

also settled—I think satisfactorily to all parties—the Ngarae half-caste's claim to land, which has been on more than one occasion before the Native Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives.

I have, &c.,

HERBERT W. BRABANT,

Resident Magistrate.

The Under-Secretary, Native Department, Wellington.

No. 8.

R. S. BUSH, Esq., R.M., to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Native Department.

SIR,—

Resident Magistrate's Office, Opotiki, 1st May, 1885.

In compliance with your Circular Letter, I have the honor to furnish the usual annual report on the Natives in this district.

Condition of the Natives.

If anything, there is a slight improvement in the condition of the Natives in this district. Since last year's report they appear to be better clothed, better fed, and have been free from epidemic since the typhoid fever outbreak amongst the Whakatohea at Omaramutu, mentioned in the last year's report. There is also an improvement on the score of drunkenness—only twenty-two have been charged with that offence since April, 1884, which, considering the very large Native population resident in the vicinity of this settlement, in which there are three licensed premises accessible to them, I think speaks very much in their favour. When drinking, the Natives generally confine themselves to beer, which, I presume, is preferred on account of their getting more for their money than they would if they drank spirits. There is one thing very noticeable, and that is, that there are no regular devotees hanging about the public-houses, day after day, the same as there are amongst our own race; I know no case where a Native has been charged with drunkenness three times, or even twice, within a period of six months. Although there were a large number of Natives from various parts here for three months during the late sittings of the Native Land Court, there was no increase of crime, but there were a few more minor offences than perhaps would have been the case, if it had not been for this great influx of Natives into this township.

It affords me much pleasure to report that the Natives appear to be getting more self-reliant and industrious every year. There is very little asking for food, clothing, &c., they seem to have made up their minds that the time for such presents has passed. Both the Ngatiawa and Ngatipukeko at Whakatanu have procured small flocks of sheep. The former have purchased four hundred, and the latter have received from their Patea relatives some five hundred as a gift. Besides these there are several small flocks scattered about the district. They are beginning to realise the value of wool, and I trust, ere long, many other sections of Natives throughout the district will follow the good example set them by those who have already commenced wool-growing. I am afraid, however, until their communistic customs are laid aside, no very great advancement will be made by the Natives generally. These old customs seem to be their bane. When one points out the absurdity of their adhering to them, the usual reply is, "How can they be got rid of?" If the answer to this is, "Commence by making the idlers work for themselves, instead of allowing them to live on the industrious and thrifty?" they reply, "We cannot do that, if we attempt it, we shall be looked upon as persons of no rank; in fact, nobodies." To so great an extent are some of these customs carried, that if a person possessed a horse, or other valuable article, which a chief such as Tawhiao desired, he would hand it over without a murmur, rather than be dubbed a *tutua*, (nobody).

So long as such customs are in vogue, it can scarcely be expected that individuals, or families of Natives, will exert themselves to improve their present state, and until some scheme is devised which will help them to break through these immemorial ancestral customs, very little change for the better will be noticeable. I believe the individualization of land, in small holdings, would do much in effecting the desired object.

Small holdings, not for hapus or sections, but for individuals and families, so that each person, or family, could hold whatever land they were entitled to, without being in any way connected with their hapu, or tribe, and free from the interference of both would be desirable. If some such arrangement could be carried out, I believe it would assist materially in weakening, and ultimately destroying these ancient usages, if not altogether, at any rate amongst those residing in the vicinity of European settlements.

As an allusion has been made in this part of the report to their behaviour, perhaps this would be the proper place to state that thirty-two Natives, in addition to those dealt with for drunkenness, have been charged in the Police Court with minor offences, and only one with an offence of a serious nature, viz., that of wounding with a knife, who was committed to take his trial at the next criminal sittings of the Supreme Court.

Besides the above, four Natives (Ureweras) were charged under the Malicious Injuries to Property Act; they failed to appear on their summonses, and warrants were issued for their apprehension, which have not been executed, owing to none of these Natives being seen in our settlements.

In the Resident Magistrate's Court, thirty-five cases have taken place, in which Natives were concerned, thirteen were between Natives only, and twenty-two between Natives and Europeans. The Native population is about the same as when the census was last taken. I have not noticed many new-born infants, nor have many deaths taken place. No chief of rank has died during the past year.

Disposition of the Natives.

As to the political condition of the Natives, I do not think they have any desire but to remain peaceful, but at the same time, as the Native is a fanatical and excitable character, he is always liable to be led astray by political excitement, got up by adventurers with the hope of obtaining power and notoriety. These temporary excitements take the Maori's attention altogether too readily, and take him from his work, in fact, they constitute a species of mild dissipation, which, for a time, he thinks vastly