

away from the Criminal Sittings of the Supreme Court here, I proceeded to the Bay of Islands, thence across country, through Hokianga, to the coast, and having just returned to Auckland, have the honor to report as follows:—

About the beginning of 1870, Messrs. Brissenden and J. C. Walker, being then largely interested in the flax trade, commissioned a Mr. Young to proceed to "The Islands," for the purpose of procuring a number of natives from there, to be employed in this Province in connection with the flax mills of the above firm, and for the conveyance of the Islanders chartered the schooner "Lulu," investing at the same time a considerable sum in suitable "trade," to facilitate Mr. Young's transactions with the natives. On the 21st May, 1870, Mr. Young landed in Auckland from the schooner twenty-three Sandwich men, Messrs. Brissenden and Walker paying the owners or agents of the "Lulu" the sum of £4 per head for all landed here.

The Islanders were taken first to the flax works at Waitakere (in which Messrs. Brissenden and Walker were jointly interested), but after some time were divided; eleven of them being sent to Walker and Reid's flax mill at Hokianga Heads, and twelve to the flax mill of Brissenden and Logan at Puriri, on the Thames River.

The latter lot remained at Puriri until the mill there was destroyed by fire, when they were transferred to an estate belonging to Mr. J. S. Macfarlane at Kohimarama, then in the occupation of Captain Johnson, of the steamer "John Penn," but now belonging to Mr. Watt, of Napier. Upon my recent visit to Kohimarama I found four of the twelve there, and ascertained from them that five more were employed in and about Mr. Brissenden's private residence, near Epsom. With respect to the other three, they informed me that some short time previously a schooner, of whose destination and name they were entirely ignorant, came to Kohimarama and took away the three in question (named respectively "One o'clock," "Charley," and "Monday"), but, instead of proceeding to Auckland, as those on shore expected, stood at once out to sea.

As the "Lismore" and several other small vessels trading to the Islands left here about that time, the Rev. Mr. Codrington, Captain Tilley, and others, were inclined to think that the three Natives referred to had been put on board one of the latter class of vessels for the purpose of being used (as the Hon. Mr. Gisborne suggests in his Memorandum) as decoys in the so-called "labour trade." I am gratified, however, at being able to state that such was not the case, for upon my asking the Islanders mustered before me at Hokianga Heads if they knew what had become of their three comrades, they at once informed me that they were there amongst them.

Upon this I called out their names (as before given), when the three natives in question at once stepped to the front. I then ascertained that Mr. Walker, with the concurrence of Mr. Brissenden, had transferred these three from Kohimarama to his mill at Hokianga Heads by the schooner "Herald," a regular trader between the latter place and Auckland.

I questioned closely each party of the Islanders seen by me as to the quantity and quality of food they received, but I cannot find out that they have any reasonable grounds of complaint on that score; and their apparently contented appearance certainly tends to create a favourable impression as to their general treatment.

At Kohimarama, I found them housed in a weatherboard building, where they appeared to have made themselves tolerably comfortable. At Hokianga Heads, I was shown a well-built hut of two good-sized rooms which had been offered to them for their use; but they prefer living in the "raupo whares" built by themselves, in which I observed they had constructed rude stretchers of saplings and sacking, blankets being furnished by their employer. I inspected at each place the food given to them, and found that they were supplied with salt beef, biscuit, potatoes or kumeras, flour, and sugar, and occasionally fresh meat. They are all rather expert at fishing; and I was informed that they were often in the habit of going out a short distance in a boat for that purpose, and thus varying their diet by a supply of fish.

Each party, however, I found, had the same grievance—viz., as to the length of their engagement. They assert, and in this they are unanimous, that Young, the agent, distinctly agreed that they were to be engaged for one year only, for which they were to receive a musket and ammunition, tomahawk, knife, and blankets, and at the end of that time were to be returned to Fāte (Sandwich), the island from which they were taken. They brought to me a notched stick, on which they had kept an account of the number of months (lunar) they had served, and upon counting the notches I found their calculation to be twenty-three months.

With reference to this statement, Messrs. Brissenden and Walker, whom I have seen separately on the subject, assure me that Young was clearly instructed to hire such Islanders as were willing to come here for the term of three years, during which time they (Brissenden and Walker) undertook to feed and clothe them, and at the expiration of that period were to pay each of the Natives so hired the sum of £10, or "trade" to that amount if preferred, and return them to their island home.

One of the Islanders at Hokianga Heads died there of consumption about five months ago, and Mr. Von Sturmer, R.M. and Coroner for that district, whom I saw on the matter, informed me that he had observed for some months previous to the death of this man (named Kuri) that the latter was in a decline, and had several times given him medicine, and therefore, when the death was notified to him, did not consider it necessary to hold an inquest.

Since my return to Auckland, I have been informed that the Rev. Mr. Codrington has taken with him in the Mission schooner the four Islanders seen by me at Kohimarama, and one of those working at Mr. Brissenden's.

Those at Hokianga Heads, when they found that I had not come there empowered to remove them, seemed, after a short time, contented to remain till the end of the three years, but expressed an earnest desire to be sent home at the end of that period, coming to me a second time to urge their wishes on that point.

In concluding this somewhat lengthy report, I would observe that should any further information on the subject be required by the Government, I have no doubt I shall be able to obtain the same.

I have, &c.,

J. B. THOMSON,

Inspector, A.C.

Hon. Dr. Pollen, Agent of General Government Auckland.