

I made a visit last December, in accordance with your instructions, to Whakatane in connection with the reserves there. There are still some confiscated land questions unsettled in that district, which the Natives brought under my notice, and with your approval they shall have my attention at as early a date as possible.

I have, &c.,

HERBERT W. BRABANT, R.M.

Native Officer, Bay of Plenty.

The Under-Secretary, Native Department, Wellington.

No. 6.

R. S. BUSH, Esq., R.M., Opotiki, to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Native Department.

SIR,—

Resident Magistrate's Office, Opotiki, 4th June, 1883.

In compliance with your circular I have the honour to furnish the usual annual report on the Natives in this district.

Condition of the Natives.

A very decided improvement in the condition and personal appearance of the Natives throughout the district was perceptible during the time the sale of intoxicating drink was prohibited. At the time the new law first came into force there was a slight amount of grumbling amongst them, which very quickly wore off. The Natives, however, had no sooner become reconciled to the new regulations, and were just beginning to derive some benefit from the prohibition, when, unfortunately for them, the restrictions were removed, and I regret to say those who indulged in strong drink very quickly drifted into their old habits of hanging about the hotels when visiting the township.

With the exception of an outbreak of typhoid fever amongst the Whakatohea Tribe residing in the vicinity of Omarumutu, the general health of the Natives will bear favourable comparison with that of former years. With reference to the outbreak of fever, the services of Dr. Reid were employed, by direction of the Hon. the Native Minister, to attend the sick Natives, ascertain the cause of the outbreak, and prevent the spread of the disease. Twenty-three known cases of this fever have occurred; only two, however, of those attended by the doctor have terminated fatally, viz., those of Puhikarua and Te Matau. In the former, death was caused through the fever being complicated with diphtheria, and in the latter, a case of relapse, through bowel complication. The cause of the outbreak is mainly attributable to these Natives living in damp whares, erected on a hill-side, and the bad state of their wells, which are situated below the level of the whares, and are consequently receptacles after every shower of rain for all the drainage from and about the whares. In one instance the well is situated below a burial-ground, and is not only subject to the drainage from the whares but also to percolation from the grave-yard. Such being the state of affairs, the wonder is the fever has not attacked a much larger number than it has. The doctor has recommended the Natives to block up their present wells and use the water from the running streams, to leave the present whares, and erect fresh ones on the table-land above, and on no account to hold the usual gatherings around the sick and dead, but to bury the latter as soon as possible after death, and keep the Natives of other settlements away from theirs. I need scarcely say that, although I have written strongly several times, and spoken oftener, the doctor's instructions and suggestions have not been complied with. In fact, the Natives seem to be perfectly regardless of the danger of infection, and ridicule the idea of taking any precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the disease, saying that it is not fever, but simply a Maori complaint brought on by *makutu*. This being the Native view of the case, it may readily be imagined the difficulties under which any medical man must labour in effecting a cure. In the case of Puhikarua, though the great danger of infection was especially pointed out by both the doctor and myself immediately upon the death taking place, and a request made to have her body interred at once without any gathering whatever, two days subsequently I learnt that the instructions had been altogether disregarded, that her body was still unburied, and that nearly the whole of the tribe had assembled to tangi. I had then to threaten to send a constable to see that and all future dead bodies buried immediately after death, if they did not bury her at once. This had the desired effect, and she was quickly interred. It is most annoying to find one's efforts for their good thwarted by their foolish conduct; indeed, it appears to me that, unless a Maori can be attended in a hospital where there are sufficient attendants to see that the doctor's instructions are strictly carried out, it is useless to attempt any other mode of treatment, as they will not obey the medical attendant's directions. The doctor is of opinion that, if they do not carry out his suggestions and instructions, possibly the fever will again appear at this season next year. The Natives have been informed of this, and urged to strictly act upon his instructions. There is one peculiar feature with reference to this outbreak of fever, and that is, that the majority of those whom it has attacked are either women or children. This the doctor accounts for from the fact of the women and children being more confined to the precincts of the settlement than the men. I am glad to be able to report that the spread of the fever has been checked, and that no fresh cases have been brought under my notice since I last communicated with you on the 22nd ultimo. The patients are progressing favourably, and I trust shortly to be able to inform you that there are none under medical treatment.

I regret that I am not in a position to report some improvement in the habits of the Natives. I fear that so long as they continue to adhere so persistently to their ancestral customs, so long will they be nursing the greatest enemies they possess to their health and prosperity; and, until they are prepared in some measure to disregard these, there is very small prospect of any marked change taking place in their present condition.

Disposition.

The Natives still maintain their character for good behaviour. No crime of a serious nature has occurred during the past year. Seventeen Natives have been dealt with by the Court for