Gum-digging.—It may not be out of place to refer briefly to a great difficulty experienced by Native-school teachers, that prevents them from getting their pupils to attend school regularly. This difficulty is almost entirely confined to North Auckland. It is rather hard to imagine how life on a gumfield can be pleasant even to a Maori child; but it is pleasant, or, perhaps, to put it more correctly, it is less unpleasant to live and work on the gumfields than it is to be left behind in the settlement and go to school. The latter kind of life restrains the children's liberty to a certain extent, and gives them hard—sometimes very hard—fare; the former, if wild and rough, is free as the air, and, unless the fates are very unpropitious, leads to an abundance of tinned meat, to biscuits, flour, and sugar. It is, indeed, the defective supply of food that really settles the question, and makes the children even anxious to go to the gumfields. The necessities of the parents prevent the children from being properly fed if they remain in the settlements. Although Maoris can obtain from a piece of good land, and from the bush, the sea-shore, and the sea, almost everything they need, they do not thus provide food for their children, simply because they have other work to do. Most Maoris have land or land-claims, and while this is so they can get credit. They avail themselves of the opportunity, and run into debt so deeply that they can hardly hope to extricate themselves from it. They soon find themselves obliged to go and work hard and long on the gumfields in order to satisfy the claims of their creditors and to provide food for themselves and their families. At times food runs short, and sooner or later the pressure becomes very great; then the children, by no means unwilling, are taken from school to work on the gumfields, where, too often, they lose their only chance of getting a fair education, and, perhaps, also, in spite of the more abundant food-supply, ruin their constitutions by working in and sleeping near swamps and marshes. It really seems that some kind of Children's Labour Act or other humane measure is needed to prevent the health and the best interests of Maori children from being sacrificed in this reckless way. It is a very difficult business to deal with, just because no Act or regulation would be operative that did not include the prevention of the incurring of legal liabilities for debt by Maori parents. The evil, however, is a grave one, and deserves very serious consideration.

It cannot be out of place to say a few words here about one or two other matters affecting the material and other interests of the Maoris. It is hardly possible for one to be engaged for years in work whose object is to benefit the Maoris in a certain direction, without gradually coming to understand what is beneficial and what is hurtful to them in other directions, and without wishing to use for the advantage of the race the knowledge thus acquired. I allude, then, in the first place, to what may be called the social effects of the great meetings that the Maoris are so fond of holding; nothing needs to be said about the political aspects of these meetings except that the outcome of them seems always to be practically *nil*. When a meeting is to take place a collection is made, and the Natives nearly everywhere do their best, by contributing largely, to avoid the imputation of meanness. This often involves not only the getting rid of most of the available food and the last penny in cash that the settlement can raise, but also a considerable addition to the liabilities of the people of the settlement. By-and-by all arrangements are complete; a great store of pigs, flour, sugar, potatoes, and luxuries has been gathered together; the people assemble from all quarters, long speeches are made, and the food is eaten. The time passes merrily enough according to Maori ideas—there is a certain rude abundance, and no reason to care for any future that is not at least some days distant. By-and-by, however, the fools' paradise has passed away, and all return to their homes. And now comes the sad part of the business. For months, probably, the children of the settlement have to pay the particularly exacting piper to whose music their parents have been dancing, by going without sufficient food and clothing, and contracting diseases that they would probably have escaped if they had not been subjected to cold and hunger. Perhaps it would be possible to prevent by legislation this kind of neglect of Maori children by their parents if the principle referred to in the preceding section were extended.

A far more encouraging feature is that to which brief reference will now be made. At the close of last year two young Maoris—both of them Te Aute boys, and one of them a very promising New Zealand University student—conceived the idea of trying to do something for the benefit of their people by organizing a kind of sanitation mission to work amongst their own people during the holidays. The subject was brought before the senior classes at Te Aute, and taken up with eagerness. A great many young Maoris undertook to give a helping hand, and addresses on the subject of health were given by these young fellows in a considerable number of the Maori settlements. Of course an effort of this kind cannot be expected to suddenly produce very striking effects, but we may safely hold that the movement is of a very novel character, and that it is likely to do much more in the way of undermining the kind of Maori conservatism which, in the presence of a superior civilisation, means the extinction of the conservatives, than has hitherto been done by any agency whatever.

The Teaching of English.—Much good may be expected from a circular recently sent out from the Department with regard to the teaching of English in Native schools. From the first it has been seen by the officers of the Department that English is the most important of the Native-school subjects, and no trouble has been spared to make the school instruction more in accordance with the principles which this fact involves. The trouble taken has not been quite thrown away; those who have been connected with Native education from the time that it came under the control of the Department know that very distinct advances have been made. On page 9 of the Native School Report for 1885 the following passage occurs: "Bearing in mind that the results obtained in 1880 were the accumulated products of several years' work, we see that the progress made has been, on the whole, continuous and satisfactory. It is right to mention, too, that the standards are now much higher than they were in 1880, and that a pupil who would have passed in English then would now be sent back as a bad failure." This present report, for 1891, might well contain a similar statement with regard to the advance made since 1885. The gentle—very gentle—treatment of pupils coming up to be examined is now a matter of ancient history, so to say, and the time appears to be