SESS. II.—1891.
NEW ZEALAND.

SUGGESTIONS RESPECTING NATIVE LAND COURTS AND DEALINGS WITH NATIVE LANDS.

(LETTER FROM MR. J. H. EDWARDS.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Mr. J. H. EDWARDS to the Hon. the NATIVE MINISTER.

SIR,— Kiokio, Otorohanga, 7th May, 1891.

I have the honour to forward herein a few remarks relative to Native-land laws. It was my intention to have given them in evidence before the Native-land Laws Commissioners when they visited Otorohanga, but, being requested by the Ngatimaniapoto to act as their mouthpiece before the Commission, and to confine the subject to the question of restriction only, I was unable to do so, and to give them. It was my intention then to have forwarded them to the Commission, but press of time has prevented me from sending them before, and, thinking that I may be too late for the Commission, I forward the same to you, as the Commissioners' report, at all events, will be submitted to you.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Native Minister, Wellington. J. H. EDWARDS.

P.S.—It is my intention shortly to discuss and advocate these views and others among the Ngatimaniapoto hapus, and if we are unanimous we will probably send down a delegate to Wellington if required.—J. H. E.

IN submitting the following suggestions on Native Land Courts and the after-dealing with Native lands, I wish at the outset to state that my remarks refer principally to lands embraced in the Rohe Potae, where my actual experience has been, in which, however, I have had a good deal to do in conducting and passing blocks of land through that Court, and, as there is a desire on the part of Government, of which you are a member, to remodel land-laws for the purpose of simplifying and making them effective, I have felt encouraged to make the following suggestions, feeling convinced of your personal desire to bring about a more satisfactory state of things.

In the first place, I recognise the great principle that the country should progress. In this, my primitive friends of the soil do not agree, no doubt, or such a doctrine is contra to their inherited ideas, not so much, perhaps, from mere obtstructiveness only, as from an insufficiency of educated power to grasp the natural evolution and progress of events. This aversion, however, is not a little untinged with a natural suspicion, inherent in a primitive race, as to the motives of the pakeha, unhappily, as in the past sometimes, not altogether without foundation. However this may be, I hold we, the Natives, should not hinder, or be made the instruments to hinder, the progress of the country, however the greed and subsequent selfishness of the speculator may conspire to do so.

Naturally, to me, this subject presents itself under two main headings—First, the ascertainment of titles to Native lands; second, subsequent to ascertainment of titles, the proper method of dealing with those lands.

As to the first subject, I cannot conceive of any other mode for the extinguishment of the Native title than that supplied by the present Acts, eliminating objectionable features therefrom to insure the just, harmonious, and speedy working of the Court. I, as one who has brought blocks of land before the Court, have been painfully impressed with the unnecessary delay—the shilly-shally and waste of time indulged in, which a little firmness would have averted. This leads me to commend the action you have taken to dispense with the old fossilised type of Judges, who, it appears to me, the more they are Maori scholars the more they are imbued with the Maori notion of *taihoa*. I say unhesitatingly, and without reservation, that Judges without a knowledge of the Maori language itself, except just sufficient knowledge of Maori customs and usuages only, which is all that is requisite, are the fairest, most impartial, and most progressive Judges. They compel the litigants to keep close to the points touching the case under question only, and exclude all extraneous matters not relevant to the case, which I have personally seen and felt as a great waste of time and money both to the litigants and the country also. In my experience before this Court, there seemed to have reigned the most utter apathy—the "Government stroke" style, as proved by five years' result of incomplete disjointed work.