

eColenso

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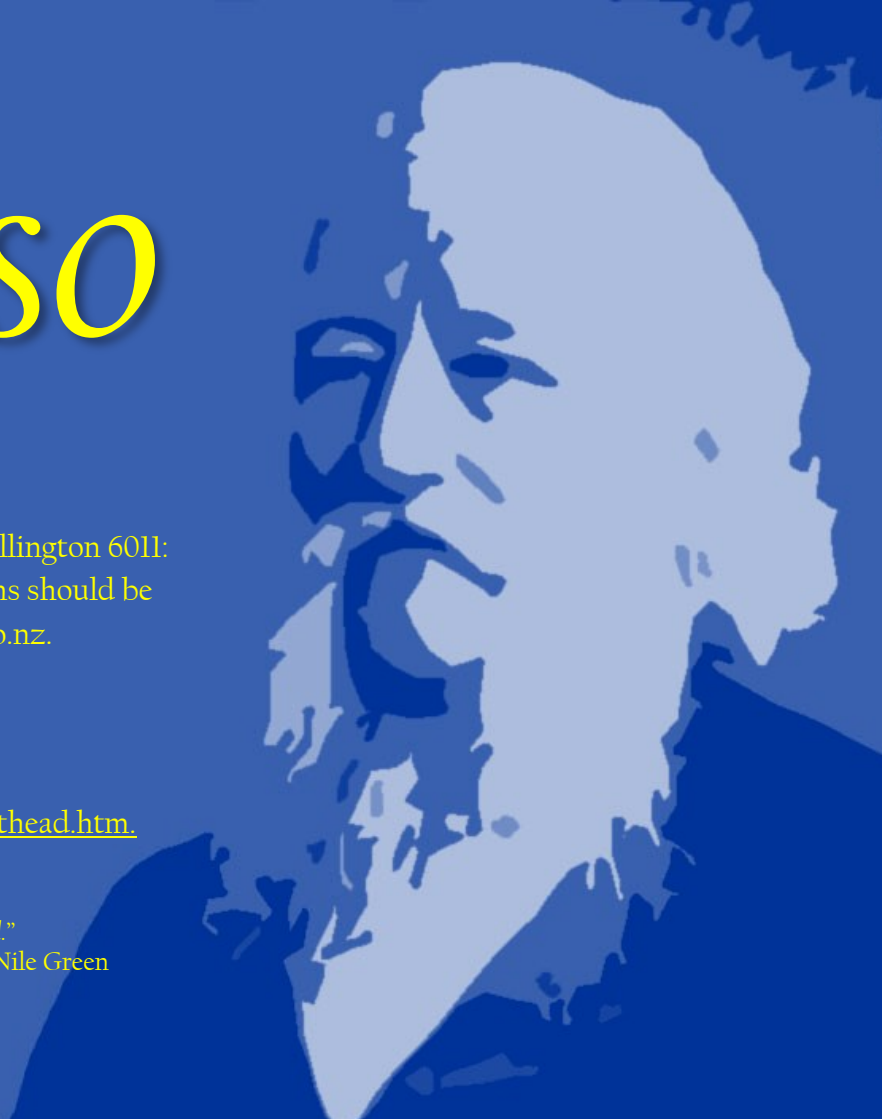
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“At ground level, all history is microhistory, accumulated and aggregated.”

—Nile Green



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I have no pet theory; I only seek the truth; to do what little I may towards establishing it.

—William Colenso.

Mr. Colenso and Dr. Hocken

Bagnall & Petersen wrote,

G. M. Thomson, of Dunedin... had published in 1882 his *Ferns and Fern Allies of New Zealand*, and about the same time was seeking contributions for his *New Zealand Journal of Science*, a worthy attempt at a more frequent and popular scientific periodical than the *Transactions*. Colenso acknowledged the request and commented on the book in no enthusiastic terms:

... I as an old & diligent fern student of 50 years, easily detect wherein you are wrong—and hence I write.... On the whole and only after much consideration I have decided it best not to send you the Ruahine journey MSS for your new serial, also not to write for it a Memoir of A. Cunningham, as intended. We seem so diametrically opposed in our Botanical views, etc., that I think I had better keep out of your arena altogether; ... I have no desire to be either tacitly passing by or always correcting of error

The letter contained a detailed commentary on what Colenso considered to be mistakes in the book. Dr Hocken, who afterwards acquired the letter, wrote at the bottom:

“The above is a good specimen of Colenso’s nasty, bitter way in criticism. He was a jealous man & was loth to allow that anyone in N.Z. knew much about N.Z. botany but himself....”

Why was the little doctor (5ft 2in) so upset? Wasn’t Colenso’s reply truthful and reasonable? Was there some other “history” between Hocken and Colenso, before Hocken annotated Colenso’s letter?



DR. T. M. HOCKEN.



Actually all of Colenso's references to Hocken are warm. Hocken was a subscriber to Colenso's Ruahine book in 1884. With Augustus Hamilton (by then in Dunedin) he visited Colenso in Napier in February 1895 and Colenso later wrote of "that memorable afternoon spent with Dr. Hocken, 'such as I may never have again'".

They met several times in Napier, as Colenso recorded in his diary and wrote to Harding (on a couple of occasions misspelling Hocken as Hocking, mind you).

Hocken was clearly seeking examples of Colenso's early printing to add to his collection and following the visit he wrote with a gift of spectacles; Colenso replied

March 16th. 1895.

Dear Dr. Hocken,

"Eureka"! I gladly exclaimed this morning, on receiving & reading your doubly kind epistle & gift: indeed, I hardly know how to thank you for both—the letter itself being so full of ready kindness. I will reply at once, to show my earnest desire to aid you....

With you—I can truly & feelingly say,—I look back with pleasure on the few hours we spent together here,—“hoping” (as you say) “that another year may see it renewed.” Thanks for your kind remembrance of me & my old work, when dining at Wellington, en route, with Sir Robert Stout....

Re your enquiry—[here he went on to discuss Hocken's requests for books, then continued],

What can I say to your kind & thoughtful gift of specs.? (& I am ashamed—until I make some kind of, or attempt at, return.) I have tried them, with great pleasure; they seem to fit

me capitally. Curiously enough, only last Friday (8th), when down in town, I brought away with me from Cooper's shop 6 pairs of “smoked” specs. on trial, 5 of them having side glasses,—but all are too dark, and I was about to return them when your boon arrived!—

And then, last, but not least, your kind, aye loving & valued Invitation. Heigh ho! I am overwhelmed: I hope yet to do something in return.—

Believe me,

Dear Dr. Hocken,

Sincerely yours,

W. Colenso.

He mentioned this in a letter to Harding,

I have received a very kind letter from Dr. Hocken together w. a pair of specs., slightly tinted & suitable, he says, for my eyes, & also a very kind & pressing Invitation to visit Dunedin & put up at his ‘nice & comfortable house’.

