

No. 7.

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

New Plymouth, 30th May, 1890.

SIR,—

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 12th instant, and to report that there is no material change in the state of this district so far as the Natives are concerned during the past year, as they have generally been living quietly on their own lands, and have not resumed the continual wandering about of former years to Parihaka and elsewhere. Te Whiti himself has served a period of imprisonment for contempt of Court since my last annual report. He had got into debt a few years back to a storekeeper, and was summoned before the Resident Magistrate's Court for the amount of his debt. When the case came off, Te Whiti did not appear, and it went by default. The creditor waited some time, and tried all reasonable means to recover, and offered to accept a lesser amount, I believe, than he got a verdict for, but, finding he could not get anything, at length applied for a judgment summons, when again Te Whiti did not appear. An order was then made that he should pay within a certain time, or go to prison for three months. Te Whiti took no notice, and was imprisoned accordingly. Unfortunately, whilst serving his sentence his wife died. After his release he stayed a few days near New Plymouth, at a Native village, and then returned to Parihaka.

I have not heard that anything remarkable took place there after his return. There is a Native village called Pumiho, about seven miles north of Parihaka, where a kind of rival prophet, called Motu lived, with a small following. He never went to Parihaka through all the years of large gatherings and excitement there, but since Te Whiti's imprisonment for debt, he (Motu) has cast in his lot with the Parihaka people, and has abandoned his own independent rôle.

A mild outbreak of superstition has occurred in the Rahotu district. A number of deaths took place amongst the Native children there, more particularly those of a chief called Te Kahui, who is perfectly convinced, as is also his wife, that the deaths were the result of witchcraft; and one of their relatives dreamt that the cause lay in a bewitched stone buried by an enemy close to the threshold of the house Te Kahui lived in, and that as the children went in and out of the house they had to walk over the spot where the stone lay buried, and the tapu thus passed into the children's bodies and caused illness which ended fatally. As the result of the dream, search was made, and the Natives say a stone was dug up at the spot indicated, which exhibited signs of blood on being exposed to the air. The house was deserted, and another of the children who was ill at the time was brought into town and placed under medical advice, but the child died, as European doctors have no power to save where Maori witchcraft exists. (The unbelieving pakeha doctors lay the death down to more natural causes.)

Two Natives, I think Waikatos, who were reported as specially endowed with power to discover hidden witchcraft, were invited to visit Rahotu, and they there unearthed a number of similarly tapued stones, which they declared to have been the cause of the numerous fatalities amongst the children. These stones were burnt with ceremony, and this was supposed to remove the witchcraft. This is by no means a new idea, as on looking over the records of the Native Office, numerous reports will be found about the doings of the stone-digging gentry.

In my last annual report I stated that Hone Pihama was the only stipendiary Assessor left in the district, and that he was ailing. Since then he has died. He has not for several years taken any active part in matters on this coast owing to his illness, and the only influence he retained was what attached to his name, but some years ago he was one of the most influential of the few chiefs who held aloof from Te Whitiism. Rumour says he became a convert before he died. His wife and children gave in their adherence to Parihaka years ago.

The general health of the Natives has been much about the average of last year. They seem to me to have been a little more industrious, but I fear it is only in fits and starts, and that steady work as practised by Europeans is out of the question so far as the present generation is concerned. Neither do they seem to appreciate the benefits of the free education which they could have for their children, as but few of the Native race are to be found in the schools of this district.

On the whole, I have not much change to report for better or worse; but I again repeat an opinion that their numbers are diminishing through a more than average mortality and paucity of births.

A strong desire is felt amongst the Natives of this district to be allowed to deal with their lands themselves, but as a large part of these lands are let through the Public Trustee to Europeans, and as some of the grants contain as many as two hundred owners, it will be found difficult to give the Natives the power they desire, and at the same time to protect the interests of the majority of the grantees. The real remedy, in my opinion, is thorough partition of the lands by the Native Land Court, and then removing the restrictions, so that each Native could lease or sell his superfluous defined land to European settlers.

The Under-Secretary, Native Department,
Wellington.

I have, &c.,

W. RENNELL,
Reserves Trustee.

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