

From the colonial point of view it would be of immense advantage to colonists to have the Maori land question settled once and for ever, in a manner that would leave no sense of wrong on the side of the Maori, and no qualms of conscience on the side of the European, and by means outside of existing channels, and free from the suspicions which attach to local action. It would meet colonial susceptibilities if the settlement of the question, in a manner favourable to the Maoris, were accompanied by immediate efforts to open up and colonize the Native lands by planting thereon important additions to the population from the Mother-country. It would be an important consideration also that the scheme should attach the Maoris to the Government of the colony, and that the capital value of the Native lands should fructify in the hands of the Government in the shape of public works. In would further be a reasonable provision that the Government should possess the reversion of the interest of the Natives in the scheme as heirs fail them, or in the event of the disappearance of the race, which is anticipated by many.

All these advantages are provided for in the following scheme:—

It is proposed to form an association in London called "The Maori Lands and Perpetual Annuities Association (Limited)," with a capital of £1,000,000, and power to increase, on the following conditions:—

That ample reserves be made for the Maoris of such lands as they can beneficially occupy, and that the remainder of the lands be surveyed, and valued according to quality at the current prices in the colony for Maori lands, or at such prices and upon such terms as may be agreed upon between the Natives and the association.

That the fee-simple of all such lands be transferred by the Natives to the association after the titles have been individualized by the ordinary Land Courts of the colony, and that the association at once deal with the lands by opening them up, selling them, and planting settlers thereon.

That certificates for the money-value of these lands be issued by the association to the individuals entitled to them, in separate series of, say, £25, £50, £100, and £1,000 each, and that some plan be devised by the Maoris for the redemption of these certificates by lot.

That the average value per acre of all the lands transferred be ascertained, and the association apply, as a sinking fund for the redemption of the certificates which may be drawn from time to time, not less than that average value of the quantity of land sold each year, and to the extent of the certificates drawn, and, on behalf of the respective owners, purchase New Zealand Government consols, and hand them over to the Public Trustee in the colony, or hand the money to the Government, to be held in either case for the owners and their heirs as perpetual annuities, the Government paying interest thereon, and utilizing the money for public works.

That the Native lands be divided into four, or, if necessary, more, separate districts, say, North, West and Middle, East, and South; and that the association appoint local boards of management for each of these districts, the Maoris being suitably represented on such Boards; and, if necessary, in order to meet objections on the ground that the land in one district is more valuable or more saleable than that in another, that the certificates be divided according to the districts, and the sinking fund applied to the redemption of the certificates in proportion to the land sold in each district.

That the profit after the application of the sinking fund be annually divided between the Maoris and the shareholders in the association, but so as not to exceed 10 per cent. on the paid-up capital of the association, and an equal amount distributed amongst the Maori certificate-holders, any balance of profit remaining over to be applied in augmentation of the sinking fund.

On the assumption that 10,000,000 acres available land will be included in the scheme, and 200,000 acres will be sold annually, it is estimated that in eighteen years, or possibly much sooner, all the Maoris will have entered into the enjoyment of the interest on the original capital value of all their lands, and a surplus of between 6,000,000 and 7,000,000 acres will still remain unsold.

It is proposed that this surplus be represented by residuary certificates, one-half to be handed to the Native owners in proportion to their original interest, and one-half to the shareholders of the association; that the liabilities be next liquidated, and a sum equal to the share capital of the association be returned to the shareholders; and that these certificates subsequently participate equally in the profit, the Maori portion by way of sinking fund as before, the European portion by way of distribution on the certificates.

The advantages of the scheme to English shareholders would be—

That they would enjoy the satisfaction of solving, to the lasting benefit of both races, a political difficulty which has long overshadowed our relations with the Natives, and on several occasions has left its dark traces in blood, and humanly speaking arrest the decay, or at least mitigate the sufferings connected with the decline, of a noble race.

That, by means of a relatively small capital paid up, say, £200,000, and by the exercise of borrowing powers as may be required, they would realize, after the first year or two of their operations, a 10 per cent. dividend for a period of years, then receive back a sum equal to their paid-up capital, and finally share equally with the Native-certificate holders in a fund of about £12,000,000 sterling.

To show that this is by no means an unreasonable anticipation, it may be stated that the average sales of waste lands effected by the Government for five years up to 1880 inclusive has been 435,841 acres per annum, and that an average price of £1 14s. 10d., cash, has been realized; but, as the association would sell for part cash and part on deferred payment, subject to interest, with security over the land sold, an increased average price of at least 10s. per acre might fairly be anticipated.

The profits of the association would not depend upon the sale of country lands only, but on the sale of township sites and suburban lands, the upset price of the former not being less than £30 per acre, and of the latter not less than £3 per acre.

The probability is that the average value or cost to the association of the Native lands transferred would not exceed 8s. per acre, and that the average value of the same lands when sold by the association would not be under £2 per acre; and, on the assumption that 10,000,000 acres are