December 1895,

A long & excellent letter to hand from Dr. Hocken—again! begging me to visit Dunedin, &c, &c.

But then in April 1896, he wrote to Harding about what he called

... a foolish idiotic letter in “Herald” early in Feby., re mis-called, mis-written, mispronounced Maori names—of 40–50 years ago, (even from Jerningham Wakefield's precious book!!) The “Professor” (after Kirk!) claiming as his “friend” Dr. Hocken of Dunedin! I immy. wrote to Dr.H. sending him the paper, & pointing out the “rot”, or “fad”:—and by my plain & truthful speaking I have lost his friendship.

Oh dear. The letter (*at right*) to the editor was a serious one, written by Professor EE Morris, an Australian academic who was indeed a friend of Hocken, and who was quite properly gathering material for a perfectly respectable dictionary of Australasian English, which was indeed published later.

Why did Colenso get this so wrong? why was such a good friendship as his with Hocken so easily wrecked? "...by my plain & truthful speaking I have lost his friendship" he wailed.

He was offended by Kirk's, (and therefore he thought Morris's) assuming the title of "professor"; he regarded himself as the prime authority on te reo and yet had not been asked; and I think he actually *misread* Morris's letter as somehow defending English-derived te reo neologisms. Of these he had written in 1883, "why is it that so many new words and phrases in broken-English are constantly being thrust forward in official Maori documents and papers as if they were proper Maori words?"

Colenso once quoted St Jerome: "If an offence come out of the Truth, better is it that the offence come than that the Truth be concealed."

Poor advice for keeping friends.

DICTIONARY OF AUSTRALASIAN ENGLISH.

SIR,—Would you kindly give me your assistance in the following matter? I am collecting material for a dictionary of Australasian English. This may be defined as "all the new words and new use of words added to the English language in Australasia." During a short sojourn in New Zealand I have been trying to complete a collection (begun some time ago of New Zealand words, most of which are taken from the Maori. In such a dictionary it is advisable not only to give the words with an explanation of their meaning, and if possible of their origin, but to insert instances of their use, arranged in chronological order as in the Oxford English Dictionary, edited in chief by Dr. Murray. Following the example of the editors of that splendid dictionary, I want now to ask the kind assistance of some amongst your readers in collecting from books, periodicals, or newspapers quotations to illustrate the use of the various words in the following list. Such quotations should vary from one to a few lines, from eight or ten up to 50 words,

unless a longer passage should offer a very clear explanation of the thing described. If in the list a date precedes the word, a passage of earlier date is wanted; if it follow, then a later passage; if there be no date at all, any passage will be welcome. Each quotation should be written on a separate small slip of paper, with the word at the head, and then the source, together with the date of publication, in every case. The following would be instances of headings:—

1845—E. J. Wakefield, *Adventures in New Zealand*, vol. 1, p. 29
1863—T. Mosser, *Mahoe Leaves*, p. 30
1896—HAWKE'S BAY HERALD, January 27, p. 2, col. 2

As I am about returning to Melbourne, I should be glad if answers to my request were sent to the following address:—"Professor Morris, care of Dr. Hocken, Dunedin." May I also add, *Bis dat qui cito dat*? It would be of great advantage to me to obtain the information soon; and, lastly, may I heartily thank in advance those who are willing to help me?—I am, &c.,

EDWARD E. MORRIS.
Riverton, January 28th.

LIST:

Ambrite. Captain Cooker. Copper Maori. Danite. Putash. Go-sebore. 1849. Gcodileite. Haeremai. 1892. Hani. 1873. Hapu. 1873. Hoot (money, or payment). Kai. 1845. 1889. Kana. Kinaki. 1873. Kohua. Kokowai. 1845. 1881. Mana. Maori-head. Pake. Pipa (clay). Pateka. 1845. Pana. 1820. Pigdog. 1845. Pipi. 1820. 1845. Porangi. 1845. Rna. 1845. Talaha. 1881. Talo. 1883. Tohoru (whale). 1893. Tohanea. Tipua (or rupa), 1845. Tuatara. 1863. Umu (oven). 1845. 1845. Utu. 1855. Vant. 1863. 1873. Walpiro. 1873. 1874. Waka. 1874. Weta. 1869. Whale-feed. 1869. Whate. 1845. 1845. Wiwi (French), 1859.

LIST OF BIRDS.

Blight-bird. 1888. Canary (N.Z.). 1873. Creeper (N.Z.). 1888. Fern-bird. 1888. Laughing jackass (or owl). Kakariki. 1869. Kea. 1872. korimako (or bell-bird). 1872. 1872. Kukupu (or wood pigeon). 1883. 1888. Miro (robby). Mutton-bird. Parera (duck). 1863. Parson-bird. Piwakawaka. 1835. 1888. Rileman. Roa. 1888. Saddle-back. 1888. Silver-eye. 1888. Siltch-bird. Whio. Whakau. 1869.

LIST OF FISH.

Butter-fish. Butterfly-fish. Cock-a-bully. Elephant-fish. Groper. 1894. Hapuku. 1872. Hoki. 1872. Inanga. 1845. Kahawai (or kawai). 1845. Kanae. 1820. Kelp-fish. King-fish. Mako. Pleton-herring. Maori-chief. Moki. 1820. Oarfish. Patiki. Piharan. 1845. Poddly. 1872. Skelp-jack. 1872. Smooth-hound. Spotty. Tamure. 1845. Warehou. Yellow-tail.

LIST OF TREES, &c.

Broad-leaf. Bullybul. Christmas tree (pohutukawa). 1867. Hout. Iron-heart. 1872. 1873. Kabikatea. 1888. Kaka-bill. Karami. Kareau (eupple-jack) 1845. 1835. Kauri. Koraddy and variations. 1872. Koromiko. 1845. Kamera. Lacebark. 1863. Mahoe. Matagory. Maori-cabbage. 1845. Manuka. Mapan. 1883. Mai (or matai). 1875. Miro (pine). 1875. 1883. Nelmel. 1888. Nikau. Ngato (or karo). Pi'an. 1845. 1892. Punga (or banger). Grams. 1854. Rata. 1845. Raupe. 1883. Rewarewa. Spianard. Spear-grass. 1867. Supple jack. Tarato. Thousand-jackies. Ti (not tea). 1845. 1857. Toot. Tooted.

