

The Natives also desire that the attention of the Government should be drawn to the scattered manner in which many of them own their land, in several widely-separated parts of the country, with a view to make some alteration that will lead to a concentration of their property in fewer localities. If a system of exchange could be established, under which a Native residing at Kaiapoi owning land, say, at Kaiapoi and Waikouaiti, could exchange with a Native residing at Waikouaiti owning land there and at Kaiapoi, it would prove a beneficial arrangement, as the owners of the land scattered in distant localities cannot possibly cultivate it, and to derive any benefit they are compelled to let to Europeans—a practice that frequently introduces a great deal of trouble amongst the Native communities.

There are other cases in which the Government might purchase the interest of small holders whose land is not worth exchanging, and apportioning the land so acquired amongst the residents of the settlements at which such parcels may be situated who only possess a limited quantity.

The following extracts from the report of the Rev. J. W. Stack in 1880, on the Canterbury Natives, is an accurate account of the condition of the Natives throughout the Southern provinces at that date, and is quite as applicable now :—

“But after all there is no denying the fact that the bulk of the Natives are very poor, and are incapable of improving their condition, and it is greatly to their credit that, in spite of their poverty, they never relax their efforts to clothe and house themselves like their European neighbours. The privations they are often forced to undergo in order to do this none but those who live amongst them can have any idea of. Their habits of reckless improvidence have produced false impressions in many minds regarding their real condition, the results of thoughtlessness being too generally attributed to the possession of a superabundance of wealth rather than to its real cause. . . . The number of aged and indigent persons is likely to increase, for, except at Kaiapoi, most of the Natives are dependant upon their own labour for subsistence. The help hitherto given by the younger people is likely to grow yearly less, owing to the general adoption by them of the Europeans' mode of living, which is so much more expensive than the old Maori way. . . . Seeing that the difficulty the Maoris' experience in providing for the wants of the aged and infirm amongst them is mainly owing to our occupation of the country, it would seem only fair and right that more should be undertaken on their behalf by the Government than would be thought necessary in the case of Europeans similarly situated.”

The physical condition of the Natives in the Southern provinces is healthy; no disease or epidemic has visited them, but their habits and general condition has not improved.

It is fortunate for the Natives that they are able to maintain a healthy condition, as they are ill-prepared as a rule to meet sickness, owing to their want of cleanliness, and the manner they try their constitutions by sleeping and congregating in ill-ventilated places. These circumstances render them an easy prey to sickness, and the wonder is that deaths are not of more frequent occurrence.

Their social condition is satisfactory, mostly all of them being possessed of wooden houses, which in some cases are fairly well furnished.

In their desire to improve their style of habitations they frequently incur heavy debts, which they have no means of paying off, and are led to let land necessary for the maintenance of themselves and families to obtain money to discharge their liabilities, so that in building themselves a house they frequently build themselves out of a home; for it is very rare that they can ever recover from the debts contracted with the tradesmen for the necessities of life, while their land is in the occupation of the tenant, who has advanced them the money to defray the cost of building their house.

Several circumstances have operated largely to make them poor and to keep them so.

The first cause that contributed largely to do so was the contributions of money made by the residents of all the settlements to aid Tairaroa in seeking redress for the non-fulfilment of the promises made them on the cession of their land to the Crown; another was the house-building craze; and another is letting their land for the sake of getting it fenced in. Another cause was the numerous meetings convened for the purpose of discussing their claims, at which large sums were expended for food, combined with which was the disorganising effect the continual agitation on this matter occasioned, which distracted their minds from other pursuits necessary for the promotion of their welfare.

In agricultural pursuits they are very backward, not growing enough for their own consumption. Formerly their indisposition to cultivate to any extent was probably caused by their land not being individualised, but that cause does not operate now. All the land that could be individualised has been partitioned in 1887; and in all other cases the relative interests of the owners have been declared.

A great deal of the land is not fit for subdivision, and even if such land was divided into small holdings the Natives would not occupy owing to the inferiority of the soil.

These lands are only fit to let, consequently it would be useless to incur the expense of dividing them into small holdings.

It was impossible for the Maoris to foresee all the consequences that were certain to follow the progress of colonising their country.

While they found a ready market for their labour and their produce they did not feel the inconvenience they are now subjected to.

In olden times the food and clothing they needed were easily obtained, but as civilisation advanced they were compelled to abandon their old and inexpensive mode of life and adopt new and uncongenial habits that require more means than they have at command to maintain. This creates a feeling of listlessness amongst them, and causes them to spend a great deal of time in talking over their altered condition, and their grievances against the Government for not fulfilling the promises made to them at the cession of their land, promises which, had they been carried out in accordance with the original intention, they feel would have placed them in a better position to cope with the difficulties that now beset them.