

E. M. Williams, Esq.
—continued.

by the Natives of this district. Never perhaps since the establishment of British authority in these islands has this feeling been more severely tried than within the last eight years, when the war which commenced in Taranaki, afterwards extending over the Waikato, Tauranga, and East Coast Districts, was producing its baneful effects throughout the Colony;—when Hauhau fanaticism was transforming its votaries into demons, the avowed object being the destruction of British authority and the massacre of every European in the Colony;—when overtures from Waikato, Ngatikahununu, and other tribes, were being made to Ngapuhi, to make common cause with their Southern brethren, under promise that if successful, the kingship should be offered to Hongi;—when, to stimulate them to action, the most exaggerated and exciting accounts were circulated by Southern emissaries throughout the district;—when, under such extraordinary pressure, an outburst of nationality was much to be feared, Ngapuhi, during the whole of this period, maintained their loyal feeling towards the Government, and their friendly relations with the settlers. No political disturbance has taken place in this district since the termination of Heke's war, in 1846.

2. *Facts which have come under my own immediate cognizance.*—Although the Natives have anxiously maintained their friendly relationship towards their European neighbours, they have not so carefully avoided intertribal quarrels and disputes amongst themselves, which in some instances have led to bloodshed.

Three cases of the kind have occurred within the last two years. The first was the murder of a young man named Te Ripi, shot by Hare Poti and party, on his attempting to return to Kaikohe, after having been expelled by Poti in consequence of his joining a party with whom Poti was at variance. Many of the Natives declared their abhorrence of the deed; meetings were held, and efforts made to have the perpetrators delivered up to justice. Adam Clarke, chief of Waima, was particularly active in endeavouring to persuade his fellow-countrymen to give them up, but, in consequence of Poti's position as a chief, a strong party soon rallied round him, declaring themselves ready to defend him; asserting, at the same time, that the crime with which he was charged was not murder, inasmuch as fair warning had been given, Poti and his party advancing openly, not by stealth, and meeting Te Ripi, not alone, but surrounded by his friends, who might have protected him had they chosen to do so.

Subsequently to Adam Clarke's death, which occurred about two months after this affair, a reaction manifested itself in the minds of the Natives, and even Te Ripi's own immediate relatives, rather than hazard a war, proposed adopting the views entertained by Hongi, who from the first had advocated peace with Poti. The result was that on the 7th of January, 1867, a large meeting was held at Kaikohe, when it was agreed that all animosity against Poti should be withdrawn. This meeting, although invited to it by the Natives, I declined to attend, fearing that my presence might be construed on their part into an approval by the Government of their proceedings.

The other two cases were conducted more in the old Maori style of warfare; the first originating in a land dispute between Te Uritaniwha and Te Ngarehauata. This, after a tedious negotiation and one engagement, in which five were killed and two wounded, was brought to a close by a declaration of peace between the parties. The portion of land in dispute did not exceed forty acres in extent. The second was occasioned by repeated depredations and insults offered by a party of young men towards Te Uriohua, resulting, on the first occasion, in two being killed and one wounded; and, during subsequent engagements, in four being slightly wounded. This affair was brought to a termination through the mediation of the neutral chiefs, Moses Tawhai, Marsh Brown, and Hira Te Awa.

These quarrels are, in great measure, attributable to that system of tribal subdivision ever observable amongst the Natives. Although a large body of people residing within a certain defined district may be designated by one title, such for example as Ngapuhi, they are nevertheless subdivided into numerous hapus, more or less powerful, totally independent of each other, claiming the separate control of their own affairs—the right of settling all disputes amongst themselves, tenacious in the extreme of any interference, and ready to resent the slightest injury or insult offered by others. Hence the difficulty often experienced in carrying out the decisions of the Courts when sub-tribal interests are at stake.

The same difficulty is experienced with regard to the question of imprisonment. In two cases brought under my notice—the first, an assault by a native upon the daughter of a settler in the district; the second, an attempted homicide, committed by one Native upon another—where in both instances I endeavoured to obtain a committal for trial, my efforts, although supported by the assessors, were strenuously opposed by the people, and fines, tendered in place of imprisonment, were ultimately accepted, under sanction of the Government.

The secret of this opposition lies in the strong feeling existing in the minds of the Natives that a man once imprisoned is not only himself ever afterwards disgraced, but brings perpetual disgrace upon the tribe to which he belongs; each tribe, therefore, strenuously endeavours to avoid, as long as possible, being (as they suppose) disgraced by the laws of the Pakeha. Imprisonment in fact is, to a Maori, a much heavier punishment than it would be to an European. By many among them it is looked upon as worse than death. This opposition may eventually give way under the influence of civilization and altered ideas, but cannot at once be overcome; time will be required for the attainment of this object. A Maori may be led, but he will never submit to be driven.

In some respects the Natives are making progress in civilization. Wooden cottages may here and there be seen taking the places of their raupo huts; their lands are being enclosed with more substantial fences than formerly; some are turning their attention to sheep-farming; many are owners of cattle, drays, and teams; they readily acquire a knowledge of agriculture, turning that knowledge to profitable account by hiring themselves to the settlers, especially as sheep-shearers and haymakers, looking forward with pleasure to each return of the season when their services may be required.

3. *Population.*—On this subject I regret being unable to give an accurate return, having failed in several attempts made to obtain a census of the district, in consequence of a manifest reluctance on the part of the Natives to give the required information, having been told by Southern Natives that, when the war in that quarter shall cease, the Government will commence a war with Ngapuhi. Many suppose the object of a census to be for the sole purpose of ascertaining the number of fighting men. This was the main argument relied upon by Southern emissaries in endeavouring to persuade Ngapuhi