

CORRESPONDENCE

RELATIVE TO

AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN MR. FIRTH AND TE KOOTI.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY COMMAND OF
HIS EXCELLENCY.

WELLINGTON.

—
1870.

CONFIDENTIAL

THESE ARE THE RESULTS OF THE
ANALYSIS OF THE

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SECRET

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.

(2.) That I did not give, sell, or supply to Te Kooti, then or at any other time, a box of percussion caps, or any caps, a revolver or any firearms, any Enfield ammunition or any ammunition, or any rum. As to the statement that I trembled at the interview and was very much afraid,—as I think it better to display courage than to talk about doing so,—I have nothing further to say than this, that had I been afraid I could have easily done what many others did, namely, retreated to a place of safety when Te Kooti was reported to be in the neighbourhood. I trust, Sir, that I have not wearied you by thus formally denying the truth of Te Huare's "statement," so significantly published by you in the Parliamentary Papers of the Session now being held. I, of course, could not suppose that the report of my interview with Te Kooti—being unofficial—would be deemed of sufficient importance to give it a place amongst the various and important telegrams, reports, statements and despatches, which together form so interesting a record of the great success which is said to have attended your efforts to capture Te Kooti. I have no doubt that you are extremely desirous that these important State Papers should be as truthful as possible; and seeing that you have authoritatively published Te Huare's "statement," it is, I think, desirable that my report and the correspondence connected with it, together with this letter, should be presented to Parliament during the present Session, so that honorable Members of both Houses may have an opportunity of hearing both sides of this question.

7. It only remains for me to direct your attention to a further statement, embodied in a Memorandum written by you, and accompanying a Despatch from His Excellency Sir George Bowen to the Right Hon. Earl Granville, dated 15th February, 1870, No. 46, which appears in "Further Despatches from His Excellency the Governor of New Zealand to the Right Hon. the Secretary of State for the Colonies, presented to both Houses of the General Assembly" in the Session of 1870. That portion of the Memorandum to which I respectfully beg to ask your particular notice, occurs in Further Despatches, &c., A. No. 1, page 79, and runs as follows:—"It" (Lord Granville's Despatch) "has even worked mischief with that section of the Colonists who have habitually felt themselves at liberty to interfere without authority, and lend their countenance to rebellion. Thus an attempt, already referred to, was made by Mr. Firth, the lessee of a large quantity of Native land, to procure for Te Kooti, who had promised not to interfere with his land, something like a free pardon." In this extract, I desire to point out to you the circumstance, that you have thought fit to impute mean and unworthy motives to me. Nor is this the only occasion in which statements of a like character regarding my action in Native affairs have been made by you. With respect to the statement in your Memorandum, I need hardly say that you could have no means of knowing that the mean motive you impute to me did actually influence me. I may state, for your information, that you are entirely in error, and that you have done me great injustice in making such a statement.

8. Sir, I shall not ask you to repair the injustice you have—perhaps unwittingly—done me, in publishing authoritatively Te Huare's scandalous statement without having taken the trouble to verify it, as well as by causing to be circulated in the highest official quarters in England statements imputing improper motives to me in my efforts to assist the Government in establishing peace in the Colony. But, in order that the true circumstances attending my interview with Te Kooti may be known, I append to this letter copies of the documents named, as under:—

1. Report of J. C. Firth's interview with Te Kooti;
2. J. C. Firth's telegram of 21st January to Lieut.-Colonel Moule;
3. J. C. Firth's telegram of 21st January to Hon. D. McLean;
4. The Hon. D. McLean's letter to J. C. Firth;
5. J. C. Firth's reply to the Hon. D. McLean;
6. J. C. Firth's letter to the Hon. D. McLean, enclosing letter from Manuhiri, with translation;

and which, together with this letter, I have the honor to request you will present to both Houses of the General Assembly. It may be unnecessary to inform you that I shall forward by this mail copies of this communication, and of the documents accompanying it, to a leading Member of the House of Representatives.

The Hon. Donald McLean,
Native and Defence Minister, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
J. C. FIRTH.

Enclosure 1 in No. 1.

REPORT of J. C. FIRTH's Interview with TE KOOTI.

Vide A. No. 24, Enclosure in No. 2.

Enclosure 2 in No. 1.

J. C. FIRTH, Esq., to Lieut.-Colonel MOULE.

(Telegram.)

Ngaruawahia, 21st January, 1870.

MR. WILLIAMS informs me that you ask if I will supply bullocks and paddocks at Matamata. In reply I have to say, that I consider the war you are rushing into unnecessary, and that Government is not warranted in undertaking it. I will not therefore supply either bullocks or paddocks for the use of the troops.

To Colonel Moule, Cambridge.

I have, &c.,
J. C. FIRTH.

Enclosure 3 in No. 1.

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

Ngaruawahia, 22nd January, 1870.

(Telegram.)

I HAVE arrived here from Matamata.

