

2. HOBSON, OTAMATEA, ETC.

SIR,—

Native Land Court Office, Auckland, 24th May, 1906.

I have the honour to forward herewith summary of the Native census in the Counties of Hobson, Otamatea, Whangarei, Rodney, and Waitemata, and the Great Barrier Island.

The results show that in some of the counties there has been an increase and in others a decrease since the last census; but taking them on the aggregate, there is an increase of some 320 in the Maori population of the district allotted to me.

The health of the Maoris in my district has been exceedingly good since the taking of the census in 1901, owing largely to the influence of the Maori Councils in inducing the Natives to live in better houses and observe more closely the laws of health and sanitation. They have not been visited by any epidemics, with the exception of an outbreak of fever amongst the Natives living in the Hobson County. Owing, however, to the exertions of the Health Department it was stamped out before many deaths occurred. Some of the Natives in the Otamatea County are at present suffering from a kind of low fever, particularly those living in the Kakaraea Settlement, where it appears to be caused by the non-observance of ordinary sanitary conditions.

The attendance of the Native children at the various public schools in the district is good, and the teachers are unanimous in praising the high intelligence shown by them.

The birth-rate throughout the district is high, but, on the other hand, the infant-mortality is equally high, and some steps should certainly be taken to as far as possible reduce it. It has been suggested, and the suggestion has been approved by various medical men who come into contact with Natives, that hostelrys should be erected at the different centres in the North to which mothers could bring their sick infants, so as to be within easy reach and under the supervision of the local doctors. It is always exceedingly difficult to get proprietors of hotels and boardinghouses to afford accommodation to sick Natives.

The potato-crops, owing to the blight, have been a complete failure throughout the North. The results, however, are not altogether so bad as might be imagined, for every one of the sub-enumerators in my district has reported that owing to it the men are compelled to go to work now on the gumfields, in the bush, at the sawmills, and flax-mills, and are gradually falling into line with Europeans in that respect.

This I take to be a very good sign, for it is only by compelling the men to work that the remnant of the race will be saved. An effective method of compulsion has been revealed by the failure of the potato-crop—viz., by bringing them face to face with the fact that if they will not work their wives and children will starve. The Maoris within certain limits are quite as good workmen as Europeans, and all they require is an incentive. When they find that by working they can obtain for their families and for themselves many of the comforts and luxuries of civilisation, I am certain that with their naturally high intelligence they will come to the conclusion that work is the best thing for them.

Attention, however, should be directed to one matter, and that is to the manner in which they are housed during the time they are working away from their homes. They are peculiarly sensitive to lung-complaints, and if they are not provided with dry and comfortable quarters all the good that the work will do them will be counteracted by attacks of disease. Therefore if it is desired to preserve the general health of the race the Government should take the matter in hand and see that under such circumstances they have proper accommodation. Maoris require educating on the subject. At present they do not pay much attention or attach much importance to it.

Owing to the Natives being so widely scattered over the different counties and the difficulty of getting to their places of abode on account of bad roads, &c., it was impossible for the sub-enumerators to complete their work in a week. In one case—viz., that of Whangarei County—the sub-enumerator was a whole month over it. In all cases they availed themselves of the permission to utilise the services of the Chairmen of the various Maori Councils, with, I consider, excellent results.

I have, &c.,

JAS. W. BROWNE.

The Under-Secretary, Justice Department, Wellington.

EXTRACT FROM REPORT OF SUB-ENUMERATORS.

Whangarei.

Owing to the Natives having lost all their potato and kumara crops, they have been compelled to not only dispose of their cattle, but to leave their homes to go on to the gumfields, flax-cutting, and doing bush and other work to obtain the necessities of life, entirely deserting their settlements in many instances, and being scattered in twos and threes all over the field. This, together with the fact that in many instances they objected to give the necessary information, also the bad state of the tracks, has very much delayed the completion of our work as sub-enumerators.

We did not find any instance of Natives cultivating together as a tribe as formerly. Their manner of living is generally the same as in the case of the European population of the poorer classes in the bush district.

The general state of their health seems good; we saw very few sickly persons amongst them; the young children seemed particularly healthy, the younger married people having fairly large families. They are all very intelligent, many of them having been educated in the various Native schools—in fact, nearly all the Natives belonging to the district can speak, read, and write English.

Through the work of the Komiti Marae, they are keeping the places where they are living in a very clean and sanitary condition.

Judging from the number of young children, we should say the Native population of the district is on the increase since last census was taken.