

REPORT OF THE MAORI MISSION FOR YEAR ENDING EASTER, 1869.

(Referred to in Evidence of the Rev. Mr. Stack.)

NOTHING of special interest has transpired in connection with the work of this Mission during the past year.

There seems no abatement of interest in the services and ordinances of religion, which are attended by the Maoris as regularly and numerous as heretofore.

The decrease in the sum total of contributions is owing to the completion of the several works undertaken by them during the past few years.

The unhealthy development of religious feeling at Arowhenua has been checked, and there seems at present little probability of its reviving or extending; but to prevent the recurrence of such outbursts of mistaken zeal, it is necessary that all the Native villages should be more frequently visited, and the intimate connection that formerly existed between them and the central station renewed. This can only be done by the employment of an assistant Native missionary; but till there are more funds at the disposal of the Mission, it is out of our power to employ one.

The Government Inspectors have expressed themselves as well pleased with the progress of the children at St. Stephens' School.

It will be unnecessary for me to allude to anything (connected with the management of this school) that has already been fully detailed in former reports.

We began the year with a debt of £20, but the fees, supplemented by a Government grant at the rate of £12 per head per annum, have been amply sufficient to cover all expenses.

The total number of children boarded during the year was seventeen. Their conduct has been exemplary, and their progress satisfactory.

Considering the fickle character of the Maori, I cannot help expressing my gratitude to God that the Mission has been permitted to reach its tenth year without having to record any evidence of decay.

The case of the Arowhenua Natives is rather a sign of life than otherwise; for it is far better that we should meet with some opposition, than that the people should give an unreasonable consent to our teaching: better spiritual disease than spiritual death.

Appended to this report is a short notice of the superstitious practices at Arowhenua.

JAMES W. STACK,
Diocesan Maori Mission.

Strange Development of Religious Feeling among the Maoris at Arowhenua.

In the early part of 1866, a Maori named Piripi, or Philip, came from the North Island on a self-constituted mission for the extinction of "tapu."

Before giving an account of his doings, it may be necessary to explain what is meant by tapu. Tapu was a system invented by the chiefs to preserve their dignity and property in a community where all freemen were considered equal, and all property held in common. Every Maori believed himself under the influence of one or more familiar spirits, but only a few favoured persons knew the charms and spells by which to control them—a knowledge they took care to keep secret from all but their own families, and thereby insured to them an influence and position they could not otherwise have maintained.

Every part of a chief's body was sacred, but his head the most so, being the seat of his familiars. Everything that touched a chief's body became tapu, and any person who violated its sacredness died immediately, unless he possessed charms more potent than those of the "rangatira" whose tapu he had violated. Tapu could only be removed from person or place by one whose familiar spirits were superior in number and power to those whose influence he wished to destroy.

To destroy tapu it was necessary to defile the person or place with cooked food, which all demons held in abomination.

Before the Northern Maoris were baptized, they broke off their connection with familiar spirits, by allowing cooked food to be eaten out of baskets placed on their heads. The Natives in this Island neglected to do this, and now attribute the mortality amongst them to the malice of the demons who still possess them and render them tapu in spite of themselves.

They believe that many have lost their lives by using other people's caps, combs, and pipes—and by passing near old ruined houses or over old burial-grounds.

Piripi, after visiting Otago and Southland, was invited by Horomona Pohio to remove the tapu from Arowhenua. On his arrival he called the entire Maori population of the place together, and, after a careful inspection, declared that he could see the demons inside Tamaiharoa and several others. With the unanimous consent of all present, he began the process of expelling the evil spirits, and removing the tapu from the neighbourhood.

First he visited all the places pointed out as tapu, taking a stick from one and a tuft of grass from another—with these he cooked food which all were required to partake of, without distinction of age or sex. Having to leave before the exorcising was complete, Piripi commissioned Tamaiharoa to finish the work of emancipating the community from the power of evil spirits. On a certain day the deputy summoned all the people before him, and having ranged them in a circle, ordered one of their number to go round and cut the nails and a lock of hair off every one present; these were placed in a plate held by Horomona, the Assessor. Each person's hand was then pricked, and the nail-parings and hair smeared with the blood. The contents of the plate were then thrown into a boiler full of tea, which was afterwards served round. This ridiculous ceremony was supposed to have the effect of rendering the evil spirits utterly powerless for the future—their proverb being, "Eat your enemy, and then you are delivered from him."

Tamaiharoa, having tested the sweets of power, grudged resigning them; but having disposed of the evil spirits in such a summary manner, he could no longer urge his influence over them as a reason why he should be consulted on every subject that concerned or interested the other Maoris.