

The Governor has only this day read these remarks in the authorized Parliamentary reports, and he desires, at once, to record officially his denial of the accuracy of the statement that he promised the Maori members that the prisoners should be tried in January or February last.

The facts of the case are these: Upon the 8th December, the Governor received a letter from three Maori members—Te Wheoro, Tainui, and Tawhai—asking for an interview on the following day, for the purpose of talking over certain matters which, they said, they considered it necessary to discuss with the Governor. The Governor showed the letter to the Native Minister, who advised that the request contained in it should be complied with. The Governor suggested that the Native Minister should be present at the interview, so as to hear what was said, and to be able to furnish any information which might be required. Mr. Bryce, however, thought it better that he should not be present, fearing, as he said, that his presence would be a restraint upon the Natives; and he advised the Governor to see them, and hear all they had to say, taking care to make them no promise, except that their views and wishes would be communicated to Ministers, and would receive careful consideration.

Accordingly, on the 9th the Governor received the three Maori members, and they commenced by referring to the objections which they entertained to the Qualification of Electors Bill, then before Parliament. A good deal of conversation took place upon this subject, as the Governor found it difficult to understand precisely what they wished, more especially as they did not appear to be quite agreed amongst themselves upon some points. Eventually the Governor told the members that he would represent what he understood to be their wishes to Ministers, but, as he did not feel sure that he had gathered their views correctly, he suggested that they should put what they wanted in writing, which would prevent any possibility of a mistake. This they promised to do.

The members next referred to the Confiscated Lands Inquiry and Maori Prisoners' Trials Bill, which had passed their House on the previous evening, and was then on its way to the Legislative Council. They said they wished (1) the prisoners to be tried not later than February; and (2) that there should be a Maori on the proposed Commission. The Governor, after hearing all they had to urge on these points, told them that he would not fail to convey their wishes to his Responsible Advisers, and that they would receive careful consideration. The members then left.

As soon as they had gone the Governor wrote down what he understood to be their views as regards each Bill, and he took the earliest opportunity of reading his notes of the interview to both the Premier and the Native Minister, observing that he did so in fulfilment of the promise which he had given to the Native members.

Shortly afterwards the Governor received the promised letter, explaining the feeling of the Natives upon the subject of Maori representation, which letter was referred to Ministers, and replied to in accordance with their advice.

The Governor does not of course pretend, after so long an interval, to remember every word that passed between himself and the Native members on the subject of the Maori prisoners. There was a good deal of conversation, and the observations on each side had to be conveyed to the other through an interpreter. It is possible, therefore, that the members may have understood his answer, as communicated to them, to mean more than he intended it to convey; but the Governor is satisfied that he adhered strictly to the determination which he had formed in his own mind before receiving the deputation—namely, to promise nothing more than to be the medium of conveying their sentiments to his Ministers. The Governor was well aware that practically the decision as to the date of the trial of the prisoners rested, not with him, but with his Advisers, who were responsible for the peace of the country; and it is not likely that he would have given a specific promise, the fulfilment of which he well knew was beyond his own control. Besides, when the Maori members called upon the Governor on the 9th December, the Maori prisoners were under committal by the Supreme Court for trial on the 5th January following, and the Maori Prisoners' Trials Bill had not been brought under discussion in the Upper House. If, therefore, the Governor had, as stated by Sir George Grey, given "the word of the Crown" to the Native members that the prisoners should be tried in January or February, he would have been making a promise as to the course to be pursued under a measure which was still under the consideration of Parliament, and might possibly never become law. Eventually the Act was assented to on the 19th December; and on the 23rd December an Order in Council was passed, postponing the date of trial from the 5th January to the 5th April, so that, if any promise, such as that alleged, were given, it was broken within a few days of its having been made: yet no representation was addressed to the Governor at the time when this supposed "violation of the word of the Crown" first took place, and the subsequent postponements to the 5th July and to the 26th July, by succeeding Orders in Council, were allowed to pass without remonstrance.

The Governor has no hesitation in affirming that no such promise as that alleged was given by him, and that the construction placed by Sir George Grey upon the conversation that took place between the Governor and the Native members is erroneous.

Government House, Wellington, 24th July, 1880.

HERCULES ROBINSON.

NOTES by the GOVERNOR.

THE three Maori members in opposition called on me to-day, to state the objections they entertained to two Bills now before the Legislature. Their wishes are given below. H. R. 9/12/79.

Qualification of Electors Act.

They wish the restriction in Maori voting to sole grantees to be taken out, and all Maori land-owners under Crown grants allowed to vote.

Major Te Wheoro thought either additional Maori members should be allowed, in same proportion to population as European members, and the representation of each race kept quite distinct; or else the additional Maori voting power asked for above for European members should be conceded.

They promised to write their views fully.

2—A. 1.