

WEST COAST COMMISSION.

FIRST REPORT.

To His Excellency Sir HERCULES GEORGE ROBERT ROBINSON, G.C.M.G.,
Governor of New Zealand.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

We ask Your Excellency's permission to address the present statement to you in anticipation of our general Report, because there are two questions which we think must be determined at once if the advancing season is not to be lost.

I. THE QUESTION OF THE PLAINS.

By this we mean the question of what is to be done with the country enclosed by the Waingongoro and Oeo Rivers; which belonged before the confiscation almost entirely to the Ngatiruanui Tribe, and contains about 120,000 acres of available land, of which 30,000 are open plain.

It would be idle for any one to deny that the more turbulent and disaffected of the Natives on the West Coast had for years determined to resist our occupation of the Plains, or that the secret of that resistance lay deeper than any mere discontent at our survey of last year. But it was not so with the resident Natives; indeed, it would not be going too far to say, that the Natives most immediately interested would have acquiesced in our occupation if sufficient reserves had been previously made for them; nor is it less true that the immediate cause of the ignominious end of the survey was the fact of no reserves having been made. General promises had more than once been given to them that their settlements, fishing-stations, burial-places, and cultivations would be respected, and that "large reserves" would be made for them; but no step was ever taken to let them really know what was to be theirs. On the contrary, the officer in charge of the district was ordered to tell them nothing about reserves without the previous sanction of the Government. Even when the Minister had been warned later on, two months before the surveyors were turned off, of the harm this mystery was doing, and had given full authority for reserves to be made, nothing was done. And when at last (after the surveyors had been turned off) it was hastily resolved to mark off some reserves upon the maps, even this was done at Wellington, and the Natives were never told of it; while what was then done was wholly inadequate to meet either their wishes or their wants.

The confidence of the Natives was hardly to be won by this prolonged secrecy upon the very question of all others on which their anxiety was sure to be greatest. To them it was the question of whether they would be allowed to keep their homes. No one with any experience in acquiring Native land ever thought of getting quiet possession of the most ordinary piece of country without previously settling about reserves; and there was nothing to justify the idea that it would be otherwise with the Taranaki Confiscation. On the contrary, there were many reasons for being