

## CORRESPONDENCE RELATIVE TO AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN MR. FIRTH AND TE KOOTI.

### No. 1.

J. C. FIRTH, Esq., to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—Auckland, 4th August, 1870.

I have the honor to direct your attention to certain statements made by various parties relative to some transactions said to have taken place in connection with the interview between Te Kooti and myself on the 17th January last.

2. These statements appear in "Further Papers relative to Military Operations against the Rebel Natives," and in "Further Despatches from His Excellency the Governor of New Zealand to the Right Hon. the Secretary of State for the Colonies," and "presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by command of His Excellency."

3. The first statement I desire to bring under your notice occurs in Further Papers, &c., &c., A. No. 8, page 70, in Enclosure 2 in No. 234, entitled "Statement made by Te Huare," dated 31st January, 1870, and running as follows:—"Forty of us went with him (Te Kooti) on horseback past Peria, in the direction of Matamata, when we met Hohaia (Mr. Firth) and another European. Te Kooti had a long talk with Hohaia, who was so frightened that he made him a present of fifty caps, some Enfield ammunition, and a revolver. Te Kooti then let him go, for his knees were shaking together through fear. Te Kooti had two or three men with him at this meeting, and they told us about it. Hohaia sent Te Kooti a lot of rum."

4. The second statement appears to have been also made by Te Huare, and occurs in a telegram from Lieut.-Colonial McDonnell, No. 200, dated 3rd February, 1870 (transmitted through Mr. St. John Branigan), to you as Defence Minister, printed in Further Papers A. No. 8A, pages 58 and 59, and running as follows:—"The Native alluded to in Mr. Mair's report (Te Huare) informs me (Lieut.-Colonel McDonnell) that Te Kooti was at Hauraki at the time of the attack on this camp, and received a large quantity of powder from Te Hira; also, that he has received some arms and ammunition from Europeans at the Thames; that he knows Mr. Firth had two interviews with Te Kooti; that he was present himself at both, and the second time Mr. Firth had given Te Kooti a box of percussion caps."

This statement, being made by the same party, is substantially the same as the preceding one.

5. I am at a loss to understand why you have caused these statements to be printed in Papers "presented to both Houses of the General Assembly." It appears from your Despatches in "Further Papers," that both these statements were in your hands before 18th February; from that date to the meeting of the Assembly in June, it is not unreasonable to suppose that you had ample time to have instituted inquiries regarding the truth or falsehood of charges of so grave a character as the supplying of arms and ammunition to rebels in arms against Her Majesty, made against a colonist so well known as myself, by a Native whose untruthfulness, I am informed, is well known to those who are acquainted with him. I presume it was this knowledge which led Lieutenant Mair to enclose Te Huare's statement to Mr. Commissioner Clarke without referring to its contents, or even noting the circumstance of its enclosure; and which also probably led Mr. Clarke to forward it in his communication to you (No. 234, 13th February,) without expressing any opinion upon its contents, and also without noting the fact of its transmission to you. I must confess my inability to understand why you did not call upon me for an explanation of the very serious charges made against me by Te Huare, more especially as this Native was within easy reach.

From the circumstance of your neither having made any investigation, nor making me acquainted with the charges against me, it appears to me evident, either that you considered the evidence you had in your possession sufficient to secure conviction, or that you thought it of so utterly worthless a character as to be unworthy of further notice. If the former were your opinion, I confess to a difficulty in understanding why you did not take measures to bring me to punishment. If the latter were your belief, I am equally at a loss to comprehend why you caused this scandalous charge against me to be printed and laid before both Houses of the General Assembly. My difficulty in arriving at a proper estimate of your proceedings on this occasion arises probably from my obtuseness—which I beg you will pardon, as I make no pretensions to understand the somewhat peculiar principles which appear to govern the department over which you preside. If you will permit me to express my own opinion, without desiring to be offensive, it is, that you have either neglected or exceeded your plain duty, with what motives I, of course, do not presume to inquire.

6. Your having published the statement made by Te Huare renders it difficult to understand why you did not also publish my report of the interview with Te Kooti, seeing that I furnished you with a report in January last. Your non-publication of the report was doubtless an omission on your part, which is the more to be regretted as it might be misinterpreted as exhibiting a marked want of fair play. By way of enabling you partially to remedy the omission, it is necessary that I should now inform you—

(1.) That I only met Te Kooti on one occasion, as detailed in my report dated 20th January, and duly-forwarded to you.