

The Battle of Waireka.

By RUIHI.

PROBABLY but a small proportion of the readers of this Magazine have ever heard the soft name "Waireka." It is a Maori word, meaning "sweet water," and is the name of a little stream, near Omata which goes trickling down through fern-starred gullies, to lose itself at last in the blue Pacific. But it is a name dear to all who have lived long in this fair province of Taranaki. Forty years ago, in March 28th, of this year, was fought the Battle of Waireka, and on its anniversary, most of the survivors who took part in that battle visited (some of them for the last time) that never-to-be-forgotten spot.

The writer, the child of one of those early pioneers, with many others, had also the



The clump of bush on top of the hill was the site of the battle. The line of crosses from the beach was the attackers' advance. The four crosses show the gully the Maoris came down. Two crosses note the position held by Capt. Atkinson to prevent natives cutting off his retreat. The white spot on the beach is Omata rock, behind which a Maori was firing all day.

privilege of being present. The road leading to this historical spot is very lovely. The day was just such a one as that forty years ago, a sky blue as turquoise, and a sun dazzling in its brightness, and surely a scene of carnage was never enacted amid fairer surroundings.

The country round Waireka is very broken, and through it, crossing the little stream, winds a narrow red road—the same path up which our militia and volunteers fought their stubborn way forty years ago. At the top of the pathway, on the crest of the hill, the self-same fern trees keep sentry, the same clumps of flax which formed such excellent cover for friend and foe alike, still wave their broad green swords in the sunshine. In front, a little to the left, are those

most picturesque islets, the Sugar Loaves, washed by the waters of a little bay bluer than any mortal artist ever painted. The sea flows over black iron sands, and this gives a peculiar depth of colour to the water which washes these shores, and also a more intense whiteness to the edges of the waves running their never-ending races up the strand. In the background of the picture is our "White Lily," Mount Egmont, the sight of which no one ever wearies, and which is said to exert a Lorelei-like influence in drawing people back from

the ends of the earth, if they have once dwelt beneath its shadow. Such are the surroundings of Waireka—the battle-ground



F. R. Huff, COL. STAPP, Wanganui. The real hero of Waireka.

of forty years ago; and now for that battle's cause. News had reached the town of New Plymouth, four miles away, that three men, Shaw, Passmore and Ford, and later, two boys, Parker and Pote, had been done to death by the Maoris, their poor young bodies being cruelly tomahawked. More than this, the foolhardy settlers still remaining in these parts were also in danger. Of these last there were several families, amongst them that of the Rev. Henry Handley Brown, a name still loved and honoured all over this province, the Gilberts, the Touets, etc. When disquieting rumours had arisen, these families had been taken under the protection of, and been

declared *tapu* by a neutral chief, Robert Erangi, a great *rangatira*, and were adorned by his badge as a proof. But this did not prevent their friends in town feeling great anxiety, and their fears were not groundless.

The warship Niger was then at anchor off New Plymouth, and on the receipt of the news of these murders some of the blue jackets and part of the 65th Regiment, under Colonel Murray, marched away in the direction of Waireka, while the Taranaki militia and volunteers took the road along the beach towards the same spot. Immediately on arrival the lastnamed were hotly engaged by the enemy, who came pouring down from Omata village, a mile away. But headway was made against the foe, although the volunteers were hard pressed, for the soldiers and marines, operating on the left flank, afforded relief.



W. A. Collis, New Plymouth. CAPT. FRANK MACE, Waireka Veteran and Winner of N.Z. Cross.

But as the day was ending, to the consternation of all, came the bugle-sound, recalling Colonel Murray's men, and the

situation became grave indeed. A messenger was sent at great risk to represent things to the Colonel, and to tell him the ammunition was also running short, but Murray replied: "The volunteers have got themselves into this mess, let them get out of it as they best can. My orders are to return to New Plymouth at nightfall." Nothing could move his determination, and he marched away, leaving the volunteers to their fate. The "Hero of Waireka" he was afterwards called in derision. His officers were furious

people were hot within them at that time, and there were indeed few, if any, who would hear or say a word in his favour.

The gallant little band was now in a desperate plight, hemmed in as they were on all sides by a fierce and brave foe. They had taken their stand round a farmhouse at this time, and had made entrenchments of firewood, sheaves of oats, etc. So they faced the foe, and fought on expecting death. But all at once the smoke grew thinner, the rattle of musketry ceased, and silence



ROCKS AT OMATA, BEHIND WHICH MAORIS FIRED.

