

William Frederick Howlett BA



Journalist,
alpinist,
naturalist,
teacher

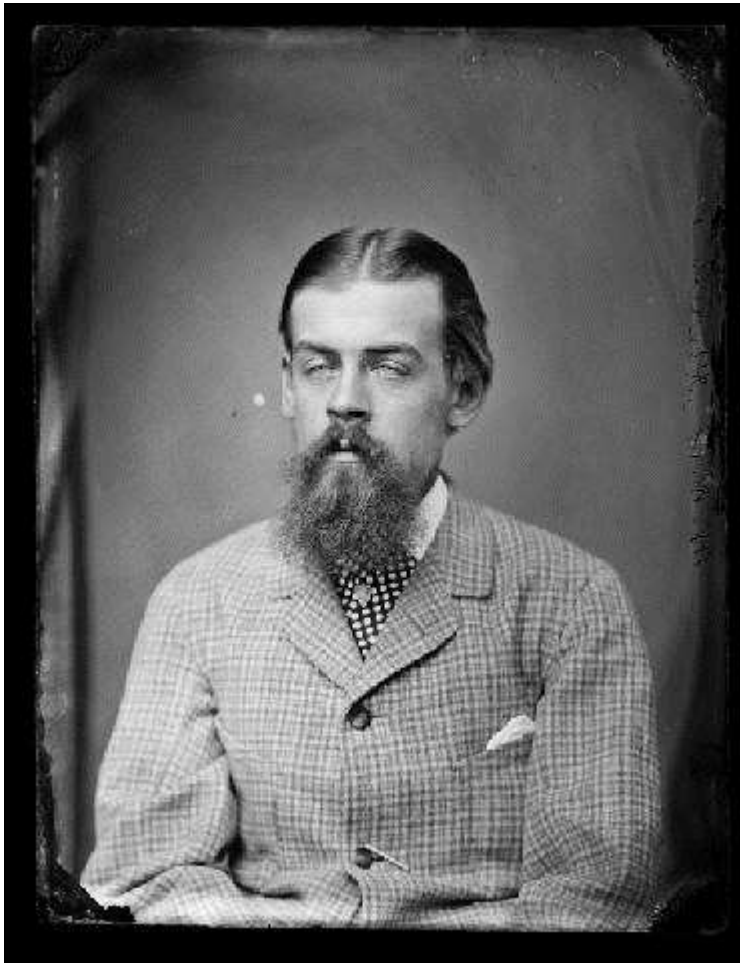
Nelson
Dunedin
Makaretu
Ongaonga
Eketahuna
Pahiatua

by Ian St George

WILLIAM
FREDERICK
HOWLETT
B.A.

JOURNALIST ALPINIST
NATURALIST TEACHER

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William Frederick Howlett 1850–1935, aged about 26, the only known photograph.

From glass monochrome quarter plate negative, Davis & Nairn collection, Nelson Provincial Museum ref. no. 6429. Reproduced with permission.

Can this be the gentleman who... was known to fame as W.F. Howlett, B.A.? Not that his B.A. was absolutely the only one in the town, but he walked with it, talked with it, ate with it, and drank with it, until Howlett and his B.A., became one and indivisible.

“Civis” in the *Otago Witness* 18 September 1890.

Satire: artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.

<https://www.britannica.com/art/satire>

CONTENTS

Chapter

1. Mad, and no mistake	1
2. England	7
3. The remittance man	13
4. The teacher: Nelson & Dunedin 1875-1880	18
5. The editor: Patea 1881-1882	30
6. The teacher: Makaretu 1882-1886	33
7. The storekeeper: Pahiatua 1886-1888	50
8. Back to Makaretu and Ongaonga 1889-90	71
9. Tirenics 1890	81
10. Makuri 1891	92
11. The naturalist	101
12. The alpinist	128
13. The journalist & satirist	154
14. Eketahuna 1900	163
15. Olive 1902-1922	184
16. Wellington c.1920-1935	194

Epilogue

1. On life	202
2. On the balance	207
3. After thoughts	210

Illustrations

William Frederick Howlett aged about 26	<i>front</i>
Howlett's "Election address", October 1890	4
Family tree	9
St Andrews College, Bradfield	11
Clifton College	11
Nelson College in Howlett's day	18
The Dunedin Athenaeum	23
Fairfield	35
Ashcott	35

Early Makaretu	36
Oscar Johansen's map of Makaretu	39
The Lutheran church at Makaretu	41
Makaretu school and store	41
The Makaretu store	47
Howlett's advertisement in the Pahiatua Star 1887	51
Main St Pahiatua 1907	55
The title page of Howlett's <i>Tiremics</i>	82
Makuri Gorge	95
Howlett's fowl's cropstones at Te Papa	112
Howlett's handwriting	120
<i>Aciphylla squarrosa</i> var. <i>flaccida</i>	126
Howlett's Hut	136
Map: Khyber Pass, Moorcock's Flat, Daphne Hut, Tiraha	140
Eketahuna	172
Map: Pahiatua, Eketahuna, Mangahao, Makuri, Tane	186
Olive Howlett's headstone	193
8 Davis St Thorndon Wellington today	195
WF Howlett's headstone	197
Ward 4 Wellington Hospital	198
Henry Hamilton Bridge	199
Henry Russell and guests at Mount Herbert 1876	200
William Russell Russell	201
Edward Alexander Hagen	201
A steelyard balance	208

CHAPTER 1: MAD, AND NO MISTAKE

On 21 October 1890 the Reverend William Colenso wrote his regular gossip-filled letter from Napier to his young friend Coupland Harding in Wellington and said,

*Howlett has got an Election address out—for Masterton! He is mad, & no mistake, and should follow Harker¹ to asylum: if I can get you a copy (Bush. Adv. reprint) I will send it.*²

This was William Frederick Howlett, remittance man, schoolteacher, journalist, politician, thorn in the side of authority—articulate, straight talking, intelligent, cynical, clever, but generally regarded as a bit odd.

Eighteen ninety was a big year for Howlett. He had started a regular column, named “Olla Podrida” in the *Hawke’s Bay Herald* in December 1889. His mother died in England in April 1890. His booklet *Tirenics* was published. He was Chairman of the Makaretu School Board, running a shop in Pahiatua and often writing letters to the editors of the *Pahiatua Star* and the *Bush Advocate*.

Surviving copies of Howlett’s election address were printed at the *Pahiatua Star*.³ Howlett stood for Masterton as an independent but styled himself a “Tirenist” candidate.⁴

His manifesto read,

FELLOW ELECTORS,—

It is just three years and three months since I last issued an address similar to this. On that occasion I merely offered to go to the poll if you wished me to.

If you have as much brains as I should like every man who votes for me to possess, you will first ask me

WHY I WANT TO GET INTO THE HOUSE.

My reply is that I am fond of getting behind the scenes. To regard the position of M.H.R. as an honor is absurd. A man is judged by his company, and as an ordinary member I should lose caste. I should, however, like very well to find out why such a number of seedy, out-at-elbows people hustle to get in. Whose

pockets do they get their fingers in? How are the steals arranged? You may be sure that the red-nosed men in patched boots and doubtful linen are not there for the honorarium, much less for the honor and glory: they have their axes to grind, and when I find out I will let you know. Please understand, also, that I am asking no favor at your hands. You want responsible and onerous work done, and nobody who knows me doubts my capacity to do it. Now I can't deny that I could get a *quid pro quo* in the shape of knowledge. I could pick up a lot of experience in the House, and would not refuse to serve if elected. I should have access to a few men who really know something, and in exchange for the opportunity of learning I offer my services. The honorarium is to me a *minus* quantity. It would cost more than £200 to leave my home for three months, and it is doubtful how long I should stay in the House, as it is my peculiar task to ferret out abuses, abolish incompetent officials, and deny all received opinions. This would expose me to such a torrent of abuse and mud-pelting, that, as likely as not, I should throw up the sponge in a few years. You will, after reading this far, ask me next

IS MY PURPOSE PURELY SELFISH.

In 1887 it was. I then wrote "You see I regard Colonial politics as utterly petty, and decline to go into heroics. The reformation of a colony about as big as a second rate European town is not worth the life-blood of one man with a spark of genius in him, and if I find the stupid party can neither be suppressed nor educated, I shall go back to my store and wash my hands of politics."

This has all been changed. If as a "Tirenist" I can effect the reforms to be mentioned later, my purpose is a high one.

MY GENERAL PLATFORM.

Republican, Atheist, Malthusian; this is a dreadfully hard nut for the average elector to crack. *Republican* means, that I seek the welfare of the average man, and regard all accumulation of capital as an insult and a menace. Qualify this by adding that the thing, in my opinion, can't be helped. *Atheist* means, that I never came across any God. There may be a dozen for all I

know. I am sick of hearing rival religions expounded. Nothing would be more interesting to a scientific man than a Creator, if we could only get him under our microscopes, but we can't; and we don't believe that the Jews, Christians, Mahommedans, and Buddhists know anything about the matter. *Malthusian* means, that poverty and crime are caused by over-breeding. I despaired in 1887 of explaining to electors why it was that no steps could be taken to check this. I said "It is not a question of practical politics here or anywhere else."

In 1890, the chief item in my policy.

MY COLONIAL PLATFORM.

Beyond a general support of whatever measures the most intelligent and honest men in the House approve of, I shall devote myself to Tirenism. What this is I have explained in a pamphlet procurable in the district.

MY LOCAL PLATFORM.

What is the use of saying I will be everyone's friend and give £5 to every public cause? That is an old story, *before* elections. I shall spare no pains to obtain a revisal and consolidation of the ridiculous legislation commonly attributed to Mr Ballance; my opinion being that if one man (a selector) may not *buy* more than a limited area, then *another* man (a runholder) should not be permitted to *hold* any more; it being understood that by "more" I do not necessarily mean more in acres, but in producing power. I also wish for a definite and authoritative report on the question of a railway through Pahiatua, and an examination of certain legislation supposed to be necessary in Bush districts, where the laws about land, fencing, and bushfires, do not work well.

WHAT DO I THINK OF——AND——?

As I shall be asked "whether I am in favor of" half a hundred things, it is just as well to say that on a great number of subjects I have simply no information that would interest my querists. Many of the questions legislators have to deal with are excessively intricate and subtle, and depend for their solution on abstruse points of history and comparative jurisprudence,



Howlett's "Election address", October 1890, printed by the Pahiatua Star.
Alexander Turnbull Library Ephemera-B-POLITICS-1890s.

wherefore I am not rash enough to promise more than this: that I will make an attempt to understand some of them, and explain them in popular language at popular meetings. If all the members would do as much we should be better informed. To have definite opinions on the whole range of subjects that come before the House is beyond any man's power.

W.F. HOWLETT.

It was, he said, his peculiar task to ferret out abuses, abolish incompetent officials, and deny all received opinions. Indeed it was and

he would ferret assiduously in local newspapers, alone in the remote rural districts of Central Hawke's Bay and the Wairarapa. He wrote in one newspaper column,

The greatest insult anyone can offer me is to ask if I am lonely. What a mind some people credit me with! Everyone asks me what I do in the evenings. Am I not lonely? To such I reply once for all in the words of a dear brother penman, now alas gone over to the great majority, who lived alone by the crystal waters of beautiful Walden: "What company has that lonely lake, I pray? and yet it has not the blue devils, but the blue angels in it, in the azure tint of its waters. The sun is alone, except in thick weather, when there sometimes appear to be two, but one is a mock sun. God is alone—but the devil, he is far from being alone; he sees a great deal of company; he is legion. I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or a horse fly, or a humble bee. I am no more lonely than the mill brook, or a weathercock, or the north star, or the south wind, or an April shower, or a January thaw, or the first spider in a new house."⁵

Fifty years before Howlett's piece Henry David Thoreau had also written,

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.⁶

Thoreau's writing weaves together close observation of nature, personal experience, pointed rhetoric, symbolic meanings, and historical lore, while displaying a poetic sensibility, philosophical

austerity, and attention to practical detail.⁷ I think Howlett wanted to be like that, adding a dash of satire when warranted.

An independent candidate for the Waipawa electorate, G Hunter, spoke at an election meeting in the Takapau Butcher's Hall on 21 November, when

Mr Howlett caused a good deal of fun by asking the candidate to explain the difference between his policy and Mr Smith's policy, Mr Hunter stated that he had nothing whatever to do with Mr Smith's policy and was quite an independent candidate. During the campaign he had refrained from mentioning Mr Smith's name. Mr Howlett went on to say that Mr Hunter was an independent candidate and Mr Smith a dependent one, and was proceeding to explain the difference when he was checked by one of the electors telling him that they did not come to hear an address from him, and after a bit of chaff Mr Howlett gracefully retired.⁸

Howlett was never a serious election contender for the Masterton seat of course, and the *Wairarapa Daily Times* lamented,

Mr W.F. Howlett, the Tirenist candidate, whether in jest or earnest we know not, has circulated amongst a few friends an election address. He is willing to go to the poll if the electors want him to, and no doubt several hundred other unambitious residents in the electorate would take the seat if they could get it without trouble and expense to themselves. Practically, Mr Howlett, who is honest and clever but eccentric to a fault, is not a candidate, is unlikely to be nominated, and even if he went to the poll would inevitably find himself at the bottom of the list. He may make some of the election meetings lively at his own end of the district, but probably will not come to Masterton, and this will be a loss to those who enjoy lively political gatherings.⁹

In 1890 New Zealanders could vote in only one electoral district, ending the right of property owners to vote in more than one.

Eighty percent of those eligible had voted. Most of the new Members were New Zealand born men of the middle class: British aristocratic influence was waning.

The Masterton seat was won by AW Hogg (1079 votes) in a two candidate race with G Beetham (1058). No votes were recorded for Howlett who had withdrawn.

The national result was not clear until Parliament met in early 1891. The Liberal government that took power was to dominate the political scene for the next twenty years. Led by John Ballance (until his death in 1893) and then by Richard Seddon, the Liberals introduced a number of laws designed to improve life for “ordinary New Zealanders”. The industrial arbitration system, votes for women, old-age pensions, and restrictions on working hours for women and young workers led some to champion New Zealand as a “social laboratory” and “working man’s paradise”.¹⁰

1 The *Bush Advocate* of 16 October 1890 reported, “Mr W.J. Harker, a gentleman well-known in Napier, has been brought up, charged with lunacy and remanded”.

