

5. COOK AND WAIAPU.

SIR,—

Gisborne, 18th May, 1906.

Waiapu.—The health of the Maoris generally is good, and a great change is noticeable in the habits of persons of all ages, they being more cleanly and much better clothed—in fact, they are rapidly advancing in European ways. It is pleasing to see that the younger people are now taking an interest in the welfare of the old ones, an interest which at one time they did not appear to take. This is no doubt brought about by the present education and guidance of the Maori Council.

In religious matters the Maoris appear to be very attentive, and by far the majority are adherents of the Church of England.

I am pleased to be able to report that there is not the immorality that was at one time prevalent among them. There is nothing like the amount of drinking going on, and serious crime is rare. Tattooing is only carried on to a small extent.

The two medical men stationed at Tolaga Bay and Waipiro Bay are a great benefit to the Natives, who readily avail themselves of their skill when requisite.

In the northern part beyond Tokomaru, I am advised that the tohunga or Maori doctor has lost his prestige, whilst in other parts his mana is greatly on the wane. (Still it is astonishing how the Maoris still cling to these people.)

Many of the young women earn considerable money cooking at sheds and rolling wool at shearing-time, planting crops, and performing domestic duties.

There is an increase of 39 acres in individual crops, whilst crops in cultivation in common show a decrease of some 37½ acres.

The Maori Council has done good work since its inception. Sanitary and many other matters have progressed under its guidance.

The children attending the various schools appear to be well looked after, and are, I am advised, progressing favourably with their studies, showing no signs of decay in so far as attendance goes. The Natives at Reporua are anxious to have a school built there, where, I am informed by a resident, there are thirty-five children. It is true there is a school at Tuparua, and another at Port Awanui (Reporua being about half-way—four miles—from each); but when it is bad weather they cannot go without arriving at school wet and tired, and consequently unfit to attend to their duties. I understand this matter was placed before the Hon. the Native Minister when in this district.

There is an increase in the population since last census of 137 persons. It is pleasing to see that we still have a few of the early owners of the soil amongst us.

No epidemic has visited the Maoris since last census.

Many of the old Maori whares are a thing of the past, and European houses have taken their place. Considerable bushfelling is done by the Natives, not only for themselves but for Europeans, and being good hands at shearing and ploughing they easily find employment and earn good cheques.

There is an increase in sown grasses of 2,407½ acres since last census.

There is a very marked improvement in the way the Maoris maintain their fences, so very different from the old slovenly way. This is without doubt due to the influence of the Maori Council.

It is gratifying to note that the Maoris are making such good use of their lands, their sheep-farming operations being on a large scale and efficiently managed, which is undoubtedly a sign of progress and prosperity.

There is a large amount of country to be opened up, and if the Maoris can only get advances made to them under the new Act (Land for Settlement Act) I am certain that greater progress will be made, for large areas of bush are waiting to be felled, which will afterwards be grassed and carry largely increased flocks.

There is an increase of 13,832 sheep, and this in the face of the fact that large numbers have been sent to the freezing-works, whilst many have been disposed of to dealers. The cattle increase is 1,573, and that of pigs 586. Wheat also shows an increase of 5½ acres, whilst the cultivation of maize has decreased by 99 acres.

From my own knowledge and from reliable information obtained, I regret to say that the potato-blight has played sad havoc with the potatoes, which will come very hard on the Maoris, for seed-potatoes are so high in price. It is pleasing to know that the kumara-crops were not affected. Upon going carefully into the figures, I find that out of 548 acres of potatoes, 53 acres were a total failure, and 390 acres affected, leaving a balance of only 105 acres of good potatoes.

Cook County.—The general condition of the Maori is good, they being better clothed. They easily find employment at shearing, ploughing, and bushfelling. Weatherboard buildings are fast taking the place of raupo whares.

I regret to say that there is a decrease of forty-four persons since the last census; this may be accounted for by the fact that many are temporarily away. Several deaths have taken place owing to old age. Consumption, coughs, colds, and bronchitis, being the principal ailments of the Maori, account to a certain extent for the demise of others. The tohungas still carry on their practices; this is to be regretted, for there is no excuse whatever, seeing we now have eight duly qualified medical gentlemen in this county. No epidemic has visited the Maoris since last census.

There is not such a large amount of drinking going on, and there is little crime amongst them.

No wheat is grown in this county. There is an increase in cattle of 303 head. Sheep show a decrease of 2,705, owing no doubt to many having taken advantage of the high prices ruling to sell. There is a decrease of 239 in pigs owing to considerable numbers having been bought by the local bacon-factory, whilst some of the Maoris have sold and gone in for milking cows.

By taking the combined population of the two counties (Cook and Waiapu), there is an increase of ninety-three persons. I have had the kind assistance of some of the members of the Maori