CORRESPONDENCE

WITH THE HON. DR. POLLEN

RELATING TO

MR. FIRTH'S INTERVIEW WITH TE KOOTI

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

WELLINGTON.

1870.

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 Ngaruawahia 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.,
WILLIAM FOX, Premier.

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

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

surprise and regret, the copies of my reply to Mr. Firth's telegram of the 15th 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 to Lieut.-Colonel Moule, not to make any movement till such interview is over."

I enclose for your information a published copy of Mr. Firth's report of his proceedings, from which it will be seen that, previously to the receipt of Te Kooti's message, he had been in communication with the Hon. the Minister for Defence, and that, in fact, the interview with Te Kooti had taken place before my reply to the message addressed to the Hon. Mr. McLean had been received by Mr. Firth. No military movement on Lieut.-Colonel Moule's side at that time was contemplated, because the advance of Lieut.-Colonel McDonnell from Taupo was not then known; but I took the precaution of giving directions to Mr. Commissioner Branigan to give his order to Lieut.-Colonel Moule, lest any movement appearing to threaten an attack should give Te Kooti an excuse for violence to Mr. Firth, who had voluntarily placed himself in great personal danger in order to do what he believed to be a great public service.

There was no Minister in Auckland at the time when Mr. Firth's telegram arrived. It appeared to me then, and does still appear, by the light of subsequent events, clear, that a bloodless surrender of Te Kooti and his followers to take their trial for their crimes, by whomsoever accomplished, was a consummation greatly to be desired, and I could not take the responsibility of closing any opening to such an end. I do not feel, and, with very great respect, I beg leave to add that I cannot express, regret for the course I have taken in this matter.

In view of an expression of disapprobation so strong as that which you have thought it right to address to me, it is proper that I should at once tender my resignation of the office of Agent of the General Government at Auckland.

I have, &c.,

Hon. Mr. Fox, Premier, Wellington. DANIEL POLLEN.

Enclosure in No. 2.

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

SIR,— Matamata, 20th January, 1870.

I have the honor to report, for your information, certain circumstances which have occurred at this place since my arrival here, ten or twelve months ago.

In order that you may the better understand my position amongst the adherents of the King, outside the confiscated line, it will be necessary for me to refer very briefly to one or two matters which have exercised more or less influence amongst the Natives living in the country beyond the frontier about Matamata. William Thompson, during his lifetime, gave in his adhesion to the new order of things inaugurated by the Native Lands Courts. His sagacious intellect recognized at once the important services these new Courts were able to confer upon his people. Unfortunately for the welfare of both races, he died in December, 1866—before the people, over whom he exercised an almost unbounded influence, fully comprehended the new state of affairs. Immediately on his death, all the Hauhau section of the Ngatihaua, and other kindred tribes, abandoned the new policy, and returned to the isolating exclusive policy adhered to with so much pertinacity by Tawhiao and his followers at Tokangamutu. Immediately after Thompson's death, a system of warnings and threatenings towards me was resorted to, with the view of compelling me to abandon the agreements made between Thompson and his adherents and myself. My house and stock-yards have been burned, my cattle have been killed, and armed parties have traversed my lands, threatening my life and the lives of my servants. When I asked why I was singled out in this manner, when there were other Europeans holding runs outside the confiscation line as well as myself, they replied, "Your leases alone have been signed by Thompson. You are the only pakeha who was prominently connected with him, and if we can drive you away we shall waste no words with the other pakehas; we shall say to them, 'Go.'" I steadfastly and quietly resisted every effort to drive me within the confiscation line. I have submitted to innumerable injuries on the part of the Natives; I have uncomplainingly borne the unjust misrepresentations of a portion of the newspaper press of the Colony. I have been alternately held up by these writers to the scorn and hatred of my countrymen. My life has been threatened again and again by the Natives. My reputation has been continually assailed by anonymous writers. The work I have had to do has been of that nature that I could not afford to lose my time or my temper because anonymous writers chose to attack me. I felt that I had been placed in a position which was none of my seeking; that I was not so much cultivating a farm, or laying the foundations of an estate, as that I was engaged in the nobler work of helping to secure the peace of the country. I have endeavoured, by firmness, justice, and patience, to show the Natives that the European settlers meant well by them: I have endeavoured to turn them from the sullen isolation and wild fanaticism in which I found them in 1865. I have never shrunk from a difficulty, nor have I ever gone out of my way to avoid a danger. When my cattle were seized by Hauhaus, I declined Government assistance to recover them. When the Natives closed up the Thames against my canoes, with the intention of starving me out, and compelling me to abandon my position, I quietly made a road across the Maungakawa Mountains, at a heavy expense, without the assistance, or indeed, I may say, without the knowledge of the Government; and yet, if operations are ever undertaken against Te Kooti, that road will be found to be the only dray-road into the great inland plains lying between the Patatere Ranges and the Waikato River. Sir, I offer no apology for this preface. Against every calumny I have hitherto maintained an immovable silence. It is now due to myself to make this explanation, because I shall most probably be attacked and insulted as before. This preparatory explanation is also due to you, whose great and intimate knowledge of Native affairs is universally admitted, but whose long absence from this Province has made you to some extent unacquainted with the new state of affairs which has arisen since the termination of the war.

