

RETURN OF MILITIA EXEMPTIONS.

PETITION FROM INHABITANTS OF AUCKLAND.

To His Excellency Sir George Grey, K.C.B., Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Islands of New Zealand.

The Humble Petition of the undersigned, on behalf of the Citizens and Inhabitants of Auckland, assembled in a public meeting, on Tuesday the 17th day of February, 1864,

SHEWETH:—

That many persons liable to serve in the Militia and Volunteers of this province, other than those lawfully entitled to exemption on medical certificate, have obtained exemption from Military duty, and particularly that numerous exemptions have illegally, as it is believed, been granted to such persons on payment of Ten Pounds; the duty of persons so exempted being thrown on the general body of the Militia and Volunteers.

Your Petitioners therefore humbly pray, that your Excellency will be pleased to order that until the Militia and Volunteers of this Province are disbanded, or otherwise relieved from service, all persons liable to serve under the Militia Act, be compelled to perform their duty personally or by substitute.

And Your Petitioners will ever pray, &c.,
W. Griffin, Chairman.
William Thompson.
J. P. Dagnall.
George Williamson.
Henry Gilbert.
Geo. B. Davy.

Committee.

UNDER SECRETARY FOR DEFENCE TO AUCKLAND PETITIONERS.

Colonial Defence Office,
Auckland, 27th February, 1864.

SIR,—

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of a Petition addressed to His Excellency the Governor, signed by yourself as Chairman of a Public Meeting, held on the 17th instant, and by the gentlemen named in the margin, complaining that extra duty has been thrown on the general body of Militia and Volunteers of this Province, in consequence of exemptions having been granted under arrangements recently made by the Government, by which men in the Auckland Militia and Volunteer Forces on service out of the town of Auckland might procure substitutes upon payment of the sum of ten pounds each.

This Petition was referred to Ministers by His Excellency in due course, and I am now directed, in reply to the allegations it contains, to inform you that the Government has much pleasure in acknowledging the promptitude and cheerfulness with which the Citizens of Auckland have, at great loss and inconvenience to themselves, performed their duties as Militiamen and Volunteers during the present emergency:

The Government regrets, however, that the promoters of the Petition presented to His Excellency, did not make themselves more fully acquainted with the matters of which they complain before taking the steps they have adopted; as on enquiry they would have found that the action of the Government was not illegal, and it was taken only with an anxious desire to relieve the citizens of Auckland from as much loss and inconvenience as possible.

It has always been competent for any one to provide a substitute, and this has frequently been done; but in consequence of the great difficulty of obtaining substitutes, the relief thus afforded to the community was small, and, to individuals, was a most expensive arrangement. Large numbers of persons also, under the pretence of having contracts with the Commissariat Department, obtained total or partial exemptions from Militia duties, and thus extra duty was imposed on the other portion of the Militia Force. The Government therefore resolved to introduce substitutes from the other Colonies for those who wished to avail themselves of their services, requiring a payment in each case of £10, about the actual cost incurred in passage money and outfit. A commencement was made to act on this plan with persons who applied for exemptions on various grounds, and in the most urgent cases these were granted as far as practicable; but the applications became so numerous, that on the urgent representation of the Military authorities it was discontinued until the arrival of an additional number of the men expected. These men have now arrived, and the Government trusts that as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made, the resumption of this plan will afford sufficient relief from the present severe pressure.

The statement prominently put forward by the promoters of the Petition, that in consequence of arrangements made by the Government for receiving £10 to procure substitutes, extra duty has been imposed on the remainder of the Militia, is not born out by the facts of the case, either with reference to the whole Militia force; or to that portion of it stationed at Drury. The exemptions granted on the present occasion, of which complaint is made, are not so numerous as they were on the last occasion when the Auckland Militia and Volunteers were in the field, for at the time the Government closed the Exemption Office, before the £10 plan was resolved on, there were in force 329 exemptions from duty, granted by the Exemption Board (exclusive of Medical exemptions,) whilst at the time the Resolutions were passed at the Public Meeting, there were only 170 in force, including all the £10 exemptions then granted; so that there were really 159 more men available for duty at that time than before the Government undertook to provide Substitutes.

The number required from the Militia and Volunteers by the Military Authorities for service at Drury was 300. This number has been there ever since the Militia was recently ordered out, and the number, even after the withdrawal of the few men whose applications for exemptions were granted, has never been reduced below 300; so that there is no foundation for the complaint that extra duty has been imposed upon the detachment stationed at that post, in consequence of the withdrawal of some of the men under the £10 system.

MR. W. GRIFFIN,
&c., &c., &c., Auckland.

I have, &c.,
WILLIAM SEED.

Mr. W. Thomson
J. P. Dagnall
Geo. Williamson
Henry Gilbert
G. B. Davy.