—indeed, more than one of them became conveniently deaf, and *failed to hear* the recall, and did not leave the battle-field. It is but fair to say the Colonel believed himself bound and fettered by red tape, and compelled to act as he did. He had been many years a soldier, yet Waireka was his first battle. His promotion had been consequently slow, and even now he was only a Brevet-Colonel. It is easier to judge after all these years, but the hearts of the

reigned as the shades of night closed round them. Was it some trick on the part of the dark-skinned foe, some plot to take them unawares? they wondered, but nothing stirred. After the young crescent moon had set, the little band crept out, pausing often to listen, but hearing nothing save the beat of the surf on the beach, or the cry of some wheeling seagull. They called in a small detachment of men stationed on the beach, and slowly and noiselessly began their

march homeward, carrying with them their dead and wounded, and stumbling now and then over the dead body of one who had

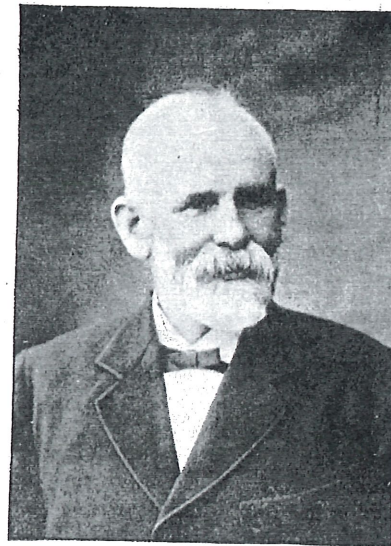


W. A. Collis, New Plymouth.
MR. ANTONIO RODRIQUEZ,
Waireka Veteran and Winner of N.Z. Cross.

been their foe, and so they reached home at last.

Afterwards the mystery was explained. Captain Cracroft (a name beloved throughout Taranaki), of the Niger, four miles away in New Plymouth, had heard of the desperate plight of the volunteers, and resolved to rescue them with the help of sixty of his gallant bluejackets. But who could act as guide. Now there was one in the town who knew every inch of the road, but *he* had been summoned to give evidence respecting the murdered boys, so he was not available. But Captain Cracroft was not to be beaten. He surrounded him in a hollow square with his bluejackets, and compelled him, a willing enough victim, to march forward. Soon they reached a *pa* on the crest of a hill half-a-mile from Waireka; they rushed it, taking possession, and

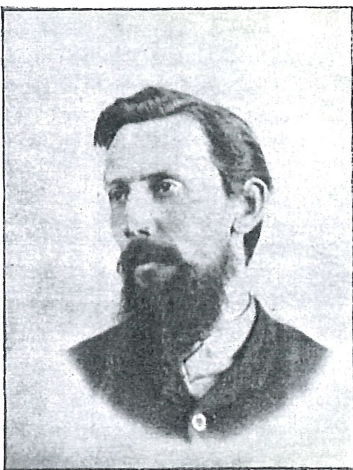
capturing the red flag, which afterwards floated proudly on one of the masts of the Niger. A diversion was thus created, the attacking Maoris hastily leaving their quarry in the farmyard, withdrew, weary and too dispirited to face another foe, and left their wounded and dead behind them. This was the turning point of the Maori war in Taranaki. Well it was that the Battle of Waireka was won by the *pakeha*. Had it been otherwise the Maoris, who were expecting strong reinforcements, had arranged to march to New Plymouth, and take the town, with its handful of men and boys, and its crowd of defenceless women and children. Had it been so, there would have been no veterans to celebrate their victory at Waireka, no descendants of those sturdy pioneers to people Taranaki to-day. It was most interesting to listen to the talk of these forty old soldiers fighting in memory their battle o'er again, on this its



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MR. CHISENHALL HAMERTON,
Wounded at Waireka.

40th anniversary. Colonel Stapp, the *real* hero of Waireka, was there on this day, soldierly and upright still. "He was a *rake*

leader," I heard an old Irishman exclaim. "He was brave himself, and made his men feel brave, too." And so in truth he was. It is said that on another occasion when a battle was raging, he stood on a fence fully exposed to the fire of the enemy, calling to the Maoris "to make a shoot," and that, filled with superstitious awe, not one of them raised a musket. Not many weeks ago he faced a grimmer, and yet more relentless foe, faced him just as bravely as he did the dark-skinned Maori at Waireka forty years ago. He had no fear of death,



MR. FRED. RAWSON.

Fatally Wounded at Waireka.

and gladly obeyed the orders of his Great General, to lay aside his arms and cease his warfare.