1. On the 12th instant, a Ngatihaua Native informed me that Te Kooti had suddenly appeared in the Patetere Ranges, near Matamata, with 800 men. He advised me to leave Matamata immediately. I did not pay much attention to his report. Later in the day other Natives gave me confirmatory

information. Next day I sent a messenger to Okauia, a Native village in the ranges, about eight miles from my house. This messenger returned with the information that Te Kooti had that morning visited Okauia. On hearing this, all the Natives at Matamata and the neighbourhood decided to leave for the Maungakawa Mountains, and strongly urged me to leave, with my people and stock, without delay.

2. It was quite evident to me that, if I abandoned Matamata, the whole of that part of the country from the River Waiho, at the base of the Patetere Range, across the Maungakawa Mountains, to the confiscation line close to Cambridge, would fall into the hands of Te Kooti, from which I knew it would be no easy matter to dislodge him. I therefore told the assembled Natives that there had been too much running away in this country on the first sound of danger, and that I intended to remain at Matamata for the present. They said, "You will certainly be killed by Te Kooti." I replied, "I am in God's hands." Next day every Maori went away to a place of safety, with the exception of four men and two women, who, seeing I was determined to remain, without any solicitation on my part decided to remain with me. Before sundown on Friday, the 14th, every horse, cow, and every particle of moveable property belonging to Maoris had been removed from Matamata. On that day I sent you the following telegram:—

"Te Kooti is in the ranges at Okauia, eight miles from here; he has 100 men with him, and intends attacking Tauranga. Ngatihaua alarmed. Have sent away their women and children. Three of the bravest men remain here with me; rest gone to Maungakawa. If danger becomes more imminent I shall send away my sons. I intend remaining here one week. My services are at your disposal. If you have any instructions, reply.

"Matamata, 14th January, 1870."

To which you returned the following reply:—

"I am much obliged for your information and attention. I shall be glad to hear further from you."

3. Next day I sent my sons to Cambridge. On Sunday two Maoris arrived from Te Kooti, with a request to me not to be afraid, but to remain on the land, as he did not wish to fight. The two Natives took a similar message to the Natives who had already fled from the district. During that afternoon a messenger arrived from Te Kooti, who informed me that he desired to meet me. I felt that a critical moment had come. I saw at once that if I manifested any sign of flinching after his message of that morning, he would most probably advance at once upon Matamata, and take possession of all that part of the country. For myself and my servants I had not much to fear. In April, 1869, I addressed a letter (copy annexed) to the principal chiefs in the Patetere Ranges, who are regularly receiving a considerable rent from me, warning them against permitting Te Kooti, should he visit them, to perpetrate any atrocity upon their lands. I felt that these chiefs knew they had too much to lose by Te Kooti killing me. I saw that by meeting him I might be able to communicate information more or less valuable to the Government, and I therefore decided to meet him. I sent at once to Cambridge for Mr. R. E. Campbell to act as interpreter, and telegraphed to you to the following effect (I quote from memory):—"Te Kooti desires to meet me. This interview may afford an opportunity for the establishment of peace. If you desire me to say anything to him, let me know what it is, and I will go down and say it to him on behalf of the Government."

4. Next day (Monday) I sent away Te Kooti's messenger, with the following reply:—

"I will meet you unarmed, at Wi Tamihana's monument. Fix the time yourself."

