

No. 13.

Mr. W. RENNELL, Reserves Trustee, New Plymouth, to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Native Department.

SIR,—

New Plymouth, 22nd April, 1886.

In accordance with your instructions of the 24th ultimo, I have now the honour to forward you the annual report upon the state of the Natives in my district.

The only event of note that has taken place amongst the Natives in my district during the past year is the increased and still increasing number of Natives travelling about from place to place. Large bodies, from two hundred to over one thousand in number, travel about between White Cliffs and Patea without any apparent object than that of amusing themselves. In some cases they have marched in procession around some of the townships on the coast; but have hitherto behaved in every way as orderly as could be expected from such a number. I have endeavoured to find out if there is any hidden meaning in these processions. Some say it is to assert their right to the confiscated territory: others, that they are wandering about like the Jews in the desert under Moses: but the most intelligent and well-informed hesitate to give a decided opinion. When these gatherings first commenced they naturally attracted a good deal of attention; but they have become so frequent of late that very little notice is taken of them. Sometimes two or three of these journeys are undertaken in a month. They originate at Parihaka, but the leadership is given to one or more influential chiefs to carry out details. Natives were always partial to large meetings, and old Native records are full of proceedings of meetings held by Natives at different times and places, such meetings, as a rule, rarely ending in anything practical. Alarmists among the Maoris themselves say that mischief is brewing; but I can see no sign of it, nor can any of the numerous chiefs I have spoken to on the subject. I have on previous occasions pointed out where possible trouble might arise from a body of Natives, some young and turbulent, riding about the country—namely, that if any dispute arises (especially about impounding horses) there is a danger of their taking the law into their own hands, and, if punished, would go to prison as cheerfully as they did a few years ago when arrested for ploughing.

The influence of Te Whiti is as great as ever over the minds of the majority of the Natives here, particularly between White Cliffs and Patea, and it extends in a weakened degree much farther than that. There has been no special sickness amongst them this year. Education is almost entirely neglected, and cultivation is only carried on to the extent of providing themselves and visitors with food, and growing a few strawberries and similarly easily-raised articles for sale. Near the towns they may bring in a few loads of firewood, but as a rule they do not settle down to anything beyond the supplying of their own immediate wants. The Native census shows an apparent increase in numbers in this district; but I put that down to the boundaries of the district being altered, and to the names of so many Natives being enrolled in hapu-grants, omissions being more easily detected now than formerly: but I am of opinion that as a race they are decreasing considerably. The Te-Whiti-ites still decline as a body to receive their shares of rent for lands leased under West Coast Settlement Acts, and generally hold a mildly-antagonistic attitude to any dealings with their land, either for leasing, rates, roads, or similar matters.

I have, &c.,

W. RENNELL,

The Under-Secretary, Native Department, Wellington.

Reserves Trustee.

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