

TARANAKI CONFISCATIONS.

3. We proceed now to deal with the question of the justice of the confiscations, and we take first the Taranaki case, as that was the first brought before us. In dealing with this subject it is not necessary to go further back than the Waitara purchase, which was made in the year 1859. The view now generally accepted of that transaction is that set forth by Mr. W. P. Reeves in his book "The Long White Cloud." This is what he has said on the subject (3rd ed., p. 196): "Colonel Gore Browne took the reins from Colonel Wynyard. The one was just such an honourable and personally estimable soldier as the other. But, though he did not involve his Parliament in ridicule, Governor Browne did much more serious mischief. In ordinary matters he took the advice of the Stafford Ministry, but in Native affairs the Colonial Office had stipulated that the Governor was to have an overriding power. He was to take the advice of his Ministers, but not necessarily to follow it. . . . On Governor Browne, therefore, rests the chief responsibility for a disastrous series of wars which broke out in 1860, and which were not finally at an end for ten years. The impatience of certain colonists to buy lands from the Maori faster than the latter cared to sell them was the simple and not too creditable cause of the outbreak. A broad survey of the position shows that there need have been no hurry over land acquisition. Nor was there any great clamour for haste, except in Taranaki, where rather less than 3,000 settlers restricted to 63,000 acres fretted at the sight of 1,750 Maoris holding and shutting up 2,000,000 acres against them." Then, after referring to the establishment of the Native Land League and to the virtual repeal of the Ordinance forbidding the sale of arms to Natives, Mr. Reeves continued thus: "Finally in 1860 came the Waitara land-purchase—the spark which set all ablaze. The name Waitara has been extended from a river both to a little seaport and to the surrounding district in Taranaki, the province where, as already said, feeling on the land difficulty had always been most acute. Enough land had been purchased, chiefly by Grey, to enable the settlement to expand into a strip of about twenty miles along the seashore, with an average depth of about seven miles. During a visit to the district, Governor Browne invited the Ngatiawa Natives to sell land. A chief, Teira, and his friends at once offered to part with 600 acres which they were occupying. The head of their tribe, however, Wiremu Kingi, vetoed the sale. The Native Department and the Governor sent down Commissioners, who, after inquiry, decided erroneously that Teira's party had a right to sell and the head chief none to interfere. A fair price was paid for the block and surveyors sent to it. The Ngatiawas good-humouredly encountered these with a band of old women well selected for their ugliness, whose appalling endearments effectually obstructed the survey work. Then, as Kingi threatened war, an armed force was sent to occupy the plot. After two days' firing upon a stockade erected there, the soldiers advanced and found it empty. Kingi, thus attacked, astutely made the disputed piece over to the King tribes, and forthwith became their *protege*. . . . It should be mentioned that while all this was going on the Premier, Mr. Stafford, was absent in England, and that his colleagues supported the Governor's action. Parliament did not assemble until war had broken out, and then a majority of members conceived themselves bound to stand by what had been done. Nevertheless, so great was the doubt about the wisdom and equity of the purchase that most of the North Island members even then condemned it. Most of the South Island members, who had much to lose and nothing to gain by war, supported it. Very heavily had their Island to pay for the Waitara purchase. It was not a crime, unless every purchaser who takes land with a bad title which he believes to be good is a criminal. But, probably wrong technically, certainly needless and disastrous, it will always remain for New Zealand the classic example of a blunder worse than a crime."

4. It is to be observed that the resolution to use military force, if necessary, for securing the completion of the purchase was adopted at a meeting of the Executive Council held at Auckland on the 25th January, 1860. The advice tendered to the Governor was as follows:—

"1st: That Mr. Parris be instructed to have the said land surveyed in the ordinary manner, and to take care that the Native chief, William King, be indirectly, but not officially, made aware of the day on which the survey will be commenced.