

Some Aspects of Maoridom.

BY HILDA KEANE.

Illustrated by D. W. Sutton.

DURING recent years there has been a marked decrease in the number of aboriginal inhabitants of New Zealand. Many reasons are adduced to account for this; and at this hour, when the numbers have fallen to some forty-two thousand, the Young Maori Party have taken the matter in hand, determined to do their best to remedy this deplorable state of things. This party consists of those natives who have received a European education, and who see, with sorrow, the rapid diminution of their people, mainly through the abuse of imported customs. The pioneer European settlers found an intelligent race of people, handsome, and physically well developed. Their food consisted of fern root, wild berries, kumaras, birds, fish, and the flesh of wild pigs.

With Europeans came foods of other kinds. It is no uncommon event for Maoris to spend all they have at the time upon tinned fruits, tinned fish, meat, etc., spread all upon one dish, and gathering round, eat of the mixture. Indigestion is thus a common complaint among natives, who do not understand European methods of cooking and of eating various foods.

Again, they come into town in the summer months, purchase gaily-coloured clothes, return to the kainga, discard the garments when worn, and spend the winter ill-clad. Then, when illness results, be it measles, typhoid fever or an ordinary cold, recourse is had to a native tohunga. These so-called Maori doctors still exist in numbers, and owing to the slow extinction of superstition, even Christianized natives still resort to the custom of their fathers. The tohunga performs the usual weird incan-

tations, and orders a dip in a cold stream. This is the universal treatment for all ills. In other cases, the patient is left entirely alone without any attention. If he recovers, well and good; their faith in the tohunga is increased; if, on the contrary, he succumbs to the disease, then some rival tohunga has been at work.

It is self evident that since in former days such diseases as consumption, bronchitis, fevers, etc., were unknown, their present prevalence is due alone to the introduction of civilisation and the abuse of its appurtenances. Some slight contradiction may be urged as regards the natives who live in the thermal district. Here, quite late at night, Maoris—men, women, and children—may be seen sitting in a steaming pool, smoking their pipes and chatting. They remain thus for hours, and probably throw a blanket round their bodies when they tire of the amusement. One naturally expects colds and chest complaints to be rife amongst them. But, on the other hand, the mortality amongst the natives here is not shewn to be greater than that among those in other places.

The Rev. F. A. Bennett tells a story of a meeting which he attended. About fifty natives were assembled in a wharepuni large enough to hold twenty comfortably. In the middle of the room blazed a huge fire. The Maoris sat round smoking. The impure air at the top of the room was so dense that the speaker had to double himself down before being able to speak at all. The heat was stifling. Two babies were crawling about wherever they could find room. As they tired, they began to cry. Then a native woman made her way to the naked little