

The general health of the people has been good, but there has been a considerable amount of sickness in places where they have been temporarily crowded in tents, as they were at Cambridge during the prolonged sittings of the Native Land Court.

There has not been exceptional activity in food cultivation, except, perhaps, in the King-country, where great preparation was made for the Hikurangi meeting just concluded. Owing to a decline in the price of kauri-gum there are not as many people engaged in this industry as there were last year.

I do not think that crime is increasing, though more cases come before the Courts now than formerly, because the law now reaches offenders in places where at one time they were free.

The only road in progress through Maori country is that from Cambridge to Rotorua, by Tapapa. All the streams have been bridged, and an excellent road made by the Armed Constabulary and by contract, as far as Tapapa; beyond this a bridle-track has been opened with Native labour through the forest to Rotorua. When completed, this road will be of great service, as it brings Ohinemutu within 58 miles of Cambridge.

The annual meeting of the Waikato tribes (which lapsed last year) was held during the present month at Hikurangi. The assemblage was not so great as upon former occasions, for there were very few people from North of Auckland; besides which the more thoughtfully inclined are beginning to tire of these affairs, which they say have no definite result beyond an enormous waste of food and a succeeding season of semi-starvation. But without these meetings the Maori King's importance would soon decline, and his own people, stimulated by his example, work heartily to procure food for the occasion. Viewed socially, these gatherings are very pernicious, for they foster the Maori love of extravagant display, and they generate disease from the over-crowding and over-feeding, and the poverty which follows. But, politically, there is something to be said in favour of them, for of late years the principal object of Tawhiao's meetings has been to devise some means by which the land could be preserved and the people saved from becoming paupers. Many of those chiefs who upon the setting-up of the first Maori King surrendered the tribal lands to him have, as is well known, sold all, or nearly all, these lands to Europeans, and now would encroach upon the possessions of others. The extreme Kingite party, on the other hand, have not sold any land; but there is reason for believing that they are not so averse to leasing. At the late meeting there was a general expression of opinion that land-selling should cease; and most of the chiefs present signed an agreement to make over all their lands to Tawhiao. I do not think that this means the locking-up of what is called the King-country, but rather that, as soon as Tawhiao feels that he has the absolute control of the estate of his people, he will throw it open for lease to Europeans for long periods. It is probably with such a scheme in his mind that he has been trying to get his people to locate themselves at Hikurangi, as the country would then be clear for his operations.

There was a very lengthy sitting of the Native Land Court at Cambridge during the summer and autumn. Very large areas of land belonging to the Ngatiraukawa, Taupo, Rotorua, and Tauranga tribes were passed through, and certificates of title issued. This land is rapidly passing into European hands, and will, I am informed, be cut up into suitable lots for runs, farms, &c. Its acquisition by industrious settlers will, of course, be an excellent thing; but it is very evident that, as the competition for it enhances its value, and the temptation to sell increases, steps will have to be adopted to prevent the Native owners from completely denuding themselves of their land. I endeavoured, both officially and privately, to get reserves set apart and made inalienable, especially in those instances where the entire possessions of a hapu or section of a tribe had passed through the Court; but I met with opposition from both Europeans and Natives, for many of the latter who are interested are Rangitikei and Otaki people, who do not care about reserves in the North, but are willing to sell every acre if the price suits. I succeeded in getting some of the Natives to promise that they would retain sufficient land for their requirements; but, generally, this will be found simply to mean holding on for a better price.

One event of considerable importance, as showing that the "Native difficulty" is gradually wearing away occurred during the year. I allude to the occupation of the Horahora Block, in what is called the King-country. It was passed through the Native Land Court some thirteen or fourteen years ago, and, after changing hands several times, came into the possession of Messrs. McLean and Co., but the Kingite Natives claimed it and resisted any attempts at occupation. In August last the proprietors threw a bridge across the Waikato to give access to the block; the Natives assembled in considerable numbers and forcibly opposed the work, but by employing a large body of workmen Mr. McLean completed the bridge. Some months afterwards an attempt was made to remove some of McLean and Co.'s people, who were living on the land. Upon receiving instructions from the Hon. the Native Minister, Colonel Lyon and myself proceeded to Horahora with a few unarmed constables, and, accompanied by Messrs. McLean and Bailly, interviewed the obstructionists at Maungatautari. I assured them that the proprietors of the land would be maintained in their determination to occupy it, and that any one breaking the law would be arrested and tried for his offence. The Natives said that the appearance of the guardians of the law upon the scene was a new feature in affairs of this kind, for which they were unprepared; and, though for a time they threatened further interference, they have not since opposed McLean and Co.'s operations.

Another disputed block of land beyond the confiscated line at Orakau, which was purchased by Mr. Tole many years since, has also been successfully occupied. The proprietor got the well-known chief Rewi and his people to support him, and, after considerable opposition on the part of another section of Natives, got possession; and, although threats have been uttered, it is not likely that there will be any further trouble in the matter.

Schools do not call for more than a passing notice in this report, as there is only one village school in my district. I allude to the one at Waitetuna recently transplanted from Karakariki on the Waipa. There are a few children from the King-country in the Auckland schools, but Tawhiao's followers do not appreciate our charitable designs in their behalf.

A census of the Maori population was taken in April. Owing to circumstances I do not think it is anything like accurate, but as the subject has been treated in another report I will not further allude to it here.