

The White Ribbon

For God, and Home, and Humanity.

Thought for the Month. . .

"In duties small, be Thou our inspiration,
In large affairs, endue us with Thy might;
Through faithful service cometh full salvation,
So may we serve; Thy Will, our chief delight."

—William Vaughan Jenkins.

Vol. 22, No. 9.

WELLINGTON, OCTOBER 1, 1950

3/6 Per Annum; 4d. Per Copy.

MAORI DAY

The Liquor Position as it Affects the Maori People Today

Written for the "White Ribbon"
by Rev. G. I. Laurenson, General
Supt., Methodist Mission Dept.

It is not easy in a short paper to give a balanced picture of the liquor situation as it affects the Maori people today. The whole question bristles with difficulties, and it is very easy to catch hold of one aspect and give a very unbalanced impression of the true position. However, there are some facts that stand out sharply.

One is that the Maori people have very recently been thrown into a most confusing world through the recent Licensing Amendment Act, which was hurried through the last House. In this legislation there was made a clean sweep of certain protective provisions in former Licensing Bills, and an effort was made to place the Maori people on a plane of equality with the Pakeha. It is interesting to remember that the protective provisions were not imposed on the Maori people by the Pakeha, but were brought into operation at the desperate and repeated urging of many groups of Maori Elders. In early days the wisest of the Maori leaders recognised that the largest single menace to the security and continuity of their racial identity was the Liquor Traffic. Old files of Government Papers have repeated and pathetic petitions from widespread meetings of Maori leaders, pressing for protection from the ravages of Strong Drink. It is to the credit of early legislators that, in the face of opposition from those who thought only of their own gain, the clamant need of the Maori people was recognised, and repeated enactments came into force that undoubtedly had much to do with the recovery of the numerical strength of the Maori race.

There have always been those, both Pakeha and Maori, who have sought

to undermine the status and effectiveness of these protective clauses, but the consensus of opinion in mature Maori leadership would always be expressed in strong appeals for the continuance and enforcement of the Law.

When the recent Royal Commission on Licensing was holding its hearings and receiving its evidence, many individuals in their own rights, or as representatives of large and influential gatherings of Maori leaders, submitted appeals for the continuance of such protective legislation. There was a readiness to concede to Maori returned servicemen, certain privileges that belonged to their Pakeha fellow servicemen, in gatherings of returned men, but that was the only extent to which such concessions were made. The usual and firm note was the request that the law be enforced and strengthened.

The Royal Commission itself recognised the need to continue and enforce some of the legislation, especially those clauses that protected the womenfolk and the Maori homes or settlements from the curse of liquor.

However, there were constantly being held gatherings of Maori folk, where a section of the younger men, supported by some of the older individuals who wished to do everything they could for the returned man, began pressing for the entire elimination of the clauses that they claimed were oppressive and discriminating. The

catch cry was "Equality." Resolutions from such groups were brought to the notice of those who were drafting legislation for the Licensing Amendment Act, and the cry was acceded to in the form of a sweeping series of recommendations. The word of this caused deep concern among the elders of the Maori people who held many large meetings and submitted their mind to the House, but unfortunately, their submissions were all brushed aside and we now have the position to face of a people, unprepared for these new responsibilities, prematurely called upon to adjust themselves to a terribly difficult situation.

Unfortunately, the section of the Maori race that is failing to make the grade is receiving all the publicity. It must not be thought that the tragic picture that is receiving such notoriety, is the only story to be told. It is a great fact that many people are making a very fine and creditable record in facing the temptations and problems of the new situation. Where there is strong Christian Faith and the happy encouragement of understanding Pakeha friends, a great number of Maori families are keeping the best side of their life uppermost, and standing against a tragic drift among others. Too many, however, are falling before the flood, and too large a proportion of the Maori people are in one way or another, suffering now from the ravages of drink. One aspect that is causing deep concern is the number of young mothers who are going with their children into public bars and making themselves a nuisance as they become increasingly helpless. The result in child neglect and home misery is too frequent to be ignored.