put to the trouble and expense of negotiating with Natives and obtaining doubtful titles. The Europeans who purchase land held under memorial of ownership direct from the Natives have innumerable difficulties to surmount, and cannot obtain a good title in one case out of fifty. If some mode of alienation as suggested were adopted, I feel sure the Natives would part with their lands more readily than they do at present, although they would at first hold back owing to their suspicious nature." After the Natives have paid all the high charges above named, they have still to pay the Native land duty of 10 per cent. to the Government. This is always calculated by the purchaser, and, if not deducted directly out of the purchase-money, so much less is given to the Natives for the land.