In a good American dictionary I find "Imou-pine, N.Z." Is this a known variant of rimu?—E. E. M.



The NZ polymath: Colenso and his contemporaries

Wellington 17–19 November

Owls do cry

Owls belong to the order Strigiformes, constituting 200 extant bird of prey species. Most are solitary and nocturnal... Wikipedia.

I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert.
Psalm 102: 6.

*There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly.* Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

William Colenso sometimes mentioned owls' cries in his writing, usually to enhance a sense of solemnity, solitude and isolation...

March 1845: *The Natives lay in groups around; no one spoke nor moved, save an owl upon a neighbouring tree, which ever and anon hooted forth, as if in solemn derision....*

March 1846: *The birds were very few—and a death-like silence reigned, not even broken by the solitary owl.*

October 1851: *And the solitude,—which is only broken by the rush of dark water, and the shrill beating of the fitful mountain blasts against the grey cliffs, and ... at night, by the additional hooting of a lonely owl, the plaintive cry of the weka calling to its mate, and the mournful wail of the wio, all lonesome birds—is intense & almost unbearable....*

At the end of the forest I halted, and sitting down on a fallen tree, I wept & prayed. It was now getting dark; the night wind moaned through the trees; while a solitary owl perched near me kept uttering its mournful cry.

Pallas Athene was the goddess of wisdom and was so impressed by the great eyes and solemn appearance of the owl that she made the night bird her favourite. Athene's bird was a European Little Owl, (*Athena noctua*). New Zealand's little owl is Ruru (*Athena novae-zealandiae*) and Colenso wrote about it in the *Transactions*...

**A few stray Notes on the New Zealand Owl,
Athena novae-zealandiae, Gml.—Ruru and Koukou of the
Maoris, and Morepork of the Settlers**

Transactions of the New Zealand Institute 1888 21: 200-205, read before the Hawke's Bay Philosophical Institute, 8th October, 1888.

When he heard the owls at midnight
Hooting, laughing in the forest,
"What is that?" he cried in terror;
"What is that," he said, "Nokomis?"
And the good Nokomis answered:
"That is but the owl and owlet,
Talking in their native language,
Talking, scolding at each other."

—*Hiawatha*, Canto III.

SEVERAL years ago—from 1844 to 1853—it was my lot to be often travelling on duty in the Wairarapa district. On one of those occasions I wished to reach the Maori village at the mouth of the Pahawa River on the east coast from the upper part of the Wairarapa Valley. In travelling thither we brought up for the night at the edge of a thicket, where my tent was pitched under a tree. My travelling companions and baggage-bearers, being weary with a long day's journey, were soon asleep, while I sat up reading, enjoying the stillness of the night, for it was a beautiful calm and moonlight one. Presently I heard a strange noise, or rather a succession of strange and peculiar unusual

noises, such as I had never heard before. These were repeated over and over, in different and strange keys and semi-discordant tones, mixed with shrill hissing, and seemed as if coming from some creatures over my head; and at last, as I could not stand it any longer, I unlaced the door of my tent and got out. Keeping quiet, and concealing myself and looking up, I saw two owls on a rather bare extended horizontal branch of the tree only a few feet above me, and these were a pair, male and female, carrying on their courtship in the most strange manner imaginable. Such a grotesque sight I never saw before or since. The manner in which they acted; their pantomimic movements—half sedate and half funny—the gentleman owl advancing from his end of the branch with his head-feathers trimmed and set up *cap-à-pie*, and his wings let down, making with them a jarring noise as if he were a little turkey-cock, and at the same time uttering all manner of strange wooing sounds, high and low, short and long; and then the lady owl, on her part, retreating to the further end of the branch with measured step and slow, turning round, bridling herself up, hissing, and scornfully resenting the behaviour of the other; also, at times, uttering strange noises, and adjusting her feathers to suit her scornful affected prude demeanour. Then the disappointed beau would slowly retire, making other peculiar sounds, to his end of the branch; when the lady would again come forward, very slowly and coquettingly, to her old position, and in a short time the gentleman owl would re-enact the solemn fun as before, only to be again served in the same kind of way. Such a mixture of strange sounds and grimaces, of pure bird *persiflage*, was unique and unusual. Words fail me fully to describe them; it was most ludicrous to behold them. The usual solemn gravity of the bird seems to have been abandoned or burlesqued. I watched them for about half an hour, when, as their play was still being carried on without alteration, I returned to my tent. I could not help thinking, from observing the extreme suitability of that long horizontal half-denuded branch, with its bunch of

leafy sprays at both ends, for their wooing and serenading,—and bearing in mind how confined the owl naturally is in its short flights, and prone to return to its haunts and perches,—that that branch was used as an old trysting-place by owls. I did laugh most heartily, though quietly, at this serio-comic performance; and whenever I have thought thereon, during these many subsequent years, it has always caused me to laugh outright.

I dare say some of my audience are acquainted with that charming book of Natural History, Gilbert White's "History of Selborne," so highly prized at home by our fathers. To those who know it, I need not say anything about it; but to those who do not, I would say—it is a most interesting book, written by an accomplished and loving naturalist, a keen and attentive observer of Nature in her manifold forms, but especially at home in his many and diverse observations on birds, as well as other animals: it is not a "dry" book. Mr. White was born at Selborne, in Hampshire, England, where, after his return from the University of Oxford, he quietly resided all his days, so spending an amiable, unambitious, and useful life, and died at an advanced age, much regretted. He steadily refused all church preferment, and during the last few years of his life officiated as curate of Selborne. His standard work has gone through several editions, and has always been highly esteemed by all lovers of Nature. Here I may be allowed to give a short sentence from its preface, written by himself exactly a hundred years ago (1788): "If the writer should at all appear to have induced any of his readers to pay a more ready attention to the wonders of the creation, too frequently overlooked as common occurrences, his purpose will be fully answered. But if he should not have been successful in any of these his intentions, yet there remains this consolation behind—that these his pursuits, by keeping the body and mind employed, have, under Providence, contributed to much health and cheerfulness of spirits, even to old age."

