

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

Taranaki Comes to Nelson: 1859-1860

Author: Shirley Tunncliff (1936-2014)

(AHS Newsletter 21, March 2002)

When Nelson was entertaining Governor Gore Browne with balls and cricket matches in the summer of 1859-1860, the growing tension overshadowing Taranaki must have seemed far removed, but the new year was to see the two provinces become closely involved with each other. The Governor's determination to proceed with the survey of the Waitara block, in spite of the opposition of Wiremu Kingi, led to the outbreak of war on 17 March. After the incident at Waireka on 28 March, the British military commander issued orders that the settlers should evacuate their women and children to the safety of the southern provinces to avoid attack by Māori and disease from the overcrowding in New Plymouth. The large rich provinces of Otago and Canterbury, isolated from any direct contact with the Māori, failed to respond, but the Provincial Government of smaller, poorer Nelson immediately sprang to their aid, offering financial help and refuge to the Taranaki families.

Alfred Domett, the Provincial Secretary, wrote at once to his friend, C.W. Richmond:

'So, all the fats in the fire with a vengeance. I have written a note to your mother to beg her to come over and make my house her home with as many daughters, granddaughters etc. as our house will hold whilst roughing it ... There is a public meeting to be held here immediately (in an hour) which some of our townspeople have got up (Superintendent superintending) to express sympathy and see what accommodation we can offer publicly to any women and children who desire to leave New Plymouth. I can't think of any unless we take some public buildings such as Freemasons' Hall, etc. for them. They will pass

some resolutions ... and most likely send the steamer (Tas. Maid) purposely. You may depend upon it, we (the Govt) will do all we can to assist in this way. If you can think of anything proper for our Government to do, be kind enough to write to me, and as far as I can get it done be sure it shall be ...

'I trust the Maori will get a good licking this time. They tell wonderful stories about their building a stockade or pah in one night -their digging holes - according to the Russian dodge - to roll shells in. Is this all true?'¹

Seventeen years had not served to dissipate Domett's bitterness about the disaster at the Wairau when twenty-two of Nelson's most influential settlers had fallen victim to their own arrogance and Rangihaeata's vengeance. It had been Domett who, with Dr Monro, had taken the Nelson settlers' views to the acting Governor in Auckland after the massacre, and who had compiled the Wairau Supplement for the Examiner of 23 December 1843 - a twelve page document which according to a recent historian 'exemplified the ignorance of the majority of company settlers regarding the Maori race, their fear and hatred of them.'²

Dr Monro wrote at this time:

'At Nelson the excitement was at one time almost as great as after the Wairau massacre ... One thing is very clear: that the Maori have wanted a good licking for some time. This is a piece of discipline, which unfortunately they have never yet had; and a black man has no respect for the white settler, until the latter has shown him that he is physically his superior.'³

Well-to-do settlers like the Richmonds and Hursthouses accepted invitations from friends and relatives, or quickly found rented accommodation. Jane Maria Atkinson wrote from New Plymouth on 20 April:

‘The Nelson people have behaved to us with the greatest kindness and liberality - numbers of people are going (free passages being granted to those who can maintain themselves when there) in the cuddy, to others in the steerage ... We are in the last agonies of departure. Mr. Domett's invitation was like himself. We shall look out at all speed for a shelter of our own.’⁴

In the end, Jane Maria decided to stay in New Plymouth:

‘On all accounts I believe it will be well for me to stay here. Unless matters change greatly, we are perfectly safe in the town, and it seems to me that Nelson will soon be quite as crowded as New Plymouth.’⁵

However, her sister-in-law, Mary Richmond, expecting her second baby shortly, left with Mrs. Richmond, her mother-in-law, and five other adults and two infants of ‘the mob’ on 31 March, by the Airedale, and were joined within the week by Harry Atkinson's wife and children. This was the first link with Nelson for a family that was to be intimately associated with the city for the next half century. Mary was delighted after three weeks to have her husband visit: ‘To our astonishment and delight James arrived here yesterday morning by steamer part of his errand to see Mr. Stafford. All Nelson is in a ferment at the bare idea of a peace being patched up with the natives - the Taranakians themselves cannot be more indignant - there is a meeting tonight to remonstrate with government against such a measure.’⁶

