

Appendix B.

Mr. Fenton's First
Minute on Native
Affairs,
13 October, 1856.

The observation has become general amongst the flour-producing tribes that, though they have observed the precepts of the European authorities, and have obtained ploughs and horses, and engaged industriously in the cultivation of wheat, still the advancement they have made is slight, and the increase of their personal comforts imperceptible.

The almost entire destruction of the old Maori law has been caused by the contact with the superior race, and the void left has not been supplied. No rule of conduct has been afforded to individuals; no system of Government has been tried or suggested for tribes or communities. The English law, which should gradually have supplied the void left by the inanition of the Maori law, is little known and scarcely respected, and can, under the most favorable circumstances, be with difficulty applied. Nor has Government taken any steps to increase this knowledge. (some recent efforts in the *Maori Messenger* excepted,) or to create the respect which can only follow on knowledge.

Exceptions must be made, from this assertion of ignorance of our most ordinary laws, with respect to the prohibitory laws on the sale of arms and spirits, which are generally known. But this exceptional knowledge only affords a melancholy proof of the facility with which they can break laws that are disagreeable to them, and of the power of faithful combination which they are capable of systematically carrying out, to secure impunity to those who wilfully and constantly disregard known enactments, if they consider the consequences of the breach to be agreeable or beneficial to themselves. The Maories have been constantly told, and at one time partially believed, that it was the wish of the Europeans to raise them to their own level, and that the object of Government was, by well-concerted measures, gradually to amalgamate the two races into one. This belief is still held, though in a very different sense, and the interpretation now placed upon these assertions is one deeply humiliating to their pride as a people, and discouraging to each man as an individual. The European traveller, if known to be of rank or intelligence, is engaged in conversation by the Chiefs, the constant burden of which is the utterance of the deep-rooted conviction that the Maori is gradually disappearing before the white man, and that some step must be taken to arrest this rapid displacement. Of this class, Waikato furnishes numerous examples. Individuals, however, are occasionally met with who, thoroughly accepting as a truth the ultimate disappearance of the Maori race before the slowly but constantly advancing body of whites, have resigned themselves to a species of indolent despair, which almost causes their conduct to be governed by the maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Ngatiapa, of Oruawhara, may be named as an instance of this latter class. But among the tribes generally, the amalgamation of the races is now construed to mean the local union of the Maories with the Europeans, founded on the supremacy of the one, and the reduction of the other to the class of hewers of wood and drawers of water. Though satisfied that this ultimate result will not occur during the time of the existing generation, yet they believe that their children will live to witness it, unless some definite and generally recognised plan of action can be discovered, which, extensively adopted by the tribes, may be the means of indefinitely postponing, if not of finally preventing, this apprehended event.

It is remarkable that a deeper object than we are used to recognise is attributed to Hone Heke's rebellion, by the Northern tribes who remained friendly during the contest. They affirm that the ruling idea of that astute leader was the establishment and consolidation of an extensive coalition, which, recognising him as its head, might treat with the British power on terms of equality. The wound which Hone Heke received early in the war, and which disabled him from taking further part either in action or council, caused the original object to be gradually lost sight of, and with the actuating motive perished also the desire to continue the contest.

The sum, then, of the preceding observations is the entire recognition by the Aboriginal race, of the certainty of their gradual decadence, the sure prospect of the Europeans gradually gaining the supreme authority, involving their own subjugation and reduction to the class of workmen for the dominant race, (though accomplished in a peaceful manner,) and a thorough conviction that all our acts of generosity towards them, whether under the name of gratuities or pensions to chiefs, are merely bribes to induce a period of quietness and to lull suspicion, until the Europeans are strong enough to take what they now endeavour to purchase, and to compel where they now negotiate.

They have not failed to observe that the Government policy has been directed with a pertinacity which, at the same time that it has excited marvel in their minds, has caused this deep apprehension, to the transfer of the possession of the soil of the country from its ancient possessors into the hands of a new and more powerful people. They have failed to observe that the largesses and assistance of Government have been bestowed upon, or extended towards them, except in a manner calculated to increase the production of New Zealand produce, or to facilitate the consumption of imported commodities, and, thereby, still further to augment the wealth and resources of the already more powerful body.

And now it may be proper for me to remark, that the Natives are generally aware that the Government of the country pursues no fixed line of policy;—that it is impossible to foretell, under a given condition of events, what will be the course to be pursued by the authorities. Previous decisions form no precedent: antecedent lines of conduct form no guarantee for similar policy under the recurrence of similar events. I do not say that this plan, or want of plan, of action can at once be avoided, but the constant relegation of the solution of difficulties into the elastic region of temporary expediency has created a feeling of doubt and insecurity, which must sooner or later operate prejudicially to both the parties concerned.