Among his numerous scientific correspondents, one, who then stood prominently, was the celebrated working British naturalist Pennant, who was himself a correspondent of Linnæus. (Some of the works of Pennant are on our library shelves: and his name is maintained and recorded among us in this country as that of a botanical genus, in our curious New Zealand forest-tree, *Pennantia*, so named by Forster.) And in an early letter from White to Pennant he makes a very similar complaint to that which I also drew your attention to in my "Presidential Address" four months ago. White says: "It has been my misfortune never to have had any neighbours whose studies have led them towards the pursuit of natural knowledge; so that, for want of a companion to quicken my industry and sharpen my attention, I have made but slender progress in a kind of information to which I have been attached from my childhood."

To return. On this subject of the variations in the hooting of owls, White has some shrewd remarks, bearing, I think, on this part of owl-conduct I have just narrated; though it does not appear that White, or his correspondents, had known the reason or cause of the variations they had noticed in the owl dialect. White says: "A friend remarks that most of his owls hoot in B flat; but that one went almost half a note below A. The pipe he tried their notes by was a common half-crown pitch-pipe, such as masters use for the tuning of harpsichords; it was the common London pitch." And, again, White remarks: "A neighbour of mine, who is said to have a nice ear, remarks that the owls about this village hoot in three different keys—in G flat or F sharp, in B flat, and A flat. He heard two hooting to each other, the one in A flat and the other in B flat. Query: Do these different notes proceed from different species, or only from various individuals?" (*loc. cit.*, pp. 234, 235.)

Other and very interesting remarks by White, on owls, are to be found in his letters. An extract from one in particular I will give you. It is

contained in a letter to the Hon. Daines Barrington, whom you may remember hearing of as taking a long journey (in those days) to Mousehole, at the extreme end of Cornwall (close to my native place, and not far from the Land's End), to see and converse with the celebrated old fisherwoman, Dolly Pentreath—said to have been the last person who spoke the ancient Cornish language. White says: "We have had ever since I can remember a pair of white owls that constantly bred under the eaves of this church. As I have paid good attention to the manner of life of these birds during their season of breeding, which lasts the summer through, the following remarks may not be unacceptable: About an hour before sunset (for then the mice begin to run) they sally forth in quest of prey, and hunt all round the hedges of meadows and small enclosures for them, which seem to be their only food. In this irregular country we can stand on an eminence and see them beat the fields over like a setting-dog, and often drop down in the grass or corn. I have minuted these birds by my watch for an hour together, and have found that they return to their nest, the one or the other of them, about once in five minutes; reflecting at the same time on the adroitness that every animal is possessed of as far as regards the well-being of itself and offspring. But a piece of address, which they show when they return loaded, should not, I think, be passed over in silence. As they take their prey with their claws, so they carry it in their claws to their nest: but, as their feet are necessary in their ascent under the tiles, they constantly perch first on the roof of the chancel, and shift the mouse from their claws to their bill, that their feet may be at liberty to take hold of the plate on the wall as they are rising under the eaves. ... The plumage of the remiges of the wings of every species of owl that I have yet examined is remarkably soft and pliant. Perhaps it may be necessary that the wings of these birds should not make much resistance or rushing, that they may be enabled to steal through the air unheard upon a nimble and watchful quarry. ... When brown owls hoot their throats swell as big as a hen's egg. I have known an owl of this spe-

cies live a full year without any water. Perhaps the case may be the same with all birds of prey. When owls fly they stretch out their legs behind them as a balance to their heavy heads; for as most nocturnal birds have large eyes and ears they must have large heads to contain them. Large eyes, I presume, are necessary to collect every ray of light, and large concave ears to command the smallest degree of sound or noise" (*l.c.*, pp. 245, 246).

And all these apt quotations naturally bring me back to the main subject of this paper—our little New Zealand owl.

Probably none of you present have ever been in an unfrequented New Zealand forest many years ago—say, half a century, or forty years. Then those woods teemed with bird-life, so widely different to what has obtained of later years. Then our little New Zealand owl was to be often seen snugly ensconced in some sheltered umbrageous nook, and not unfrequently nestling close under the fronds of the tree-fern (*Cyathea dealbata*). There, for me, such would have ever remained unmolested, but not so by the smaller birds—denizens of the forest; for, as soon as his retreat was discovered by them, the battle, or rather the mobbing, began. The incessant noise the little fellows made brought up their friends from all quarters, and I have been sometimes astonished to see the great number—the cloud—of those small birds so quickly got together; and then, too, their apparent fearlessness or carelessness of my presence, of which they seemed to take no notice, so filled with rage were they and so very intent on insulting their common enemy. But while they would often fly up quite close to him, yet they never laid hold of him or touched him with their beaks; not a feather flew. Still the owl did not like it, and tried hard to get at them without removing from his perch, by thrusting forth his head and fiercely snapping his beak; and while I could see the difference in the dilation of the pupils of his eyes, which sometimes glared on the disturbers of his sleep and peace, yet I doubted if he clearly saw

them, although he must have heard them plainly enough. I have never known the owl at such times to make any sound. Occasionally I have seen the so-persecuted bird fly away to some other neighbouring tree or bush; but in so doing he would generally make a woeful mistake, sometimes by coming abruptly against a branch, or between the close-growing canes of supplejacks (*Rhipogonum*), and sometimes by lighting in a less secure place, where the enemy could surround him, and then another fly-away would take place, and I have watched him fly back to his old quarters; but it always seemed as if there would be no rest, no peace, for him while day-light lasted; and then, no doubt, the tables were turned upon his persecutors with heavy interest.

There being formerly no mice in this country, and I suppose our little New Zealand owl was far too diminutive to attack the now extinct New Zealand rat, and the small birds of the woods being then so exceedingly plentiful, these no doubt formed its chief articles of food, and this the little aerial legions well knew, and so naturally united to persecute him. I have good reasons, however, for knowing that some of our larger insects, especially of the Orthopterous order, as the big grasshoppers in the plains, and the wetas (*Deinacrida* and *Hemideina*) in the forests, formed a portion of the food of our owl; and now since mice have been introduced and become so numerous, and the indigenous small birds on the other hand have become so scarce, our owl does his share in the economy of nature to keep their number down, and therefore should never be wantonly destroyed as if he were an enemy and invader of the “rights of man.”

Before I close I would briefly refer to that exquisitely conceived and highly natural legendary fable of the ancient Maoris—viz., the great fixed “battle between the land and sea birds,”—which has always served to remind me of Homer’s battle between the frogs and mice—in which our little owl, who could not join the great united army of land birds in the long day’s sanguinary conflict, owing to his being a

nocturnal bird; yet, at the close of that prolonged fight, when the sea birds were utterly routed, distinguished himself by acting as a brave herald-trumpeter, and so added to their fear by joining in the pursuit with his insulting discordant note of ironical derision—*toā koē! toā koē!*—thou (art) brave! thou (art) victor! These words are ludicrously Maorified from the owls’ common note of *koū koū! koū koū!* by a kind of onomatopœia—so common among the Maoris, and which a Maori, by a slight twist in the pronunciation, and more particularly when made in the mimicking tone, would cause them to pretty nearly resemble.