I find that every man in the Waikato district under fifty-five years has been pressed into active military service; that the women and children are either crammed into barracks or left trembling at their unprotected homes. Meantime the cattle are unattended to, the harvesting has been abandoned, and in ten days more the result of one year's labour will have been lost; in short, about as much damage to the harvest will have been done as would be effected by a raid by Te Kooti. Sir, the Colony was quietly drifting into peace, it is staggering under debt, and you are madly rushing it into war. Titokowaru, left alone, has become a helpless outcast. Te Kooti, discountenanced by Tawhiao and all the more influential chiefs, will shortly sink into a similar state, if you will let him alone. Follow him as you are now preparing to do; let the chances of war give him but a trifling success; and you will have raised him from the position of a miserable outcast to the much more dangerous one of a representative of national feeling and sympathies. Your prolonged absence at Tauranga has been a public misfortune. I learn at this place that you have arrived in town, and I hasten to warn you before it be too late. Should this war, which you are about to commence in the heart of the Island, begin by efforts to catch Te Kooti and end by becoming a war of extermination, ruinous to the reputation and the finances of the Colony, you will incur a heavy responsibility.

Withdraw your soldiers, and time will fight for us.

I have, &c.,

Hon. D. McLean, Auckland.

J. C. FIRTH.

Enclosure 4 in No. 1.

The Hon. D. McLEAN to J. C. FIRTH, Esq.

(No. 63.)

General Government Offices,

SIR,—

Auckland, 1st February, 1870.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your report dated the 20th ultimo, and also of a telegram not previously acknowledged.

I will not question the motives which have actuated you, but, however praiseworthy your intentions, it is my duty to tell you I consider that a private individual's interference with matters of a delicate public nature, the entire responsibility of dealing with which belongs to the Government, cannot be productive of good, and may be very mischievous.

Whilst therefore I do not question your good intentions, I must advise you that in future you will do most public good by refraining from interference with questions of this nature.

I have, &c.,

J. C. Firth, Esq., Auckland.

DONALD McLEAN.

Enclosure 5 in No. 1.

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

SIR,—

Auckland, 5th February, 1870.

Your letter of the 1st February, acknowledging the reception of my report of an interview with Te Kooti, is couched in terms which practically forbid my furnishing your Government with any information on Native subjects, or assisting you in any way.

Were you a private citizen, or were I a party man, I should treat your communication in a manner befitting its merits. But considering that important events frequently occur beyond the frontier, which may not come to the knowledge of the Government, I have always, under such circumstances, conceived it to be my duty loyally to render whatever assistance lay in my power to any Government which might chance to be in office. I did this to Mr. Stafford's Government, and I have done it to yours.

Notwithstanding your late treatment (referred to above), I shall not hesitate to continue to make you acquainted with any important information that may come before me, and which, in my opinion, may have a more or less important bearing on the welfare of the Colony.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. Donald McLean,
Native and Defence Minister, Auckland.

J. C. FIRTH, Esq.,

Enclosure 6 in No. 1.

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

SIR,—

Auckland, 5th February, 1870.

I have the honor to inform you that I have received a letter from Manuhiri, dated 27th January, 1870, which contains certain information with which I think it my duty to make you acquainted. I therefore beg to enclose a copy of the letter, with translation attached,

The Hon. Donald McLean,
Native and Defence Minister, Auckland.

I have, &c.,

J. C. FIRTH.

Sub-Enclosure to Enclosure 6 in No. 1.

Copy of Letter from MANUHIRI to J. C. FIRTH, Esq., referred to in Letter attached.
 E. KORO, E HOHAIA,— Te Kuiti, 27th Henuere, 1870.
 Tena koe. Kua rongo au kua kite koe i Te Koti. Kua tika koe, kua rongo ano au, kua whaia e te Pakeha e te Maori a Te Koti. Ehoa, kua paru ta korua pai ko Tamehana nei paru ki waho e pai ana. Kotena i Waikato Tonu te Kinonga.
 E Hohaia, ku a pakaru te tuanui o te whare. Kia kaha koe whaka matua tenei mahi.
 E heana,
 Kia Hohaia kei Peria Waikato. Heoi Na MANUHIRI.

[TRANSLATION.]

MANUHIRI to J. C. FIRTH, Esq.

SIR (MR. FIRTH),—

Te Kuiti, 27th January, 1870.

Salutations. I have heard that you have seen Te Kooti. You are right (or did right). I have heard also that the Europeans and Maoris are chasing (or hunting) Te Kooti. Sir, your and Tamehana's good policy is soiled (besmeared). If it were only soiled outside (*i.e.* the boundary), it would not matter, but the mischief is in Waikato itself.

O Josiah (Mr. Firth), the roof (ridge pole) of the house is broken (*i.e.*, the people are divided). Be thou strong to cause this evil work to cease. That is all.

To Mr. Firth, at Peria, Waikato.

MANUHIRI.

No. 2.

The Hon. D. McLEAN to J. C. FIRTH, Esq.

SIR,—

Colonial Defence Office, Wellington, 30th August, 1870.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 4th instant, complaining of certain statements respecting yourself which have been printed in papers laid before the General Assembly.

In the press of business I regret that Huare's narrative, containing reflections upon you, should have been published without my having had an opportunity for careful perusal.

With reference to the latter portion of your letter, respecting the mention of your name in a Memorandum to His Excellency enclosed in Despatch to Earl Granville, I have only to repeat that my opinion with reference to the course you then pursued remains unaltered.

I do not consider the correspondence, which I shall lay on the table, to be of sufficient interest to be published with Parliamentary papers.

J. C. Firth, Esq., Auckland.

I have, &c.,

DONALD McLEAN.