The memory of Wairau had become a legend in the Nelson settlement, and the tales of terror told with relish by the Taranaki refugees roused their hosts to a fever of indignation. The public

meeting held on 22 March reflects this outlook. In his speech the Superintendent referred to the Wairau:

‘When they considered the unfortunate position of those now in Taranaki and the surrounding neighbourhood and compared it with what were their own feelings some years ago, when the inhabitants of Nelson knew not but that their town might be surrounded by hostile natives at any moment: That was a trying time for Nelson, but not so trying as the present was for Taranaki.’⁷

The Examiner brought out a special supplement on Taranaki, and two editorials reflected the intensity of feeling in Nelson:

“What we have to put down ... is no more than a wilful and contumacious rebellion of a portion of the Maori people, excited by ill-founded jealousy and cupidity, and emboldened by a long course of leniency and forbearance, which, in their ignorance, they have mistaken for weakness ... Consider the position of the respective belligerents. On the one side, some thousands of British men, with assigned leaders and good weapons, fighting in defence of their hearths, of their wives, and their children; on the other side, an array of savages clever at building stockades and fighting in the bush, but powerless for attack, because incapable of combination without discipline, bad shots, and the majority of them badly armed. It is hardly possible to doubt for an instant about the result of the struggle ... Witness the battle of the Waireka the other day, where their march upon Taranaki was arrested by a body of white men not half their numbers, with a loss on our side utterly trifling, but on their side such as to have apparently sickened them. Let them come into the green fields about Auckland, and they will meet an opponent before whom they must go down, the nation of the pale faces, who in every quarter of the globe have given proof of their superiority of intelligence, in courage, in endurance, in physical strength, and

in humanity, to every coloured race that has ever sought to bar them in their progress.’⁸

A Taranaki Aid Committee was set up to organize billets, and offers of accommodation poured in from the country for married women with up to three children willing ‘to make themselves useful’ in dairying and other farm work, and a certain number of women were offered board and lodging in private houses in return for sewing and dressmaking. Single females from fourteen years upwards were similarly offered food and shelter in return for domestic help. Offering help to Taranaki women ‘of the labouring class’ suddenly solved the perennial ‘servant problem.’ On the other hand, the ladies of Nelson threw themselves into a spate of patriotic good works, raising funds with concerts and bazaars.

On 25 March, an English governess in the family of the Rev. H. H. Brown wrote from their home in Omata, Taranaki:

‘The settlers at Nelson have behaved very well. They have chartered a vessel for our use during the war and have offered to receive all the women and children receiving support in New Plymouth, and to provide for them until our difficulties are over. As the town is in a sadly overcrowded state, such an offer is not to be refused.’ Four days later she records they had spent two anxious days after the murder of five English settlers at Omata. They could see the fighting all day from their house: ‘Most likely they (the Maori) will massacre all the whites they can.’

The battle at Waireka was followed by escape to New Plymouth, billeted by friends ‘who were only too glad to receive us as those rescued from savage murderers.’⁹ On Good Friday the news was so bad Mr. Brown decided to send his family for safety to Nelson, leaving only his wife and two eldest sons in New Plymouth:

‘Ten of us were received most hospitably by the Bishop, and five of us remained his guests for more than two months. The visit was a most delightful one to me, and I felt sorry when the

time came for us to leave. Mr. Brown came over and established us in a small house for the winter, for there is no prospect at present of the Taranaki settlers being able to return to their homes. The war promises to be a tedious affair and will cause the ruin of many families.’¹⁰

