

kaingas where the water-supply consists of a running stream this dreadful fever is seldom heard of, Natives, however, become so attached to old localities that they even prefer to die there, rather than remove their residences to more healthful spots.

The recent census, just compiled, seems to indicate a considerable decrease in the rate of mortality in the various districts throughout the North Island. In these districts the rate is unusually low, not exceeding more than twenty per thousand during the period of the last five years. There is, however, one very noticeable fact, that is, the disappearance of the very old Maoris, who appear to have nearly all died off. This may, in a measure, account for the present favourable state of affairs, which, however, may again be altered during the next decade, through the ordinary process of nature, when the present middle-aged will be numbered amongst the old, and many of them die off.

The Natives year by year appear to become more thrifty and industrious, and as a result cultivate considerable areas of crop, consisting of maize, wheat, oats, and potatoes, which usually realise fair prices. Besides these sources of acquiring money, many are periodically engaged in cutting flax for the various mills, while others are employed on the gumfields, and some fifty on railway-works. Occasionally Natives compete with their European neighbours for contracts on roads, some of which they sometimes succeed in securing; but I am inclined to think Natives who persevere in agricultural pursuits are in the long run the best off.

Of course the Natives have been subject to the usual excitements in the shape of Kingite meetings, and a meeting with Te Kooti in the Urewera country and surrounding settlements about Whakatane. There are several Natives, both here and at Maketu, who professedly are Kingites, and these generally attend Tawhiao's meetings. Many of them were present at Pukekawa, in Waikato, not long since, when, if rumour speaks correctly, Te Pokiha, of Maketu, and other prominent chiefs from this locality, strongly advocated petitions for the return of the confiscated lands; but, when Tawhiao suggested they should form themselves into a Committee and take the matter in hand, they all discovered that they were too busy with their agricultural pursuits to devote that amount of time which a scheme of the magnitude proposed required, consequently it was left to Tawhiao and his immediate people to take what action they deemed fit.

The big flood which took place in the month of February caused considerable damage to potato- and kumara-crops growing on low-lying ground, but the loss does not seem to have been sufficient to deprive them of food. It will, no doubt, leave them without more potatoes than they require for actual use. This flood only affected the settlements about Opotiki and Whakatane.

The crops throughout the district appear very good, and I hear no grumbling with respect to them as a whole. The principal event of the year has been His Excellency the Governor's visit to the Urewera, with which the Urewera appear highly delighted, and regret that His Excellency could not have visited them a little sooner, when they had a large assemblage of Natives met together at Ruatahuna attending the opening of a large meeting-house. An attempt was made to keep this assemblage together to meet His Excellency, but, as some three weeks elapsed between the time this meeting broke up and His Excellency's arrival, the want of food gradually dispersed many of those who otherwise would have been present at Ruatoki to meet His Excellency. Every Urewera I have since met has expressed himself much pleased with the visit, and I have every reason to believe that it will prove most beneficial in time to come, as I already hear considerable talk amongst a section of the Urewera with respect to having some of their lands surveyed and put through the Native Land Court. These are two subjects hitherto strenuously objected to by these people, and even opposed with threats to kill those who persisted in introducing surveyors within their boundaries.

Fifteen Native schools have been in full work during the past year, in which the average attendance has been fairly well maintained and very good progress made. Applications have been received requesting the establishment of new schools in fresh localities, in which the Natives interested have expressed a willingness to give land for the sites for the same. In some of these schools the teachers and pupils labour under great disadvantages, particularly in the winter months.

A fair number of interests have been acquired in the blocks of land under purchase by the Crown. Some of these have been completed, while in others, which are probably fancy spots to Natives, little progress has been made, owing to the owners, from old associations, being reluctant to part with their shares.

The Natives generally appear to be more settled than they have been for years, and to depend more on themselves and their own resources; consequently there are very few begging letters received as compared to what were so received a few years ago. This alone is a favourable indication, and proves that with more settled occupations the Natives are able to supply their own wants without outside aid. In what may be termed industrious districts—*i.e.*, districts in which Natives cultivate grain extensively, there are what may be termed very few idlers hanging about Native Land Courts: they only attend when actually interested. Of course, persons coming from a distance are compelled to be in attendance the whole time, or until their cases are disposed of. It is a pity that Natives waste so much time in contesting boundaries of land of little value, instead of allowing the Court to ascertain tribes who own, and then divide fairly amongst them, irrespective of boundaries. This mode of procedure would save both the Maoris' time and pocket. No public works have been carried on by Natives under my control.

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The Under-Secretary, Native Department,  
Wellington.

R. S. BUSH,  
Resident Magistrate.