

obstacle has now been got rid of, the survey of the reserves having been completed; and as provision is made by "The Stewart's Island Grants Act, 1873," for the execution of grants to half-castes born on the island, all further difficulty is removed as far as those coming under that category is concerned, but as there are others equally entitled to a similar concession, it will be necessary to take steps to legalize the dedication of land to them in a like manner.

With a view to expedite the settlement of the question, and to enable the half-castes entitled to land in the neighbourhood of Foveaux Strait to select their several portions, I made application to the Waste Land Board at Invercargill (which was granted) to temporarily reserve from sale certain lands particularized in a schedule accompanying the applications.

A return containing the names of the claimants, places of abode, and the locality in which they have already selected or desire to select their land, was also furnished to the Commissioner of Crown Lands at the same time. This, and other information pertaining to the question, I purpose forwarding for the information of the Government in a separate letter.

In fulfilment of your instructions, I also visited the majority of the schools, and will report separately on the subject.

The condition of the Natives residing at the settlements I visited in the South, excepting at Otago Heads and Waikouaiti, is much the same as it was six years ago; they do not appear to have improved in either industry or their mode of living, and their cultivations are still on the same limited scale. In the early days of the colony, when they found a ready market for their produce, they were stimulated to greater attention to agricultural pursuits: but now, owing to their incapacity to compete with the European settlers in the production of grain and potatoes, they have drifted into indolent habits, and in many instances prefer letting their land, though the rental received forms but a trifle of what they might obtain by cultivating it themselves.

A number of the young men find employment on the stations in mustering and shearing seasons, and during harvest, with the farmers; some also own boats, and go fishing, sealing, and whaling, and are able to make a fair living in that way: but a large proportion of the population are incapacitated for hard labour, either through age, ill health, or other causes.

At Otago Heads and Waikouaiti the social condition of the people is far more satisfactory than at the other settlements in the South. Their dispersion into families has evidently effected a great improvement amongst them, and there is an evident desire to raise themselves to the level of the Europeans. Many of the residents possess neat weatherboard houses, and the most of the land is enclosed with substantial fences.

At Otago Heads the Natives own over 1,000 sheep, besides a number of cattle and horses; and at Waikouaiti they own over 2,000 sheep, as well as cattle and horses. They also possess carts, ploughs, a threshing machine, and other agricultural implements. At the latter place the Natives are becoming alive to the importance of securing education for their children as a means of elevating their status as a people, and have made application to have a school established there. There also appears to be a general desire on the part of the residents to have their land subdivided with a view to individual occupation, as they find that the system of holding their property in common affords too great facilities for the idle to prey on the industrious.

The proposed main trunk line of railway will pass through the Purakaunui and Waikouaiti Reserves, and will take about 20 acres out of each. The Natives are asking a high price for compensation, and they certainly deserve to be well paid, as the line will absorb a great deal of their best land, besides the inconvenience caused by severance.

Poverty is increasing amongst the Natives at some of the settlements, especially at Kaiapoi; there the residents have required assistance from the Government during the past season. The Natives have nothing left them now as a means of subsistence, since the timber on the reserves has been consumed, but their farms of 14 acres, which, instead of cultivating, they frequently lease to the European settlers for the sake of obtaining a little ready money, but as the area owned by each individual is but small, a very insufficient income is realized. A much larger area is necessary to afford subsistence for a Maori than for a European, owing to the difference in their mode of tillage. The Native system of husbandry is a very exhaustive one to the soil, and so soon as it is worn out it becomes of no further use to them. This forms the chief cause of their impoverished condition. In former years, before the country was occupied by Europeans, they could roam all over it in search of edibles, but now they are hemmed in by civilization, and have no chance of obtaining the necessary supplies should the few acres they cultivate fail to produce a sufficiency. Every year as the settlement of the country progresses, the Natives are necessarily restricted to narrower and narrower limits, until they no longer possess the freedom adapted to their mode of life. The settlers hunt down, for pastime or other purposes, the birds which constituted their food, or, for purposes of improvement, drain the swamps and watercourses from which they obtained their supplies of fish; their ordinary subsistence failing them, and lacking the energy or ability to supplement their means of livelihood by labour, they lead a life of misery and semi-starvation.

All this might have been obviated in the case of the Southern Natives, had the precaution been taken to set apart land to provide for the wants of the Natives, in anticipation of the probable effect of colonization on their former habits. It would have been an easy matter for the Government to have imposed this tax on the landed estate, on the acquisition of Native territory. Such reserves would have afforded easy relief to the people who had ceded their lands for a trifle, and formed the only possible way of paying them with justice.

Two political meetings have been held by the Southern Natives since the commencement of the present year; one at Otago Heads, in January, and the other at Kaiapoi, in April,—the object being to ascertain the opinion of the majority of the people as to the course to be pursued to effectuate the fulfilment of certain promises made to them on the cession of their territory to the Crown; and whether Hori Kerei Taiaroa, the Native member for the Middle Island, was justified in asking the General Assembly, last Session, for £2,000,000 in satisfaction of their claims.

The Natives appear to have taken up the question in earnest, and have made up their minds to appeal to the Imperial Government if they cannot obtain redress in the Colony.