

I submit that had my relations with Dr. Featherston in these matters been such as Mr. Mantell appears to have understood from my conversation with him, I should not merely have been "in danger of losing the respect of the Natives," but should have proved myself, on my own confession, utterly unworthy of my office, by having become a party to gross fraud and deception; and I cannot understand how it was that Mr. Mantell, (the Native Minister,) having so interpreted what I said, did not at the time visit my supposed admission of guilt with the severity it deserved. It appears that my conversation simply had the effect of "confirming him in his determination to check the continuance of such traffic on the part of Resident Magistrates."

What I said to Mr. Mantell, was, in effect, this—that so far from the negotiations in which I had been concerned with Dr. Featherston having impaired my influence with the Natives on the West Coast, I was of opinion that my influence had been rather strengthened thereby; that not being myself the Government buyer, and not being in any sense bound to beat the Natives down, as to price, I was able to take an independent position, and to act as much on behalf of the Natives of my district as on behalf of the Government—a position which the Natives seemed fully to understand and appreciate. Mr. Mantell expressed entire disapproval of my views on the subject; and to illustrate my meaning more fully, I described to him the manner in which I had assisted the Commissioner in the purchase of the Upper Manawatu Block.

I considered the Government offer for this Block (£6000) far too low, while I regarded the price which the Natives had continued to demand for several years (10s. or 15s. per acre) ridiculously high.

I sought to convince the Natives that to ask an exorbitant price was practically to postpone indefinitely the sale of the land; while, at the same time, I used every legitimate argument to prove that (provided that the Reserves were ample and well selected) the speedy occupation of the Block by European settlers would be of the utmost advantage to the Natives themselves. I told them plainly that I considered the Commissioner's offer an insufficient one. I promised that if they would make a reasonable offer I would urge the Commissioner to accept it; and, without consulting Dr. Featherston, I myself suggested £12,000 as a fair price for them to ask. Having ultimately agreed to this, they communicated their decision to me, and I reported it to Dr. Featherston on his arrival at Manawatu (from Wanganui). He at once accepted the offer, and I then learnt, for the first time, that he had already in his own mind fixed upon this price (within a few hundred pounds) as the maximum he was prepared to give.

The Natives knew perfectly well that I was not aware beforehand how their offer would be accepted by the Commissioner. Having agreed to the price demanded, Dr. Featherston left me to arrange the details with Meihana and the other sellers.

From the public acknowledgment of my services which His Honor immediately afterwards made in his opening speech to the Provincial Council, I was glad to find that I had rendered good service to the Province; and I honestly felt that in the tedious negotiations which I had undertaken I had acted throughout as the *bona fide* friend and adviser of the Natives in that portion of my district.

I have, &c.,

The Honourable the Native Minister.

WALTER BULLER, R.M.

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No. 6.

NOTE by W. B. D. MANTELL, Esq.

I have read Mr. Buller's letter of September 27th.

The conversation described by me took place in my office, and was to the purport already recorded by me. I spoke of it with Mr. Weld at the time, and frequently since.

As I saw nothing in the alleged proceeding incompatible with the principles of the old Native Land Purchase System, I had no reason to doubt that Mr. Buller had acted in the manner described by him, nor did my previous experience of that officer lead me to believe that he would perceive any "guilt" in such a course.

21st October, 1865.

W. B. D. MANTELL.

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