About noon, some of my people observed a long line of dust on the road from Ohineroa. Immediately afterwards a messenger galloped up, and informed me that Te Kooti, with forty attendants, would meet me, at 1 o'clock, at Thompson's monument at Turangamoana. Mr. Campbell having just come in from Cambridge, and no reply to my telegram having arrived from town, I rode off to meet Te Kooti, accompanied by Mr. Campbell, Kereama Tauwhare, and Hori Neri, two Ngatihaua Natives.

5. I arrived on the ground at 1 o'clock. As I approached the monument, a Maori advanced to meet me, raising his hat and saluting me as he approached. I dismounted on learning that Te Kooti stood before me. He was attended by two half-caste youths, fully armed; Te Kooti himself being unarmed. His height is about five feet nine inches; he is about thirty-five years of age, stoutly built, broad-shouldered and strong-limbed. His features are not repulsive; a rather large development of jaw and chin conveys the idea of a man of strong and resolute will. He has no tattoo; hair black and glossy; wears a black moustache and short black beard. His dress consisted of woollen cords, top boots, and a grey shirt; over the latter he wore a loose vest, with gold chain, and greenstone ornament. I noticed that he had lost the middle finger of the left hand. Without further ceremony, on dismounting, I said to him, "Te Kooti, your messenger informed me that you desired to meet me. I have come. My ears are open. What is the word you have to say to me? Remember I am a settler, without authority from the Government to offer you any terms. I am in the canoe, but I neither direct nor steer."

Te Kooti then replied: "I have met you, the friend of William Thompson, the man who had a great regard for the people. I want to say to you that I will respect his last words spoken to you. I will not molest you or anything belonging to you, or to any of your people on this land. I wish also to say to you that I am weary of fighting, and desire to live quietly at Tapapa. If I am let alone I will never fight more, and will not hurt man, woman, or child."

I then pointed out to him that he had committed many crimes; that he had killed women and children, both Pakeha and Maori, without mercy; and that in the eyes of us Europeans he was a murderer—tangata kohuru.

Te Kooti replied: "The deeds I have done may be considered by you Europeans to be murders, but not by the Maoris, and even for them (*i.e.*, the killing of women and children) the Government is to blame. When I escaped from captivity, and landed at Turanga, my only wish was to be allowed to go inland and settle quietly. But they would not. They followed me up, and we fought. I killed women and children at Poverty Bay, both Pakeha and Maori. That gave me a name. Then I went to Taupo, wishing still to remain quiet. But the European and Maori followed me up, and we again

fought. Then I went to Tokangamutu. I said to the Government of the Maori and to the Government of the European, "Let there be no more fighting—let it cease;" but they did not listen; they still followed to molest me. Now, I have come here, not to fight, but to live quietly with Hakaria at Tapapa. But if the Europeans and the Maoris attack me from every side—if they jump upon me—I shall turn upon them. I will rise up and fight, and kill all, as before.

I said, "This is my word to you—surrender to the Government."

He said, "No; I will remain at peace."

I advised him to say to the Government, "Spare my life, and the lives of my followers, and I will give our bodies and our arms into your hands."

He said, "I will not surrender." He continued, "Have you any word from the Government?" I replied, "No; my messenger has not returned; the road is long."

He said, "If they will let me alone, I will live quietly; if not, I will fight."

I said, "If you fight, fight like a man, with men, and not with helpless women and children."

He replied, "I have heard your words."

During this conversation his followers had formed in a half-circle at his back. They were all well armed—some with short Enfields, some with breech-loaders, and one or two double-barrelled fowling-pieces, all apparently in excellent order. A well-dressed woman, about twenty-five years old, of a handsome but melancholy cast of countenance, sat at Te Kooti's feet during the interview. I learnt afterwards that this woman was his wife.

I said, in conclusion, "I have heard your words. Remember my words. I go now to my kainga."

The interview then ended, and I rode homewards.

7. On my return to Matamata, Dr. Pollen's reply to my telegram had arrived. It ran as follows:—

"If Te Kooti will surrender unconditionally, I will guarantee his safe conduct to Auckland as a prisoner."