Like other Nelson households the Bishop’s home was stretched to the limit by this influx of refugees. The Bishop’s wife remembered: ‘our Taranaki refugees came tumbling in upon us late of Easter Eve! I shall never forget the procession that appeared to me to be advancing as I stood at the door.’¹¹

Bishop Hobhouse wrote to his sister:

‘Our House is full throng. Mr. Codrington is domiciled with us for the while, till he goes to his first location in the Goldfield, for two months, and besides we have eight Browns, daughters and sons of my old school-fellow (Bro. of Batcombe) and Miss (Dr) Morris (a Governess), a Nurse, and an old man with a Maori wife, whose Maori-speaking powers helped the Browns in the outbreak at Taranaki, and brought upon the Reporters Maori vengeance. Happily, we are able to house this large Garrison by the aid of a mud Hut which Dr Richardson erected on some adjoining ground, and which has been thrown into my Lease, and by the completion of the riggings, simple enough, which turn our kitchen (the best room in the House) into a Dining-room for all orders and degrees of men, after ancient manorial fashion, the back kitchen doing the cookery. Poor Mr. and Mrs. Brown and his rifle-bearing sons remain in half-siege at Taranaki, all inefficients being dismissed to the South Island; Nelson receives 400.’¹²

How she coped with her overcrowded house, Mary Hobhouse reveals in June when the Browns’ imminent departure must have been a relief as she was expecting a baby in August and the arrival of her sister. One of the small spare rooms was ‘occupied by three Browns, and the other by a fourth Brown and a governess.’ The

Brown girls and their governess are still our inmates but as to their great joy their father has arrived today from Taranaki, I suppose they will soon be located in a house of their own and greatly shall we miss them, though sometimes I felt the house was rather too full, for they are as nice a set of girls as I ever saw. The little boys I was glad to have located at a little distance under the entire care of their nurse and out of my sight, for of course when children are with one, one must take charge of them whether one wishes or not ... Anyhow, they (the girls) have brightened up our circle wonderfully and as we had no privacy before, they have not robbed us of it.¹³

As the war in Taranaki dragged on through the miserable winter of 1860 more refugees arrived. The influx of about a thousand extra inhabitants to the small town naturally produced strains of various kinds. There were brawls among the occupants of the Oddfellows Hall provoked by too-close proximity of families in anxious and uncomfortable conditions, and although, later in the year, a special barracks was built to house the Taranaki families it was a poor substitute for their own Taranaki homes. An anonymous visitor gave a rather patronizing description of the new buildings in December. On the way to Richmond, he passed 'the Taranaki Buildings' where:

'A large number of the unfortunate refugees are located in a fine healthy site, and where but for that homesickness which seems to cling to the Taranakians ... these widowed wives and their children might be very comfortable ... Like many other dwellers in other provinces, I was once disposed to think that there was something like a disposition on the part of the Nelson authorities to make political capital out of offering a home to the Taranaki refugees, or expatriated women and children. On arriving here, I learned that some of the good Taranaki dames thought themselves hardly dealt with by the Nelson Government and longed for their own firesides and their snug little cottage homes in New Plymouth. My curiosity being excited, I paid a

visit to these buildings, and I must say I was much pleased with what I saw. The site is admirably chosen on gently elevated ground; the buildings themselves are roomy and constructed with due regard to sanitary principles; every absolute requisite for culinary and domestic purposes is provided, and on a scale which would do no discredit to the Royal Model Cottages at Windsor; there is an abundant supply of water, a hospital, safes, etc.; the occupants were keeping their rooms in a very creditable state of cleanliness, and their children looked fat and healthy, although like their mothers, they doubtless missed their daddy's familiar face. The provisions of every kind are of a good quality, and supplied in ample quantity, and medical comforts are not overlooked in the case of nursing mothers and delicate women and children. Altogether the whole arrangements are very creditable to the people of Nelson ... and I can congratulate the women and children of Taranaki on having had such comfortable provision made for their reception during their temporary absence from their own province.'¹⁴

Even those who were fortunate enough to be in private accommodation found the conditions trying. James Richmond reported after a brief visit in April to the family in Nelson that they were 'pretty comfortable, but as in a perfect nutshell of an abode as to size of rooms.'¹⁵

Maria Nicholson on 2 August reports that the news from Taranaki is still bad, and that:

'Three hundred more women and children are to be sent here by the next steamer. Nelson is already crowded to an unhealthy state, and where the additional refugees are to be housed, I cannot imagine.'

