

THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE TO SIR GEORGE GREY.

(No. 37.)

Downing-street, 26th April, 1862.

SIR,—

I have to inform you that I have received a communication from the Secretary of State for War, enclosing copy of a letter which had been addressed to him by General Cameron, in which, adverting to the employment of the troops in extending the road from Auckland to the Waikato river, as reported in your Despatch No. 2, of the 7th January, he calls attention to the fact that the annual training of the Militia force, as prescribed by local Ordinance, has been dispensed with, notwithstanding the critical position in which the colony has been placed for some time past.

I must express my surprise at the want of energy displayed by your Government in not using every effort to maintain the usefulness of a force which might render such valuable assistance, and I feel that I have a right, with such a fact before me, to assume that there are more soldiers in the colony than are required.

I have, &c.,

NEWCASTLE.

Governor Sir George Grey,
&c., &c., &c.

Memorandum by Mr. Fox.

Ministers regret that they were not aware of General Cameron's communication on this subject to Her Majesty's Government at the time when it was made, as they might have offered explanations which would have prevented misapprehension. The discontinuance of the Militia training occurred in the month of July or August, under Governor Browne's administration, and was attributable to two causes. First, the season of the year, being the depth of winter and the period of agricultural operations. Secondly, the certainty that any rigorous measures, such as alone could have ensured efficient training would, beyond all doubt, have depopulated the Provinces of the Northern Island, causing a general exodus to the Middle Island and Australia, already presenting the great attraction of unbounded gold fields far from native disturbances or other trouble. In short, had the training been enforced at that date, there would shortly have been few persons left in the Settlements of the Northern Island to be trained. The mere preparation for it caused such a panic that the whole of the labourers on some extensive farms are reported to have at once given notice to their employers to quit their service at a week's notice.

Another obstacle which has prevented the renewal of any attempt to train the Militia during the past year, has been the imperfect state of the law on the subject, which has rendered it impossible to organize an efficient local force.

The Government also, in January last (the date referred to in the Despatch), issued Regulations offering more liberal inducements than had previously existed for the formation of Volunteer corps throughout the colony, and a considerable number of men have enrolled themselves under those Regulations in the various Settlements and attend weekly parades for the purpose of training and exercise. The result of these regulations in the Province of Auckland was, that the Volunteers enrolled under them took garrison duties for six weeks in Auckland and enabled the General to detach one hundred and fifty more soldiers for the prosecution of the military road to the Waikato. The Government have also during the last year sent an order to England for 1000 Enfield Rifles (in addition to the 3000 previously supplied) for the purpose of arming the Militia and Volunteers in New Zealand.

Ministers propose to introduce Bills into the Assembly during the present session, which, it is hoped, may remove some of the existing difficulties and tend to the permanent establishment of a system of local defence. It must be borne in mind, however, that many of the difficulties which exist are such as no legislation can remove, and it is more than questionable whether the Militia of the Colony can be placed on such a footing as to satisfy the expectations of Military Officers who have been accustomed to older and less sparsely populated communities.

WILLIAM FOX.