2 Alexander Turnbull Library qMS-0495.

3 The *Star* was begun by EA Haggen and published between 1886 and 1893 when it was incorporated into the *Pahiatua Herald*.

4 “Niu Tireni” was a te reo neologism for New Zealand.

5 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 18 December 1889.

6 Henry David Thoreau. “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”, in *Walden*.

7 <https://www.google.co.nz/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=thoreau> accessed 2 November 2016.

8 *Bush Advocate* 22 November 1890.

9 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 23 October 1890.

10 <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/first-general-election-held-under-one-man-one-vote-principle>

CHAPTER 2: ENGLAND

His grandfather was Yorkshireman John Howlett, born in about 1762 at Hull. He married Eliza Ann North at York in 1810 and they had three children, Eliza Ann (1815), William (1816) and Margaret (1818). All three would have New Zealand connections.

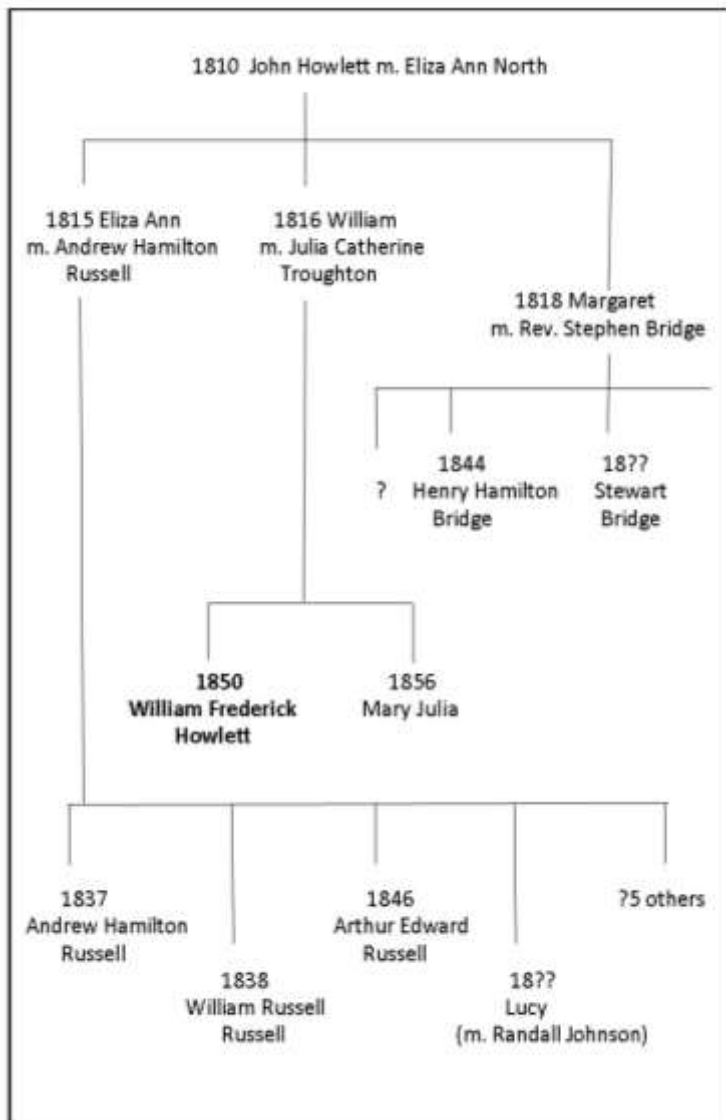
In 1819 John Howlett bought Aboukir plantation in St Ann, Jamaica, a handy 2224 acres, named no doubt for Aboukir Bay where Nelson had defeated the French in the Battle of the Nile 20 years earlier. During the next eight years he owned up to 204 slaves and exported coffee and sugar to London; he lived at Cherry Gardens sugar refinery

in Kingston Jamaica. He was also mortgagee-in-possession of Aberley Plantation in St Ann.¹ In England the family lived at Cupola House in Hornsey, Middlesex, though John Howlett had been living at Chatham Place in Hackney when he died.²

He died in 1826; he left most of his estate in trust, to be sold in the case of the real estate, to fund a number of legacies, including £2000 each to his son and daughters, with the residue to his son, William. He also instructed his trustees to build a “neat chapel” on Aboukir and offer it to the Lord Bishop and then to the Wesleyan Society.³ His children were therefore left wealthy.

John Howlett’s elder daughter Eliza Ann married Andrew Hamilton Russell in 1835. Russell saw active service in India and New Zealand. He retired from the army as Lieutenant Colonel in 1859 and took up the Mangakuri sheep station in Hawke’s Bay. He was summoned to the Legislative Council in 1861, was appointed Inspector of Native Schools and was Minister of Native Affairs in the Stafford ministry. In 1874 he sold his Mangakuri property and returned to England. He died at Torquay in 1900. The eldest son, Andrew Hamilton Russell 1837–1916 farmed in Hawke’s Bay⁴ at Tunanui with the second son William Russell Russell 1838–1913 (known as Captain Russell); the third was Arthur Edward Russell 1846–1924. There were 6 other children, including Lucy who would become Lucy Randall Johnson of Wairakaia Station in Poverty Bay. This family should not be confused with that of HR Russell, the founder of Waipukurau.

John Howlett’s younger daughter Margaret married Rev. Stephen Bridge in 1839 and they lived in Surrey and Hampshire until he retired to Clifton, Bristol. Their second child, born 1844, was Henry (Harry) Hamilton Bridge and their third was Stewart Bridge: both emigrated to New Zealand. In 1868 AE Russell, WJ Birch⁵ and HH Bridge journeyed from Hawke’s Bay through Taupo and the thermal regions in search of good grazing land.⁶ Bridge acquired Fairfield and leased Ashcott estate at Ongaonga, near Waipawa, Central Hawke’s Bay.⁷ His brother Stewart lived with him. Bridge St, the main street of Ongaonga is named after them. Harry remained unmarried till he was back in England in 1907.



John and Eliza Ann Howlett's descendants with a New Zealand connection.

In 1816 John Howlett's son William, who would become the father of William Frederick Howlett, was born at Hornsea on the Yorkshire coast. He was admitted to Jesus College, Cambridge in 1837, graduated MA in 1841, was ordained deacon at Hardwycke, Northamptonshire in 1842, priest in 1844. He married Julia Catherine, daughter of Ellis John Troughton at St Dunstan in the East, London on 26 April 1849⁸ and their son William Frederick Howlett was born on 13 April 1850, in Thundersley, Essex.⁹

The 1851 Census has them at the Thundersley Rectory—William, Curate, 35; Julia, Wife, 26; W.F.H., Son, 11 months; Mary B Troughton, Sister-in-law, unmarried visitor; Jane Clayden, unmarried, 23, Maid servant; Kath. Burns, married, 23, Wet Nurse.

In 1855 they were in Liddington Bedfordshire. A daughter Mary Julia was born in 1856 in London and in April 1857 the family moved to Congham Rectory, Norfolk¹⁰ where they stayed till 1861.¹¹

The 1861 Census records the family at St Mary's, Stoke Newington—William ("Clergyman without care of souls"), Julia, William Frederick aged 10, Mary Julia aged 6 and three maidservants aged 23, 21 and 13.

In 1865 they were at Ilkley, Otley, Yorkshire, in 1866 at Ashchurch near Tewkesbury.

In 1870 Rev William Howlett was living at St Leonards on Sea,¹² and 1875–1880 was Curate of Bulkington, Wiltshire. They (Rev. William, wife Julia Catherine and daughter Mary Julia) later moved to Torquay where his sister Eliza Ann and brother in law Andrew Hamilton Russell were then living. Julia Catherine Howlett died there in 1890 and William in 1896, aged 80. He left an estate worth £12,054 8s 6d.

In 1863 William Frederick Howlett was a pupil at St Andrew's College, Bradfield. That is where Kate Middleton went to school, the most expensive in England now and very swanky even in Howlett's day. At the school sports he came second in the "Consolation Stakes Sack Race". In 1864 he won the Fifth Form Mathematical Prize.

He entered Marlborough College in August 1865 but his record there states he left in November of that year.

He entered Clifton College in January 1866 and his record there states, "Howlett, W.F. Son of Rev. W. Howlett, Ashchurch, Tewkesbury. (Dakyns, Cay. Class. V–VI; left July, 1869. Junior Student of Ch. Ch.,

Oxford.” HG Dakyns & CH Cay were masters. In April 1867 he acted as one of the stewards (not a participant) at the Clifton College athletic sports.



St Andrews College, Bradfield



Clifton College

In February 1869 WF Howlett was elected to a Mathematical junior studentship of Christ Church, Oxford. In 1872 he passed the Oxford

Preliminary Honours Examinations in Mechanics and Physics, and in Chemistry. In December 1873 he graduated BA.

At some time he must have visited the Mediterranean, judging from comments in his writing.

Years later he would write, “Am running over *Acarina* and reviving old memories of 1868–1871, when I knew about all that was then known about them”. Perhaps therefore his hobby during his Oxford years was the study of mites.

Howlett mentioned his sister Mary (in the third person) in a newspaper column in 1890; he was writing about the corporal punishment of naughty children,

I know that in England many a family has a skeleton in the cupboard in the shape of a girl who is really naughty. I knew one (about 17) who would insist on going into a private room where her brother kept his microscopes, anatomical works, and tools. She read his books, including Swinburne and Rossetti. The brother asked his father to forbid this, but he (a clergyman) said “If the books are immoral, burn them.” It caused very strained feelings for a long time. Fancy a young girl, of no literary tastes, learning by heart “In the Orchard,” which begins “Leave go my hands.” The whole poem throbs with Provençal passion, and verses of which every educated Englishman may feel proud would be absolutely bad for a mere school girl. Or take the central chorus in “Erechtheus,” in which only, of all English poems, the spirits of wind and storm live imperishably pictured for all time; in which only, the marvellous epode (I think it is what musicians would call a change into a minor key) raises emotion not yet describable at all in words. (It begins, “Of the hoary-headed woe Song made memory long ago; Now a younger grief to mourn Needs a new song younger born) and so pants with music that one can hardly refrain from believing that, as one reads it alone at night, the orchestra is sounding in one’s ears. Conceive it made the plaything of mischievous girls. Yet this girl was not in the least prurient, simply naughty....¹³

His older cousin Harry Bridge was an Ensign in the New Zealand militia by 1869 and he and his brother Stewart would settle at Ongaonga. His even older cousins Andrew, William and Arthur

Russell were living in Hawke's Bay. New Zealand would have seemed a sensible destination for the young graduate.

Messrs. Shaw, Saville & Co's *Merope*, a ship of 1053 tons, was bringing emigrants to New Zealand. In 1873 when the Hills (educationalist Henry and women's suffrage activist Emily) were aboard, they met William Colenso's son Willie who was a seaman on the ship.

Two years later the *Merope*, Captain Sutherland, sailed from Deal on 23 June 1875, from Plymouth on 29 June, for Canterbury, with 264 Government immigrants and 20 Saloon passengers. WF Howlett was a saloon passenger. They arrived at Lyttelton on 23 September.

1 <http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/AL15ann.htm>

2 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146639645>

3 PROB 11/1724/318.

4 Te Ara biography by Bernard John Foster, M.A., Research Officer, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington.

5 The *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* (1897) has, "The 'Tuscan Hills' Estate, in the Makuri Valley... is the property of Mr. W. J. Birch, of 'Erewhon,' Hawkes Bay."

6 Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-1024 describes the nature of terrain traversed, geological formation, Maori way of life, deserted mission stations with detailed impressions of thermal regions, including the Pink and White Terraces.

7 *Burke's Colonial Gentry* 1891, p.346.

8 *Oxford Journal* 28 April 1849.

9 *London Evening Standard* 18 April 1850. WF Howlett's birthplace is often mistakenly given as Torquay, perhaps because his father died there in 1896.

10 *Hampshire Advertiser* 11 April 1857. An older William Howlett had also been Stipendary Curate at Congham 30 years earlier, apparently unrelated; on 31 August Fanny Anne Howlett, the daughter of the older Rev William Howlett, was married at Congham: the younger Rev William Howlett assisted at the ceremony.

11 *Alumni Cantabrigienses*.

12 He worked as an occasional locum—see *The Burnley Gazette* 24 September 1870.

13 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 6 February 1890.

CHAPTER 3: THE REMITTANCE MAN

WF Howlett is said to have been a remittance man. The Oxford Dictionaries define that as, "An emigrant supported or assisted by payments of money from home", but the *Canadian Encyclopedia* comes closer to our New Zealand understanding: "a term once widely used... for an immigrant living... on funds remitted by his family in

England, usually to ensure that he would not return home and become a source of embarrassment.”

The Observer of 20 January 1894 reported the death of a Napier remittance man, Charles Henry Dowsett, and in doing so summed up the general view,

One more unfortunate weary of breath, rashly importunate,
gone to his death!

Charles Henry Dowsett suicided at Napier last week. Went into his bedroom at his lodgings and cut his throat. Dowsett was only 30. He was a “remittance man.” Somehow the men who end by laying violent hands upon themselves in the colonies, generally are remittance men. I know nothing of Dowsett’s case save what the very brief particulars wired to the Auckland daily papers could tell me. But there is a strong family likeness in all these suicides by remittance men. They are generally attributable to the same causes.

The remittance man seldom does any work. He depends upon his remittance, and when one cheque is “done” he waits for the next to arrive. Between times he loafes away his time and very often amuses himself by cursing the colony and the day on which he saw it first. Remittance men (of course there are exceptions to the rule) have generally been failures at Home, and have been shipped out to the colonies by their affectionate friends and relations to sink or swim or go to the dogs, as they please. Many otherwise sane and intelligent persons in the Old Country are firmly impressed with the belief that the man who has failed utterly to make his mark (or even his bread and cheese) in England, has only to set foot in Greater Britain to straightway become a dazzling success.¹

These were young people, perhaps wayward, perhaps with mental illness, paid off, abandoned and exiled, isolated and alone. Small wonder they often came to no good.

Thomas Hood’s “The Bridge of Sighs” was apt and sympathetic,

One more Unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death!

Take her up tenderly,
 Lift her with care;
 Fashion'd so slenderly
 Young, and so fair!