Having referred to that ancient Maori fable of the battle of the land and sea birds, in which nearly all our indigenous land birds are brought to the fore to repel the invaders, to fight and to perform prodigies of valour, even to the including of the piwakawaka, *Rhipidura flabellifera*, Gml.—the pied fantail-flycatcher—I would just call your attention to the grave fact of the total omission of the gigantic moa (*Dinornis*, sps.), and of all allusion to it, as a further proof of what some of you have already more than once heard from me, that *the ancient Maori did not know of its living existence as a bird*; for, if they did, they would have assuredly brought it prominently forward on that occasion as their great hero and redoubted champion, and the dreadful foe of the sea-birds, to whom, as giants in the battle-field, Goliath of Gath, or Og of Bashan, would have been but puny comparisons. That one plain and striking list of negative evidence, *re* the age in which the moa existed, has ever seemed to me to be of far greater value than all the loud and fussy statements of modern Maoris, made to suit the times and the wishes and questions of zealous European inquirers.



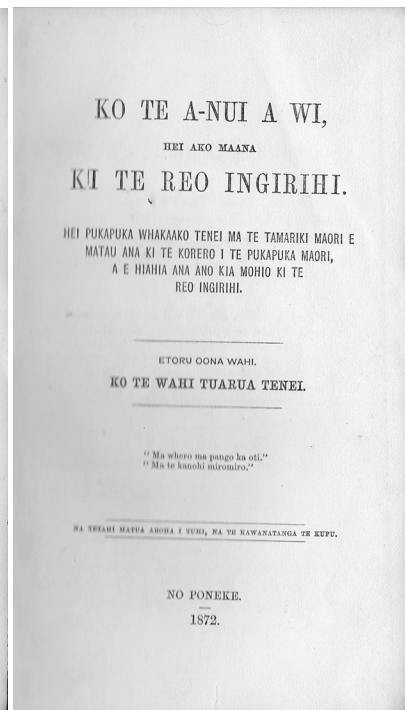
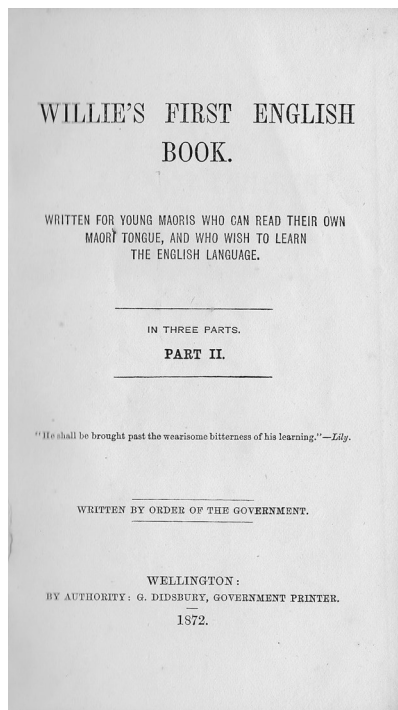
Willie's first English book

William Colenso named his primer for Maori children *Willie's first English book: written for young Maoris who can read their own Maori tongue, and who wish to learn the English language* (Government Printer, Wellington, 1872). It bears the subtitle "Written by order of the Government" and had been commissioned by Native Secretary Dr Edward Shortland (for Native Minister William Fox) nine years earlier, in 1863,¹ and was never finished.² Colenso's diaries of that period are missing.

Bagnall & Petersen noted, "It appears to have been unduly long in composition, which delay was unpleasantly commented upon by the Native Secretary when forwarding £150 lexicon allowance for the period March to December, 1866: '... I am to add that as you have failed in your smaller undertaking the Government must be satisfied that the larger one is substantially progressing before a further grant can be made.'"³

Colenso's son Wiremu was known to all as "Willie". It may have been written and named for him—when it was commissioned in 1863 Wiremu was 12 and had just returned to live with his father. On the other hand in 1872 when it was finally published Wiremu was 21, no longer a child, and had been well taught at Napier High School and his Cornish finishing school and was working as a seaman.

In his first letter to the Native Minister advocating the development of elementary school books and a Maori Lexicon, Colenso had written, of Willie,



I may add, that, during the past 12 months, I have had a particular opportunity of proving the truth of what I have herein stated: having had a little half-caste Boy (during that period) residing with me, whom I have been teaching both Maori and English. When he came he knew not a letter of either; now, however, he can Read and Write in both. From all the English Primers and Spelling-Books published, that I could find (either here or in Wellington), I have gained but little real assistance.—

Still sore from Bishop Selwyn's dismissing him from the clergy, Colenso wrote that, "in order to the greater and more general use of the work, all words and sentences of a strictly religious nature have been purposely omitted." At the time he was school inspector and supported a secular Education Act;⁴ later he would write against Bibles in schools.^{5,6} The Church reaction to the secular content of the 1877 Act is explored by Sangster.⁷

Perhaps the book was named in honour of Willie. A letter from CJ Parr in the AG Bagnall papers in the Turnbull Library (88-103-1/17) appears to assume so,

In Williams Bibliography under the year 1872 appears "Willie's First Book Part I & II. By Wm. Colenso." Surely, even after 20 years, rather an unfortunate title.

There is another possible source of the title: in 1857 *Willie's first drawing lessons* appeared, written by "A lady", published by Thomas Nelson & Sons, London, and illustrated with numerous engravings by Philip Henry Delamotte 1820–1889. Delamotte had illustrated the later 19th century editions of Gilbert White's *Natural history of Selborne*, of which Colenso had written, "... that charming book of Natural History, Gilbert White's 'History of Selborne,' so highly prized at home by our fathers."⁸ He had ordered it through Sir William Hooker in 1842.

I suspect school inspector Colenso knew of *Willie's first drawing lessons*, saw how apt an altered version of that title would be for his own planned book and changed the words to suit.

Later, others, with keen educationalist cynicism, altered the words to suit their own purposes: the short silent film *Willie's first smoke* was produced by the Edison Manufacturing Company in 1899 and again by the Selig Polyscope Company in 1903 ("Willie enjoys his first

cigar with the usual results. The 'internal trouble' consequent upon a first trial is rendered comic by the unfeeling jeers of Willie's exultant companions"⁹).