Mrs. Brown was dispatched to join her children and governess in the house that Mr. Brown had found for them in Nelson:

'She has come for two months, but my opinion is that she will not be able to go back. Orders have already been issued that no women shall be

allowed to return to Taranaki: indeed I quite expect to hear that the town has been attacked and taken ... our cottage is small, and we are much crowded like all the rest of the Taranaki refugees, but the situation is delightful quite out of town, on a hill close to the sea with a fine view of the Motueka Hills across the Bay and the snow ranges beyond.¹⁶

Even after most of the Taranaki refugees had departed there were several tangible legacies left from their invasion. The 'Taranaki Cuildings' remained in use for many years as a home for the destitute elderly. The need to provide for the education of the Taranaki children led Bishop Hobhouse to open a school for infants in one of the cob outhouses which dotted the grounds of the Episcopal ground. His wife wrote: 'As long as we had a school for Taranaki infants in our cob house the young ladies (the Brown daughters) came to help us, the regular teacher being only 13 years old. I never saw a happier set of children than these Taranaki 'Infants' though no way polished. Their punctuality too was amazing for they would begin coming at half past 8 for a ten o'clock opening but that may have been connected with a tree loaded with almonds and a swing in the immediate neighbourhood of the school.'¹⁷

When the numbers outgrew the cob schoolroom, the Bishop re-opened the little school building begun by Bishop Selwyn and installed the Rev. Thomas Bowden as headmaster. This was the 'Bishop's School' which, again restored in 1881 by Bishop Suter, operated until the end of the century. The church of All Saints, though not opened till 1868, also derives from the Taranaki invasion. The little parish church of Christ Church was soon overcrowded with the newcomers, and the Bishop started services for them in the Oddfellows Hall, in the lower less fashionable part of town. The popularity of these services led him to make plans to build a permanent second church for a new 'Western Parish' plans which were to set in train disastrous consequences.

A less tangible result was the hardening attitude to Māori problems which, sown originally among the first Nelson settlers by the Wairau incident, was fed and watered by the presence of exiles from Taranaki. Not only was the first arrival of the panic-stricken women and children at Easter, 1860 enough to spread rumours of Māori atrocities and as in all war situations provoke outraged letters to the papers, but the arrival of James Crowe Richmond to be editor of the Nelson Examiner at the end of 1861 brought an outspoken articulate defender of the Taranaki settlers' point of view to exercise an influence on the opinions of the newspaper reading public. This is highlighted shortly after Richmond's takeover of the Examiner, by the arrival in Nelson of the whole weight of the Anglican hierarchy, whose pro-Maori sympathies were well known.

The General Synod of the Anglican Church was held in February 1862 during which a brisk exchange of views took place in the columns of the Examiner. Bishop William Williams wrote to the Examiner claiming to be heard for the work the missionaries had done ever since the Treaty of Waitangi. He claimed: 'the best exertions of the missionaries have been given to promote the peace of the country.' He concluded with a tribute to Bishop Selwyn:

'The Bishop of New Zealand has proved himself from the beginning the warm friend of the native race, but, at the same time, there is no man in the whole community who, for nearly twenty years, has been equal to him in the exercise of a self-denying labour, from the northern extremity of the island to the far south, by land and water, to stay the progress of evil among the colonists, or between the colonists and the native race, often amid reproach and scorn, yet pursuing his onward course. And, while his peculiar anxiety has been the care of all the churches, he has laboured, without ceasing, to promote the temporal welfare of his countrymen.'

