

No. 15.

WAIRARAPA.

REPORT from H. WARDELL, Esq., Resident Magistrate, Wairarapa.

H. Wardell, Esq.

I REGRET that Mr. Rolleston's circular letter of the 15th February last, which was received at this office during my absence on leave, has escaped my attention until now. In compliance with the request therein contained, I have the honor to submit, for the information of His Excellency the Governor, the following sketch of the history of the past few years, so far as it has affected the Native population in this district, politically, socially, and morally.

None of the events of that period, the effect of which has been felt throughout the Colony, had their locale here, but probably no section of the Native population has been more disturbed and agitated by them than our own.

The organization of the King party failed to induce that general rising of the Native population to which it was undoubtedly directed, but nevertheless it affected the opinions and conduct of those belonging to it to an extent that made events occurring in one part of the Island felt in their effects throughout the whole; consequently we have passed through periods of great excitement and panic, and it has required great prudence in the administration of the law, the authority of which was ignored by many, and in dealing with those numerous cases to which the jealousy of races and the ill-defined rights of the Natives gave rise, to avoid affording to the leaders of that party a pretext for the use of violence which would probably have resulted in making this district a scene of warfare. Happily the peace has been preserved.

I assume that I need not refer to an earlier period than that of the attack upon the escort under Captain Traggett, at Tataraimaka, in May, 1863, about the time of Sir George Grey's surrender of Waitara. This attack was, on the receipt of the news here, condemned as a murder by Natives generally; but very shortly they were induced by communications from other parts of the Island to regard it as a fair act of warfare arising out of the land dispute at Taranaki, and they anticipated a second campaign; but when they found the troops moved towards Waikato, they considered it indicated an intention on the part of the Government to put down the King party throughout the Island by force, and the members of that party believing in their strength, and irritated by a report that troops were about to be sent to this district, assumed a tone of defiance, and threatened vengeance especially upon the small section of Natives who were loyal, and further suggested the probable arrival of a war party from the West Coast in retaliation for the entrance of troops into Waikato. The loyal Natives, therefore, became alarmed, and their alarm soon spread among the settlers, so much so that a large proportion of the women and children left the district. This alarm was the result of the entire absence of any arrangements for defence on the part of the Europeans: they were widely scattered, unarmed, and unorganized, and would have been absolutely at the mercy of any marauders. On several previous occasions the necessity of some organization for the defence of this district had been represented to the authorities, but for reasons good or bad no steps were taken. The state of affairs had, however, now reached such a pitch that it was deemed advisable by His Honor the Superintendent, with whom authority had been vested, to accept the service of Volunteers, and three companies were enrolled on the 23rd August, 1863. It was considered necessary to get the arms and ammunition into the district in the least obtrusive manner—viz., by the common carriers, and they were careful to travel by night. The volunteers were enrolled, and arms served out with great expedition, to the no small amazement of the Natives, who, however, imitated us by drilling their men, and this sometimes even in sight of our own people. The confidence of the settlers, now that they were in a fair position to defend themselves, was quickly restored, and by the end of the following month most of the women and children had returned.

During the progress of the Waikato campaign absurd stories of misfortunes on our side were circulated amongst Natives, which several times nearly led to serious consequences, for the settlers being now armed, many were disposed to assume, on the strength of our real successes at Waikato, a manner which contrasted strongly with that they had exhibited but a very short time previously, and taunts and threats were freely used against Natives. Gradually the members of the King party learnt that the reports they had received from Waikato were false, and in fear of attack withdrew from their settlements in the valley to positions on the hills which they considered they would be better able to defend. This movement on their part produced fresh excitement and alarm amongst the settlers and loyal Natives, and a cry for stockades became pretty general. No stockades were however erected, but a troop of the Colonial Defence Force were stationed at Featherston. After the lapse of a few months confidence was restored on both sides, and Natives returned generally to their settlements (August, 1864).

In January, 1865, the first seeds of Hauhauism were sown in this district, by the circulation of reports of miracles said to have been effected by Te Ua. The King party at this time, although their confidence in their own power was shaken, were not convinced of the hopelessness of their movement, and the necessity of placing themselves honestly in the position of British subjects; they were therefore ready to become followers of one who, like Te Ua, professed to have Divine authority, and to be endowed with attributes which would secure success. But it was not until Ngairo's return from the West Coast, in March of that year, that any here professed themselves believers in Te Ua's teaching. The acceptance of Hauhauism by the majority of the Natives, however, dates only from the arrival of Te Rangihoroa in the month of May. The avidity with which these people accepted his teaching presented a remarkable view of Native character; it showed clearly that the previous profession of the doctrines of Christianity had been the result of fashion rather than belief, and was a fresh proof of the eagerness with which a half-savage race will embrace any novelty which is presented to it; yet I cannot but feel that the action taken by the Government in the issue of the Proclamation of the 29th day of April, 1865, in consequence of the murders at Opotiki, against all professed Hauhaus, confounded the religious and political character in that body in a manner which recommended it to a people in the position in which the King party was then placed; they saw combined in it a religious and political movement under new leaders, and entertained fresh hopes of success.