A French version (does it matter with silent movies?), *Le premier cigare de Willy* appeared in 1912, one of many Willy short films directed by Joseph Faivre.

References

1. Colenso to McLean 25 August 1873 (about payment for the Maori Lexicon): "I have since seen in the Hansard what was said, and I find you were all wrong:—you, in saying I had received £1180. (here is an error of nearly £200, as the Treasury has always lumped together the payments for the Lexicon and those for the Elementary Books &c., lately published: this latter being a separate affair, arranged for in '63, when Dr. Shortland was N.M.)"
2. Colenso to McLean 23 November 1872: "Last week Locke shewed copies of Parts I & II of that English-Maori work of mine, which I hear is in request. Could you pass the word for me to have a copy of each part (or, 3 copies of each part)? And, by-and-bye, when you are less busy,—tell me, *whether you would wish the work to be continued.*" Apparently McLean did not, as Part III was never published.
3. Native Secretary to Colenso 2 May 1867 (N.D. Letter Book I, p. 480).
4. Colenso to McLean 14 September 1871: "I hope you will pass a really good Education Act—one, wholly secular, I should prefer—and such will be by & bye, here & elsewhere as the world gets wiser."
5. Colenso W 1880. The Bible in Schools. Hawke's Bay Herald June 7.
6. Colenso W 1880. The Bible in Schools II. Hawke's Bay Herald June 8.
7. Sangster, A 1984. The Anglican reaction to the secular clause of the 1877 Education Act : a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. in History at Massey University.
8. Colenso W 1888. A few stray Notes on the New Zealand Owl, *Athene novæ-zealandiæ*, Gml.—Ruru and Koukou of the Maoris, and Morepork of the Settlers. Transactions of the New Zealand Institute 21: 200–205.
9. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0405472/>

The demolition and apotheosis of John White

On 27 July 1880 Colenso wrote to Hector and after expressing astonishment that the Government had struck out its usual £500 for the NZ Institute, went on,

Aye, and doubly so, & more, at their voting such a sum for John White's Romances!! Had I not previously heard of it—or both—through our Papers, I should have dropped your letter with astonishment, and w. the Dominie of old roared out “Prodigious!”—or something worse....

I would that J. White should collect all that he could (indeed I would, if required, aid him pecuniarily in doing so,) but I would not allow him to add thereto: he is a terrible fellow for romancing, & running off to antipodal extremes; utterly devoid of clear & sober judgment, or of making any thing approaching to a reasonable deduction. Indeed, he firmly believes all the Bible says, for he has more than once told me so:—ergo.—

In all that he is worse than Taylor, and as bad as Stack (!) who has not 1/10th of J. White's knowledge of the Maori lang. &c.—

John White was born in England and came to New Zealand with his father in 1832, settling first in the far north. He was gold commissioner at Coromandel, and was official interpreter and agent for the purchase of lands; he succeeded in obtaining for the Government the title to most of the land round Auckland. Later White became magistrate at Whanganui. He died suddenly at Auckland on 13 January 1891.

In 1879 the Government commissioned White to compile a complete history of the Māori traditions; he had finished six volumes at the time of his death in 1891. They appeared in 1889 with the title *The Ancient History of the Maori*. (See <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/white-john> for a full biographical sketch).

In March 1888 Colenso received volumes 1 and 2 and wrote to White that he was hugely grateful though had not bothered to open the book—

Napier,
March 26, 1888.

Mr. John White
Wellington.

Dear Sir,

Your friendly note of the 21st instant (reminding me of days long gone by!) with accompanying kind gift of a Book lately published there at Wellington, are to hand, and I thank you heartily for thus thoughtfully remembering me. I have no time at present to look into the book—that I intend to do after Easter, up in the solitudes of the “70-m-Bush,” on some rainy day or days—when I expect to find a treat: you may again hear from me.

Your note took me by surprise, for I had no idea you were at Wgn. rather at Auckland, or somewhere N. enjoying kumara!

I suppose this book to be a copy of what Didsbury has advd. in the “Kahiti.” I first saw that advt. when up in the Bush in Feby., and on my return to Napier a fortnight ago I ordered a copy which has also lately arrived;—but, as yet, I have not untied the parcel!—

I had also early received a copy of a work of yours published

last yr. by the Govt.—yet (strange as it may seem) this, too, I have not yet seen!!.

I have very little time for reading, save some Botanical and Theological (not Ecclesl.) works which I must look at.

I hope you are keeping well, I am at present, save too frequent attacks of Rheumatism for comfort!—but I manage to keep on— “faint but still pursuing.”—

E hara taau i te tahae: he hanga nea iho. Ko taaua ano taaua.—

Why did you not ask for Maori originals? You should have had them with pleasure, if I could readily find them.

Tregear wanted some Karakia's (tu-a-makutu) but I could not find them among such a lot! and time with me is doubly precious now. With kind regards, Believe me,

Yours truly,

Wm.. Colenso.

By 1 December 1890 Colenso still had not opened them, but wanted the complete set so wrote to Harding,

I have lately noticed (somewhere) of several (6?) vols. of J. White's work! Is this so? I have only 2—& these uncut!!

By & by—I think—I will send for the remg. vols. of Jno. White's (I have first two).

1891 January 13: to Harding

Strange to say—I have only recently looked into J. White's 1 & 2 vols., and am astonished at his “Dicty”.—have you seen it? J.W. says

“A—was the name given to the author of the Universe, & signifies—“Am the unlimited in power,” “The conception,”

“Am the leader”, and “The beyond all.” Vol I. p.4.

And so on, & so on!!!—

And in the 2nd Vol., which he sent me, but which I only last week took out of its wrapper, (as I had previously got a copy from Wgn.) I find, written by him:—

“W. Colenso, Esq. F.L.S

He mihi naku ki tana tino mohio kinga mea katoa a nga mahi a nga maori.”

(signed) “John White”

(I think you will easily translate this.)

....

Could you enq. for me, of Didsbury, if he has complete (i.e. vols. III onwards) of J. White's work—owing to fire: and, if so, let him send me those vols, & I will remit amount in P.

Notes.—

30 January 1891 to Harding:

I am really sorry not to have obtained all the pubd. vols. of J. White's, but the fault is my own

5 February 1891 to Harding:

Don't forget—a copy of J. White's works—vols III—IV: had I better write to Blair? or to Dy. about them? as the bulk was burnt, I am very anxious.

