

1903.

NEW ZEALAND.

GENERAL CONFERENCE

(REPORT OF THE) HELD UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF "THE MAORI COUNCILS ACT, 1900."

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Mr. Carroll, by leave of the House.

The SUPERINTENDENT of MAORI COUNCILS to the Hon. the NATIVE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Maori Councils Office, Wellington, 18th July, 1903.

I have the honour to submit for your information the following reports on the working of the Maori Councils.

Acting under your instructions, I took charge of the Maori Councils Department in March last, and attended the meeting of delegates under the Act which took place at Rotorua on the 17th April and following days. I beg to attach hereto a report of the proceedings of the Conference, and have much pleasure in testifying to the practical intelligence, assiduity, and perfect decorum displayed by the members in their deliberations.

The report is so clear and concise that it is almost superfluous to add anything thereto, beyond expressing the belief that the younger generation of Natives are now realising that if the race is to be perpetuated they must take advantage of the opportunities open to them under the recent legislation of improving their social condition.

In only one respect did the Conference fail to rise to the occasion, and that was while dealing with the rather difficult question relating to Maori *tohungas*. Superstitions die hard; therefore I do not think the Natives themselves are capable of putting down this serious evil. These *tohungas* are the curse of their race. They are generally persons of bad repute, whose cleverness enables them to impose upon the credulity of their countrymen. Without actually demanding payment for their services, they generally manage to obtain an undue share of worldly goods. They do incalculable harm, and I respectfully urge that more stringent steps be taken to put down this serious evil.

Though I have not had time or opportunity of visiting recently many of the more largely populated districts, yet, in addition to personal knowledge, reports have been received from reliable sources as to the general condition of the Maori people, and I can state emphatically that great good has already resulted from the establishment of the Councils. Some of the Native villages are now models of cleanliness and neatness. The unsightly insanitary old whares are gradually being replaced by wooden buildings. Greater attention is bestowed on the water-supply, sleeping-apartments, fencing-out pigs and other animals from the villages, the disposal of ordure and dead animals, payment of the dog-tax, a stricter supervision over the supplying of spirits in the kaingas or tobacco to children, the interment of the dead within a reasonable time and the consequent saving of waste and impoverishment through prolonged tangis, the discontinuance of eating putrid food, and a better attendance at the schools. These are some of the most marked signs of improvement.

The Councils in two or three instances have been neglectful of their duties, owing probably to the inexperience or indifference of their respective Chairmen, and it would be as well if the latter were called upon to resign and be replaced by more intelligent active men.

Several of the Advisory Counsellors, too, have proved more of a hindrance than a benefit, through assuming the power of veto, which they are not slow to exercise. The position of these members is too loosely defined. Of course, there are many honourable exceptions, like the chiefs Te Kepa Te Rangipuawhe, Hori Ngatai, Tamahau Mahupuku, and others.

There is a disposition shown by the Councils to assume authority not bestowed on them by the Legislature—an over-eagerness to combat every form of evil-doing by the Maoris without due consideration of the Council's ability to carry their by-laws into effect; so that in reaching after powers with which they have not been endowed by Parliament, they rather neglect to make the fullest use of those they already possess. Indeed, it would be far better were the Councils to devote more of their energy and undoubted intelligence to matters of sanitation, upon which the welfare of the Maoris so greatly depends.

As an earnest of their evident desire to assist the Councils, the Natives have subscribed considerably over £1,000 towards the Councils' funds, and, generally speaking, they readily pay the dog-tax. In the Arawa Maori District alone over eight hundred dog-collars have been issued, and in the Horouta District the Natives paid £145 11s. 5d. dog-tax; but all the Councils have erred somewhat in fixing this tax too low. Mr. Apirana Ngata, LL.B., in a very able report on