The *Wairarapa Daily Times* showed no sympathy,

One of the most undesirable class of men in New Zealand is formed by what is commonly known as "remittance men." They are to be found north, south, east, and west, congregating in towns, and carousing in townships. They are, for the most part, young persons with respectable connections at Home, and have been sent to the antipodes to be out of the way. The British parent is frequently under the delusive idea that his unsteady son, who cannot be trusted with money at Home, is fitted to have the charge of it in a distant colony. He appears to consider that the temptations which surround a young man in England are not to be apprehended in New Zealand. He does not understand that the best thing he can do for his wild colt is to send him away with a light purse, and that if he must start him with a full one, the wisest plan is to leave the youth to run the career of a prodigal son without check or hindrance. Unfortunately, in too many instances, the young man who arrives in this colony is kept from work by the receipt from Home of periodical remittances. Year after year, by hook and by crook, he is enabled to spend an idle and dissolute life through the mistaken kindness of his friends. When he has money he spends it royally on vicious pleasures. When it is exhausted, he anticipates his next remittance by borrowing, and if he cannot do this he usually manages on the strength of his prospective allowances, to run into debt. Of course in time the sources of his supplies become exhausted, and he is then compelled to pick up some odd job of work or to hang on as a general loafer. Occasionally he reaches a lower stage, and is found as an inmate of our hospitals and police cells. The evil of all this lies probably more at the doors of the injudicious friends at home than it does on the heads of the remittance men themselves. Honest manly work will reform many a wild young man who has lost his chance of success in England. It is the miserable habit of relying upon friends at home instead of upon his own brains or sinews, which emasculates him. Could parents

and guardians in England be only warned that the best chance their sons can have in the colonies is to land with five pounds in their pockets and without the hope of “more to follow” a very undesirable class of settlers in this colony would be replaced by a band of workers who would in time become valued colonists, increasing instead of decreasing the wealth of the country. It may be argued that remittance men spend vast sums of money in the colony, but few will, we trust, be found to believe that such money, circulating as it does in vicious channels, is a source of strength to the colony. A word of warning, could it reach the ears of those parents at Home who are responsible for perpetuating the “remittance men” class, would do much good. It might perhaps also, in some instances, be useful to the men themselves if they could only be brought to see the inevitable end of an idle and useless career, and to appreciate the honor, the dignity, and the moral and physical progress which is obtainable from self-supporting industry.²

Not all remittance men were sad or bad though. Many, relatively free of the repression of work, contributed their considerable talents to the growth, prosperity and culture of their new country.

The nineteenth century was an age of appearances, a time when propriety was more important than truth. Distasteful evidence was either destroyed or discreet reticence observed. In the preface of her book on remittance men *Colonial outcasts* Nell Hartley wrote she was told by a librarian in a major city library that, because of this conspiratorial silence, she had set herself an impossible task.³

Indeed, in that way she had. Try though we may to discern the reasons young men were banished, those are the very details that are now too blurred—purposefully or not—and we find only hints.

What did WF Howlett do that his wealthy reverend father would banish him to New Zealand? Is his chequered secondary schooling (three schools) a clue? why did he enter Oxford as a student of Christ Church but graduate “unattached”? what about his parents’ frequent changes of parish? his later reputation as a womaniser? his brilliant but often unkind wit? his eccentricity?

Was it something that happened after he graduated in 1873 and before he emigrated in 1875? There is no record of that period.

We know nothing of his relationship with his family, but perhaps significantly, he described himself in his 1902 marriage notice as “grandson of the late John Howlett, of Jamaica,” rather than “son of Rev. William Howlett”.

In 1895 WF Howlett would write to barrister AR Atkinson,

If I ever come to Wellington you must let me have a long yarn with you. There are some things you can hardly have escaped reading for the schools, & you can lay me on to some books. One thing I particularly want is an up to date exposition of this mysterious “moral sense” which all the Richmonds & Atkinsons think they know all about. I recognise nothing but hedonism pure & simple so far as I know. “Ought” is to me as meaningless as $\sqrt{-1}$, and while $\sqrt{-1}$ does not vitiate conclusions, an “ought” mars the whole logic of an argument to my mind. My poor old dad says this is because I am sinful & my carnal heart loathes the restraints of Xtianity. To which I reply with Clough “It may be and yet be not”.⁴

Howlett placed notices of his parents’ deaths in local New Zealand newspapers. Of his mother he said,

HOWLETT.—At East Grinstead, on April 15th, Julia Catharine, wife of Rev. William Howlett, aged 65 years. “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.”⁵

But of his father, only this,

HOWLETT.—At his residence, Torquay, England, on 26th January, Rev. W.H. Howlett, aged 80 years.⁶

1 *The Observer* 20 January 1894.

2 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 23 April 1884.

3 Nell Hartley. *Colonial outcasts; a search for the Remittance Men*. Arrow Press, Morrinsville, 1993.

4 Richmond-Atkinson family papers. Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-4298-104.

5 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 31 May 1890.

6 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 30 January 1896.

CHAPTER 4: THE TEACHER: NELSON AND DUNEDIN 1875–1880

The 25 year old WF Howlett disembarked from the *Merope* at Lyttelton on 23 September 1875. On 1 July 1876 the *Nelson Evening Mail* reported,

At a meeting of the College Governors held yesterday, we understand that the following arrangements were made for the ensuing six months:—Acting Head and Mathematical Master, Mr J. Mackay; Second and Classical Master, Mr W. F. Howlett; Third Master, Mr Sedgwick; Fourth, Mr Firth; Modern languages, Mr Charles Harling.

The Nelson College Deed of Foundation had been signed in 1857 and set out the curriculum to be followed by the College. It included English language and literature, one or more modern languages, geography, mathematics, classics, history, drawing, music and such other branches of science as the Council of Governors should determine. The purpose of the school was the “advancement of religion and morality, and the promotion of useful knowledge, by offering to the youth of the Province general education of a superior character.”



Nelson College in Howlett's day

A distinguished old boy, Professor W. P. Evans MA PhD FRSNZ, recalled in 1959,

The lean-to... was the special room of the eccentric Howlett known as “JIMMY”—a strange mixture of cruelty (in a rage) and excessive remorse (afterwards). He regaled us with imitations of submarine mines using a kerosene tin full of water as the ocean: whacked us unmercifully and followed up the caning with cigarettes and cookies in his study.

In 1876, the first inter-College rugby match in New Zealand was played between Nelson College and Wellington College. WF Howlett may have been there, but he suffered a mysterious illness in 1876. The maths master J Mackay spoke at the annual prizegiving,

The circumstances regarding the College had, during the past year been very extraordinary. First there was the remittent illness of the late Mr Simmons, necessitating his frequent absence, and culminating in his lamented death. Then Mr Andrew took charge for a short time until he was compelled to leave to attend to his Parliamentary duties. Then the Governors had to get together a scratch staff and scarcely was this done and the machinery began once more to move smoothly, than Mr Howlett was taken seriously ill and had been incapacitated ever since from attending. The whole work therefore fell on himself, and Messrs Firth, Sedgwick, and Harling, to whose hearty co-operation it was in a high degree owing that the numbers remained undiminished and the discipline unimpaired. He wished then to say that he believed less and less in the administration of corporal punishment. (Loud cheers from the boys.) When younger and less experienced he believed in it thoroughly, and administered it freely, but it was now his matured conviction that the master who depended upon the lash to train his pupils had mistaken his vocation, and had better give it up.¹

Was Mackay taking a swipe at Howlett? Perceived excessive corporal punishment would become an issue for the latter in future years.

The *Colonist* added, “... that Mr Howlett was completely recovered, and would resume duties after the holidays.”

Later in December the College was advertising, for example in the *Grey River Argus* of 30 December 1876,

NELSON COLLEGE

Principal:

REV. J. C. ANDREW, M.A.

Late Fellow and Tutor of Lincoln College, Oxford.

Resident and Mathematical Master:

J. MACKAY, M.A., Aberdeen.

Third Master:

W. F. HOWLETT, B.A. Christ Church, Oxford.

Fourth Master:

J. FIRTH, Esq.

Modern Languages:

HERR HARLING.

The *Colonist* of 23 January 1877 reported the success of Nelson College boys in the examinations for the Civil Service, successes that,

... spite of all the difficulties under which the College suffered for a large portion of last year from the loss of Mr Simmons and the illness of Mr Howlett, the staff left at work increased their efforts, and maintained the high standard of former years, under such great disadvantages.

There is no record of what was wrong with him, though his photograph suggests a condition that would later, in 1895, be called *myasthenia gravis*. Howlett appears in the lists of members of the Nelson Association for the Promotion of Science and Industry (forerunner of the Nelson Philosophical Society) in 1876–7–8.

At the end of 1877 he resigned and in 1878 was in Dunedin, at the “Dunedin Academy”, whose Rector, William Norrie announced,

The Mathematical Department is under the charge of Mr W.F. Howlett, B.A., late Junior Mathematical Student, Christchurch, Oxford, and recently one of the Masters and Lecturer in Natural Science in Nelson College.²

Soon Norrie would hand over to Howlett,

DUNEDIN ACADEMY

I beg to intimate that I have TRANSFERRED MY INTEREST in this Academy to Mr W.F. Howlett, late Mathematical Master.³

Howlett in turn reminded his pupils that “the Second Quarter begins on the 23rd inst. For all information apply to the Principal, either in writing, or personally at St. Paul’s Church Schoolrooms, between 3.30 and 4 p.m.” These were the Sunday school rooms attached to St Paul’s in the Octagon.

Journalist, pamphleteer and raconteur of considerable notoriety, JGS Grant had opened the Dunedin Academy in 1855, ^{4,5} hours 9 to 12 a.m. for one class and 2 to 4 p.m. for another.

By thus curtailing the time of attendance, and prescribing liberally for the Pupil at home, it is conceived a greater degree of proficiency will be attained, and greater relish for intellectual exertion may be excited, than by absurdly prolonging the time, according to the usual mode, to such an extent as positively to exhaust the patience of both Preceptor and Pupil. Besides being very prejudicial to the body, the tendency of long hours is to create in the mind a positive aversion from learning. The great secret of Education being to implant in the mind a lively sympathy for the lessons, so that they become a matter of pure pleasure, and not a dogged task.⁶

In June applicants to Howlett’s Academy were to apply at Ashley House, Rattray St⁷ and in July 1878 Howlett was advertising on his own account, intimating he had moved to new rooms in the Albert Buildings, opposite the Post Office in Princes St.⁸ In October he was teaching English and Mathematics at Madame Muller’s College for Young Ladies, York Terrace.⁹ One of his pupils was the 18 year old Edward Alexander Hagen.¹⁰

Now began Howlett’s career as a writer of letters to editors. The first concerned the library at the Dunedin Athenaeum.

THE ATHENAEUM.

SIR—An advertisement in your columns has given rise to a good deal of surmise.

What kind of a Librarian do the Athenaeum Committee propose to engage?

The present condition of the place is lamentable; there appears hardly any attempt at arrangement; the catalogue is badly compiled; the fines for detaining books beyond the allowed

time are not enforced; it is a literal fact that I have twice asked the Librarian, "Have you any means of ascertaining whether a book I will name is in the Library?" and he has replied that he had no means whatever. Many books in the reference-room have no apparent business there, and others are so loaded with dust, that after handling them one hardly likes to touch a clean book.

The omissions from the library are so many, and of such a kind, that I would rather refer your readers to the shelves than attempt to indicate them. You may look in vain for a Latin dictionary, for Kingsley's Poems, for Ganot's Physics, for the Transactions of the New Zealand Institute; and although the Statutes of Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria are found, those of New Zealand do not appear. The above books are merely the last half-dozen I have happened to want; the list could easily be indefinitely extended. In the reading-room all is disorder. No one can tell what papers are or ought to be on the tables; nor on what principle they have been selected.

The conclusion I would draw is, that the Committee would do well to select some man who can do more than the mechanical routine of receiving books and posting entries. If they appoint a man competent to reorganise the whole library, reject scores of perfectly useless books, prepare lists of urgent requirements, cut up the new catalogue and put it into proper shape, enforce fines, arrange the reading-room tables, provide means for ensuring the replacement of volumes, and a hundred other things, he will have his work cut out for months, and will require at least one assistant during office hours. I can assure you that I am not writing at random; for during three years I used almost daily the excellently arranged library of the Oxford Union, in the management of which we all had a voice.

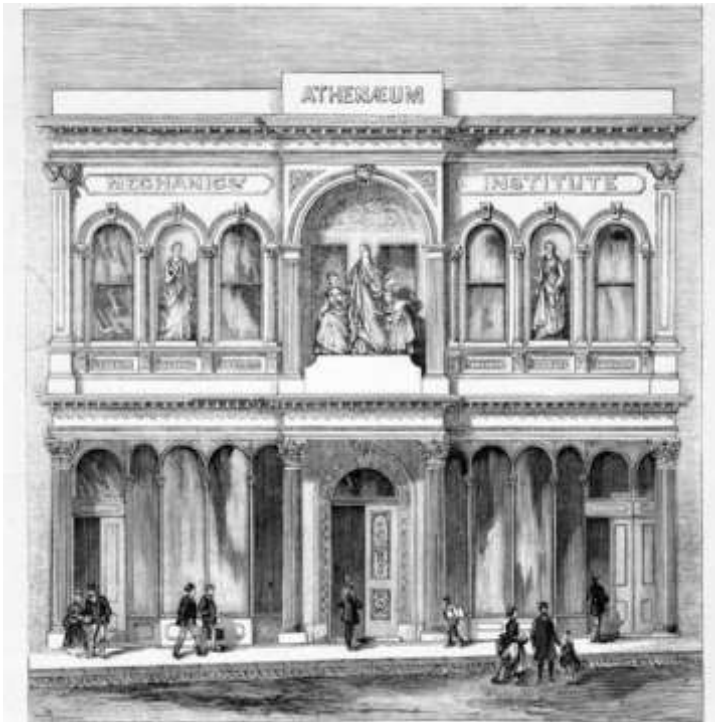
If the Committee will give the librarian considerable liberty of action, and adequate clerical assistance, I believe I could induce a good man to apply. At any rate, I would gladly subscribe towards the additional expense incurred, and do my best to induce others to contribute.

If, on the other hand, the Committee elect some man who is simply a fair clerk, prepared to take orders, but not to guide the Committee, it is to be feared that the Athenaeum will remain as it is now—an institution conspicuously mismanaged, in a city conspicuously well provided with institutions that really function.

