

No. 49.

COPY of a DESPATCH from Governor Sir G. F. BOWEN, G.C.M.G., to His Grace the Duke of BUCKINGHAM.

(No. 49.)
MY LORD DUKE,—

Government House, Wellington,
30th June, 1868.

In my Despatch No. 45, of the 2nd instant, I reported that I had then recently returned from a very interesting official tour through the Waikato District; in which I had been accompanied by the Minister for Native Affairs (Mr. Richmond), by the Superintendent of the Province of Auckland, and by several officers of the Government. I added that by the next mail I hoped to transmit further information respecting the present condition of the British settlements in the interior of the North Island of New Zealand; and also respecting the present attitude of the so-called Maori king and his adherents.

2. The Waikato district has been described in works lately published by two able writers, thoroughly acquainted with their subject,—by Mr. Fox, formerly Prime Minister of this Colony, in his book on “The War in New Zealand,” and by Mr. Gorst, late Commissioner of the Waikato, and now member for Cambridge in the Imperial Parliament.

3. Mr. Fox observes :—“The geographical relation of Waikato to Auckland, the Seat of Government at the commencement of the war, will be comprehended by a glance at the map. The Waikato District may be said to commence at the point where the river takes its rectangular bend to the sea, and to embrace all the country on or about the river and its two affluents, the Horotiu and Waipa, for 100 miles south from that point. Starting from Auckland there is a wide metalled road for forty miles to the river; the first twenty-five running between fences and through cultivated farms; twelve of the remaining fifteen through a dense forest, through broken country, over hills and gullies of an elevation of from 300 to 400 feet high. The river once reached becomes the natural highway, being navigable for light-draught steamers and boats to almost the southern extremity of the district; and the land being practically level along the proper right bank, there is also, with few and trifling impediments, chiefly creeks, a good summer road all the way, either at the river side or at a little distance from it. The great Waikato plain between the two affluents—Horotiu and Waipa—is practically level, open, and without ‘bush.’ I remember no gradient too steep to gallop a horse upon, and there are only a few clumps of forest here and there. It is pretty nearly an equilateral triangle, with sides of from forty to fifty miles each in length.”

4. Mr. Gorst writes :—“‘Waikato’ is used indifferently as the name of a river, a confederation of Maori tribes, and the country inhabited by them. The basin, which is drained by the great river and its tributaries, is occupied by a very large number of tribes, distinct, though intimately related. They are divided geographically and politically into three sections,—Ngatimaniapoto, Ngatihaua, and a group of small tribes called Waikato, over which Ngatimahuta, the King’s tribe, is dominant. The name Waikato is, however, often applied to the whole confederation which the three sections have formed, not only by the Colonists, who do not trouble themselves about nice tribal distinctions, but even by the Maoris themselves.

“The Maoris of the Waikato confederation have been for many years regarded as the most important in New Zealand. Their pre-eminence over other tribes is due not to any intrinsic merit of their own, but solely to their geographical position. Their greatness has grown up with the settlement of Auckland—the richest in the North Island—which lies at their feet, and has been for many years at their mercy. The land on which they live is fertile and difficult to be invaded; while at their backs they have a rugged inaccessible country, a retreat where they can set our civilized armies at defiance. When New Zealand was first colonized, no one supposed that in the end we should have to fight the Maoris for the possession of the soil. The early settlers confidently pushed their way into the heart of Native districts; homesteads, of a few hundred acres, isolated in the midst of Maori villages, were bought without apprehension by European farmers, and inhabited in security by their wives

See especially
chapter vi.

See pages 71, 72.

See especially
chapter ii., pages
12 and 13.