

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE GOVERNMENT AGENT, AUCKLAND, RELATING TO MR. FIRTH'S INTERVIEW WITH TE KOOTI.

No. 1.

Copy of a Letter from the Hon. the PREMIER to the GOVERNMENT AGENT, Auckland.

SIR,—

Wellington, 24th January, 1870.

The members of the Government now in Wellington have read, with feelings of the greatest surprise and regret, the copies of your replies to Mr. Firth's telegram of the 16th January, in which a pledge is given to him that "no movement from the Waikato side will be allowed till Mr. Firth's interview with Te Kooti is over;" and also the orders issued by Mr. Branigan (under your direction, it is presumed) to Lieut.-Colonel Moule, "not to make any movement till such interview is over."

For telegrams referred to see Parl. Papers, A. No. 8A., p. 34, 1870.

In pursuing the above course, you appear to have taken upon yourself a responsibility which is altogether beyond the limits of any authority vested in you, and to have done what even any single Minister, unaided by the advice of his colleagues, would have hesitated to do.

While the Government is at all times willing to treat for surrender and submission with rebels whose offence has been merely an armed resistance to lawful authority based on political grounds, and whose conduct has been marked, as in many cases, even by a chivalrous and humane treatment of those to whom they were opposed, the case is entirely different with a man of Te Kooti's character. An assassin on principle—a midnight murderer of defenceless women and helpless infants—whose very name is suggestive of atrocious cruelty and outrage—whose savage temper is unredeemed by a single trait of barbaric virtue—who has made victims of the loyal of his own race equally with the peaceable colonist—whose acts are repudiated and abhorred by the bulk of his own people, even by those who have been opposed in arms to the Queen's authority—it is an indignity to the Government of any civilized community to enter into or to countenance negotiations, by any indirectly authorized private person, with a monster of such a stamp. And although you have expressly told Mr. Firth that no terms except unconditional surrender can be accepted, you have, as an agent of the Government, sanctioned his treating with him, by promising him to restrain the advance of our forces while he is doing it, and have placed the Government in a position which they cannot consent, for one moment, to accept. They desire to repudiate all sanction and countenance of Mr. Firth's negotiations with Te Kooti, and will be in no way bound either by his act or any pledge given by you to him without express authority of Ministers.

You appear, also, to have entirely overlooked the most serious practical consequences which might, and perhaps have, resulted from your action. The Premier, on the Wanganui River, and Mr. Ormond, the Government Agent in Hawke's Bay Province, have for several months past been making the most arduous exertions to concentrate the Colonial Forces and Native Contingents upon Te Kooti's position. At last they have succeeded in doing so. He is drawn from his stronghold, and flies with only a small following to Patetere, whither he is being pursued with all the expedition that supplies and weather will permit. At this most critical moment Mr. Firth is allowed to step in, and he and Te Kooti are permitted to become masters of the situation; dictating, with your concurrence, an interlude of inaction which may utterly defeat the plans of the Government, and afford that breathing time to Te Kooti, evidently at his last gasp, which may enable him to escape from our hands. That, under any circumstances, any private individual should have been allowed to put himself in the position of a mediator between the Government and an armed rebel in Te Kooti's position, would be highly irregular and unconstitutional; in this case it is full of peril to the community, and if concurred in by the Government, would cover it with degradation.

Mr. Firth's officious interference at Ngauawahia last year, and its utter failure, ought, if no other consideration had occurred, to have prevented your assenting to a proposition which, if not instantly repudiated, would give the sanction of the Government to his interference, and place it in the position of complicity with his act.

Probably before this reaches you the consequences of the course pursued, whatever they may be, will be beyond control. But if otherwise, you will immediately recall the instructions given to Colonel Moule not to advance, and cease from all interference with the action of those in command of the Constabulary or Native Forces.

Copies of this will be forwarded to Hon. Messrs. McLean and Vogel by this mail.

I regret that I should be obliged to address you in terms of such strong disapprobation; but it is impossible that the members of the Government can do otherwise than repudiate a course of action entirely foreign to their own policy and opinions, and for the consequences of which they will accept no responsibility.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. D. Pollen, M.L.C.

WILLIAM FOX, Premier.

No. 2.

Copy of a Letter from the GOVERNMENT AGENT, Auckland, to the Hon. the PREMIER.

SIR,—

General Government Offices, Auckland, 29th January, 1870.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of date 24th January inst., informing me that the "members of the Government now in Wellington have read, with feelings of the greatest