—I am, &c., W. F. HOWLETT.¹¹

Old Athenaeum members replied in angry concert. Howlett returned to the fray on 28 October,

SIR—Your correspondents, “An Old Librarian,” “An Old Member,” and “One of the Old Members,” evince much wisdom in with-holding their names—more, perhaps, than in publishing their inability to understand my meaning. When I wrote that there existed no means of ascertaining whether a book was “in the Library,” I thought most readers would recognise the slang familiar to all haunters of libraries. “In the Library” means “possessed by the Society,” while “in” means “on the shelves.”¹²



The Dunedin Athenaeum

The letters dragged on through 1878 and into 1879, the comments and suggestions becoming increasingly *ad hominem*. Eventually, under the title “Athaenomania” Howlett wrote,

SIR,—I have nothing—no word at all—in reply to “B.A.” His abuse and misrepresentation ruffle me no more than the language of a parrot that has been taught to swear.

I have, however, a word to certain acquaintances. These gentlemen insist that “B.A.’s” disguise is a flimsy one. He is, they maintain, none other than Balaam’s ass. Now, sir, it is very hard that I should have to stay in-doors all this sweet Sunday afternoon for fear of meeting men who loudly dub me “Balaam,” and insist that I must smite the ass.

If my friends will only drop this unpleasant and irreverent soubriquet I will promise to be as “irrepressible” as a man generally is who fully believes in the cause he has taken up.—I am, etc., W. F. Howlett. Dunedin, January 9.¹³

The *Otago Daily Times* of 11 March 1879 reported,

One of Edison’s electric pens is in use at the Railway station, and is found to work admirably. With this instrument a circular is written almost as rapidly as with the ordinary pen, and from the first copy, which is used as a stencilplate, 3000 circulars may be printed in about two hours. The advantages of this process are that there is no delay involved in it, as the operator can begin to print as soon as the circular has been written. When a clear copy is obtained, any one, with a little practice, can use it. An electric pen company has been for some time established in Dunedin, and the circulars which have been produced by the company are good samples of the efficiency of the electric pen for the work it is intended to perform.¹⁴

In May 1879 Howlett was among those presented to Governor Sir Hercules Robinson on a Vice-Regal visit to Dunedin.¹⁵

Howlett was advertising his Academy from the Electric Pen Company’s offices in 1880 and he was probably the owner. The *ODT* had reported,

The Electric Pen Company have issued a prospectus, setting forth the work they are prepared to do. The process by which copies of anything written with the electric pen can be

reproduced, is pretty well known to our readers, and we cannot do better than quote the prospectus, which says that “Everybody who wishes to deliver his soul on any subject whatever, whether he has compiled a tract, composed a poem, drafted a petition, floated a company, devised rules for a club, or written a political squib, can obtain copies of his work at a low rate from the Electric Pen Company.”¹⁶

Early in 1880 the *Wanganui Herald* (EA Haggan was a sub-editor) reported,

The Saturday Advertiser is responsible for the following:—
“There is a vile conspiracy abroad against the printers. First we have Mr W.F. Howlett, B.A., establishing an Electric Pen Company, for the purpose of dealing a death blow to the job printing trade. Then comes the Veloscribe, another invention, the object of which is to deprive unfortunate typos of their bread and butter. After this infernal machine comes the manigraph, another engine of destruction to the printing trade. And lastly, Mr Howlett threatens us with the psychoscribe, an invention of that gentleman’s own. The psychoscribe, we understand, will simply consist of specially manufactured slips of paper, and no ink is to be used in connexion therewith. The process to be observed in the working of the psychoscribe is simply, to place a bundle of, say, fifty slips of paper across the forehead for the term of five seconds, and whatever is wished to be imprinted on the slips will be immediately transcribed, through the medium of psychic force and electricity, from the tablets of the brain to the prepared paper.”¹⁷

In 1880 he was appointed a member of an Otago committee organised to collect subscriptions for the relief of the Irish famine.¹⁸ Two weeks later he was summoned for refusing to pay the fare of 6d to a cabman for driving him from the cricket ground, though the case was dismissed.¹⁹

He announced a change of address to 10 Hanover St in April.

In May he was thrashed in a pub.²⁰ The whole, lovingly detailed *ODT* report is reproduced below. It says a lot.

A HORSEWHIPPING CASE.

Algernon Herbert, more generally known as “Kosmos,” was charged at the City Police Court yesterday, before Messrs Logan and Fish, J.P.’s, with having on the 7th May assaulted and beaten William Frederick Howlett, who prayed that the said Algernon Herbert might be required to find sureties to keep the peace.

Defendant, in answer to the charge, said he admitted the assault, but he would ask their Worships to hear the reasons why he committed it.

Mr Denniston, who appeared for the plaintiff, said....The case was one of the kind ordinarily known as one of horsewhipping, in which a person deliberately and intentionally set about breaking the law, and outraging it in the worst manner....

W. F. Howlett deposed: I am a schoolmaster, and I write for the Press. I know defendant. He confessed judgment for £8 in a case I brought against him in the R.M. Court. I instructed my solicitor to get payment in any way open to him. On 7th May I was in Watson’s Hotel at half-past 11 in the morning. The defendant walked in, came up to me, and asked me what I meant by putting a bailiff into his house. That was the substance of what he said. He then took hold of me by the coat with the left hand and struck me with a stick several times—more than several, I may say eight times, perhaps.

Defendant: You say I walked over to you and asked you what you meant by putting a bailiff in my house? Did I not ask you what you meant by that last proceeding of yours?

—Yes.

And you replied “What proceeding?”—Yes.

What did you mean by asking me “What proceeding?”—I meant to ask you “What proceeding?” of course.

Did I tell you that those blackguard transactions would meet with their reward?—I think not.

Did I not say I had come to give you a chance of explaining, and you laughed in my face? Is that so?—No.

As to the assault, that has been exaggerated. Is that the stick? (pointing to a stick on the table)—Yes.

Ah! you remember it.—(Laughter.)

... Defendant continued that plaintiff had behaved towards him with ingratitude, malice, and falsehood, till the thing went beyond human endurance. He would give one instance of the ingratitude of plaintiff. Howlett had come out to his residence at Caversham and told him that he had been turned out by the person with whom he had been living—whom he had been living on, in fact. He (defendant) did not care to take Howlett into his own house, knowing his notorious character.

Mr Denniston objected to a remark of this kind.

Mr Logan: You must not say what you cannot prove.

Defendant: That is easily proved.

Mr Fish: He may be notorious in a way that many people consider meritorious.—(Laughter)....

Defendant continued that, taking pity on plaintiff, he “made it right,” as people said here, with his former landlady in Hanover street, and put Howlett into his old rooms there. Yet after this Howlett brought an unjust case against him in the R.M. Court. His solicitor had told him in regard to that case that the money might be paid within 10 days. Last Thursday he went to Port Chalmers to see a friend off by the steamer, and he believed Howlett overheard him say he was going. Howlett thereupon went to see the Resident Magistrate’s Court and laid some kind of information to the effect that he (defendant) intended to leave the country. When he returned at night he found a bailiff in his house. He offered a cheque in payment of the claim, but the bailiff could not take this, and not having sufficient cash with him he had to tolerate the presence of the bailiff in his house all night. He was naturally considerably aggravated in consequence, and meeting Howlett next morning, asked him to explain his conduct, but Howlett laughed in his face. He thereupon took him by the collar and gave him five or six cuts with his cane. They were not violent cuts, but were intended to impress Howlett with his (defendant’s) appreciation of his

blackguardly character. As to plaintiff's falsehood, he did not care to go into that, but he would like him recalled, so that he might put one question to him.

Plaintiff having gone into the box,

Defendant said to the Bench: Mr Howlett has sworn; I wish you to ask him whether he believes in that Book. He is a notorious Freethinker.

The Bench could not allow the question to be put, Mr Logan adding; he might believe in the revised edition when it comes out. It would be too much to ask him if he believes in that one....

After an explanation from Mr Denniston, who was several times interrupted by defendant as to some point in connection with the R.M. Court case, in which Mr Howlett had also been represented by Mr Denniston, The Bench had to announce that the case was closed.

Mr Fish: There has been a great deal too much latitude allowed.

Mr Logan: It is a peculiar sort of case altogether.

After some consultation, during which both Justices appeared considerably amused, the Bench decided that a fine of 60s would be inflicted on defendant, with 30s costs (including £1. 1s professional fee); in default, distress; in default of distress, three days' imprisonment.

The fine was paid.

The *Cromwell Argus* was not kind,

Howlett is almost as well known through writing ridiculous, conceited letters to the papers as J. G. S. Grant; Herbert is better known as "Kosmos." Both are of the "haw-haw" order, with great pretensions to excessive aristocracy and breeding. The two had a row—over what does not now matter; and as an outcome Herbert, catching Howlett one morning in Watson's, the eternal resort of Dunedin's young bloods, took him by the collar, lifted him out of his chair, and—aw—caned him—aw. Howlett took it in a lamblike fashion, though scarcely in an aristocratic or even manly way, for he admitted he had had enough when the caning was finished, and resorted to a

summons—the resort of the base-born—for satisfaction. “Kosmos” had to pay £3 and 30s expenses, and probably enough would be glad to give Howlett another “caning” tomorrow on the same terms. Poor Howlett has decidedly had the worst of it. He is the sort of fellow who boasts a great deal about being a public school boy from England, but has not sustained the reputation.²¹

Herbert (“Kosmos”) was a commentator on horse racing and the story of Howlett’s “horse-whipping” at his hands delighted editors all around the country. The Dunedin paper *The Colonial Printers’ Register* reported the story, adding that Howlett had briefly edited the *Southland News*,

Algernon Herbert, better known as “Kosmos,” celebrated as a sporting writer, has been fined £3 and costs (£1 10s.), with the alternative of three days’ imprisonment, for assaulting William Frederick Howlett, B.A. Algernon paid the fine. The case, which caused not a little amusement, was heard at the Dunedin City Police Court on the 11th inst. The B.A. recently had the honour of temporarily occupying the editorial chair of the *Southland News*.²²

The Otago newspapers made no further mention of WF Howlett after the incident, though much later Milton’s *Bruce Herald* noted his candidacy in the 1890 election with some distaste,

A man called Howlett is a candidate for Masterton. He describes himself as a Tirenist, a Republican, an Atheist, and a Malthusian. His programme will probably be so popular with a large class of the electors that he will be returned, but if the new Parliament should happen to be respectable, as we believe it is likely to be, it is not probable *honorable* members will sit with him.²³

1 *Nelson Evening Mail* 14 December 1876.

2 *Otago Daily Times* 9 March 1878.

3 *Otago Daily Times* 15 April 1878. Norrie had been replaced as rector of the Boys’ High School by GM Thomson; his relationship with the educational establishment was strained and he left for South Africa in 1878.

4 See <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1g18/grant-james-gordon-stuart> for a biography.

- 5 Olive Trotter. *Dunedin's spiteful Socrates: James Gordon Stuart Grant*. Dunedin, private printing, 2006.
 - 6 *Otago Witness* 29 September 1855.
 - 7 *Evening Star* 15 June 1878.
 - 8 *Otago Daily Times* 30 July 1878.
 - 9 *Evening Star* 3 October 1878.
 - 10 *The Daily Colonist, Victoria B.C.* 24 April 1929.
 - 11 *Otago Daily Times* 1 November 1878.
 - 12 *Otago Daily Times* 28 October 1878.
 - 13 *Evening Star* 9 June 1879.
 - 14 *Otago Daily Times* 11 March 1879.
 - 15 *Otago Daily Times* 2 May 1879.
 - 16 *Otago Daily Times* 25 November 1879.
 - 17 *Wanganui Herald* 22 January 1880.
 - 18 *Otago Daily Times* 30 January 1880.
 - 19 *Otago Daily Times* 29 January 1880.
 - 20 *Otago Daily Times* 12 May 1880.
 - 21 *Cromwell Argus* 18 May 1880.
 - 22 *The Colonial Printers' Register* 22 May 1880. The *Register* of 15 October 1879 carries the enigmatic "W. F. Howlett (Invercargill.)—Your kind suggestion shall be acted upon".
 - 23 *Bruce Herald* 31 October 1890.
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CHAPTER 5: THE EDITOR: PATEA 1881–1882

Howlett may have simply outlived the patience of Dunedin society. He must have gone to Wellington (a "Howlett" arrived at Wellington on the *Taiaroa* on 20 May), for he next appears in the "General List" at "The Governor's Levee," Sir Arthur Gordon's first party at Government House, Wellington, on 7 December 1880.¹

In August 1881 he was arguing with "McA" in the correspondence columns of the *Evening Post* (Wellington) on the Irish Question.

He was on his way to Patea, as editor of the newly established *Evening News*. He arrived there on 28 August 1881, a passenger on the *Patea*, 50 tons, from Wellington.²

He was late: the *Wanganui Chronicle's* Patea correspondent had reported on 24 August,

The usual quiet of our little town has just been disturbed by the appearance of the Evening News, which it is intended to publish every evening. It is neatly printed on demy, by Mr Edward Norris, for the proprietor, Mr J. Black. The editor has not yet

arrived, and the opening address does not in any way indicate the political opinions likely to obtain support. The following apology for the incompleteness of the paper appears:— “We did not intend issuing the News for a few weeks, as our staff arrangements are not yet complete, therefore we hope a little consideration will be shown until the arrival of the gentleman who is to occupy the editorial chair.” Judging from the influential support already promised, the proprietor should not be long in making the enlargement promised.³

Copies of the *Patea Evening News* are hard to find, but its editorials were sometimes sufficiently interesting for other papers to report them—for instance this,⁴

THE WAVERLEY-PATEA RAILWAY.

(Patea Evening News.)

Our old enemy and ex-Colonial Treasurer, Mr John Ballance,⁵ not content with the persistent opposition shown by him to this district, has discovered a “political job” in the adoption of the Coast route for the railway line north of Waverley. His organ (the Wanganui Herald) last evening states that Government had decided the line should be taken by the inland route. This is new to us, for we were of opinion that no decision had been arrived at until within the present week. Then, arguing from this point of view, it proceeds to account for the change which followed by saying— “The general election is at hand, and the necessary pressure having been brought to bear, Major Atkinson at once meets the wishes of his supporters, calls the Cabinet together, and gets it to agree to the ‘political railway route.’” It is very evident from this that our contemporary is looking through coloured glasses. The fact is that the line by the seaward can be worked far cheaper than the inland one, and does away with the necessity for a branch, and Government have acted in their best interests by bringing Waverley nearer to Patea, which will be their port for the future. The expenses of a branch line are done away with, and the high prices realised by Government for land in Patea township should make it worthy of some consideration.⁶

In December Howlett was again writing to the *Evening Post*, this time on trade with New Caledonia—but really, Taranaki was no better than Dunedin when it came to the availability of a decent library,

... My reason in writing this letter does not lie on the surface. I wish a few people to know that I, and a few more, protest most indignantly at the way our New Zealand Government refuse to gratify our natural desire to get information about the prospects and resources of the Empire. Mr. Phillips will cordially agree with me that these Consular reports, together with all State papers published by the Imperial Government, ought to be accessible to students in the four New Zealand towns. Why should private people, like myself, have to go to the very great trouble and expense of importing specially such documents? It is the same with all information. All the way up the coast, from Patea to Hawera, Opunake, and New Plymouth, there is not a place where even the publications of the New Zealand Government can be seen. You cannot get a file of the Gazette, a set of Acts, or even a copy of the West Coast Commission Report.