I despatched this message to Te Kooti. Next day he sent the following reply, which I telegraphed at once in Maori to Dr. Pollen:—

"To Dr. Pollen.—I have seen your letter. My word to you. I have already promised Mr. Firth to cease fighting. Afterwards your letter reached me. I will stop fighting—stop entirely. But as for me, I will not go to Auckland. Let me remain at peace. The killing shall cease. But if you follow me up, let it be so. Sir, cease your punishing of me. This is all.—From

"Te Kooti."

I cannot conclude this report without bringing under your notice the brave conduct and ready assistance afforded me by Mr. R. E. Campbell, in the capacity of interpreter. I am also under great obligations to the Ngatihaua Natives, Kereama Tauwhare and Hori Neri, for the steady support and valuable assistance they have given me.

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

Sub-Enclosure to Enclosure in No. 2.

J. C. Firth, Esq., to the Chiefs of Turangamoana.

Auckland, 5th April, 1869.

To the Chiefs of the Lands of Turangamoana.

Friends,—

Salutations to you all. The time has come for me to speak weighty words to you. Hearken: the greatest chief of this Island, Wi Tamihana is dead. He was your father. In former times he said to you, "Do not lease the land to the Pakeha." After that he saw that these words did not bring good but evil to the land and to you. I spoke to him. Then his eyes were opened. Then he found that the Pakeha Courts, for finding out to whom the land belonged, were good. These Courts were open to all. Wi Tamihana spoke to the Court at Hamilton. He then said, "Why should the land remain idle? Let Hohaia have the land for an annual payment." Wi Tamihana (William Thompson) and I had buried the tomahawk at Puketutu. He made peace in Waiho. After that he died. His last works were better than his former works. He said to me, "Be patient with my people." Since his death you have done, or permitted to be done, many evil things to me. Have I not been patient and just towards you? I have paid to you large sums of money as rent for Turangamoana. Your foolish actions have prevented my having any benefit from those payments for the land, but I have put on William Thompson's mantle of patience which he gave me. I have had great patience. I have said, "These men have done me wrong, but they are children, and do childish things. They will soon become men, and cast childish things away." I am still waiting.

My friends, this is another word. Do you hear it? Evil deeds are being done in this Island. Ministers, and women, and children have been killed by bad men. God will surely punish them for doing these evil deeds. You permit murderers and bad men to dwell amongst you. Tawhiao is said to be angry with these bad men. Be you very careful that the footsteps of a murderer do not defile Turangamoana. I have sent my women and children away from Turangamoana, so that they may not be killed there, so that no act of war be done there. My men-servants and my herds of cattle still remain on that land. Now these are my words to you. Remember them well. The lands of Turangamoana are written in the books of the law to be your lands. If no evil deed be done, these lands will remain yours for ever. But hearken: if men are killed there, if cattle are killed there, these lands may pass out of your hands. If the waters of Waiho (Thames) run red with blood, your lands will go to sea. Now, hearken. I leave my men and my cattle in your keeping; keep them safely and in peace, for I shall require them again at your hands. From your friend,

J. C. Firth.

No. 3.

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

SIR,— Government Offices, Auckland, 13th March, 1870.

Your letter of the 29th of January ultimo, in which you tender the resignation of your office of Government Agent, was duly received, and would have been acknowledged before, but for the fact of the several members of the Ministry being apart, and the delay arising from that fact.

The Government cannot see, in the explanation offered by you, any ground for withdrawing the disapprobation it has expressed of the course pursued by you in reference to the interview between Mr. Firth and Te Kooti; but the Government does not consider this error in judgment one which would compel it to withdraw from you their general confidence.

While, therefore, it is unable to retract or qualify in any way the expression of opinion already placed on record, it is not desirous that your action should be followed by the severance of your official connection with it; and it is with the full concurrence of the other members of the Ministry that I now beg to suggest that you should withdraw your letter, in which you tender your resignation.

I have, &c.,

Hon. D. Pollen, Government Agent, Auckland. WILLIAM FOX, Premier.

No. 4.

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

SIR,— General Government Offices, Auckland, 23rd March, 1870.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of date March 18th instant, and, in accordance with your suggestion, beg leave to withdraw the tender of resignation of my office of Agent of the General Government at Auckland.

I have, &c.,

DANIEL POLLEN,

Hon. Wm. Fox, Premier. Agent, General Government.