

No. 30.

Copy of a Letter from Mr. H. T. CLARKE to Mr. COOPER.

(No. 221.)

Civil Commissioner's Office,
Tauranga, 26th March, 1869.

SIR,— I have the honor to report, for the information of the Government, that I returned to Tauranga on the morning of 11th instant, and at once resumed my duties.

The murder of Mr. Pitcairn by Te Kooti's order, and the general alarm felt in the district, induced the Hon. Dr. Pollen to visit the settlements along the Coast, and learn from personal observation the actual state of things.

Immediately on our arriving, we received intelligence that Te Kooti had attacked the friendly Natives at Whakatane, and had killed several of them, including two principal chiefs, Hori Tunui and Heremia Mokai. The pa was said to be besieged.

On the night of the 11th we steamed for Whakatane *via* Te Awa-o-te-Atua, and reached the latter place at daylight. I approached the shore in a boat as near as I could (the surf on the beach being too heavy to land), when I received intelligence that the Ngatipukeko were obliged to evacuate their pa, after a three days' siege; that the European settlements at the mouth of the Whakatane had been destroyed, and that a European force from Opotiki was there. I gave the Natives to understand that we had arms and ammunition on board, and requested them to proceed to Whakatane to receive them.

On reaching Whakatane we found the prominent points over the ruined settlement of Whakatane occupied by our men. I, at the request of Dr. Pollen, conferred with Major Mair, who was in command of about 150 men, composed of Europeans and Whakatohea and Ngaitai Natives. Major Mair had just returned from reconnoitring Te Kooti's position, and was obliged to retire before Te Kooti's superior forces.

I break off from this part of the narrative, and allow Major Mair (whose report is hereunto attached) to speak for himself.

I left Major Mair with the promise that supplies should be sent by the steamer "Tauranga" on the following day; but as it was found after the vessel left Whakatane that she had barely sufficient coals to take her back to Auckland, it was found to be impracticable. Dr. Pollen then arranged that, after landing me at Tauranga, the steamer should go to Auckland for the supplies and return forthwith.

On arriving at Tauranga we learned that very exaggerated statements had preceded us, to the effect that Te Kooti, after destroying the Whakatane settlements, had surprised the Arawa settlements at Te Matata, and was on his march to Maketu.

Te Pokiha, who with a force of his own men had charge of one of the redoubts at this place, left in hot haste with all his people to meet Te Kooti; and every available man of the European Militia had been called out. The place was in a state of great alarm.

On Monday, the 15th, the steamer returned from Auckland with supplies for Major Mair's forces. I left in her immediately for Whakatane, *via* Maketu, where I intended to land twenty smooth-bore muskets and three kegs ammunition. On arriving there (Maketu), I was astonished to find the place crowded with women and children. They begged me to consider their unprotected state—that their husbands and brothers had all gone in pursuit of Te Kooti. Under the circumstances, I felt that we were bound to afford protection; I therefore placed twenty men (*i.e.* Maoris of the Arawa Tribe) on pay, at the rate of 2s. per diem.

From Maketu we steamed to Whakatane. Major Mair was awaiting my arrival; he reported Te Kooti having retired up the Whakatane for a short distance, and then his having crossed the ranges to the Rangitaiki; it was supposed that his intention was to draw the Natives away from Paharakeke and attack Kokohinau (*vide* Major Mair's report).

I arranged with Major Mair if possible to leave the supplies at Te Awa-o-te-Atua; but on reaching Te Awa-o-te-Atua, it was found that the surf was so heavy, we only succeeded in landing one box of biscuits. I was therefore obliged to return at once to Tauranga, where I hoped to meet the "Clyde," a small river steamer, sent down by the Hon. Dr. Pollen.

At Tauranga I found the whole settlement in a state of consternation, from many causes. In the first place, Mr. Piercy, the clerk and interpreter to the Resident Magistrate's Court, Maketu, in the absence of Dr. Nesbitt, sent a letter, of which the enclosed is a copy. Then it was alleged that the Natives living and working for Europeans here had been suddenly warned to leave for their respective residences at once. Messengers were known to have come from different Hauhau settlements and held some sort of communication with their friends, and had returned.

I had not time to analyze the different statements so as to form an opinion as to the amount of reliance to be placed on them; but the Commanding Officer thought it advisable, and I concurred with him, to allow as many of the women and children to go to Auckland as were willing and able to go.

On Saturday, the 20th instant, Captain St. George arrived from Taupo, with the intelligence that it was very probable that Te Kooti would force his way across the country and retire into the Waikato country; that he met with a Native chief,* of the Ngatitahu, closely connected with the Uriwera, who was then on his way, he stated, to receive his rent from one of the runholders bordering the Uriwera. He was told that the person had left. He then made excuse that he was going to hunt pigs there. He was asked whether he had any one with him; he replied in the negative; but from something suspicious about the man Captain St. George was induced to get off his horse and look into a whare close by, where he saw at least ten men, most of them strangers. The whole of the district was in an excited state, and the Natives were calling out for arms, &c.; he also brought Native letters reporting the destruction of nine Ngatimanawa, (Arawas).

I deemed it a matter of great importance to frustrate, if possible, any attempt of Te Kooti to cross the Waikato, which I had little doubt he was endeavouring to do, as it exactly coincided with what we had heard from Patetere.

* Ihaina, a short time since reported killed by the Hauhau.