I am, &c, W. F. HOWLETT.⁷

The *News* failed: the *Feilding Star* of 25 October 1882 would report,

The Patea Evening News has come to an end, and the plant has been purchased for removal to another district. In taking leave the editor says that the News has had many compliments paid to it during the fifteen months of its existence, but something more was needed to give it sustenance.⁸

At some time GW Wakelin of Greytown took over as editor of the paper,⁹ so Howlett may have left before 1882.

He returned, for in 1885 he took the train from Wanganui to Patea without a ticket and was fined.¹⁰ Four years after that the *Wanganui Herald* would report (on 11 March 1889),

Mr F.W. Howlett, formerly of Patea, where he edited a paper for a time, with Mr H.H. Bridge, of Woodville, were in town yesterday on their way to Manaia, whence they start for the top of Egmont, via Dawson's Falls.¹¹

The writer did not mean to imply Harry Bridge was co-editor of the paper, but that he was now in Wanganui with his cousin WF Howlett for the climb. There is no record of whether or not they succeeded.

1 *Evening Post* 8 December 1880.

2 *Hawera and Normanby Star* 31 August 1881.

3 *Wanganui Chronicle* 24 August 1881.

4 *Wanganui Chronicle* 24 October 1881.

5 Ballance had founded the *Wanganui Herald*.

6 *Taranaki Herald* 30 March 1882.

7 *Evening Post* 29 December 1881.

8 *Feilding Star* 25 October 1882

9 <http://bygonedaysphotography.blogspot.co.nz/2008/12/mr-mrs-richard-wakelin-of-greytown-new.html> 2 November 2016.

10 *Patea Mail* 9 February 1885.

11 *Wanganui Herald* 11 March 1889.

CHAPTER 6: THE TEACHER: MAKARETU 1882–1886

Howlett's bachelor cousins Harry and Stewart Bridge were living at Ongaonga where Harry owned Fairfield and leased Ashcott stations.

In April 1882 the Hawke's Bay Education Board invited applications for the position of master of the two half-time schools at Blackburn and Makaretu.¹ The *Waipawa Mail* advised, "Two horses are needed by the teacher in order to insure punctual attendance at both schools.... The Makaretu school house is quite inaccessible in winter for carts."²

On 20 June 1882 the Hawke's Bay Education Board (Captain Russell, Howlett's cousin, was a member) approved a recommendation of the Onga Onga School Committee that Mr Howlett should be appointed master of the Blackburn and Makaretu schools.³

On 22 October 1882 William Colenso wrote to John Drummond in Ongaonga,

Yours of the 2nd, with the egg or capsule of those worms, I duly received and I have been watching the said egg ever since, but it is still the same. I think I must take it with me to ensure its safety &c. If your

*good friend Mr Howlett can get you one, or two more, without too much trouble, I should be glad to receive them.*⁴

Perhaps Howlett, after leaving the *Patea Evening News*, had gone to stay with his cousins in Ongaonga and befriended Drummond there. Ten miles west was the Bush settlement of Makaretu.

Howlett was graded B4 in 1883.⁵ In August the Board received a letter from him,

... stating that he had built a stable and made other improvements at the school, and asking for a grant of money. Mr Howlett added that if his request were granted he would go on making improvements without applying for further assistance; if the Board could not legally make a grant he would make them a present of the work already done.—Reply to be sent stating the Board regretted that they could not legally make a grant.⁶

In late 1883 he was Makaretu agent for Dinwiddie's *Hawke's Bay Almanac*, so he had opened his store by then.

Howlett wrote,

The school inspector strongly urges making the Makaretu school a full time one, and as the establishment and maintenance of half time schools is not authorised by the Act, it is to be hoped it will be done. All the expenditure hitherto has been illegal, and should not have been allowed to pass without comment by a competent auditor.⁷

He reported that a newly elected Ongaonga district school committee had decided,

... that none of the elder children are to be used as monitors without their parents' consent. This will make the school much less effective, as one teacher cannot properly teach seven classes, two of which are infants. The matter is of some general interest, and it would be well if you could induce one or two country teachers to inform you as briefly as possible how they manage. You see infants really require continual supervision, or they would be better playing outside. Leave them alone, and

they break their pencils, or use them only to try and make holes in their surroundings generally.⁸

School Inspector Henry Hill visited Makaretu later in 1884 and found 51 children in attendance. He pronounced the accommodation insufficient, and suggested that the Blackburn school (then closed) be pulled down and re-erected as an infant school at Makaretu.⁹ The Board didn't agree.



Fairfield



Ashcott, where Howlett had an upstairs room.



Early Makaretu in the remains of the 70 Mile Bush
—from Miriam Macgregor. *Pioneer trails of Hawke's Bay*, Reed 1975.

The *Daily Telegraph's* own correspondent visited Howlett at Makaretu in March 1885,

The school is a very nice one, and in good condition, but limited in accommodation, only 27 being provided for, while the attendance frequently exceeds 50. Those in standards have precedence, of course, while the balance have to sit on the floor in any corner where they can find room. The school looked very clean and nice, and we saw some work done by the scholars hung on the wall. Mr. Howlett's residence was close by. It is a very comfortable 4-roomed house, in the front room of which he keeps a store where we noticed a very varied assortment of goods from hammers and other tools to all sorts of drapery and grocery. Here let me interpose a brief remark about this school.

At a late meeting of the Education Board it was decided that the Makaretu and Onga Onga school district should be divided, since when nothing more has been heard about it. I presume that it is the duty of a Board to make the requisite arrangements for carrying this out and to appoint a day and place for and election of committees for each. If this is not done education will soon be at a standstill in this locality, especially as matters are going on at present. For instance they have adopted the compulsory clauses, which means that every parent who has children of suitable age are compelled to send their children to school. In the Makaretu school there is accommodation for 27 children only, yet there are about 70 children of school age in the district. Surely here is a pressing case, and the least that could be expected from the powers that be, after placing those poor Scandinavians in such an out-of-the-way place, is to find their children accommodation in school.¹⁰

In September Howlett wrote to the *Hawke's Bay Herald*,

MUSIC AND DRAWING TUITION FOR TEACHERS.

... When I applied for a certificate I told the Minister plainly I could neither draw nor sing, and he said it didn't matter. I have just been over the whole correspondence. I am certainly not going to learn. A very cursory examination of the "requirements" has led me to conclude that "drawing" is really not meant to be taught. What is really meant is the construction of easy diagrams, such as squares and ellipses. These anyone can produce after a few minutes' trial. I think that if the Minister would explain a little more clearly what he wants, any sensible teacher would acquire facility without instruction. About singing. I quite agree that it is nice to hear singing, but is it worth while, to dismiss men who are doing good work and appoint others who will certainly teach singing, and yet as likely as not teach it all wrong. When I came up to this remote bush settlement I found singing in full blast, and the result was so dreadful that I did not regret my own incapacity. You might reply that a teacher should not be appointed who cannot teach singing well. I answer that for the small salaries allowed (mine is about the same as that of a head shepherd in the employ of a neighboring friend) you can very seldom get men who can teach anything. I don't want to speak egotistically, but I say honestly

that beyond arithmetic and geography I know very little except about things children do not require to learn. When I am teaching history I tell the children frankly that I know nothing about it. I read it with them, not teach it to them. I know hardly anything of reading, or infant school work, or sewing, or drawing, or music. A man cannot know everything, and very few men know anything, and I should say that it is a mistake to enforce anything but the three R's as absolutely compulsory subjects....

—I am, &c, W. F. HOWLETT, Makaretu,
19th September, 1885.¹¹

Draw or sing he could not, but he could make fireworks; he wrote (of himself),

There is to be a display of fireworks at the school on Wednesday next, the 19th; they were manufactured locally, and all the latest French colors have been attempted, but great difficulty is found in getting the proper materials in this colony.¹²

In 1889 he explained (of himself),

Fireworks are a tradition at Makaretu, for the schoolmaster who was here from 1882 to 1886 had the tools and used to make them, while after his departure Mr H.H. Bridge several times provided them at his cost.¹³

Henry Hill visited again on 24 September. He “expressed interest in the maps, especially those of the locality, which took the children five hours to make, and have since being selling freely for 10s a-piece.” One such map, drawn by Oscar Johansen, has survived and is in the possession of a descendant of the boy cartographer.

In October 1885 a Makaretu School Committee meeting was called to investigate charges of cruelty to children and resolved, “That Mr Howlett be instructed not to beat or strike any of the children in any way in future.”¹⁴ He closed the school.

Again writing of himself in the third person, he commented,

There is a pretty row on at central Makaretu about the schoolmaster. The committee met on Monday to investigate a charge of beating a girl, with the result that they prohibited the



Oscar Johansen's map, drawn at Makaretu school c. 1883, the original held by Bryan Johansen whose ancestors owned Lot 67. Copy supplied by Neville Berkahn whose ancestors owned Lot 56.

teacher, by resolution, from thrashing any more children. On being informed of this, I believe, he wrote to the chairman stating that he had closed the school until the matter had been dealt with by the Education Board, and if he perseveres in this course the school will continue closed for a month!¹⁵

... and a few days later,

Our Makaretu correspondent (Howlett himself again) writes:—
 “I told you in my last that the school committee had prohibited all corporal punishment and that the teacher had closed the school and asked the Board whether he was bound to recognise this prohibition. Since then the Board has replied, ‘Re-open the school.’ The teacher, not considering this an answer to his question, has again asked the Board to give him plain orders. It would appear that if the Board entrust the secretary with executive powers sufficient to justify him in ordering the school to be re-opened, he would also be competent to advise the teacher as requested, or at any rate to refuse such advice, in which case the teacher is prepared to re-open the school, and act on his own judgment with respect to the committee’s prohibition of corporal punishment.”¹⁶

School Inspector Henry Hill had reported very favourably after his 1885 visit,

Makaretu is quite an unique position among the schools of the district, and it appears to me to deserve more than a passing notice. When judged according to the standard of work alone, the results are low, but judged according to the usefulness of the work done I am inclined to place it among the best in my district. The children are of mixed race, but the majority are Scandinavians, and the master well knowing how the lives of the majority of them will be cast has practically adapted his instruction to the future necessities of the children. From standard II upwards the work partakes more or less of a technical character. The pupils are made familiar with all forms of business—of buying and selling, of exchange, of keeping accounts, of tendering for work, and making topographical plans of the Makaretu settlement. They are acquainted with the more important trees in the Bush, and can botanically describe the flowers growing by the wayside. I have carefully examined



The Lutheran church and Sunday school at Makaretu.
From D and P Severinsen 1993. *The Severinsen family. Book 2* .



Makaretu school and school house including store.

the pupils in most of these matters, and I must confess the pleasure I experienced on finding that the children had a full appreciation of many of the social and economical questions which will come more closely under their observation in years to come. The topographical maps of the settlement instructed by the pupils in Standards II and IV are excellent, and when mounted and varnished readily sell to the settlers at prices varying from 2/- to 10/- each. The tendering by the lads for digging small garden plots for the master is well carried out, and shows really good judgement on their part. I have gone over the last lot of tenders sent in for digging a plot of ground $4\frac{1}{2}$ yards by 5 yards, and I have not found relatively so much difference between the highest and lowest tenders as I have often seen in tenders for the erection of school buildings. The method adopted by the master in teaching his children the art of buying and selling and keeping accounts is exceedingly interesting and instructive. Each senior pupil is required to open a business account with the master. The latter is supposed to purchase from the parents, but only through the children, articles such as bread, milk, butter, eggs, and cream, and directly from the children eels, would-hens, and many other things. Then the children purchase from the master various kinds of articles which they or their parents may require from time to time. The account books are balanced monthly, and the master expects a proper credit balance to be carried forward.¹⁷

The store hours were irregular, debtors' names were posted on the door and inevitably business suffered. In 1885 he advertised a wool press for sale.¹⁸ The store met with criticism and Howlett wrote as Makaretu correspondent to the *Herald*,

The school here is in its usual state of racket. First, the teacher keeps a store in the school-house. This is indisputably the fact, as "school-house" is expressly defined in the Act to include the master's residence, where the store is. This is a great source of trouble. It seems he sells everything under cost price, and as he has a large salary, amounting for the present quarter to no less than two pounds one shilling per week, he can clearly well afford to do so. There is no use his telling his customers that his coffee costs him 11d at his door; they all know better; they have bought worse in Napier and paid 2s. Therefore if he sells it at

1s 3d he is 9d out of pocket. Now this destroys and ruins the honest men who keep stores in the locality. How can they get 2s, as an honest, legitimate storekeeper should, if this pestilent teacher sells it at 1s 3d? And worse than all this, he is proud of being an illegitimate storekeeper; as bad as William the Conqueror, who, after his iron rule had crushed the rowdy Norman nobles, used to cynically sign proclamations, "William the Bastard." One honest fellow in the neighborhood got up a petition to the committee, praying them to order the teacher to discontinue his mercantile experiments, but when it came to the scratch only one man could be got to sign it, and he was induced to do so simply because as he never, never has any cash, he never visits the school store. Alas! that moral courage should be so rare. But the store racket is not the only racket. There is a committeeman who has a firm belief that the children are mercilessly beaten. One day lately he went into the school and endeavored to protest against the Orbilius-like¹⁹ barbarities of the teacher-storekeeper. But when the teacher told his visitor flatly that he must entirely abstain from any appearance of interference, the children manifested their assent to this so cordially that the committeeman fled most ignominiously. There is to be a committee meeting on the 19th to investigate the matter.

