

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 6TH JULY, 1900.—(Mr. W. SYMES, Chairman.)

A. T. Ngata deposed as follows: I was sent up about a couple of months ago by the general committee of the Te Aute Students' Association to go through the King-country and furnish a report as to the state of affairs in regard to the sale and consumption of liquor. The attitude taken up by the Te Aute Association at this time was in favour of the continuance of the present prohibition of the sale of liquor in the King-country, as being in the best interests of the Maori population; but that was before we really knew anything of the actual facts of the existing state of things. Finding it would be better to get at the bottom of the matter, my committee (of the Te Aute Students' Association) sent me up through the country to make a special report. I went and spent three weeks in the King-country, seeing as much as I could in that time. All that has been said about sly-grog selling in the King-country has been amply confirmed by my experience of things there during my visit. I do not know whether you want me to give evidence upon the subject of sly-grog selling.

The Chairman: We want anything that will help to solve the difficulty. Give us all the information you can upon the matter.

Witness, continuing, said: Well, looking at the question from a Maori point of view, and with reference specially to the welfare of the Maori people, I find that there is a very degrading state of affairs, a very demoralising condition of things, in the King-country. It would be impossible to count how many sly-grog-selling places there are in the King-country.

Mr. Lethbridge: About what localities did you find them?

Witness: Between Mokau and Otorohanga. Just along the railway-line and a little off it. That is where most of it exists. A good deal has been said about the opinions of the Maori people in the King-country upon this subject by gentlemen outside of your House. I find there seems to be a consensus of opinion of the Natives on both sides (I mean of those in favour and those opposed to liquor in the King-country) in favour of a change from the present state of things. I went, first of all, to the liquor side or party, and of course their views will be treated as the views of interested persons. Then I went to the temperance chiefs, of whom there are a good many. I saw Moerua and Whitinui, and I would like here to read from a note which I took: "Several attempts have been made by some of us at the instigation of pakehas to secure the removal of the prohibition. Others objected until the restriction had had a longer trial. Now it has had a fair trial, and is an absolute failure. Even if you prohibited the introduction of the stuff, you could not prevent smuggling. It would require a cordon of police to watch the thousand-and-one inlets. More drinking goes on now than if the district had licensed houses. At one time it was secret, but hardly so now. It is demoralising and entirely degrading. . . . The land-sales came about ten years ago, and brought in more Europeans. Matters became worse and worse. Many of them tampered with our women, living with many of them. The Natives were taught sly-grog selling, and evasions of the law were clever and numerous. A large trade in *waiipiro* was carried on secretly, but everybody here knew about it. Men, women, and children were engaged in it, for the profits were great."

Witness, continuing, said: That is just an expression of the opinion of two chiefs who were themselves favourable to the cause of temperance. The whole trouble seems to have been caused by the failure, I might call it, of the Government—or, rather, I might say, of successive Governments—to note this point: that there were actually two prohibitions, one being in regard to the sale of liquor and the other restricting the sale of lands. So long as the two things went together the prohibition had a chance; but settlement was allowed to proceed in the King-country, and it was inevitable that the prohibition must break down. During the last two years settlement has been increasing very rapidly. Since last October some two hundred settlers have been brought into the country, and it is an indisputable fact that once you bring settlement into a Maori district prohibition as far as liquor is concerned must go. I felt bound to report to my committee that we must favour a change of some kind, and not bolster up a prohibition that is an absolute failure. There are some minor facts to be noted as to the effect, for instance, of sly-grog selling. When I was at Otorohanga a party of six Natives came into the accommodation-house. There was always a constable on watch about the place, but the Maoris, watching their opportunity, slipped into a room. I do not know whether there was any liquor there or not, but I saw the effect, because, after hearing them say "We might never get the chance again," they went in, and in about an hour's time all were dead-drunk. There were two women amongst them. Further up the line there was another instance. As to the amount of drinking that goes on, I believe that amongst the Maori tribes of the North Island the Ngatimaniapoto are the most drunken of all. At any rate, I would say that you see more drunkenness among that tribe than among their neighbours the Waikatos. But the latter have licensed houses right through their country, and you do not see so much of it there. I got this from another prominent man amongst them: that the convictions which the police obtained against them for sly-grog selling have had no effect whatever in keeping down sly-grog selling. On the contrary, the convictions seem rather to act as a spur to these sellers to make as much money as possible in a short time, so as to lay up a certain amount of