

REPORT.

The principal subject engaging the attention of the Natives of this district during the greater part of the past year has been the travelling about from village to village of bodies of Natives, feasting as they go. As soon as it was known that the restrictions on large bodies of Natives gathering together was removed, the movement began. In August last a body of Parihaka Natives passed through the town and went on to Waiwakaiho, for the double purpose of celebrating the opening of the roads, and to lament over Te Tahana Papawaka, an influential Native Assessor, who was lying dangerously ill, and not expected to live. (He is since dead.) When this party got back to Parihaka, another and much larger visiting party was organised to muster there and proceed southwards. They set out in journeying by easy stages from village to village until they got to Patea, when they dispersed homewards again. They appeared so well pleased with their reception that they determined to muster again, and visit the northern part of the district, and go so far as White Cliffs. Between, however, the southern journey and the northern one, a split between them had taken place over some money matters, and the consequence was that the performance by the women of the *haka*, and swinging small bundles or balls of *raupo*, called *poi*, to time and movement of the body and limbs, which formed a conspicuous feature of the southern visit, was absent during their visit north.

On the southern journey it was estimated that two thousand visited Patea, but not more than one thousand five hundred visited White Cliffs.

The mode of procedure is something like this: The movement originates at Parihaka, when Te Whiti and Tohu give general instructions, and hand over to Titokowaru the carrying of them out. They leave Parihaka, where they have been mustered, on a given day, and proceed to the nearest Native village of any importance, where the hosts have prepared as much food as their means will allow, and have erected sufficient extra accommodation, say, from two long temporary houses, as at Waitara, to simply a break of fern, etc., to keep off the wind from the tents the visitors have with them. In some places the tents number nearly one hundred. When the food is gone at this village they go on to the next halting-place, the hitherto hosts now joining and swelling the body of visitors; and so they go on till they have reached the end of their journey, when they, who have hitherto gone onwards with great form and ceremony, suddenly become a mob hastening homewards, the reason probably being that, having eaten all before them as they advanced, there is nothing to sustain a large body of people on their return.

On their arrival at Patea they distributed a large number of Maori presents, such as greenstones (worked, or partially so), Maori garments, mats, &c. The greenstones included a great quantity of rings and ornaments manufactured by the Maoris who were prisoners at Dunedin, Lyttelton, and other places. I visited them at Waiwakaiho during their journey northwards, and saw similar articles, intended for presents, exhibited, but, I was told, not so numerous as they had taken south. They had a bundle of bank notes hung up with the other articles, and two men were told off specially to keep guard over the exhibits, and prevent visitors from touching. Their behaviour has been orderly, so far as I have heard.

The quantity of food consumed during these meetings is immense, from five to ten bullocks being sometimes slaughtered at a stoppage, large quantities of bread, butter, tea, sugar, &c., being also provided; besides their own Native food, such as shark, mussels, and vegetables. They sent to Nelson a few Natives especially to gather mussels, and the latter brought back several cart-loads of them for Waiwakaiho; and one Nelson Native sent twenty-five cases of apples and five cases of jam as a present and contribution. At Waiwakaiho over a thousand new cups and saucers were used, besides plates, basins, &c., in proportion, and about a dozen of new boilers; and, I am informed, that a similar number of the same kind of articles were used at Waitara. These liberal presents must quite impoverish the Natives, and I fear there will be a great scarcity of food this year amongst them.

One of the reasons given for these visitings, as I heard from a very intelligent Native chief, is to finally put an end to all bad feelings which may have arisen among the Natives during their former wars, they saying that peace has been firmly established between Europeans and Natives, but it cannot be equally binding amongst the Natives themselves until these meetings have taken place, where old enemies meet together in a friendly manner, face to face, and old resentments are banished.

They have mooted much more extended journeys, even so far as Wellington one way, and north on to Waikato and round to the East Coast; but at present this district is too exhausted to bear another similar strain for some time to come, although, with the object of entertaining visitors in view, the Natives will undergo great hardships and privations, and work heartily for a time to gather the means to feast those who visit them. My own opinion of these things is, that it is a way of passing their idle time. Natives require only a few months in the year to supply all their wants, and the question with them is how to fill up their spare time agreeably. Formerly, wars amongst themselves occupied their leisure time; afterwards, war between Europeans and themselves; later, Te Whiti's periodical monthly meetings; and now these friendly gatherings.

With regard to the system of leasing their lands under the West Coast Settlement Reserves Acts, I find a large proportion of the Natives are opposed to receiving their shares of rent, from superstitious motives, believing that by taking money so earned they will be transgressing the laws, or wishes, of Te Whiti; but they would willingly allow their shares of rent to be given to their friends and relations, if it could be done without giving *written* authority.

They have no objection to money if earned by their *werawera* (literally, "sweat of the brow").

Owing to their peculiar ideas, there has until lately been difficulty in dividing the rents, but now all the interests in let lands have been ascertained, and very shortly those willing to receive rents will get their shares; and I have no doubt the unwilling ones will gradually alter their minds when they see the benefits to be derived therefrom.

Socially and physically the Natives of this district are much as they always were, living comfortably enough in small communities, and as healthy as Maoris usually are, except when they crowd together in a dirty village, such as in the latter part of last year, when disease set in at Parihaka, described, I believe, by Dr. O'Carroll as a form of erysipelas, and was very severe for a time, but was, considering the surrounding circumstances, speedily stamped out.