

134. Have you heard whether the merchants in Auckland or anywhere else sent the liquor?—No; but I have seen jars of whisky and rum in long packing cases going up into the King-country.

TUESDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 1900.

Mr. ELLIS examined.

*The Chairman:* This meeting has been particularly called to-day for the purpose of hearing evidence from Mr. Ellis and Mr. Isitt. The Committee will be very pleased to hear any information you can give us in connection with this licensing in the King-country, Mr. Ellis. It is a question agitating not only the Government, but the whole country, at the present time; and the object of the Committee is, if possible, to bring about some solution of the difficulty—at any rate, to be in a position to assist the Government in arriving at a solution of the difficulty.

1. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] How long have you been in the King-country?—I have been in the King-country for twenty-six years.

2. Did you know it when there were any licenses there?—There have never been any licenses in the King-country.

3. You were there when the Maoris first asked for prohibition?—Yes; long before that.

4. Was there much drunkenness in the country then?—No; apparently no drunkenness whatever.

5. How long is it since the Maoris first petitioned against the sale of it?—I suppose about 1883 was when it really commenced.

6. And do you think that it could have been stopped at that time if proper measures had been taken?—Yes, I think so, if certain measures had been taken. The Maoris asked for prohibition, and subsequently the prohibiting of liquor coming into the country, and the confiscation of the liquor which was coming up by train. They found that prohibition did not go far enough. I was speaking to Mr. A. Ormsby lately, and he said they thought they had done all that was required of them, and that the Government took no notice of the request that liquor should be stopped coming into the country.

7. Is he a Native?—He is a half-caste, and was the local representative with C. O. Davis and T. B. Hill when the second petition asking for prohibition was signed, in 1884.

8. You think, then, that if proper measures had been taken at that time this trouble would not have occurred?—Yes.

9. It is pretty generally stated, Mr. Ellis, that there are fearful scenes there with drunkenness; do you know of anything of that sort?—Yes, I have seen drunkenness there; but, of course, it has been grossly overcoloured; there is no doubt about that. The liquor and prohibition parties, of course, make us out worse than we are.

10. Have you seen scenes as bad where there are publichouses?—Yes, very much worse. At the time I lived at Kihikihi, on the borders of the King-country, it was the headquarters of the navvies when the railway was commenced, and of the Land Court, which was sitting there at the time, and I have seen it so bad that you could not drive through there, except at walking-pace, for fear of running over people.

11. The Land Court was sitting at the time. Were the Natives drunk?—Yes, very drunk at times; the Land Court had several times to stop sitting on account of it.

12. Has the Land Court stopped sitting at any time in the King-country?—No; although there has been an almost continuous Land Court there for the past twelve years there has not been a single instance of the Court having to adjourn for that cause. I lately asked Judge Mair, who has been presiding at Land Courts for some months past at Te Kuiti and Otorohanga, how the drinking-habits of the Maoris in the King-country compared with those of other districts he had held Courts in? He replied that he had seen hardly any drinking, and could only remember having seen one drunken Maori since he had been in the district.

13. You know Mr. Batley, of Moawhango?—Yes.

14. I think this place, Moawhango, is in something of the same condition as the King-country?—I think that the state of things at Moawhango should not be compared with the King-country, where there is not much settlement yet.

15. Do you know if there has been any license in Moawhango?—Yes, there was one for a short time; the sly-grog selling was so bad there that the inhabitants advocated a license to stop the drinking and the sly-grog trade, as many are now doing in the King-country. The result was so much the opposite to what they expected that they got the license cancelled at the first opportunity. Mr. Batley, the owner of the house that was used as an hotel, told me a few days ago that, although he was only getting £1 a week for the house now, he would not again lease it for the same purposes at £10 a week, as the state of things was so much worse under license. We have always had from three to six hundred of the navy class in the King-country, and we have them still.

16. Of course, they will not always be there?—No; as the railway moves on they will go with it. I am anxious that the power of voting should be put off until we have a more settled population.

17. Do you think if the Natives had a vote now that they would vote for liquor?—I think so.

18. Why do you think so?—I do not think they are particularly anxious to have the liquor, but they think the present state of things is a reflection on them—that they are being treated like children; and this feeling, I think, is at the bottom of it. I may say that all the leading chiefs in the King-country are dead; there are no commanding Native chiefs.

2—I. 1A.