The school was inspected on the 24th, and I hope to send you some remarks on the report when it arrives. The Inspector expressed interest in the maps, especially those of the locality, which took the children five hours to make, and have since been selling freely at 10s a piece.²⁰

The Napier *Daily Telegraph's* "own correspondent" in Waipawa (Howlett again) reported in November that,

Mr Hill, Inspector of Schools, passed through here on his return from Makaretu, to-day. I believe he put the matter very pointedly to Mr Howlett, telling him that he had come to have the school re-opened. If the teacher chose to do so well and good, otherwise he had come prepared to take charge of it himself. Mr Howlett decided to go on, but added that he would not obey the resolution of the committee in doing away with flogging the children.²¹

The Hawke's Bay Education Board discussed the Makaretu school at length at its 17 November meeting,

The Chairman said he had before him a tremendously long correspondence relating to the closing of the Makaretu school. Practically what had taken place was this: The master chastised one of the children, and the committee thought the punishment too severe, and ordered the master to desist from corporal punishment in future. He then closed the school, and it remained closed some considerable time. He applied to the Board for advice as to whether the committee had power to stop him inflicting corporal punishment, and he (the chairman) instructed the inspector to write telling him to re-open the school pending consideration by the Board of the point Mr Howlett had raised. As he did not reopen the school the inspector went up and saw him and the school was then re-opened after being closed three weeks.

[The Chairman then read some of the correspondence, which caused great amusement owing to the quaint manner in which Mr Howlett described the affair.]

Mr Harding said the school must have been closed under any circumstances, in consequence of the alterations going on.

Mr Sidey said the master must have discretionary powers as to punishment, or he could not maintain discipline.

Captain Russell²² agreed with Mr Sidey.

Mr Guy said the master had treated both the committee and the Board with contempt, and had by correspondence in the papers brought the Board into ridicule. He (Mr Guy) moved that Mr Howlett be summarily dismissed for "gross misbehavior" under clause 47 of the Act.

Captain Russell said Mr Howlett was in the wrong, but he was a good teacher.

The Inspector, replying to a question, said Mr Howlett was a good worker, and most intelligent in his method of teaching.

Mr Harding said they would not get another like Mr Howlett, but it was to be feared that after this affair he would not work amicably with the committee.

Mr Sidey said the real question at issue was whether the committee had a right to stop corporal punishment. Could a committee practically say to a teacher, "You are not to enforce discipline?"

Mr Guy said the real issue was whether a teacher was to be allowed to defy the Board and the committee. Mr Howlett was too independent. He went into the bush, with a store, and taught the school, working one thing with the other.

Mr Sidey: I think it's a good thing for a teacher to be independent.

Mr Guy: Yes, when he's got common sense.

Replying to Captain Russell, the Inspector said Mr Howlett always seemed to be very popular with the children—they did not seem to be afraid of him, but were quite familiar. How it would be in the future he (the Inspector) could not say. He fancied that the present friction would disappear if Mr Howlett had an assistant to manage the little ones. Very few of them spoke any English, and it required great patience to manage them. The school was entitled to a pupil teacher, and if all the children in the district attended it would be entitled to an assistant mistress.

After some further discussion Mr Guy altered his motion to read that three months' notice be given to Mr Howlett.

Mr White seconded, giving as his reason a belief that a cordial feeling between Mr Howlett and the committee would not be restored.

Captain Russell moved that Mr Howlett be reprimanded.

Mr Harding seconded the amendment, which on being put was carried.

On the motion of Mr Sidey, the secretary was directed to write to the Makaretu committee, expressing regret at the course

adopted by the committee, as the Board considered the absolute abolition of corporal punishment impracticable.²³

But the Board declined even to read a letter from Howlett at its 15 December meeting “as it had not come through the (school) committee”.²⁴

On 19 January 1886 the Board received a letter “From Mr W.F. Howlett, resigning his position as teacher of Makaretu School.—Resignation accepted”.²⁵

The *Woodville Examiner*:

MAKARETU SCHOOL STORE

UNAVOIDABLY CLOSED
UNTIL
JANUARY 26th

Very sorry, but cannot help it.
W.F. HOWLETT,
Manager.²⁶

MAKARETU SCHOOL STORE,
JANUARY 26^m, 1886

Some lines quite out, pending transference to
new hands.

Fair Stocks of—
Flour,
Wire,
Nails,
Tea,
Boots.

I hope to see my successor established and fully
stocked in 3 weeks.

W.F. HOWLETT,
Manager.²⁷

Howlett sold the store at Makaretu to JG Macfarlane, storekeeper at Ongaonga, but the latter sold up in 1889.

FOR SALE. Post-office Store, Makaretu, doing a good business. Stock at valuation. Apply at premises, or to J. G. MACFARLANE, Onga Onga.

All accounts owing to above Store to be paid forthwith.

J.G. MACFARLANE.

Onga Onga, 28th. October, 1889.



The enlarged Makaretu store under Macfarlane's ownership.
—from Miriam Macgregor. *Pioneer trails of Hawke's Bay*, Reed 1975.

Much later, as chairman of the school committee in 1894, Howlett was involved in a group trying to extend the Makaretu school, but again his efforts were frustrated by bureaucracy, by “those stuck-in-the-muds,” the Hawke’s Bay Education Board, and he wrote to the editor,

SIR,—Here is the plain story of our attempt to enlarge the Makaretu school. It consisted of two rooms, each with separate desks for 27 children. Before the last examination there were 29 children in the upper room and 42 in the infants’ room.

Now, the second standard having been promoted, there are 34 in the upper room and 38 in the infants' room. Experience shows that during the next nine months the number of "upper" children will decrease and of "infants" increase. The Board should have enlarged the infants' room. Instead of that they have enlarged the upper room. And a gay mess. The new work doesn't match the old, and is hideous to any educated eye on that account, and the Tobins are put in all wrong. Any sanitary engineer would smile. Well, I thought the best way was to put our hands in our pockets, and I got a strong committee, including Messrs Finley, Morrison, and Alex Stenby, to guarantee the money, and politely requested the Board to find half the cost and let us (not gas about it but) do the job. At the last meeting they hung it up for a month to "obtain Mr Hill's report." I had previously urged the secretary to either get the report, or have him in attendance, or ring him up. At the next meeting they are having it all up again for an architect's report and *plans*! Ye Gods! *Plans* wanted to simply run a gable out! We shall want plans and architects and months of delay to but a quire of foolscap next! We are all more or less carpenters here, and I'll answer for it our work would not have been so opposed to all canons of taste as the recent enlargement of the upper room. To crown it all, the Board refuse to correspond with me! Now, look here, Mr Editor, suppose I come and offer you a new font of type, A1 type, if you will pay half, and promise to get it much cheaper than you can, and you want the type badly? How would you act? If you refused to correspond with me, and tried to make me look a fool, I know what I should do, I should tell you to go to Sheol. I am, etc.,

WF HOWLETT.

P.S.--In my indignation I left part of my story out. We met on Wednesday to receive the Board's reply, which I had requested the secretary to mail on Tuesday. No reply arrived! We had no course but to dissolve, and there is no more any School Extension Committee.--W.F.H.²⁸

Three weeks later he was back,

SIR,--This is going to be a very grave serious letter. I want to let the public see that the Education Board needs reform. Some of

the members are quite rational when you get them alone, (but) as a *body* they are senile, or rather anile, and I think they must be dominated by some one or two, and induced to acquiesce in bungling....

The Board's secretary, George Fannin, had offered to supply Howlett with a copy of its regulations,

... and did hand me a bundle of papers. The first was a circular a year old, in which he informed some Committee that the Board intended to meet on the 20th June *ultimo*. You're no scholar, Mr Editor, neither am I. But we both of us know that *ultimo* means *last* month. To an educated man (that's not me, don't make any error) the circular would be as indecently flippant as if Mr Fannin were to throw a somersault in Hastings street and ask the Bishop, "What is your nibs going to have for dinner yesterday?"²⁹

1 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 22 April 1882.

2 *Waipawa Mail* 27 May 1882.

3 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 21 June 1882.

4 Alexander Turnbull Library 88-103-1/13.

5 *Daily Telegraph* 17 April 1883.

6 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 22 August 1883.

7 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 13 December 1883.

8 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 5 February 1884.

9 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 17 June 1884.

10 "To the Makaretu". *Daily Telegraph* 19 March 1885.

11 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 25 September 1885. A lesson for any profession.

12 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 13 December 1883.

13 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 10 December 1889.

14 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 21 October 1885.

15 *Daily Telegraph* 21 October 1885.

16 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 30 October 1885.

17 MTG Hawke's Bay collections m55/20 (d), 24048. Hill gave an example of such an account at the end of his report: a bucket of milk cost 2/6 but a wooden only 6d.

18 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 11 November 1885.

19 Lucius Orbilius Pupillus taught Horace who described him as *plagosus* (a flogger).

20 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 10 October 1885.

21 *Daily Telegraph* 13 November 1885.

22 Howlett's cousin William Russell.

23 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 18 November 1885.

24 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 16 December 1885.

25 *Daily Telegraph* 19 January 1886.

26 *Woodville Examiner* 26 January 1886.

27 *Woodville Examiner* 29 January 1886.

28 *Evening News and Hawke's Bay Advertiser* 22 October 1894. He had written in similar language to the *Hawke's Bay Herald* on 20 September.

29 *Evening News and Hawke's Bay Advertiser* 16 November 1894.

CHAPTER 7: THE STOREKEEPER: PAHIATUA 1886–1888

Howlett gave his residential address as Waipawa and his occupation as teacher on the 1885–1886 electoral roll, but soon thereafter the *Hawke's Bay Herald's* readers were hearing from “an occasional correspondent” in the southern Bush township of Pahiataua. In a style they would have found familiar, he reported of Pahiataua that,

... the most noticeable feature of the place is the number of new buildings going up. I think there can hardly be less than a dozen of the latter. At all events there are at least two bakers' shops, a couple of stores, and a number of dwelling houses, while I saw a man carrying along the road two boards—one marked *Makaretu Cash Store* and the other *Will open here by 1st May*. So I suppose Mr Howlett intends to keep himself before the public.¹

Howlett sold up in Makaretu and moved to Pahiataua where he called for tenders for a new building² and reopened his store, calling it, confusingly perhaps, the Makaretu Cash Store.

MAKARETU SCHOOL STORE

This Store is dead—defunct—a thing of the past. I hope to Open at Pahiataua under another title, about 1st May, 1886.

W.F. HOWLETT.³

MAKARETU CASH STORE

I have moved to Pahiataua, and am doing business under above style. Terms as before, cash only. All General Goods kept. Builders' requisites a specialty.⁴

He wasn't quite ready for the first issue of EA Haggan and Alexander Black's *Pahiataua Star* on 11 June 1886, but advertised nonetheless,

MAKARETU CASH STORE

The Building is about half completed and it is proposed to open about 15th July. The stock will include—

Groceries,
 Drapery,
 Hardware,
 Crockery,
 Boots,
 And whatever else is likely to find a local Sale.
 W.F. HOWLETT,
 Manager.⁵

He later advertised extensively in the *Pahiatua Star*, e.g. in 1887,

MAKARETU CASH STORE.

Pahiatua, 2nd August, 1887.

A few lines not generally kept in country stores, or at any rate not at our prices are subjoined:—

Groceries.

Silver Dust Flour, 13s; Potatoes, 10s per bag of 1½ cwt; Oatmeal, 4s; American Evaporated Fruit as Nectarines, Plums, Pears; Lusk's Canned Peaches; Salt in stone jars; Pure and Mixed Coffee. Ceylon and China Tea; Nelson Moate's Tea in half-pounds, pounds, and 5 and 10 pound tins at 2s lb.

Hardware.

Guns and Ammunition in very considerable variety. The Makareta Watch, a stem-winding, hand-setting, enamel-dial, -sunk -seconds Pound's worth—will be on sale in about a month. The Waterbury Watch, let a man have it if he will, 11s 6d. Turkey Stones and Slips; Lamp Fillers; Mixed Paint; Trowels; short Weeding Forks. Table Kerosene Lamps, as Annapie, Sham Silber, Duplex, Bracket. Axes, as Maine, Georgia, Mann's, Eureka. Roofing Felt; Galvanised Iron, Redelyffe Brand, at 22s by the case.

Crockery.

Garden Flower-pots, Choice Glass Dishes, Painted Fern-pots, Expensive Tea-pots, Vast Butter Crocks, Stew-pots.

Drapery.

Green and Red Baize, Heavy Worsted Fringe and Fancy Nails, with which you can convert a Kitchen into Boudoir. Trimmed Hats, Feather Ornaments, Fur Capes, Claret and other Ulster Cloths, Chenille Flowers, Ostrich

Feathers, Black Straw Hats, Fancy and Felt do., Ulsters in variety, Boys' Wool Shirts, Infants' Pelisses and Hats; Silk, Satin, and Velvet in black, navy, marone, and cardinal; Ladies' Handbags and Muffs; Wadding, Bonnet Wire; Men's Socks up to 3s 6d and worth it, Boys' Kicker Hose, best in market, American Brown Duck riveted Pants, and Coats (these are direct from Frisco, a very special line, worth early inspection), Men's Wool Gloves, White Comforters, Cashmere Mufflers.

Sundries.

Chinese Fireworks; Tobacco, as Juno, Venus, Victory, Ruby, Navy, Black Swan; Cigars, as Indian, Eagle, Queen's, Manilla, Swiss. Doors, Windows, Fresh Fruit, as Apples, Oranges, Cocoa-nuts, Bananas, Lemons. Smoked Fish, as Barracouta. Garden Seeds—Sutton's, expected daily, ask for printed list. Fruit Trees, named varieties, excellent, not like you get from a hawker, as Gooseberry 6d, Currant 1s, Apple 2s, also Filbert, Pear. Flowers, as Rose 1s 6d, Lily, Fuchsia.

How business is done at Credit Stores—Those who do pay have to pay for those who don't.

How business is done at Cash Stores—Every man on his own bottom.

TOWN SECTIONS FOR SALE.

Mr Horace Baker's remaining Sections near Makareta Store, and most of the Sections across the Tirameua Road. Terms and maps may be seen on application.

Delivery of Goods in town only by wheelbarrow express.

Hours, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturdays open till 10 p.m. No trade on Sundays.

W. F. HOWLETT.

In February 1887 Howlett wrote an open letter to Lands Minister John Ballance, whose 1885 Land Act sought to place as many people as possible on the land by encouraging leasehold tenure and establishing government-assisted special settlement schemes.⁶ The *Pahiatua Star* published the letter and the *Hawke's Bay Herald* gleefully took it up,

PEGS.

