

Observations on the authority of New Zealand chiefs

Observations on the Authority which the Chiefs
possess in New Zealand

There are Chiefs who hold large Tracts of Land in New Zealand as their hereditary right; yet their authority over the Persons and property of those who live within their Jurisdiction is very circumscribed, and confined within their own Family Domestic and Slaves, over whom they have the most absolute power. Upon their Lands a number of inferior Chiefs generally reside by permission, who may be allied in some way or other to the principal Chief by Family connexions, Intermarriages, or Friendship. Each of these Chiefs carries on their own Cultivation, have their own Domestic and Slaves over whom the principal Chief has no authority whatever. Besides these there are free Persons who are poor, and who possess neither Land no Slaves; and whose Families have probably been reduced by war or other Calamities. Over these also the Chiefs has no authority whatever. They go where they please, and live as they please, without interruption from any one. As the Chief is generally a Military Character those who live within his Jurisdiction look up to him in times of common danger for protection, and range themselves under his Barrier from motives of personal Safety. He also on his part conciliates their Esteem, and ensures their obedience more by Courtesy and Kindness than by Command. Knowing that he has no authority to command them many of the inferior Chiefs with their domestics and Slaves as well as the poor freemen will readily join the principal Chief in his wars, in order to indulge their natural disposition for fighting, and in hope of sharing the spoils of war. Was the principal Chief to call

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upon any Class of free People within his Jurisdiction to labour they would pay little attention to his Commands. he has no authority over them in this respect nor any means to enforce their obedience. The principal Chiefs, as well as the inferior ones are all extremely Jealous of the Authority they possess tho' individually it is very small. The most of the Chiefs with whom I have conversed upon the moral and political state of their Country, are [f] convinced they want a Government. But there is no one Chief possest of sufficient information, power, and Influence, to enable him to establish himself as a King over the rest and the Chiefs are too proud, and jealous to invest their Authority in the hands of any Individual of their own Country. The Chiefs at the River Thames requested that some European ASoldiers might be sent to them, to assist them to protect themselves from the more powerful Tribes at the Bay of Islands, who have greatly the advantage over them from their Fire arms. It is necessity, not Choice that induces them to solicit this assistance, and perhaps this necessity may open the way, and lay the foundation for the establishment of a regular Government in time. Tho' the Chiefs know they want a Government and are sensible that their Country would be greatly benefited from what they have seen heard and learned from their intercourse with the Europeans, yet they never can accomplish such an important object without the assistance of some civilized nation.-

If they lived under the Authority of one Chief he might form some regular Government, but under their feudal System this can never be done. Tho' one Tribe or whole districts would willingly receive foreign assistance to protect

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them from their more powerful Enemies, yet I think it very probable, that the body of the Chiefs would hesitate before they placed their Country under the power and Government of a foreign nation; they will never wish to be commanded if they can possibly avoid this. Temmaranga is a man of very sound sense, and very deep reflection - He laments the state of his Country much more than any Chief I have ever seen, and is better acquainted with its miseries. He is a Chief of great Consequence: Had been a great warrior, but is now anxious to put a stop to their destructive wars, and the three months he has travelled with me, he has used every argument with the Chiefs we have met with, to induce them to live in peace. He has often told me that there is nothing but the High hand of Authority that can restrain some of the Chiefs from Spoil and Murder - and has observed, if he was King and had the power, he would take their Heads off immediately, if they would not be quiet, and seemed to think that nothing short of that would put a stop to their Cruelties - He is very anxious that Captain Downies recommendation to the British Government, to send a man of war to New Zealand, should be attended to, as he hopes his Country will derive many benefits [f] from such a measure: and particularly that a Man of War will prevent those tribes who are possest of Fire Arms from ranging the Sea Coast, and Murdering the tribes who are not able to resist them. I am strongly inclined to think that those Chiefs at the River Thames at Wyekotto and further to the Southward, who have no means to procure Arms and Ammunition, will be driven from mere necessity to place themselves under the protection of some civil Government, should they have it

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in their power to do this. Should such an event ever take place, and security given to persons and property, New Zealand will then be a Civilized Nation in a short time, and Agriculture and the simple Arts will flourish. Its Climate and other local advantages are so favourable for the production of all the Comforts of Civil Life, that it will rise in importance, and its inhabitants will abound with plenty.

Samuel Marsden