By 20 March 1891 Colenso decided to order his own copies and wrote to the Colonial Secretary; Colonial Secretary Patrick Buckley sent a memorandum to Undersecretary, Mr GS Cooper, who instructed his clerk to “Tell Mr Colenso that the reason why Mr. White's book was withdrawn from sale was the destruction by fire of the greater number of volumes on hand. Of the few wh. are left the Col.



John White



William Travers

Sec. has authorised the issue of a copy of a vol each of Nos. 3 & 4 to Mr. C. on payt." He referred the matter to Mr Geo. Didsbury, the Government Printer, to send the books.

The National Archives at Wellington has all the original letters, memos, drafts and comments. What a weight of bureaucracy was involved in ordering a couple of books. *The King asked / The Queen, and / The Queen asked / The Dairymaid... / The Dairymaid / Said, "Certainly, / I'll go and tell / The cow / Now....*

24 April 1891 Colenso to Harding,

Two days ago I recd. vols. 3–5 of J. White's work from Didsby.—in reply to my letter to Col. Secy., but no letter, only a memo. inside, to forward £1.2.6, which I did yesty. I have only just peeped into them: I find that J.W. had again used largely my historical & quasi-legendary papers in "Trans. N.Z. Inst.," and acknowledging same in preface:—I am glad I have got this work; if vol.VI should be pubd., be sure to get me a copy. In vol.V(?) J. Wh. copies from "Saty. Rev."—its loud & lengthy praises of him & his work.

12 August 1891 to Harding: *I borrd. Owen's 4to; "Extinct Wingless Birds of N.Z." and am sorry to find such stuff about the Moa therein, e.g. last one killed at Waipukurau apud Travers & his henchman J. White.*

10 February 1892 to Harding: *should you have the opportunity to enq. of Didsbury re vols. VI & VII of Jno. Whites work—please do so: also, if I can get them from D.*

29 February 1892 to Harding: *I will say nothing of Travers (my quondam Botanical friend!) who, ever since my exposure of J. White's Waipukurau Moa—that Travers so gloated over!—has become a constant & bitter foe. [see box next page].*

8 March 1892 to Russell: *... Travers (my old foe—ever since I summarily disposed of John White's Moa— "killed at Waipukurau 45 yrs. ago"!!!—wh. T. so chuckled over! at the time, J.W. being then pd. by him for his wonderful discovery!!) [see box overleaf—Ed].*

Colenso W 1879. On the moa. *Transactions N.Z. Inst.* 12: 104–105:

Mr. Travers' paper (compilation)* I should not care to notice separately, were it not for a letter contained therein, written by my good friend Mr. John White. (I could only wish, in this as in some other matters, that Mr. Travers would write of what he himself knows of things). Some portions of Mr. White's letter astonish me. For Mr. White had lived at the North among the Ngapuhi tribes many years (just as I had), and to that information said to be obtained from them he adds more—even to a Moa which was “killed” here in modern times “near to Waipukurau!”† where I have also been living nearly forty years!! and where I had conversed with those old Maoris who saw Cook, but who knew nothing of the Moa! (I fear this Moa “killed here near to Waipukurau” was much like mine which lived on Whakapunake, or that one mentioned by Dr. Dieffenbach as said to be living on Mount Egmont!) Yet, not only this last statement, but nearly all that Mr. White says is equally new to me. Now I recollect when Mr. John White came to New Zealand (a boy); it must have taken him some time to learn the language—before at all events he could talk clearly about such a highly recondite subject as the Moa, not being then particularly drawn thereto—and when talked of, I presume, such was only very occasionally, and then but slightly; whereas with me and others it was a matter of deep, extensive, and persistent enquiry extending over years. Remembering, also, how

Dr. Dieffenbach and others‡ laboured to glean something about the Moa in those same northern parts before that Mr. White knew Maori,—I confess I feel strange. The only ready solution to my mind is that Mr. White in this matter has been half deceived; that is, he heard something long ago (just as Sir G. Grey and others heard it), and the rest has been in the course of many years evolved therefrom or added thereto, or both.

* Vide Trans. N. Z. Inst., Vol. VIII., p. 58.

† Vide my genealogical note on Hinetemoa, p. 95, ante.

‡ Here I should briefly mention a few of those scientific gentlemen who were also in the Bay of Islands and its neighbourhood during those years (omitting mere passing visitors), and who all through their interpreters zealously sought after any remains of the Moa, now especially coming into prominence; viz., the Antarctic Expedition, under Sir J. C. Ross, R.N., with his several able naturalists (including Sir J. D. Hooker), who wintered there; the United States Exploring Expedition, under Commander Wilkes, U.S.N.; the several French ships of war and discovery, under Admiral Dumont D'Urville, Captain Cecille, Captain L'Eveque, and others; and many other private gentlemen, as Mr. Busby, Mr. Cunningham, the Rev. W. C. Cotton, and Dr. Sinclair,—but whose gains were nil! Through my residing in the Bay and close to the anchorage, I saw and knew them all, and of course had much conversation with them about the Moa, and its history. And last, though not least, there were the many “stores,” or traders settled on shore in various parts of the Bay, who had very extensive dealings not only with the shipping but with the Maoris; who, be it further observed, were now everywhere breaking soil in seeking after the new commercial product, Kauri resin. Those traders would have been sure to have picked up readily any specimens of Moa remains, or any fragments of its past history,—but they, too, got none!

The ethnobotanist

Ethnobotany is the study of the ways indigenous people make use of indigenous plants. Ethnobotanists explore how plants are used for such purposes as food, shelter, medicine, clothing, hunting, and religious ceremonies.¹

The term was not coined till 1895, but Theophrastus had written of plants and people's use of them in his works, as have many others since.

In his letters and plant lists sent to Kew during his missionary years, William Colenso often commented on their customary uses by Māori. He was usually the only European to have seen the plants alive and the only person to have observed their different purposes.

For instance...