Richmond's editorial tartly comments:

'Bishop Williams hints that Bishop Selwyn's character is above all charges. Now, we may refer him with satisfaction to the Taranaki newspapers throughout the war, in support of his own testimony to the fairness of New Zealand settlers ... The good temper of the settlers has been echoed in their press. And in these newspapers, he will find the character of Bishop Selwyn treated with a generosity which that prelate has won from his countrymen in all places. A manly man, to bin an abbot able! - yet surely, he himself will not desire that he should be thought exempt from human frailty. His great exemplar, the first apostle to the Gentiles, was conscious of 'a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.' It is not for one man to ask entrance into the secrets of another's mind, 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness.' Yet one can imagine that the thorn which the Bishop of New Zealand recognises in his lot, consists in the very pride and impetuosity by which the Taranaki people think he has wronged them, and in the unbridled admiration of his many friends, which may tempt him to forget those faults. The complaint of our unfortunate neighbours is, that the rare occasions of his visits there have been marked more by reproofs of imagined sins, than sympathy in too obvious difficulties.'

Richmond refers to the outbreak of the Taranaki war and continues:

'In all that dreary eighteen months the energetic and benevolent Primate never, by pastoral letter or bodily presence, made known his sympathy or gave his counsel, and they heard of him only in protest against a course which they deemed to be necessary alike for their interests and those of the native race, and in the repeated rumour that he declared that they had brought their misfortunes on themselves.'¹⁸

Richmond's wife, Mary, wrote soon after to her sister-in-law that as they were meeting Bishop Selwyn constantly while he was in Nelson:

'We thought it would be well to ask him to spend

an evening with us, I hardly thought he would come. However, he came (the day after Jas's article on his address to the Synod) and revenged himself by not letting the article alone all the evening. He pretended to think Annie (her sister) had written it - curiously enough Jas was completely unconscious of what was going on ...The Govetts and Fitzgibbons were there and seemed rather puzzled by the Bishop's conversation. It was amusing at the time but left altogether a painful impression. The Bishop was evidently made sore by the article. I was rather sorry that it was written. I agreed with it, but it seemed to me rather superfluous and likely to vex the Bishop in vain.'¹⁹

The presence in Nelson of almost all the senior Anglican clergy made the topic of Māori land rights a hot topic of conversation, as most were passionately committed protagonists. Archdeacon Hadfield's controversial pamphlets 'One of England's Little Wars' and his defense of Wiremu Kingi before the bar of the House made his name anathema to Taranaki settlers; the Selwyns and Abrahams had recently, with Sir William and Lady Martin, published their views in Britain, 'Extracts of Letters from New Zealand on the War Question' (1861); Archdeacon Maunsell had devoted nearly thirty years of his linguistic scholarship to Māori translation and was unusually for the time empathetic to Māori culture.

Bishop Williams had defended the Treaty of Waitangi in the local newspaper, and Richmond's acerbic response must have been vigorously discussed by the Bishop of Nelson's guests, and their host found himself isolated. He had earlier told his sister:

'Bishop Abraham, who, I imagine reflects the mind of the Primate as he certainly does of Archdeacon Hadfield, thinks the Governor's attack on William King as exceedingly rash as well as unjust, and he believes the Natives to be capable of maintaining resistance for two or

three years.'

