

NATIVE AFFAIRS.

REPORT FROM MR. FENTON, R.M., AS TO NATIVE AFFAIRS IN THE WAIKATO DISTRICT.

I know not whether my official position has sufficient of the political character appertaining to it, to justify me in communicating with His Excellency on the state of events around me, and the nature of the ideas that are spreading among the aborigines of this country.

There are times in the history of every people, when the popular mind, excited by some benefit coveted, or inflamed by some present hardship suffered, or future evil apprehended, is in a state of restless and abnormal agitation. The records of the past prove that a movement of this nature tends to permanent good, and develops itself in rapid and successful social progress, or becomes the source of discontent and retarded civilization, according as it is guided by the intelligence, or neglected by the supineness, of the governing power. Nor is a ready apprehension of the need of action with a judicious discrimination of the course to be pursued, whilst contemplating movements of this nature, of more grave necessity than promptness in commencing, and decision in conducting the plans decided on, when once it has been determined that the directing hand of Government shall be interposed. The delay of a brief period in the action of Government may allow the agitation to have grown beyond control, or may cause the objects sought to be obtained thereby to have become of an antagonistic character.

When I prepared my previous minute on the advantages which would be derived by the Government, and the benefits which would accrue to the Maories, by concentration of the population and fixity of residence, to be obtained by the establishment of villages with a permanent system of agriculture, and a settled plan of administration of law for their own municipal purposes, it seemed to me probable that there would be no necessity for the Government to take any further step, until by some perseverance in the course laid down, and practical experience of the benefits resulting therefrom, the Maories had gained confidence in the new system of things, and had begun to feel that further development was necessary to provide for newly discovered wants. It was with this expectation that I remarked that provision for the adjustment of intertribal matters could be arranged hereafter, when the Maori Magistrate or Warden had become partially educated in the administration of law by the practice of settling disputes in his own tribe, and had been taught to consider the principles of law, by the necessity of making rules for the good order of his own village.

I was not, therefore, prepared to recognize as a fact, that a large proportion of the aboriginal population of this country—including the numerous tribes comprehended under the general name of "Waikato"—have already advanced in their desires for the establishment of law, beyond a mere provision for the internal Government of each tribe, and are now actively engaged in devising some means by which the whole of the extensive district peopled by them may be brought under the control of a number of officers of their own race, whose duty it shall be to administer the few simple laws which they, as a people, propose to make for the protection of their persons and property. Having, however, ascertained by personal attendance at several of their numerous meetings, and attentive consideration of their debates, that this movement is not a fugitive desire, the result of temporary excitement, but a fixed determination to discover and establish among themselves, a system of order and combination, which may enable them to advance in the social scale, and preserve them from the ultimate fate of total subserviency to their European brethren, it seemed to me proper to communicate for the information of His Excellency the Governor:—

I. An accurate account of the feelings and movements before alluded to;

II. An explanation of the plans proposed by them to effectuate their desires; and

III. I propose, with great submission, to add a few remarks stating the conclusions at which I have arrived, and the course which it seems to me advantageous to pursue, in the present position of events.

I refrain from commenting on the long course of "*laissez faire*" policy, and the other causes which have induced these conditions, as I have stated them with some fullness in the minute before referred to, though I must admit that the development of the state of feeling resulting from those causes has been more rapid, and seems to have effected a more speedy combination, than I once thought probable.

It is further to be noticed that statements and opinions contained in this paper are only intended to apply to that portion of the Maori population known as "the Waikato tribes"; though, as the four large tribes which now occupy the banks of the Thames resided formerly, for a long period, in the upper districts of Waikato, are sprung from the same stock,* and still retain a close and constant connexion with the tribes still resident in the district, it is probable that similar impulses are now actuating them. However, the question of extent of country, and numbers and importance of tribes concerned, is merely one of time, for similar causes, under similar conditions, will ultimately produce similar results.

I. The feelings and desires of the Maori population with respect to their present social and political position may be succinctly stated, as they are entertained almost with unanimity, although

* Marutuahu, from Kawhia, is the ancestor of the Thames tribes, and his name is often used to designate that people.