

The following day I visited, by a written invitation, Wi Tako and his people; their welcome was more than cordial, and a long korero ensued. Reminding me that they had faithfully redeemed their pledge to keep the peace during my absence at Auckland, they evinced great anxiety to learn what had taken place at Waikato, and at the great pakeha runanga. They listened with deep interest to the account of General Cameron's operations (Wi Tako showing that he had a thorough knowledge of the country, by explaining the nature of each position), and were highly pleased at the fraternising of the soldiers with the natives at Rangiriri, with the compliment paid them by General Cameron, and the kind treatment the prisoners were receiving. Wi Tako remarked that he had always said that the battle of kingism would have to be fought at Waikato; that the battle had taken place, and the Waikatos were conquered; admitting repeatedly that all I had told him at my meeting with them last year had come true, and that the Maoris were engaged in a hopeless struggle; still he gave no intimation that he intended to abandon the king movement, although he expressed uneasiness at the future of himself and people. Wi Tako finds himself between two fires; he is afraid that he will be punished by the Government for the part he has taken in kingism, but he is still more thoroughly convinced that if he suddenly gave it up he would be murdered by his own people. The opinion I have long held, that had Wi Tako, not on more than one occasion, at a sacrifice of his personal influence, restrained the more violent of the ultra-kingites, the peace of this province could not have been preserved, remains unchanged. Neither surprise nor dissatisfaction were expressed when I explained the measures passed by the Assembly, and the determination of the Governor to crush the rebellion at once and for ever, and to trample out kingism in every part of the Colony. While freely confessing the part they had taken in hoisting king's flags, in issuing proclamations in his name, in arming and drilling, &c., they laid great stress upon their not having disturbed the peace of the Province, and upon none of them having gone to the war either at Taranaki or Waikato, pleading also that they in common with many others had been disappointed with the results of the king movement. After suggesting to them that the time had arrived when it became them calmly to consider the position in which they would stand towards the Government if they did not soon return to their allegiance, I left them, with many thanks from them for my visit, and the exaction of a promise that I would see them on my return. On passing through Otaki the same day, I found that most of the natives had already proceeded to Rangitikei, but I saw Heremia, and promised to meet them on my way home. Manawatu was also deserted for the same reason. I here picked up Mr. Hamlin, who, with Mr. Buller's consent, had consented to accompany me and act as interpreter. Arriving at Rangitikei on the evening of the 15th, I immediately proceeded to Ihakara's pa, where I found about 400 (including women and children) of the Rangitanes and Ngatirauka was assembled. Hiepa is not in any sense fortified, and there are not more than a few, probably four or five, acres under cultivation. All the principal chiefs of the two tribes were present; Ihakara being evidently the recognised leader in this land dispute. He has, in fact, by the prominent lead he has taken in it, acquired an influence which he never previously possessed, and seems inclined to foment the quarrel rather than abdicate the position which he has attained by it.

Having uttered a few words of welcome, Ihakara called upon me to open the proceedings. After stating that I came amongst them deputed by the Government to do my utmost to arrange a quarrel which seemed likely to involve the parties engaged in it at any moment in war, I begged them distinctly to understand that the Government would not permit any fighting either in this or any other case; that the time had for ever gone by when one tribe would be permitted to make war upon another; that the Queen's Government was prepared to preserve the peace and to protect all Her Majesty's subjects, whether Pakehas or Maoris, and that whichever of the three tribes engaged in the dispute dared to fire a shot, or strike the first blow, would be regarded as being in arms against the Queen's Government, and punished accordingly. Referring them to the efforts already made to adjust their differences, I suggested whether, if each party appointed a committee of their leading men, they could not come to some compromise without the Government interfering. They scouted this suggestion as infinitely absurd, and then said that they had all along been and were still willing to submit the matters in dispute to arbitration, that they were prepared to nominate as their arbitrators Captain Robinson and Mr. Yalcombe, with a Maori to be named hereafter, and requested me to bear their proposal to the Ngatiapas. In consequence of an observation which fell from one of the speakers, I asked whether the arbitration was to be strictly in accordance with Pakeha rules, which I briefly explained. "Kahore," exclaimed Ihakara, "the arbitrators must meet in the presence of the three tribes; the tribes will meet with their arms in hand. Each man will say what he pleases." I pointed out that such a meeting must end in a general shindy. Tamihana Rauparaua backed me in urging them to adhere to Pakeha regulations; but Ihakara's motion was put to the meeting in regular form, and carried with enthusiasm. The following day (Saturday the 16th) I met the Ngatiapas at Parawhenua; they did not muster more than 150. I was here joined by John Williams, Mete Kingi, and other Wanganui chiefs. J. Williams has been for some months doing his utmost to induce the Ngatiapas to sign the arbitration bond, and at once told me that he had given it up in despair; that he felt satisfied the Ngatiapas never would agree to arbitration. The proceedings were opened by Governor Hunia addressing a few compliments to Matini Te Whiwhi and Tamihana Rauparalia. The Ngatiapas recognised them as chiefs, and would to some convenient extent be guided by them, but as to Ihakara he was nobody, and they utterly ignored him and his people. I then related what had taken place at my yesterday's meeting with the Ngatiraukas and Rangitanes, and submitted their proposal, pointing out that such a fair proposal was evidence of their desire for a peaceful solution of the difficulty, and that the Government was prepared to carry it out. At first there was a good deal of fencing with the question of arbitration. "They could not entertain such a proposal without consulting chiefs who were absent." "Well, I will wait until you can see those absent." A consultation here took place amongst the chiefs, and they got up one after another in rapid succession, and declared they never would consent to arbitration; that an arbitration would involve them in an endless number of disputes; that they would dispute about the apportionment of the block; that they would dispute about the particular block to be assigned to each party, about the surveys, about the boundaries of each man's land, and therefore they would have nothing to say to arbitration. "We hand over the block in dispute to you." "Your words," I replied, "are not clear. I must understand clearly what you mean by handing over to me, as the representative of the Government, your lands." Mohi, the old fighting warrior of the Ngapuhi, became very angry, declaring that I knew perfectly well what they meant. "We hand over the whole block to you."