

Maoris do not desire prohibition. At any general meeting held on this subject every man will, for the sake of appearances and the safety of his church-membership, speak against the sale of liquor, but privately they are as a rule in favour of it, and cannot see why a Maori should be treated differently from a European. Whatever there may have been of drunkenness during the last five years has been due to bush beer, which is almost invariably drunk on the Sunday with the full knowledge of the chiefs of the *tapere*, police, and church-members, but the offenders are never brought before the Court unless they have been so foolish as to exhibit their drunkenness on the public road where they may be seen by Europeans. Public sympathy is with the beer-drinkers.

The arrangement by which the then British Resident authorised the sale of liquor to Natives on a permit signed by the resident Ariki failed; firstly, because the two leading Arikis disliked the law; and, secondly, because they believed they were being used as a catspaw. They therefore refused to sign; but it has been urged against them that, though they disapproved of the law, they allowed deputies to sign for them. On this point they have not been heard in their defence, and they would probably have a good deal to say; but that people who were not Arikis did sign, and charged sixpence for each signature, and that the Bondmaster acted on these illegal permits, is quite certain. With the result that a Native could for 2s. obtain a bottle of rum, and generally get as much liquor as he could pay for, so that in practice there was no limit to the sales other than a man's ability to pay. A Government return shows that during the last six months of 1897—6,543 bottles of spirits, 898 bottles of wine, and 974 bottles of beer were sold to an adult male population of less than seven hundred, and from what is known of the methods of those days it will be safe to assume that at least half as much more was disposed of without the form of permit. The vigorous protests of the Rev. Mr. Hutchin, Mr. Wilkie, and Dr. G. Craig put an end to this illegal traffic, and during the first six months of 1898 the sale of spirits decreased appreciably from 6,543 to 2,967 bottles.

Since my arrival in the Islands in September, 1898, no permit has been issued in favour of any Native; but the effective blow to the liquor traffic was the raising of the duty on spirits from 5 per cent. *ad valorem* to 12s. per proof gallon,—an innovation that had the effect of driving all of the drunken foreign element from this Group. I am not in a position to report that spirits issued to foreigners may not have found their way into the hands of Natives, and therefore I have included Chinamen among the prohibited persons.

It is possible that this Ordinance may not effect all the good anticipated from it, for when the people are hostile to any law they will not find it difficult to evade the provisions thereof. We have already some four hundred Cook-Islanders living in Tahiti, who were driven hence by the tyranny of the old laws and their administrators, and who, finding the happy-go-lucky life of that place very much to their liking, have remained there. I therefore anticipate that those men who are inclined to drink will simply find in Tahiti that freedom of action which is denied to them here, in which case those who are so anxious to force their own idea of moral living on the Maori people will have done more to destroy the race than any member of the much-maligned trading class. There is, of course, an alternative—the Cook-Islander may continue to brew his bush beer in the remote mountain valleys without fear of detection, for a large majority of the people will sympathize with him: in any case some curious developments may be expected. We can prevent the Cook-Islander from drinking spirits of European manufacture, but we cannot make him either sober or temperate. There are, however, people who pretend to think otherwise, and who ignore the fact that there are ten Sabbath-Day drunkards for one seen at any other time, that being the day specially chosen by the people for bush-beer drinking.

THE VITAL STATISTICS OF THE GROUP.

During the past year there have been an unusual number of deaths, due for the most part to the after-effects of measles. When this disease was introduced from New Zealand nearly every Native of Rarotonga suffered a mild attack, and no one seemed much the worse for it. But in Tahiti many people died, and when the steamer and trading-schooners introduced that form of the disease into Atiu and Aitutaki the people began to realise that the situation was serious, inasmuch as the Maori has no constitution that will resist any form of fever. The result is that the deaths exceed the births by no less than 109. I submit the following schedule for your information:—

							Births.	Deaths.	Marriages.	Population.
Rarotonga	..	..	..	..	..	..	55	94	45	1,900
Mangaia	..	..	..	..	..	..	54	52	5	1,507
Aitutaki	..	..	..	..	..	..	26	69	23	1,170
Atiu	..	..	..	..	..	..	21	51	10	940
Mauke	..	..	..	..	..	..	19	21	6	338
Mitiaro	..	..	..	..	..	..	7	4	2	218
Totals	..	..	..	..	..	..	182	291	91	6,073

W. E. GUDGEON,
Resident Commissioner.