There were two New Zealand crosses to be seen on the field of Waireka on the battle's anniversary. These are of silver—maltese in shape—with a crown and garland of gold, and the owner of each is in receipt of £10 a year. One of the veterans present still carries in his body, and will carry to his dying day, a bullet that a Maori fired into him all those years ago. It was interesting, too, to climb to the top of a hill ear by, the very hill upon which stood the Maori chiefs, forty years ago, watching the battle rage, and directing operations. From

thence we could see the little by-road on which was blown the bugle summoning Colonel Murray's men to retire. Up that little strip of saffron-coloured road rushed the gallant Cracroft's brave marines, and by that hedge yonder, on that memorable day, stood a Maori, brave as any Englishman, wrapped in his red blanket, and placidly building himself a trench while the bullets whizzed round him, yet harmed him not.

Such was the Battle of Waireka. Later on in November of the same year came (for this district) the crowning mercy of Mahoetahi. The Taranakis had, after Waireka, been reinforced by three Waikato chiefs and their followers. Weteni Taiporotu was the name of the leader, and all three were veritable sons of Anak. This is, very briefly, the story of Mahoetahi. The Maoris took up a position two or three miles from Waitara, but with a Boer-like contempt of the English, failed to properly fortify and entrench. Accordingly there was a comparatively easy victory for our arms, our losses being four killed and sixteen wounded, while nearly seventy Maoris bit the dust on that day. I have heard my mother tell how the anxious wives and mothers of New Plymouth hurried to the town to meet our returning heroes, among whom was my father. In the midst of the column was a string of bullock carts, bearing ammunition, and there was one also which held the three dead Waikato chiefs. From the back of the last she saw protruding their huge, dark-skinned feet. It was a sight which will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it. These three *rangatiras* were buried in a corner of what now is the garden of St. Mary's Vicarage, and the last time I passed them by it seemed as if a bit of heaven itself had fluttered down to cover them, so blue was the sheet of hyacinths spreading above them.

Thus were the battles of Waireka and Mahoetahi fought and won. It is surely good for us young New Zealanders to hear for ourselves from the lips of those who fought in them, how this goodly heritage was won for us nearly half a century ago.

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Australian Poets and Their Work.

BY EDITH G. WOOLCOTT.

PART I.

"Here is a land whose large, imperial grace
Must tempt thee, Goddess, in thine holy place!
Here are the dells of peace and plenitude,
The hills of morning and the slopes of noon;
Here are the waters dear to days of blue,
And dark-green hollows of the noontide dew;
Here lies the harp, by fragrant wood-winds fanned,
That waits the coming of thy quickening hand!
And shall Australia, framed and set in sea
August with glory, wait in vain for thee?
Shall more than Tempe's beauty be unsung
Because its shine is strange—its colours young?"

This beauteous appeal of "a singer of the dawn" fitly introduces the whole subject of Australian verse. Moreover, the lines contain a far-off hint of reproach which can hardly fail to touch our own conscience. What have we of to-day done to hasten the coming of that "quickening hand," which this "sweet dead singer, buried by the sea," predicted must awaken the wondrous music slumbering in Australia's many-mooded clime?

We have not yet realised our responsibilities as colonial readers of colonial literature. Many of us know a line here and a line there from the writings of some of these poets, but, even where the necessary leisure for study has been ours, of what value has been the support we have accorded to the chanters of this new land? Because the "shine is strange, the colours young," it does not necessarily follow that the colouring is all crude, or the shine dull. We are ready to show a reverence for Longfellow, to bow before the genius of Tennyson, to concede the talent of Browning, for years of acquaintance and usage have convinced us of the worth of these writers.

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that, hitherto, we have taken little trouble to discover the surprising beauties, the loveliness of thought expressed in much of their verse. Have we appreciated, even ever so faintly, the yearning which made Kendall cry for

"One hour
Of life, pre-eminent with perfect power,"

that he might—

"leave a song whose lonely rays
May shine hereafter from these songless days?"

Nor have we essayed to sympathetically understand his—

"Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion
Lyrics with beats like the heartbeats of passion—
Songs interwoven of lights and of laughers."

Have we discovered whether Victor Daley has fulfilled his own expressed desire to write—

"Love-lyrics delicate as lilac scent,
Soft idylls woven of wind, and flower, and
stream"?

Then, must Will Ogilvie's grand song of "The Men who Blazed the Track" remain an unknown psalm to us?

"Here's a toast for you, comrades o' mine:
To the fighting band that won the land
From the bitterest wastes out back!
From hut and hall to the kings of all—
'The Men who Blazed the Track!'

"They rode away into the forest
In mornings gold-studded with stars,
And the song of the leaders was chorused
To the clinking of rowel and bars;
They fought for the fame of the Islands,
And struck for the width of the world;
They fashioned new roads in the silence,
And flags in the fastness unfurled.

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