

Mr W. Jenkins and the Maoris

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(From the "Nelson Colonist")

On Tuesday evening (Dec 6.), Mr William Jenkins, who had charge of the troupe of Maoris whom a company formed in Nelson took to England on speculation last year, delivered in the Provincial Hall an address or narrative of his and their proceedings, trials, and tribulations during their sojourn in the home country.

By some mismanagement the chairman was not forthcoming at the appointed hour, and after numerous fruitless solicitations to gentlemen present to preside, Mr Jenkins had to proceed with his lecture without a chairman. We pass over the preliminary arrangements before departure from New Zealand, merely remarking that Mr Jenkins read clauses from the deed of co-partnership entered into by the company. The speaker narrated the interviews of himself and the chiefs with the Duke of Newcastle, the Earl of Shaftesbury, the Prince of Wales, and their visit to the Queen at Osborne House; and dwelt frequently and with particular gusto on the sumptuous banquets which on these and other occasions were provided for the strangers, and the ample justice which was done to the viands.

He said that at the first interview he told the Duke of Newcastle their purpose, and his Grace offered to send letters of introduction all over the country for them. The Earl of Shaftesbury, too, he said, highly approved of the project of taking the Maoris through England, and was very enthusiastic. They visited many places, lived in great style at a cost of £80 a week, said the speaker; and were prevented from giving lectures because it was deemed improper that the Maoris should be treated in that manner.

At length, when commanded to visit the Queen, they were reduced to their last pound. Mr Jenkins had often asked the Duke of Newcastle and the Earl of Shaftesbury to let them alone, and permit them to carry out their own project in their own way; but they always started objections, and thus they were staying doing nothing. He borrowed money to pay their expenses to Osborne House, and these expenses were £80. He afterwards asked the Duke of Newcastle how they were to be paid for all this outlay, and told him that they had now no money, and the Duke said, "Oh, never mind, you'll have plenty of money by-and-bye," and afterwards in the carriage he urged this question on his Grace, and told him he was anxious to commence lecturing at once, and his Grace replied that he was not prepared to consent to allowing the natives to go about in this manner, at least until the Queen should agree to it, and for a long time he was kept running to and fro from Downing street.

At last he asked the Duke, "Your Grace, what are we to do? Will you give us a release, and let us follow our own course?" Then his Grace proposed that the Maoris should go back to New Zealand at once with the whole party, and that their passages would be paid, provided they agreed to go at once. This was refused by Mr Jenkins, and his partners, and by the Maoris. The Duke said he had no wish to interfere with his arrangements, only he had told him that lecturing would most certainly result in a pecuniary loss, and that he did not wish to see the Maoris exhibited in the Queen's name, but concluded his Grace, "I leave you to do anything you choose."

After this, lecturing was resolved on, and Mr Jenkins narrated the visit to Bristol and Birmingham, and denounced Mr Ridgway, of Leicester-square (London), who, he alleged, set Dr. Hodgkin, the Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and others against him and his party. He spoke of how spies were set upon him, how untrue letters had been sent to Birmingham from Dr Hodgkin, making strong and libellous charges against him, but he did not state what these charges were; but declared that a Committee of the Society of Friends vindicated him from them; that he intended to proceed against Dr Hodgkin for libel, claiming £200 as advised by some solicitors, but was deterred by the Quakers, because they said they did not like law, and if went to law, they would have nothing more to do with him, and so he did not go.

While in Birmingham they were watched by a spy, a despicable Jewish fellow, Mr Jenkins termed him, and all this he attributed to Mr Ridgway's opposition; which arose, said Mr Jenkins, because he had refused to allow him to climb once more into favour at Downing-street upon their shoulders. Mr Ridgway had also prevented, through the Aborigines Society, the females of the party from accompanying them to the provinces. They afterwards visited several places in the Midland district of England, and paid their expenses, and paid off £100 of the debt they had contracted in London, showing that, if let alone they would have done well and made money – but the influence of these letters followed them everywhere.

At last, a wealthy lady (Miss Weale) called and offered to send the whole party back to New Zealand, and would carry out the scheme herself, if he would agree to give her charge of the natives. He had grown sceptical of these things, and asked her by what means she would carry out this scheme, and told her that he would like to see the money down first. At last he agreed to call at her residence with the Maoris and their mats, spears, &c., and here he met three more enemies, Mrs Colenso, Mr Stack, and Mr Maunsell, son of Archdeacon Maunsell, all from New Zealand, who were there as interpreters, and then Miss Weale charged him with not being kind to the natives. But he read letters he had received from Mr Stack and Mrs Colenso, while they were in London (not in the country, to which place, it appeared, Mrs Weale's charges applied) in which that gentleman and lady certified to his kind treatment of the natives in London; and then, on reading these letters, Mrs Colenso, quoth Mr Jenkins, had not a word to say for herself.

He agreed to hand over his right of managing the Maoris to Miss Weale, and signed a document cancelling the former agreement with the Maoris, upon which Miss Weale, he said, took the paper, and told him that the Maoris would stop with her, and that he should have nothing more to do with them. But afterwards some of them were glad to come secretly to him in town, and get some tobacco, which they were denied at Miss Weale's.

He condemned the circular afterwards published by the Earl of Shaftesbury, at the instigation of Miss Weale, and which stated that the natives had been left unprovided by him, and he declared the statements to be untrue. He said, too, that it was a charge against him that he was not Native Interpreter for New Zealand; but he had a letter from Sir George Grey, in which he was styled Native Interpreter, which answered this charge. Mr Jenkins did not, however, state that this office was only a provincial one and not an office under the New Zealand Government proper. The letter, he said, too, was a reply to one he had written to his Excellency, complaining of the attacks made upon him; but on its being read, it appeared not to be so; as the letter expressed the Governor's satisfaction on hearing of the "great kindness" which Mr Jenkins had reported he had received in England.

He also entered into a long and rather ill-judged, not to say ungenerous, attack on one of his partners in the speculation, who had lost a good deal of money in the concern; and during this attack he was several times hissed.

He also declared that the statements attributed to him by the newspapers in Bristol and elsewhere, to the effect that he had said the greedy colonists desired to take the lands from the natives, were not true, and he explained that he meant the early settlers, whalers and others, who had come long ago, and he read a long letter which he addressed to a Birmingham paper, giving his sentiments touching the war, and contradicting these mis-statements, which had been published there, and also published in the Nelson and other papers, and with strong remarks.

It happened, however, that this letter appeared on 26th May last; that it contained opinions respecting the Three Million Loan and the Confiscation Act, while the statements in the newspapers appeared in October previous, and were commented on in the Nelson and other papers in January following.

Mr Jenkins concluded a lengthy, and, as he said, certainly a somewhat "rambling" address, by reading a document signed by some forty or fifty clergymen, doctors, and gentlemen of Birmingham, who sympathised with him for the abuse he had undergone, and certifying that he had carefully avoided anything like a sensational exhibition of the Maoris. The sample people also presented him with a writing desk. The meeting then separated.