Mr W.F. Howlett has written a funny letter to the *Pahiatua Star* that is worth reading, and we offer the divertisement to our readers. Mr Howlett calls it

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HON. JOHN BALLANCE.

"SIR,—On the 7th February I wired to you that I could not find the pegs in the Pahiatua village settlement, and asked you to "instruct some local man" to show me the pegs of section 87. Getting no reply, I wired next day asking 'why any mystery about the pegs?' The only answer I got to this was a call from Mr Sedcole, who showed me a telegram from Mr Marchant alluding to certain instructions issued to Mr Sedcole on 2nd February, and saying I 'complained' I could not find the pegs.

"You, Sir, who have at any rate experience of departmental work, will readily see that the affair, as far as I have gone, is very confused. What have Messrs Marchant and Sedcole to do with the matter? In order to ascertain I wired to Mr Marchant asking him to instruct Mr Sedcole to show me the above-mentioned instructions issued 2nd February. To this Mr Marchant replied. 'You should see Mr Sedcole, who has already informed me he has seen you and arranged to go over ground with you.' You will see that Mr Marchant neither refuses to let me see these instructions nor instructs Mr Sedcole to show me them. He only tells me what I was perfectly well aware of. Telegrams cost money, and as I knew Mr Sedcole was in communication with Mr Marchant, I only stated in my telegram what was necessary.

"The upshot of the whole thing is that I want an explicit answer to my first telegram of 7th February. I want to know will you or will you not have the pegs of section 87 pointed out to me? I am sorry to adopt this unusual way of addressing you, but as you

do not answer my telegrams, and your subordinates do so evasively, I have no course open but the one I have taken.

“There is not the least necessity for me to offer any explanation of my wish to see these pegs, but, as it may interest some of your colleagues, I will do so. First, I want to know whether the pegs are supposed to be in. Second, whether they are as a matter of fact in. Third, whether they can be found by persons ordinarily skilled. Fourth, I want to know the relations that exist between yourself and Mr Sedcole. I want to find out his proper style, and his duties; also by what authority he was appointed. No doubt the bulk of those who read this letter will be quite incapable of understanding that the machinery of Government is a proper object of study; but as you cannot well admit that you have never studied it yourself, you are in a different position, and you will allow that in giving my serious attention to your new land scheme, I am really fulfilling a duty.

“I will tell you a little secret. I and a considerable number of political students, as distinguished from the unthinking crowd who clamor for party, wish you every success in your scheme although we regard it as visionary and badly planned. Our idea is, that every school of thought (or of folly) should have ample scope. We see a dog-fight and applaud both dogs. We subscribe to both Roman Catholic chapels and English churches. We want to investigate your scheme, remedy its defects, and give it a real good chance. And then away with it to Limbo, along with Major Atkinson’s scheme of compulsory assurance, and Mr Maxwell’s Railway Parcels Delivery, and all other addled eggs that the Ministers for the time being cackle over as if they were hatchable. And what, you ask, will be our attitude if your scheme turns out well? We shall admit frankly that you deserve the highest credit for seeing that what is economically absurd is practically feasible. We know, none better, that the noblest victories are sometimes won by a daring disregard of current beliefs and rules. We are anxious you should have a fair field; and when you have won your victory, but not before, our applause will be without a particle of jealousy.

“I wish Mr Sedcole’s name was not mixed up with my inquiries. I hope he will forgive me for saying that I have not the smallest

reason for supposing that he has in any way neglected his instructions or failed in courtesy to myself.—I am, &c,

W.F. HOWLETT.⁷

He wrote, as Pahiatua Correspondent to the *Wairarapa Daily Times*, of himself,

Mr Howlett: That unrestrainable dreamer of dreams is planting a solid quarter acre of cabbages to supply the local market in August and September. He has also got a new Japanese shrub, a perfect substitute for tea, that will grow in any garden, and supply the finest Bohea at no cost at all.

The bush round us is being attacked again; one outsider⁸ has bought a place about three miles off for £1600 cash, and is coming along soon; another outsider⁹ has (it is whispered) secured sections amounting to over 1000 acres all virgin bush, and will fell the lot in 4 to 6 months, £1700, more or less, to be divided amongst the sons of toil! How they will enjoy the money now they cannot get goods on credit!¹⁰

In the *Wairarapa Daily Times* of 25 July 1888, Howlett would write, of his cousins,

Some large holdings have been recently purchased here in Mangaone. A Mr Bridge, of Napier, has taken up about a thousand acres, and a Mr Russell, from the same place, a large block, the exact area of which I am unable to inform you of. The bush-felling season not yet being very far advanced, no doubt these gentlemen will make a move in this direction.

Three weeks later,

I went up on Saturday to see the place where 780 acres of bush are being felled for Messrs Bridge and Russell. The contractors seem to have made up their minds to carry the thing through, and they say 70 men will be on the ground this week. To get to the place you go along the main road to Nereha's pah, which is nine miles south of Pahiatua, and six miles north of Eketahuna. At this point you turn up the Hawera road due East. The road is a good one but in a shameful condition. The watertables either never were made or have been allowed to become choked up. The result is that streams of water run down the ruts

and cut the roads up. A mile from Nereha's pah I overtook a dray which had sunk up to the axle and had to be unloaded. It was carrying stores to Mr Howlett's Mangaone branch store, which is being carried on to supply the numerous camps of bushmen and others. If this meets the eye of any member of the Eketahuna Road Board, I hope he will move to have a man put on to give the road a few friendly touches.¹¹

He advertised his store often but gave no credit and would be unforgiving of debtors, contributing (for instance) to the bankruptcy of bushman Carl Johann Fredericksen in 1888.¹²



Main Street, Pahiātua, 1907

The 1887 election

Howlett, planning his political debut, sent an exchange of letters between himself and Sir Robert Stout to the *Woodville Examiner* of 17 June 1887,

VANDERBILTISM.¹³

The following telegraphic correspondence has passed between Mr Howlett and the Premier:—

Pahiatua, June 9, 1887.

SIR ROBERT STOUT,
Wellington,

Macara is now running a shilling coach from Woodville to Palmerston, simply to crush opposition. Cannot you stop these Vanderbilt tactics by sending twenty unemployed to ride backwards and forwards all day?

W. F. HOWLETT.

Pahiatua, June 10, 1887.

SIR ROBERT STOUT,
Wellington,

Macara's shilling coach forms a serious obstacle to through traffic between Napier and Wellington. The low price crowds it with local passengers, and *bona fide* travellers are greatly inconvenienced, especially ladies. Macara has for a year been running these cheap coaches in different places, in some cases carrying passengers gratis, simply to run the other coaches off; this accomplished he resorts to high charges. Public feeling is very strong about this unprincipled and wanton use of capital to crush opposition at no matter what annoyance to general public. I submit very confidently that you will view with grave displeasure the fact of subsidised mail coaches being made in any way accessory to such experiments. You will also agree that the suppression of Vanderbiltism will one day be a question of practical politics, and I submit that judicious action taken now may act as timely warning, and produce a lasting impression. Do not trouble to reply to this. I have really no right to offer advice, much less to require any expression of opinion.

W. F. HOWLETT.

Wellington, June 11th, 1887.

W. F. HOWLETT ESQ.,
Pahiatua.

The Government cannot interfere between rural coach proprietors.
ROBERT STOUT.

Pahiatua, June 12th, 1887.

SIR ROBERT STOUT,
Wellington.

May I publish my telegrams to you and your reply? What ever answer you send to this I shall consider confidential unless you mark it otherwise.
W. F. HOWLETT.

Wellington, June 14, 1887.

W. F. HOWLETT ESQ.,
Pahiatua.

I have no objection to publication of previous telegrams and this one.
ROBERT STOUT.

Within the week Howlett declared his willingness to stand in the election.

SIR,—I notice several candidates in the field; but for what districts? Until the districts are proclaimed, all their eloquence is thrown away. If as is possible, I notice any district unprovided with a reasonable decent candidate, I shall ask you to announce me in your advertising columns as willing to act. In the meantime I venture to suggest a few questions that every elector should put to every candidate. 1. Are you a needy man of doubtful antecedents? Do you drink? Do you habitually associate with men of no standing, or with men of honor? Have you any money? By this I mean, do you, can you, live within your income? Do you know anything? Are you willing to study the history and laws of New Zealand, England, and the world generally? Why do you want to get into the House? Have you an axe to grind? if so, tell us all about it. I think the most uneducated elector can hardly fail to see the point of these questions. There is another much more important, which they always ask, namely, "Are you a rich squatter, idle and luxurious,

caring nothing for the elevation of the masses?" This is really the most important, but as they always ask it, I do not enumerate it now. I should not care to run against Mr Ormond, Captain Russell, or Mr Horace Baker. All these would have weight, and would I believe be found on the side of orderly well-considered progress. Against Messrs Tanner, McCardle, Hall, Beetham, and W.C. Smith, I should be tempted to run, chiefly for the reason that they are not "children of the idea." They are genuine Englishmen in this, that they just legislate where the shoe pinches. They aim at remedying pressing evils, not at making our laws consistent, workable, and one harmonious whole. For messires (is that the proper plural?) Stout and Vogel I entertain respect, and should like to see them in the House again; but I know so little of either that my opinion is worth almost nothing. As for the future leader, I can see no promise of any satisfactory person as yet. The objection to Major Atkinson is that he does not understand the doctrine of Free Trade. He has not read what has been written about it, and is in a fog. Also I am afraid he will try what I call political experiments such as National Insurance. A struggling colony has nothing to do with these fantastic speculations. If a baker who had not yet made his business pay spent all his best energies in collecting postage stamps, we should call him a donkey. It is the same with New Zealand. First get our finance straight; then tackle land; then the Custom Tariff, leave National Insurance, Female Franchise, and such questions until we make our business pay,—I am, etc.,

W. F. HOWLETT.¹⁴

He was to stand as an independent for the newly formed Woodville electorate in the 1887 election. The seat was contested by William Cowper Smith, Horace Baker and William Wilson McCardle, who obtained 922, 761, and 452 votes, respectively. Smith was thus declared elected. Howlett had issued his notice to electors, an earlier version of the text he used in 1890, printed by the *Pahiatua Star* and reproduced in part, with great pleasure, by editors as far away as Queenstown,

Mr W. F. Howlett, who will probably stand for North Wairarapa or New Bush district, has issued an address to the electors of his locality, decidedly quaint and original. Here is an extract:—"I don't care two pins whether I get in or not. To

regard the position of M.H.R. as an honor is absurd. A man is judged by his company, and as an ordinary member I should lose caste. I should, however, like to find out why such a number of seedy out-at-elbows people hustle to get in. Whose pockets do they get their fingers in? How are their 'steals' arranged? You may be sure that the rednosed men in patched boots and doubtful linen are not there for the honorarium, much less the honor and glory. They have their axes to grind, and when I find out I will let you know."¹⁵

He withdrew before the polling.

The Railways exchanges

In the Magistrates' Court in Patea on Friday 6 February 1885 information was laid by the railways department against W. Howlett for travelling from Wanganui to Patea without a ticket. Howlett represented himself, claiming the railways had lost his luggage and that by the time they had recovered it he had not time to buy a ticket. The Court told him he had committed a breach of the Railway By-laws (though not with any intention to defraud) "but simply because you have got some notion in your head about the public good". He was fined.¹⁶

Howlett explained himself in the same issue of the *Patea Mail*,

SIR,—Kindly permit me to explain the point of law which I urged this morning in the R.M. Court. The Railway Department sued me criminally, for not paying what they call a *fare*. The P. W. Act 1863 provides that all fares are *to be recovered as an ordinary debt*. Now when the Court decided that a bye-law could over-rule a *provision of the Act* I forbore to press the point; for you will agree with me that there is no use arguing such things before an R.M. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." With regard to the *common sense* view of the matter, I am quite content with the view the Court took. It is not my view, but I do not *therefore* regard it as wrong.—I am, &c.,
W. F. HOWLETT.

This was the start of a long campaign against the railways. He wrote an open letter to the Napier district manager of NZ Railways, published in the *Hawke's Bay Herald* of 30 April 1887,

Dear Sir,—Some time ago I received from you some oatmeal which was damaged, and I asked you to pay for the damage done. You replied that as I gave you a clean receipt, and as also you carried same at owner's risk you would not pay.

Now I am really vexed beyond all endurance at this nonsense. You go and spoil my oatmeal; and you allow my carter, who is no scholar, to sign your book; though he pointed out the damage at the time. Then you call this a "clean receipt." Why, my dear sir, what could my carter do? Do you provide forms of "*un*-clean" receipts? The carter was there with his dray, he made a verbal protest, and if you knew that was of no avail you should have told him so. There is no use reporting things to you; you all screen one another from the Minister up on top down to the porter at bottom; all I can do is desist from claiming refunds and simply print my complaints.

The following correspondence explains itself:—

1. Telegram from W. F. H., Pahiatua, to station-master, Woodville.—"Six bags meat refuse expected to-day. Please warn carter very nasty stuff to handle."
2. Memorandum from station-master, Woodville, to W.F.H.—Sir,—I am in receipt of above, and note you refuse delivery of meat consigned to you."
3. Telegram (urgent) from W.F.H. to station-master, Woodville; costs 5s 8d.—"Your memorandum indicates complete misapprehension of my telegram. Meat refuse means a sort of manure. I mean you are to hand it to my carter with instructions to be careful how to handle it."

Now, my dear Mr District Manager, if you like to refund that 5s 8d you can, and if you don't, you needn't. Understand that what we want really to know is, Who is to be sacked for this intolerable piece of folly? Who is responsible? Is it the station master? Or, sir, is it the unfortunate Maxwell. I am sorry to have to print a correspondence of so damaging a nature; you have driven me to it by refusing to give fair consideration to demands

made privately. Private word in your ear: I did not do so badly with the oatmeal—you only charged me 3s 3d for carrying 16 bags 97 miles, and so you see I can set that off against the damage done, and cry quits. Nearly every document your clerks fill is wrong in one respect or another. I will make a small collection anon, and print them for your information.—Yours very respectfully,

W. F. HOWLETT.¹⁷

He wrote another open letter to the Manawatu railway manager,

SIR,—The subjoined letters indicate an amount of cleverness or stupidity (I don't know which) that baffles me. Surely, the man is poking fun at me? He can't be such an owl as to intend his reply seriously. His evasion of my query is too ingeniously addle-pated to be a misconception. He thinks he has achieved a triumph of diplomacy.—I am, &c.,

W. F. HOWLETT.

The Manager Manawatu Railway Company.

