

Natives, who proceeded to erect fences in different places across the completed portions of the road which was being constructed through the district by military working parties. The military for some time did no more than remove the obstructions as fast as they were erected, whilst the fencers were remonstrated with by Government officers in a goodhumoured way, the childish folly of their proceedings being pointed out to them. These remonstrances, however, were unavailing. The Natives were obviously not acting with any settled purpose of their own in view, but simply in obedience to the orders of Te Whiti, in whose supernatural power they entertained a blind, unquestioning belief. As soon, therefore, as it became apparent to the Government that the Natives intended to proceed with these obstructions until some action was taken, a batch of fencers were arrested. When this was done, Te Whiti sent four men every day to the camp to re-erect the fence across the road in the face of the military, with the object, of course, of their being arrested. This went on for five or six weeks, from four to six men being arrested daily without any opposition on their part, until Te Whiti's stock of men available for arrest was apparently exhausted. The precise object of this extraordinary proceeding was never clearly ascertained. The fencers were of course merely acting under the influence of fanaticism, but what Te Whiti's object was could only be conjectured. It may have been intended to provoke hostilities, the Maoris having a superstitious aversion to drawing first blood; it may have been the Maori mode of asserting a claim to the land over which the road ran in a way prescribed by some ancient tradition or custom; or, as I think more likely, it may have been simply an ingenious device on the part of Te Whiti, adopted with the twofold object of disposing of some of his followers who were beginning to be troublesome, and of imposing on the Government the cost of maintaining them through the winter in greater comfort than they would have experienced in their own homes in Parihaka, where provisions were supposed to be running short. However, whatever may have been the object, the result was that the Government found itself with a large number of these fencers on hand, and a difficulty in dealing with their offence under any existing law. Act No. 6 of 1880* was accordingly passed at once, without any opposition, through both Houses of Parliament. This Act authorized the detention in custody of these men, and of any others who might be arrested under similar circumstances, until the 31st October. The intention of Parliament, however, was not that these men should be liberated on or before that date, but simply to provide for their legal detention pending the consideration of the whole question, which the Ministry announced its intention to deal with before the close of the session.

10. The West Coast difficulty was accordingly discussed later on, and the result was the passing of Act No. 39 of 1880,† with, as far as I can remember, the almost unanimous concurrence of both Houses of Parliament. This measure provided for the final settlement of every Native claim or grievance in respect of land within the confiscated territory, in accordance with the recommendations of the Commissioners who had been appointed to inquire into the subject. The Act also constituted certain specified offences against the public peace (of the same character as the ploughing and fencing to which I have referred) misdemeanours punishable at the discretion of the Court by imprisonment, with or without hard labour, for any time not exceeding two years. As the operation of the clauses creating new offences could not be made retrospective, and as the Natives in custody for fencing under Act No. 6 could not with safety be released in a body by the 31st October, it was determined to deal with them in the same way as the prisoners in confinement for ploughing had been dealt with under Act No. 4; and the Act No. 39 accordingly authorized the detention of these men in custody at the discretion of the Government, until the close of the next session of Parliament, giving power for their discharge at any time previously if it should be considered that such a course could be adopted with safety.

11. I believe that these measures of special legislation were necessary, and that in the perplexing circumstances of the case they were the best that could be devised for the purpose of averting a Maori war. So far, they have been attended with complete success. The Natives were the victims of a delusion, and were for the time beyond the reach of reason. They fully believed that Te Whiti could, if he thought fit, release them from prison and raise them from the dead. The Government was overwhelmingly strong, having about 1,200 well-armed and thoroughly efficient men stationed on the West Coast. If, under these conditions, hostilities had once commenced whilst the Natives were imbued with such a spirit of reckless fanaticism, I believe the result of the contest would have been the practical extermination of the Maoris throughout the district. The strong-handed measures which were adopted to prevent that "beginning of strife" which "is like the letting-out of water," were, therefore, in my opinion, called for, not so much in the interest of the Europeans as in that of the Maoris themselves.

12. I have written this letter merely from recollection, but I think I have given upon all material points a substantially correct narrative of the events and reasons which led to the passing of the Acts referred to me. Those Acts had not been sent Home when I left New Zealand, the session having closed only a day or two before my departure; but I presume the Administrator, in forwarding them, transmitted also the usual explanatory report on them by the Solicitor-General. The local *Hansards*, also furnished to your Lordship's office, will be found to contain the debates which took place in both Houses of Parliament when these measures were being

* "An Act to authorize the Detention, for a Limited Time, of certain Native Prisoners." 6th August, 1880.

† "An Act to empower the Governor to settle Outstanding Questions on the West Coast of the North Island." 1st September, 1880.