

The Natives show a becoming respect for the law, and readily obey the summonses issued out of our Courts. Some little time ago a charge of arson was sworn against three Natives living at Murimotu. I issued summonses for their attendance before me here. The summonses were promptly obeyed. Trial by a jury of Maoris is not considered by our local Press to be quite a success. In the case I have just referred to, at the last sitting of the Supreme Court here, in spite of strong evidence of the defendants' guilt, the Maori jury brought in a verdict of "Not guilty." Need I remark that European juries sometimes take the same course under similar circumstances.

Coming now to the important question, Are the Maoris, as a nation, dying out? In my opinion, "Yes;" but not so fast as some think. So far as I have observed, the death-rate seems to be the heaviest among those living near European towns and settlements; while those residing far away from our towns, and who are not brought much into intercourse with the pakehas, are much hardier: attributable, I think, very largely to their living in primitive Maori style. Those living nearer our towns suffer, to some extent, from intemperance, and, in consequence, irregular and unhealthy habits of life; and also by wearing European clothes in the day-time, and returning to their Maori habit of being lightly clad at night, and going, while so clad, from ill-ventilated and heated whares into the cold air, and thus get sudden chills, causing almost universal suffering from pulmonary complaints, from which, in too many instances, they languish and die.

On the 28th January last I held an election here of Native persons to serve as members of the Native Committee for the Whanganui District. Some interest was shown by the Natives in the district, but not as much as I expected. Those elected, though not men of the highest rank or possessing the greatest personal influence, are second to none in intelligence. I am a little curious to see how these Committees will be found to work.

Major Kemp has made himself very popular with the Europeans generally in this part of the district. He received quite an ovation at a public meeting held here lately, when he made an excellent speech on the subject of throwing open the Upper Whanganui, Murimotu, and Tuhua country for railway purposes and gold-seeking, offering, if need be, to go with the prospectors, and aid them in every way his extensive influence could be brought to bear. The hearty and strong support he is giving Mr. Rochfort and party in surveying the much-talked-of, and by many the much-hoped-for, central railway-line, may be regarded as proofs of the genuineness of his friendly professions. He has assured me of his wish to aid me to the best of his ability in such steps as I may find it necessary or desirable to take for the purpose of securing the real and lasting welfare of the Maoris in the district.

Churton's College has not proved such a success as it deserves to be, and as was hoped it would be. I think I am right in saying that only about twenty children receive instruction there. I think one of the reasons why so few of the up-river Natives send their little girls to this institution is that, owing to their fondness for their children, they like to have them about them at their pas and kaingas, and therefore refrain from sending their little maids a long distance to this home school, so generously given them and endowed by Mr. Henry Churton, of this place. I think it is a very great pity the Natives do not allow their children to avail themselves of the great privileges and benefits so nobly placed at their disposal. Those children who have been there some time speak the English language clearly and distinctly, and sing English ballads and songs remarkably well. In Mr. and Mrs. Menzies they have a master and matron eminently suitable for, and most devoted to, the work in which they are engaged.

The inquiry lately held at Marton, by Mr. Commissioner Mackay, for the purpose of ascertaining and determining in whom the Reureu Reserve, on the south bank of the Rangitikei River, should be vested will tend much to settle the minds of the Natives interested in or living on the block. I understand he is of opinion that a Crown grant in favour of the four hapus residing on the block should be issued. I think this will give general satisfaction, and will, I believe, give effect to the wishes expressed by the donor, the late Sir Donald McLean, then Native Minister.

The prospect of a final and satisfactory settlement of the difficulties in regard to the Ota-makapua Block should be hailed with great pleasure by all parties concerned. It should also have the good effect of causing a very large block of land to be thrown open for sale, and made available for settlement.

Throughout the district the Natives, as a whole, are peaceable and quiet in their conduct; and I rejoice on being able again to report favourably on them.

I have, &c.,

ROBERT WARD, R.M.

The Under-Secretary, Native Department, Wellington.

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No. 12.

R. PARRIS, Esq., New Plymouth, to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Native Department.

SIR,—

New Plymouth, 12th May, 1884.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your Circular Letter No. 3, of the 9th April, calling for the usual annual report upon the state of the Natives in this district, for presentation to Parliament.