

No. 7.

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SIR,—

Tauranga, Bay of Plenty, 30th April, 1885.

I have the honor to submit the following as my annual report on the state of the Natives in the districts under my charge.

I.—*Tauranga District.*

There is but little change in the state of the Natives in this district since my report in 1884, any difference there is, however, being in the direction of improvement and progress. The health of the Native population has been good, they have been as usual gratuitously supplied by Government with medical attendance and medicines. They have had much better crops than last year, the season having been more favourable, but as I have had occasion to remark before, the Natives in this district rely less year by year on their plantations, and more on other means of subsistence. A number of the younger men work for wages, and it is becoming a custom for large numbers of them to resort to the gum-fields lying between here and the Thames. The fields at and near Tairua are very productive, the Natives proceed there with their families, and not only live well while digging, but generally bring home with them considerable sums of money. I think that nearly a fourth of the whole Native population of Tauranga are at present absent at the gum-fields. It is gratifying to be able to remark that the improvement of the Natives in the matter of sobriety continues; their habits in this respect, are very different from what they were some years ago, and the improvement is especially noticeable in their chiefs. It is due in a great measure to a total abstinence society which has been established amongst them by the Bishop of Waiapu; I also learn that they have received letters from Tawhiao in which "Blue Ribbon" principles are advocated. Some of the chiefs have left here for Tawhiao's meeting in the North, and it is worth noticing that the *soi-disant* king continues, as I am told, his endeavours to obtain adherents in this district. In the Resident Magistrate's Court, Tauranga, the charges against Maoris during the past year were:—Larceny, 2; robbery, 1; forgery, 1; embezzlement, 1; drunkenness, 1; miscellaneous, 1: total 7. Of these cases one resulted in a committal, two in convictions, and the rest were dismissed. Twelve civil cases were heard in which Maoris were concerned.

There are three Native schools in the district, viz., Maungatapu, Huria and Paeroa, which continue to be well attended. The Education Department have just erected neat buildings for the two last-named, which were until lately conducted in temporary and unsuitable houses.

II.—*Maketu-Rotorua District.*

The Natives have had fair crops this year, and they have not suffered much from sickness. The Government Medical Officer at Rotorua attends them gratuitously, and supplies of simple medicines have been kept at all the isolated Native schools.

I think there is some improvement in this district as respects sobriety, but it is not so noticeable as in the Tauranga District. Land Courts have sat at Ohinemutu, Rotoiti and Maketu during the past year, and the minds of the Natives are chiefly engrossed with the proceedings. Owing to the intricate nature of the titles the progress in investigation is but slow. The Natives have during the past year sold some land to the Government and are anxious that it should be speedily settled. As in past years I have acted as Resident Magistrate at Rotorua, and Mr. Bush at Maketu; at the former place the criminal charges against Natives were:—Murder, 1; larceny, 4; burglary, 1; cattle stealing, 1; assault, 1: total 7. Of these 3 were committed for trial, 2 convicted and 2 dismissed, the murderer was found to be insane. There were also 18 civil cases heard in which Natives were concerned. A remarkable charge of highway robbery was brought before me there—seven Natives being accused of taking by force from another Native a considerable sum of money, which had been received from the Government for land, and which was being conveyed by the latter Native to a meeting at which it was to be divided amongst the tribe. The men who took the money it appeared kept it to themselves and deprived the bulk of the tribe of their share in it, but on the charge coming before the Supreme Court it was dismissed on a technical point—on the ground that as the men who took the money by force had a claim on it, and were part owners, they could not be convicted of stealing it. The case is curious, as showing how the law failed to punish what was regarded by Europeans and Natives as a serious offence—an offence that would doubtless, if committed a few years ago, have caused bloodshed amongst the Native people.

There are six Native schools in operation in this district, at Maketu, Matata, Rotoiti, Tarawera, Ohinemutu and Te Awahou—they continue to be, on the whole, well attended. The Natives of the district take an increased interest in education, and petitions have been sent to Government for several new schools.

III.—*Confiscated Lands.*

As Commissioner under the Tauranga District Lands Act, I have proceeded with the settlement of the titles as fast as the delays caused by the absence of Natives and by the carrying out of the necessary surveys would permit.

I have sat in open Court with an assessor fifty-nine days, I have divided 6,000 acres of the reserve lands into forty blocks and have settled forty-six lists of names. The certificates of these are now being prepared and sent to Wellington as fast as the surveys are completed. The titles to the whole of the lands within the district have now been investigated. Three or four blocks have, however, to be further subdivided at the request of the owners, and one important claim has to be reheard. I have, during the past year, completed the settlement of the titles to the reserves within the actually confiscated, and purchased blocks in the Tauranga District, and I have held an enquiry at Whakatane with a view to settle the title of a large reserve of 20,000 acres on the Rangitaiki River. I have