

Gorge. My provisions not having come up I was compelled to retire also, and on the evening of the 9th, when met by Mr. Gascoigne with a day's supply only, the Heretaunga Natives asked leave to go home. I could hardly refuse it, being unable to feed them further, and indeed must now retire another day to the rear to get rations: we have lived upon horseflesh for two days, and could continue to do so, but we have neither groceries nor flour.

During this indecisive action, the enemy fought very differently to any Natives I have yet seen engaged. He held a body of desperate men in reserve, to charge whenever he sounded the bugle. His fire was deliberate and never thrown away; every shot fell close to its mark if it did not reach it, and there was no wild volley discharge during the action. He began the fighting himself, and no opportunity was afforded me to summon him to surrender. He lost a great many men, we know; but as I did not hold the ground after the action, I could not search for them. I am, however, aware that when the advanced guard was charged, many were shot at a few feet distance before the men were driven in; and an old Native whom the ex-prisoners disarmed and took, but who escaped, corroborates the testimony of the men, given to me before he returned to us, on this point. At the island where we drove the enemy in, he lost probably more than we saw, for he ran from it in great haste, and hurried up the bank under a hot fire, losing men all the way; and I therefore feel sure he would not have run the gauntlet of all our fire if he had not been roughly handled first. All along my flank he was engaged with us, nearly the whole time of the action, at about twenty or thirty yards distance, and gradually driven up the ridge, so that he may have lost men there. But certainly we killed nine close to us, and as many more are positively stated to have been shot at the longer range firing at the island and retreat from it. The Napier Natives conclude, from his not taking courage to move on as we withdrew, that he was very much weakened by his losses. On our side, I have not words to express my admiration of the gallantry, coolness, and cheerfulness shown by the men and officers. Nothing can be more trying than an action in which the men are necessarily separated from their officers; and yet the Constabulary went forward cheerfully, behaved steadily, took up their wounded on their shoulders, and carried them back through the rocks as calmly as if no fire was going on, instead of their becoming targets for rifles at an easy range; and lastly, most difficult of all, they withdrew fighting slowly, steadily, and without the least show of hurry or wish to hurry back. Major Fraser, as on many previous occasions, showed his many soldierly qualities, and himself attended to the rear, placing each man of the rear guard so as to give his fire with effect in covering the movement. Sub-Inspector Tuke, personally known to the ex-prisoners from his connection with the guard at the Chatham Islands, was received with a storm of bullets, which riddled his clothes and wounded him in the arm. The Natives, who as a body behaved very well for Maoris, were charmed with the fighting of the Constabulary, and cannot understand how men can be so cool in action. This was due to the example of the officers and non-commissioned officers in the main, but also greatly to the character of the corps, from which the indifferent men have been carefully weeded out and discharged. The Napier Volunteers were fortunate in their officer, for Captain Herrick, who kindly took charge of them, is a very well known settler of Hawke's Bay, and evinced those soldierlike and manly qualities which he has long been known to possess. He comprehended at a glance what he had to do, and did it steadily and successfully, bringing on his untried men mainly by the force of his personal example. What, however, was the most pleasing feature in the affair, was the behaviour of the Natives of Napier, who had never before held any reputation for courage. One of them, the chief Paul Kaiwhatu, got into Captain Herrick's post before he could bring up the Volunteers, and, alone, kept up an audacious attack on the island. The Natives were calling out his name and trying to shoot him, but could not hit him. This chief, and the young chiefs Henare Tomona and Rionihi (nephew of Tareha, M.H.R.), behaved so well that I trust the Government will in some manner acknowledge their services. The chief Hotene, disappointed that his people had not come up, and Paul Poro of Turanga—sole representative of that district, except Assistant-Surgeon Brown—both endeavoured, with their few men, to be of use, and set an excellent example. I must not omit to mention Mr. Hamlin's services with the Natives, which have been once more rendered on this occasion with the zeal and ability so well and often displayed before in many ways, and on many trying occasions. Nor can I neglect to thank Major Fraser and his corps, and Captain Herrick and his men, for their great assistance to me throughout the operations. Mr. Assistant-Surgeon Brown, the sole medical officer with my force, was most attentive to the wounded; and though the carrying of these poor fellows kept him and the bearers for the whole night long, and till 2 p.m. next day, continually moving slowly towards my camp, I am sure that in no respect could wounded men have been more attentively and kindly treated.

I cannot forbear to say a few words of tribute to the memory of my two brave friends Captain Carr and Mr. Canning, who from purely public-spirited motives accompanied me on this expedition, who yielded me in all the hardships (and they have been considerable) we have undergone together, a zealous, intelligent, and always unselfish assistance, whose loss is what throws a gloom over what otherwise were operations, under rare difficulties, which it would have been pleasant to remember, and whose brilliant courage animated our men to a point at which, with the opportunity, they would have done anything at their call. It is, I fear, not too much to say, that in the Province which will regard this expedition with special interest, because almost all the force came from its population, the loss of these two brave, honorable, and respected settlers will be learned with universal sorrow, and looked upon as a public calamity. I feel sure the Government will sympathize with the public of Hawke's Bay in this matter, and equally with me deplore the untimely end of two such settlers as the Colony ill can spare.

I shall in a separate despatch report the steps I have taken in furtherance of your instructions; and I am glad to find by the despatches which reached me during the action of the 8th that I exactly have followed your wishes, and pressed the pursuit with the same object as you mention, viz., to intercept the enemy from joining the Uriwera.* This was my desire and why I pressed the operations, regardless of weather, climate, comfort, or food to the last moment I could, after Major Fraser joined me with his men.

* N.B.—The Uriwera territory begins some seven or eight miles further than I went, so I have not even crossed their land.