A large Fungus, which grows on the Fagus, at Wangarei. Always found pendulous from beneath, and at the junction of the large branches with the trunk. The one sent is a small one; some measure from 4 to 6 feet across. In the fresh state they are very heavy from being full of water; when dry they soon decay on the outside. The Natives use them for tinder, for which purpose they are admirably adapted. Native name Putawa.²

A Transverse Section of an enormous Alga, found growing on the E. Coast, in 1–2 fath. water, a few yards beyond low-water mark, nr. Cape Kidnapper, & also, nr. Castle Point:—25–45 feet long, and about a foot wide, plain lanceolate frond, sometimes bifid at apex. The Natives use them to put cooked Pork, &c., in; also, as Trowsers, or Gaiters, when walking through the harsh fern.³

My splendid sp... at length detected in flower & fruit. Cordyline utilis, W.C. arborescent, 8–12 feet, stem remarkably stout, 7–10 in. diamr.; panicle, lateral drooping, rigid. Skirts of forests, hills, base of mountain range. Extensively used by the Natives in manufacture of “mats”; fibres of stem used; strong, durable. Nat. name of plant, Tikapu: if garment made from it, Toii. The 2 smaller leaves sent, are bracts.⁴

A bundle of fibres from the large roots of the Cordyline australis;—those roots the Natives dig up and bake and boil in scarce seasons, and gain therefrom a very sweet and somewhat pulpy mess. These fibres are from roots which have been so used.⁵

A mat made of the leaves of Phormium tenax; both these are used by Chiefs for sitting and sleeping on, generally the latter. They call them (here) Tienga; and (in the North) Takapau.⁶

An ornamental basket made of the leaves of Phormium tenax; these are only used by Chiefs, and by them only occasionally—to carry their clothes, &c in. They are now getting very scarce. Native name a kete.⁷

Colenso wrote to Joseph Hooker critiquing the Handbook...

P(odocarpus) dacrydioides—“twigs used for Eel-basket,”—certainly not—rather of P. spicata.⁸ (ie, matai rather than kahika-tea)

Ethnobotany as an aid to taxonomy

Colenso often suggested manuscript names for plants he regarded as new, and often expressed his exasperation later, that his names (and thus his observations on the distinctness of the plants) had not been accepted. Jim Endersby wrote,

“Colenso was one of the few European botanists who took any interest in indigenous knowledge; the uses to which ‘the locals’ put plants was seen as a sufficient basis for a species name in his eyes.”⁹

So he used ethnobotany to support his taxonomic arguments...

Calystegia tuguriorum, Forst. I send you this, that I may the better call your attention to the fact, that the roots of this species were formerly eaten commonly by the Natives, and are now eagerly sought after by pigs.—Now C. sepium is a terrible purgative”.¹⁰

In my speaking of the spp. of Phormia, you will please bear in mind,—that, perhaps, no person has seen more of them than myself, and that, too, in all situations throughout 20 years. Further, I have also taken the universal distinctive uses of the Plants into consideration, and no New Zealander would (or could) ever use one sp. for the other. I thus speak with especial reference to the 2 principal, and, to me, exceedingly well-defined) species....¹¹

Notwithstanding what both yourself & Endlicher say concerning Tetragonia, I firmly believe in 2 sp., (and here again I have use to aid me). The small-leaved smooth-fruited plant, has its berry (sarcocarps) filled with a carmine-colored juice, which is expressed & used as ink, this sp. is only found S. of the E. Cape. The true T. expansa, has much larger leaves & ugly dry hard fruit.

Of Aciphylla I feel assured there are 2 good sp. The smaller one grows lower down than its ally. The youngest states of either plant are as easily distinguishable as its older ones; as ea. sp. preserves its size & color from first leaves. It is curious to observe them mingling, as it were, on their respective borders on the sub-alpine hills. There again, use lends her aid, from the large alpine sp., the New Zealanders formerly obtained (at much trouble) a fragrant oil, with which they anointed themselves.¹¹

Tetragonia trigyna: I wrote you about this, their fleshy drupe

were full of red juice. used as “red ink” by natives & settlers, but fugitive. Vide, L. Jl. Boty. vol. iii. S. 16: see also Müller, Fl. Chath. Islands, p.12.⁸

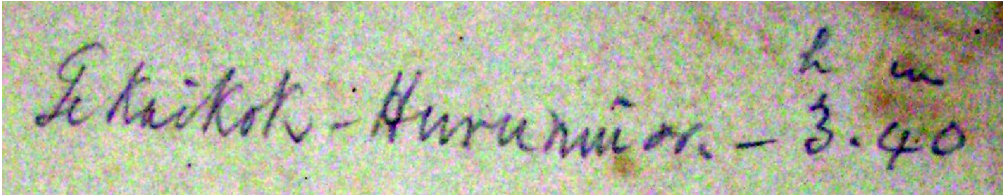
Examine & compare this fern—whether differing from Polypodium pustulatum, as it is a fragrant species, and used by the Natives to scent oil, food. &c.¹²

Phormium: the variegated var., very scarce; I have never seen it growing really wild, although almost every old village has a cultivated plant or two of it growing within its enclosures. Leaves irregularly striped from base to apex with cream-colored lines of various breadths, from $\frac{1}{50}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch. Plant smaller than the foregoing, but larger than Ph., No. 4347, and very rarely flowering; at least I have seldom detected it in that state. Flowers, reddish, orange, & green, resembling in color & general appearance, those of No. 4347. I had a fine plant of it in my garden at Paihia, Bay of Islands, (which Dr Jos. Hooker saw.) but it never flowered. I have also, at present, a plant in my garden here, which is thriving but without flowers. It is, I believe, rarely or never used for its fibres (“flax”), which are said to be coarse.¹³

References

1. <http://www.accessexcellence.org/RC/Ethnobotany/page2.php>.
2. Specimen 423, sent July 1844. See *Colenso's collections*.
3. Specimen 1421, sent September 1847.
4. Specimen 1508, sent September 1848.
5. Specimen 3925, sent June 1850.
6. Specimen 3935, sent June 1850.
7. Specimen 3936, sent June 1850.
8. “A few notes made in going through Dr. Hooker’s ‘Hand Book of N. Zealand Flora’: part I.” 29 November 1865.
9. Endersby J 2001. “From having no Herbarium”. Local knowledge vs. metropolitan expertise: Joseph Hooker’s Australasian correspondence with William Colenso and Ronald Gunn. *Pacific Science*, 55 (4), pp. 343-358.
10. Specimen 2468, June 1850. A convolvulus or bindweed.
11. Colenso to Hooker 28 August 1854. Refers to different kinds of flax, to NZ spinach and to spear-grasses.
12. Specimen 2044, June 1850. A fern.
13. Specimen 4534, January 1853. Variegated flax.

From Te Kaikokirikiri to Hurunuiorangi



Te Kaikokirikiri - Hurunuiorangi - 3.40

▲ From Colenso's notebook (MTG Hawke's Bay Museum Trust Ruawhāro-Tā-ū-rangi collection). He walked from Te Kaikokirikiri (sited on part of Masterton golf course) to Hurunuiorangi in 3 hours 40 minutes.

▼ Hurunuiorangi marae today





W-WHAT?

