

1885.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE NORTH ISLAND TRUNK RAILWAY

(REPORT ON THE CEREMONY OF TURNING THE FIRST SOD OF), AT PUNIU, 15TH APRIL, 1885.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

MR. G. T. WILKINSON, Government Native Agent, Alexandra, to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Native Department.

SIR,—

Native Office, Alexandra, 13th May, 1885.

In accordance with request contained in your letter (No. 381, of 28th ultimo), I have the honour to forward herewith a special report on the ceremony of turning the first sod of the North Island Trunk Railway at Puniu on the 15th ultimo.

I have, &c.,

The Under-Secretary, Native Department,
Wellington.

G. T. WILKINSON,
Government Native Agent.

CEREMONY of turning the first sod of the North Island Trunk Railway by the Hon. Robert Stout, Premier of New Zealand, assisted by the Ngatimaniapoto chiefs, Wahanui and Rewi, at the confiscation-line at the southern bank of the Puniu River, on the 15th April, 1885.

SOME days before the ceremony took place the representatives of the different tribes commenced to assemble at Wahanui's house at Alexandra for the purpose of meeting the Hon. the Premier, who they had been informed would take part in the ceremony. On the evening of his arrival at Alexandra (14th April) some fifty or more—all representative men—were there to meet him, but the lateness of the hour at which he arrived precluded them from seeing him that night. The next morning, however, the Premier, accompanied by Mr. Blair, Assistant Engineer-in-Chief, and myself, proceeded to Wahanui's house and there met the people who were assembled. Old Rewi, who had driven over from Kihikihi, and several other chiefs were formally introduced to Mr. Stout, as was Mr. John Ormsby, half-caste, chairman of the Kawhia Native Committee.

After the friendly greetings were over, Mr. Ormsby, who had been chosen spokesman, rose and said that, on behalf of the Natives of the district, he welcomed Mr. Stout to Alexandra. The Natives were all aware of the great work on which he had come, and they looked upon it as an important event, just as the Premier did. They considered the action to be taken to-day would be looked upon as an earnest of what was to be the policy of the future. The Native people were aware that Mr. Stout had come to turn the first sod of the main trunk railway. They had a request to make—namely, that the owners of the land should be allowed to take part in the ceremony, and, if Mr. Stout would agree to that, the way they had appointed to assist Mr. Stout was, Wahanui and they would ask Mr. Stout if he would allow Wahanui to dig the sod and put it in the barrow, Mr. Stout to perform the ceremony of wheeling it away, thereby both taking part.

In reply, Mr. Stout said he was exceedingly glad to meet the Natives there assembled. He had heard of Rewi. He was very highly spoken of by the Europeans, both on account of his rank and bravery. He had seen Wahanui at Wellington. He thought the Natives could not have a better representative in Wellington than Wahanui, who had been strenuous in his endeavours to get the best done for the Maoris and to promote their good in every way. He agreed to their proposal as to the turning of the sod. He wished the Natives to know that the ceremony had nothing to do with the title to the land, nor did it affect the chieftainship. Whether a man was there or not it would not make any one's title better or worse, or a chief's chieftainship greater or less. The fact of taking part in the ceremony would not give those who did so any advantage or any greater claim to the land than they had before. It was customary for Europeans who had no claim to a building to be chosen to lay the foundation-stone. The same custom prevailed in regard to the turning of the first sod for a railway: representative men were chosen. He wished to impress upon them the importance of attending to their health. If they wished to preserve their race they must preserve their health. In order to do this it was necessary that they should see that their dwellings were situated in healthy positions, and that they were well ventilated. It was important that they should pay attention to their food, and stop taking alcohol. A little book was being printed in Maori, in which they would learn how to prevent disease, deal with sickness, &c. This book would be circulated among the Maoris. He hoped they would all see to the education of their children. Being Minister for Education, he should be very glad to hear that they had taken measures to have schools erected in their districts, and to provide their young people with knowledge, so that they might read and write English, and know what was being done in different parts of the world.