Written on the outbreak of war in 1860, a year after his arrival, he modestly added he was not yet competent to judge for himself:

'I am therefore not unhopeful that this outbreak may be the prelude to a happier state of things, but you must not suppose that my brief experience, confined as it is chiefly to this Island, warrants me in pronouncing very safely upon any part of the Maori question.'²⁰

However, fifteen months later he had come to conclusions of his own:

'Your Report of dear Caroline Abraham's Letters on Maori Matters does not surprise me. On the Maori Subject she gets her Husband's Views, which in Him are not duly restrained by His Office and Position or by His own good Sense, and of course in her, are unchecked by any such modifying Causes. I never mention the Subject to any of my Brethren - and avoid it with most Persons. I cannot see now how anyone can say that the Maori King Movement was not essentially a Rebellion, calling on the Governor's strong Arm as soon as it was strong enough, to crush it. I humbly hope that it is now strong enough and that its strength may be both wisely and mercifully wielded. One smart Blow would I conceive, be the greatest Blessing to the Maori People. This Dream of an impossible Independence is withdrawing Them from the steady Pursuit of Industry, by which they were

raising their social Condition. They are now spending their Time in Koreros (Colloquies) and Feastings, and their Money in buying Munitions of War, and in making Provision for the regal Estate of their Monarch.'²¹

With views like these it would hardly have been expected that a courteous host would have allowed himself to express them with guests of such firm philo-Maori opinions.

Mary Hobhouse, his wife, significantly, was much more sympathetic to the Māori point of view. Writing of Taranaki early in 1861 she commented:

'There have been no victories there except of large forces over handfuls of Maoris, and we have certainly done nothing in this campaign to lessen the profound contempt of the natives for British soldiers. What this new General (Cameron) may do I don't know, but now we hear rumours of peace being patched. If so, it will probably all begin over again in a few years unless they (that is the Government) will find some better system for managing Maori affairs. The Maoris wisely enough have profound contempt for the collective wisdom of the millers and public-house keepers of NZ as expressed in the debates of the Assembly and unless a Governor can have full powers to conduct native affairs, I don't see how they are to be conducted. How can the natives expect justice when the people who covet every inch of their land, are the makers of the laws?'²²

Endnotes

¹ Sarah Greenwood claims that the editorials of 4 and 11 April were written by Dr Monro, 'not by my Dr who would not have used one or two of the phrases thereof.' Letter, 5 May 1860.

² A Domett, to C W Richmond, 21 March 1860, G II Scholefield, *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*, Wellington: Government Printer, 1960, Vol. 1, p.545 (hereafter R/A Papers).

³ Patricia Burns, *Fatal Success*, Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1989, p.238.

⁴ Letters to G M F Tytler, 4 May 1860, and to D Binning Monro, 4 June 1860, wuoted by R E Wright-St Clair, *Doctors Monro: a medical saga*, London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1964, P.127.

⁵ J M Atkinson to ? 20 April 1860. R/A Papers, p.569.

⁶ J M Atkins to Maria Richmond, New Plymouth, 10 April 1860, *Ibid.*, p.561.

-
- ⁷ Mary Richmond to Emily Richmond, 23 April 1860. R/A Papers. Vol, 1. p.570.
- ⁸ *Nelson Examiner*, 24 March 1860.
- ⁹ Mary Nicholson to her cousin, 25 March 1860
- ¹⁰ Mary Nicholson to her cousin, 14 July 1860.
- ¹¹ Mary Hobhouse to Eliza Hobhouse, 10 April 1861, 414/1, ATI.
- ¹² Bishop Hobhouse to his sister, Eliza, 13 April 1860, 414, ATI.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1860. 414/4 ATI.
- ¹⁴ *Nelson Examiner*, 19 December 1860.
- ¹⁵ Jane Maria Atkinson to her Mother, 29 April 1860, R/A Papers. Vol. 1. p. 572.
- ¹⁶ Maria Nicholson, *op. Cit.*, 14 July 1860.
- ¹⁷ MEH to Eliza, 10 April 1861, 414/4, ATL.
- ¹⁸ *Nelson Examiner*, 19 February 1862.
- ¹⁹ Mary Richmond to Emily Richmond, 10 March 1862. R/A Papers, Vol. 1.p. 751.
- ²⁰ Hobhouse to Eliza Hobhouse, 13 April 1860. ATL> MS 414.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 4 July 1861.
- ²² ME to Eliza, 4 April 1861. ATL MS 414/4.