

No. 8.

N A P I E R.

REPORT from G. S. COOPER, Esq., Resident Magistrate, Napier.

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 15th of February, calling upon me to furnish for the information of His Excellency Sir G. F. Bowen, a general report, giving the fullest information I am able to afford on the present state of the Natives in my district.

G. S. Cooper, Esq.

The information called for is so extensive and varied, that I approach the subject oppressed by a sense of my incompetence to do it full justice, and I must beg the indulgence of His Excellency and Mr. Richmond for the shortcomings which will abound in the following paragraphs.

Maoris have such an objection to being numbered that I cannot give an absolutely reliable tale of the present population of the district. About eleven years ago I took a tolerably accurate census, but it was done with great difficulty, and I have never been able to accomplish it since. The number of Natives in the Province was then about 3,673, and in my district (excluding Wairoa) about 1,400. I do not think these figures have been much altered in the interval, as although the Maori population here is as elsewhere, decreasing, the process is much less rapid than amongst other tribes. I should take the population of my district to be at present about 1,300, of which nearly half are males capable of bearing arms.

The decrease in the Maori population, though as I have said less rapid than in other parts of the country, is nevertheless certain and steady, and will become more apparent as time wears on. The reason is, that the supply of children is insufficient to keep up the numbers. This arises partly from an inequality in the sexes, partly from the unfruitfulness of the women, and partly from the heavy death-rate among the children.

The unfruitfulness of the women is a fact observed by all, but it is one which I have only heard satisfactorily accounted for in one way, viz., that the Maori race had been too long isolated from intercourse with the rest of the world, and that from having so closely intermarried for many generations without being able to infuse new blood, they have become effete and unproductive. This theory appears to be borne out by the fact that Maori women married to white men generally have families, and many of them large ones. And yet it is found that the offspring of these unions are of themselves unfruitful as a rule, whether united to Maori or European mates. If I am not mistaken the same result has been observed in other parts of the world where what the Americans call "miscegenation" between races of markedly distinct types has been attempted.

The careless way in which the children are tended and fed is the obvious cause of the numerous deaths among them.

The physical condition of the present generation is certainly good. They are strong and active in frame and generally possess good constitutions. They draw large sums, amounting in the aggregate to something approaching £18,000 or £20,000 annually from the settlers in the shape of rents; whilst the sale of timber and of agricultural produce, shearing wages, &c., bring them in about £5,000 more. In this sense and to this extent they are tolerably well off: but money so easily procured is more easily spent, and habits of idleness and dissipation are engendered which it will be impossible to cure. As I pointed out in a former letter (14th August last) the result is becoming visible in the reckless way in which they are beginning to denude themselves of the splendid estate that remained to them when the land-purchasing operations of the Government ceased.

I am sorry I cannot say much that is favourable of their moral condition. They are obedient to the law, and crimes of a serious nature are extremely rare. Murder, highway robbery, arson, are never heard of, and rape scarcely ever. But they are lazy and untruthful to a degree, of commercial morality they have lost all they ever had, petty larceny is common, and horse-stealing a matter of every day occurrence. Morality as regards intercourse between the sexes is almost gone from among them; and drunkenness has within the last three or four years increased to an extent simply awful to contemplate. Education is hardly thought of, and, with rare exceptions, the children are growing up unable to read and write, presenting in this respect a marked contrast to their parents, who almost without exception can read, write, and cypher with fluency.

Their religious convictions, never very strong or sincere, have now almost entirely evaporated. True they generally attend worship to a certain extent on Sundays since they abandoned Hauhausism, but they think very little of the matter and the outward semblance of devotion does not survive the departure of the missionary, whilst "Sabbath observance," for which they used once to be famous, has now quite gone out of fashion. Of course there are exceptions to the above rules, but every unprejudiced observer will admit that they are all but universally applicable.

The state of feeling of the Maoris of this district towards Europeans generally is very good. When they joined the King movement and afterwards when they turned Hauhaus, their feeling towards the settlers—even when to some extent alienated from the Government—has always been friendly. In fact they look upon the colonists here almost in the light of guests who came on their invitation, and whom they are therefore bound to protect from molestation from without. Perhaps the revenues they derive from their presence may have something to do with this aspect of the question.

The progress of Hauhausism in this district was never rapid or strong, and there is not a vestige of it left now.

Even the King movement was not cordially taken up here, though most of the Maoris turned Kingites. But they were always suspicious and could never be quite satisfied as to what the ultimate tendency of it might be. Even through the Taranaki and Waikato wars they did not give it up, but were constantly sending messengers to the seat of war and to the King for news. In the former war they thought the Government decidedly in the wrong, in the latter they doubted this; but finally when they sent a deputation to urge upon Waikato to consent to refer the Waitara question to arbitration as proposed by Mr. Fox, and the latter refused, saying they did not want peace and would not rest till they had driven out the Pakeha, the Hawke's Bay Natives abandoned the movement at once and for all, and have never shown the least inclination to return to it since.