

WELLINGTON PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT.

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 13th February, 1884.*]

ABSTRACT.

Referring to the Transactions of the Institute, Dr. Buller stated that he wished, having said so much in praise of the annual volume, to call attention to what appeared to him a very serious defect in it. He referred to the extreme paucity of articles relating to the Maori inhabitants of the country, their mythology, their manners and customs, their traditions, their habits of life, their treatment of the sick, burial of the dead, and so forth. The ethnologist of the future will naturally look to the "Transactions" for reliable information on all these points. Newspaper literature is ephemeral, and not always reliable; but the fact that every paper is vouched for by the name of the author is some sort of guarantee that none but well-authenticated facts will be found in the pages of the "Transactions."

Looking to the fact that the Maori race was dying out very rapidly, and that, in all probability, five and twenty years hence there would only be a remnant left, it was of the first importance, from an ethnological or ethnographical point of view, to collect and preserve, while yet there was opportunity, a faithful history of so interesting a people. He (Dr. Buller) had often heard Maoris themselves speculate on their speedy extinction, saying in a melancholy way, that as the Norwegian had destroyed the native rat, and as the indigenous birds and shrubs were being supplanted by the introduced ones, so surely would the Maori disappear before the pakeha. And this was no mere fancy. The abnormal condition of the population—the females far outnumbering the males—was the surest indication of national decay. Every successive enumeration of the people told its sad tale, and the decrease must of necessity go on in a progressive ratio. In Cook's time the Maori population was estimated at a hundred thousand; at the period of our first colonization of the islands at seventy thousand; and his own opinion was that at the present day they do not number, men, women, and children, more than thirty thousand.

He knew of districts swarming with Maoris in former years, now depopulated. He had known whole hapus disappear, and he had seen an entire family die out in the course of a year. Twenty years ago he was stationed as Native Resident Magistrate at Manawatu, and he had then under his nominal control and management some 2,500 Maoris. It would be difficult now within the same district to find as many hundreds. In 1866 he was present at Rangitikei when Dr Featherston paid over the purchase money of the Manawatu Block, amounting to £25,000, and there were some 1,500 natives present. It was proposed to pay over to the natives, in a month's time, double that amount, for the Otamakapua Block, and he doubted whether in the same district 300 will be brought together for that purpose, even counting the Hawke's Bay contingent! Last week he was at Otaki, and took some visitors to the Maori church. There, where formerly about 1,000

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