

The great event of the year was the meeting lately held at Kaiapoi, at which representatives from every settlement in the Island were present. The subject of discussion was "the best means of securing the fulfilment of the promises made by the Land Purchase Commissioners." A most enthusiastic reception was given to the Hon. Mr. Sheehan and the Hon. Hoani Nahe, who attended the meeting at the request of Mr. Taiaroa. The proposed appointment of a mixed Commission of Maoris and Europeans, to inquire into the claims and report to Parliament, met with the approval of the meeting. But the difficulty they seem to experience in fixing their choice of Commissioners is likely to postpone this arrangement indefinitely. The order and sobriety that prevailed during the five weeks the *hui* lasted was very creditable to Ngaitahu.

The Natives who invaded the Hon. R. Campbell's run are still occupying the land. There can be no doubt that they ought to have had more land assigned to them originally—the amount reserved for them per head is ridiculously small when compared with the average holdings of the colonists; but it is a question whether they ought to be allowed to take the law into their own hands to right themselves. The effect upon the more law-abiding portion of the population is to produce dissatisfaction. These people do not hesitate to say, "See what we have lost by listening to the advice of those who told us to obey the law; had we despised and broken it, we should have done better for ourselves and our children."

In my last report I drew attention to the unsatisfactory state of the marriage law as it relates to Maoris. A circumstance lately occurred at Aowhenua which proves the necessity of something being done to remedy the existing defect in the law. A certain Maori, of the name of Taorangi, desired to have two wives. His first wife was an elderly woman, with whom he had lived for upwards of twenty years, but, becoming enamoured of a young widow, he avowed his intention of having her for a second wife. To this all the Maoris objected, regarding it as a scandalous proceeding. A meeting was called, and Taorangi was required to pay a fine and ordered to leave the place; but, instead of doing so, he went to the Registrar at Temuka, and married the widow. He was married after Maori custom to the first wife. He had recognized her for upwards of twenty years as his wife, and yet he was at liberty to contract a legal marriage with another woman.

The Kaiapoi Natives have not yet been put into possession of the reserves made in 1876. Both the Premier and the Hon. Mr. Sheehan promised, when visiting Kaiapoi, that a sitting of the Native Land Court should shortly be held to settle the succession to the numerous intestate estates, and also the question of title to these reserves.

The practice now becoming so general amongst the Natives here of letting their reserves is very prejudicial to their welfare. But, unless the office of Prosecutor is revived, there is no way of preventing the lands being leased, in spite of the Governor's approval being withheld. Persons will always be found ready to run the risk of leasing, and it is therefore advisable that the occupation of Maori land, without legal sanction, should constitute a punishable offence. Properties are now often underlet, in spite of every one authorized to guard the interests of the Natives.

Increasing interest is shown in the education of the children. At Rapaki, near Lyttelton, a new schoolroom and master's house are in course of erection, and where schools already exist the Natives seem to take a pride in the attainments of the children.

There has been little or no sickness amongst the Natives in this district during the past year, and they appear to be in better circumstances than they have been for years past. Drunkenness is a rare vice, only a few notorious characters being known to drink: in other respects, too, I am glad to observe an improvement in the moral tone of the people.

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