

1882.

NEW ZEALAND.

WEST COAST COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS.

(REPLY BY HON. SIR W. FOX TO CHARGES AGAINST THE COMMISSIONERS BY
HON. R. HART, M.L.C.)*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

SIR,—

Rangitikei, 1st July, 1882.

The Hon. R. Hart, M.L.C., on the 6th June, addressed a speech to the Legislative Council, in which he not only criticised severely the reports of the West Coast Commissioners of 1880, but charged them (particularly myself by name) with disingenuousness and misrepresentation, by which we had misled the Government and the country. He expressly challenged me to explain how I had been induced to be guilty of the misconduct imputed, a charge which, of course, includes my late colleague, Sir Dillon Bell, who, equally with myself, is responsible for the contents of our reports made to the Governor, and presented to Parliament.

I have now the honor to enclose a memorandum, in which I have, I hope successfully, replied to the very grave accusations made against Sir Dillon Bell and myself; and I have to request that you will lay it before His Excellency the Governor, and request his permission to place it on the tables of the Legislative Council and House of Representatives.

I have, &c.,

WILLIAM FOX,

West Coast Commissioner.

The Hon. F. Whitaker, M.L.C., Premier, &c.

MEMORANDUM by Sir WILLIAM FOX, West Coast Commissioner, upon a Speech delivered by the Hon. R. HART, M.L.C., in the Legislative Council, on the 6th June, 1882.

WHEN the West Coast Commissioners' reports were presented to Parliament, in August, 1880, the Hon. Mr. Hart, in the Legislative Council, criticised them in a speech which fills nine columns of *Hansard*. He was briefly replied to by Sir F. Dillon Bell. After two years, he has spoken again on the same subject, but Sir Dillon Bell is out of the colony, and his co-Commissioner is no longer in Parliament. Mr. Hart has the double advantage of speaking in the absence of those whom he attacks, and of having his speech recorded in *Hansard*, where it occupies fifteen columns, and in which any reply on their behalf will not appear. In his speech in 1880, Mr. Hart spoke in very respectful terms of the Commissioners, and commended their reports as "a work, which for the great industry bestowed upon it, and the results as far as practical effects are concerned, is second to none brought forward by any Commissioners." In his recent speech, he describes the Commissioners as men who had altogether lost their heads, suffering under "a mesmeric exaltation, causing them to put judgment and memory in the background, and let imagination have its sway," the result being that they suppressed or overlooked materials at their hand, gave a false complexion to their reports, were led into errors, and did almost everything which Commissioners ought not to do. In support of this indictment, Mr. Hart relies on three points, and only three, though he has elaborated these at such length that his speech is said to have taken an hour and a-half in delivery. I venture to hope that they can be disposed of much more briefly.

1. The first point relied on by Mr. Hart is, that in their second report, page 13, the Commissioners stated, "At the end of the war in 1865, the whole coast from Wanganui to the White Cliffs was confiscated under the powers of the West Coast Settlements Acts." Mr. Hart remarks on this, that "the statement was very questionable, and that if Te Whiti and Tohu were brought to trial to-morrow, it would be denied in Court;" and he proceeds to argue at great length, that on technical grounds the confiscation was invalid, and complains that the Commissioners did not tell the Governor that it was so. The answer to this is, that the Commissioners, in this part of their report, were giving a brief historical *resumé* of the facts which had led up to the state of events on the West Coast, and, speaking of it simply as a fact, they said the country in question had been confiscated. What were the facts? Four Orders in Council had been issued, declaring the limits of the districts, and setting them apart for purposes of settlement under the Acts of Parliament: they had been taken possession of, and great part of them surveyed, sold, given away to military settlers and others; extensive public works, roads, and bridges had been