Dear Sir,—On Wednesday last about 11 a.m. I asked the station-master at Longburn whether your guards were under instructions to give their name to any possessor asking for same. The station-master replied in the negative. Will you inform me whether any of your employees are under such instructions?—I am, &c.,

W. F. HOWLETT.

Mr W. F. Howlett. Pahiatua.

Dear Sir,—In reply to your note of the 3rd May, the servants of the company are not under instructions to refuse to give their names when called upon in reasonable circumstances. The station-master at Longburn states he did not reply to your question relative to this, that they were. Yours truly, JAS. WALLACE, General Manager Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company.¹⁸

He quickly followed this with another to the Napier district manager,¹⁹ and another,

SIR,—A few weeks ago you published a funny correspondence between me and the general manager of the Wellington

Manawatu Railway Company; I asked him whether his guards were instructed to furnish their names if required, and he replied that they were not instructed to refute them. The correspondence proceeds—

Pahiatua, 9th May, 1887.

General Manager, Wellington-Manawatu Railway Company.
Dear Sir,—Yours of 7th May is in my opinion very unworthy of an adult. Will you do me the honor to re-read mine of the 2nd. and to answer it? I dislike jokes when offered in this form.—Yours truly, W.F. HOWLETT.

11th May, 1887.

To Mr W. F. Howlett, Pahiatua.

Sir,—In your letter of the 2nd instant you desired to be informed whether the company's employes are under instructions to refuse to give their names when asked. In reply I stated they were not, and that the stationmaster states he did not say to you they were. Please explain where the joke comes in.—Yours, &c, J.W. WALLACE, General Manager.

Pahiatua, May 16, 1887.

Manager Wellington - Manawatu Railway Company.

Sir,—Re yours of 11th. The joke comes in this way; I asked you whether your guards were instructed to "give;" you replied they were not instructed to "refuse." Now kindly re-read mine of 2nd. and reply thereto. This correspondence is all being published in H.B. HERALD.—

Yours, W. F. HOWLETT.

You will not be surprised to learn that mine of the 16th May remains unanswered. I shall forward the whole correspondence to the directors.—I am, &c,

W. F. HOWLETT.

Perhaps the railways people took matters into their own hands,

SIR,—After a tedious series of thirteen telegrams and memoranda I have elicited the following information:—A consignment of shot and felt left Napier 2.15 p.m. on the 2nd of June, and did not arrive at Woodville until 1.30 p.m. on the 3rd of June. In the meantime my carter had been for them, and had to go back at a cost of 15s. The cost of the telegrams and

memoranda I have not computed. There is no redress. My goods were simply left all night at Tahoraite. That is all.—I am, &c,

W. F. HOWLETT.²⁰

SIR,—In reply to “L.S.,” I suppose I am the person who “desires to see himself in print.” Now I like the tone of his letter, and I beg leave to say I have taken extreme precautions to avoid collision with the department. I accept his statement that he has been well treated, without asking for evidence. I ask him to believe I have been badly treated, and I refer him to my numerous letters for evidence. I will now tell how my assistant was treated to-day. He is a young fellow of a big, innocent appearance, and would, I imagine, be rather confused and over polite in a station, as he is not accustomed to trains. He applied for a first-class ticket, Wellington–Palmerston, and paid 12s 6d. Then he lost it and went to the station-master, who told him he could buy another. Then he got in the train and hunted. Finding it not, he asked the guard what he must do. Guard issued another ticket, and charged him 18s 6d. When I heard this I said, “Did none of them tell you how to get a refund?” To my surprise he said no hint of this had been given. Now does “L.S.” call this an error or a fraud? I merely tell you what happened. The Wellington–Manawatu line is in my opinion worse managed than the Government lines. I cannot now tell you why, as what I know is more or less confidential. I presume “L.S.” knows that the audit system on railways provides means for ascertaining whether my assistant’s story is true. I shall send a copy of this letter to the directors, but I doubt their seeing what it is I complain of. I do not complain of the double charge. I complain that *both* the station-master *and* the guard should have explained to him how to get a refund.—I am, &c.,

W. F. HOWLETT,

Pahiatua, 21st June, 1887.²¹

SIR,—I precis some bulky correspondence of recent date. (1.) Self to district manager: I received two large consignments on one delivery note. The shippers’ marks not entered; hence

unable to separate consignments. (2.) Reply: Station-master, Spit, omitted to enter same on way-bill.

(1.) Self to district manager: One large consignment from Napier was split in transit and arrived by different trains, hence confusion. (2.) Reply: Part was gunpowder, and according to regulations, &c.

There is of course no redress. The politeness with which the present district manager replies to my queries makes me inclined to think he does all he can under existing regulations. But these regulations are not accessible to the public any more than the departmental regulations issued to Post-offices and police stations. When a delivery note has a special column for "marks" and this column is not filled, I say a fine should be inflicted and consignee informed of same. Similarly when a consignment of goods is handed in, if it *must* be split and forwarded by different trains, consignee should be advised by wire. When I expect a certain known number of packages, and only a portion arrive, I am obliged to immediately prosecute inquiries or else I lose the run of the goods and cannot fix blame on right party.—I am, &c.

W. F. HOWLETT.

Pahiatua, June 23, 1887.²²

SIR,—You will remember that on the 10th of June I was charged with assaulting the Palmerston station-master, and as he and I swore directly opposite the case was dismissed. The station-master said on oath: "I treated Mr Howlett as a low blackguard should be treated." This I submit very respectfully, requires some notice from the department.

It may interest you further to know that last Wednesday I received a summons to appear at the R.M. Court at Masterton on Monday, on the charge of giving a railway servant a gratuity. The case is *sub judice* and I forbear from comment.

One thing is certain that if my energetic attempts to reform the railway administration do not meet with public support, I must knock under. I am locked up at Palmerston, kept in a freezing place until I get a "bad cold," which was very nearly a serious lung business; now I am taken away for say three days to

Masterton on a charge of an unprecedented nature. My purse will not stand it for one thing. It is a serious matter to visit Masterton from Pahiatua, the roads are dreadful, and if I am to have legal assistance I shall have to leave home on Saturday and return Tuesday. If it is your sober opinion that I am doing no good, say so, and in future I will tolerate everything. If I am doing real public service, would it not be possible to get some sort of subscription raised to defray the cost of all these journeys, delays, legal fees? I shall send you a report of the proceedings at Masterton.—I am, &c, W.F. HOWLETT.

He was fined £5 and severely reprimanded for sending a tip to the stationmaster at Mangamahoe and then reporting what he had done to the head of the Railway Department.²³ The case was widely reported and Howlett responded,

SIR,—You have already been informed that on Monday at Masterton I was convicted of giving a railway servant a gratuity and fined five pounds. The charge was under a bye-law which you can see in every station. It says that no person shall give a railway servant a gratuity. My defence was that the byelaw was obviously *ultra vires*, because it prohibits lawful acts. I explained to the Bench that under this bye-law if a father gave his son a present on his birthday, the father (if his son was a porter) must be fined. The Bench did not concur in this view. I have no money to appeal the case; but I do not for a moment doubt that the Supreme Court would agree with me that any bye-law which prohibits lawful acts is *ipso facto ultra vires* and invalid. Let me explain further. Conceive an Act authorising the Minister of Justice to frame a criminal code and issue it without further sanction. Suppose one article ran “Any man who kills another man shall be hanged.” Under this article a hangman who exercised his calling successfully, or a doctor unsuccessfully, would suffer death. The article would be obviously and necessarily invalid. You may ask why I split hairs like this? I reply that it has for centuries been every Englishman’s right during life to gift away his property. The limitations as far as I know are few. To make the act illegal you must prove either that the money I gave was not mine, or that there was an immoral motive. Now, in the case at Masterton, the Crown never suggested or implied any hidden or unlawful motive. I maintain

that there has been a failure of justice, and that we really want some cheap means of revising the decisions of Resident Magistrates. I am not aware what knowledge of law Mr Von Sturmer, who fined me, may have; and though the five pounds is no great matter, I like to be treated properly. You may want to know what the amount of the gratuity was. It was £5 6s 6d. You may ask whether it has been refunded to me? Answer, no! Further, was it a gratuity? Of course not. I am not quite such a fool as to give a man five pounds odd for nothing. I expected the station-master to perform perfectly definite duties. That he neglected to perform them, and in fact did nothing for his money, is no argument at all. You may further ask how it was found out? This is quite beside the question, and I do not care now to prolong this letter. It is enough to say that, regarding the payments made as perfectly legal, I myself mentioned the matter to the department, with a view to proving, incontestably, that I had used every effort to prevent any collision with the authorities on the Wellington line. At Mr Maxwell's request, never dreaming that I had committed any offence, I gave him full particulars. The use he made of these particulars you now know. I dare say you will not wonder that when Mr M'Cardle said in his speech at Woodville that he would be glad to see Mr Maxwell removed, there were some tokens of assent. Last of all, why was I ignorant of the bye-law? My answer is that, as some are enforced and some are not, it is useless to study them. There is one that prohibits smoking on platforms. Go on *any* platform, *any* day, and see it broken under the stationmaster's nose.—I am, &c,

W.F. HOWLETT.²⁴

Reporting a Woodville election meeting as "Our Pahiatua Correspondent" to the *Hawke's Bay Herald* a few weeks later, Howlett could laugh at himself: "Mr Howlett wanted to know about the railway through Pahiatua and was howled at...."²⁵

Not everyone was amused. The *Herald* reported on 12 July,

The clever but eccentric Mr Howlett has become known in his district as an "Infidel," and a gentleman named Powell, who is apparently incensed at Mr Howlett, suggests in the *Pahiatua Star* the following cure for heterodoxy:—"Mr Howlett is wicked, and for a man of his sort, who creates scandal, it were better for him

if he had a millstone around his neck and be put in the deepest part of the sea".²⁶

A writer for the *New Zealand Herald* of 3 August 1887, under the head "Ramblings of a tramp" wrote with heavily sarcastic metropolitan condescension about Pahiatua in general and Howlett in particular,

PAHIATUA. This is the principal town of "pauperdom." Special settlers of all sorts swarm here—mostly poor and, we hope, honest. It has a bank, a church, a school, a public hall, or theatre, a "pub," a temperance hotel, a sawmill, a doctor, a tonsorial professor, a peripatetic policeman, and a newspaper. It cannot boast a lunatic asylum, but it has a railway reformer and a candidate for a seat in the House. Mr. Howlett, general reformer, storekeeper, and patriot, has tried many things, but yet is not the railway reformed. The pudding-headed Pahiatuans stand agape with their hands in their pockets, but nary a Jubilee shilling will they subscribe towards defraying the expenses incurred by Mr. Howlett the suffering martyr in his praiseworthy efforts to reform creation in general and the manufacture of soap and New Zealand railways in particular. Mr. Howlett has studied soapsuds; Mr. Howlett has written a treatise on soap; Mr. Howlett has analysed soap and pronounced the whole article an abominable adulteration, and the bar of soap as retailed to the Pahiatuans a warped and shrunken fraud—a vote of thanks ought to be instantly passed by the settlements and tendered to their soaponaceous benefactor for his timely exposure of the gross and general adulteration of soap. As the blowing of adulterated soap bubbles by the rising generation of our new-found "slaves" might be fatal to the success of the village settlement scheme, the Hon. John Ballance should appoint an inspector of soap, who would see that nothing but "Old Brown Windsor" was sold to the settlers—Mr. Howlett would fit the billet.²⁷

Land issues

On 27 March 1888 Howlett wrote from Pahiatua to the Commissioner of Crown lands in Wellington,²⁸

Dear Sir, will you kindly forward me a list of sections now open for application in this neighborhood, together with a plan shewing their position. I am, Yours truly...

On 13 April Howlett wrote again, stating he was “acting for 3 or 4 people who may possibly apply for all the sections.” He wrote again on 4 August,

The information you sent me re land for sale in Block III Survey District Mangaone was submitted to my friends with the result that one of them (Mr Stewart Bridge) bought nearly all you offered. I now wish to obtain a section myself and shall feel obliged if you will send me a plan, marking as before in red ink what is open. The locality I desire is in the Mangaramarama Valley, as near Block III Mangaone as may be. If you mark all the sections that are open within a radius of say 5 miles, it is possible other friends of mine will be glad to take some up. I hear from a friend that there is a section which would suit me, that has recently been forfeited, or at any rate is open; but I cannot get at the number. Please send also application forms.

I am Yours truly W.F. Howlett.

P.S. I am, as you may know, a storekeeper here, and directly interested in the settlement of the land. Mr Stewart Bridge's purchase means immediate work for 50 men for three months, as he is felling 780 acres. You will see that it serves my purpose to act as your agent without commission, as every section I can place means a certain amount of custom for myself. I am not sure that the Government might not sell land more easily and get better prices if they set in foot some scheme for supplying local storekeepers with maps, and weekly or monthly reports of land sold & land open. You have no land office here, and ordinary commission agents naturally attempt to dissuade buyers from looking at Government lands.²⁹

He received no reply. Earlier he had written (as Woodville correspondent) to Wellington's *Evening Post*,

The Editor of the Woodville Examiner and the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Napier are at loggerheads. Examiner, by inference, charged the Commissioner with delaying the necessary steps to bring lands forward for selection in time for this season's felling. The Commissioner in a long speech referred to what Mr. Hagen had stated as quite unwarranted, as he had personally and verbally informed Mr. Hagen as to the real cause of delay. The truth is, the Commissioner is working under a Government, and especially a Minister of

Lands, averse to settlement of the land. This gentleman is the greatest obstacle to settlement that could possibly be placed in the way. The very highest price is wrung from the selectors, and nothing or next to nothing is placed on the Estimates to give access to the lands. He seems to glory in the fact that he regards special and village settlements as a great fraud, and he does not hesitate to flaunt these opinions in the face of men possessing a much greater practical knowledge of land settlement than himself who may, and do, think differently. Can there be any wonder that a department with such a head should be dilatory in giving effect to a system which its president does not approve.³⁰

The *Woodville Examiner's* EA Haggren rejoined the fray,

We have repeatedly referred to instances which prove the wretched failure of Mr Richardson as administrator of the Land Act. His mismanagement and imbecility in grasping his important duties have been ably exposed by Mr Howlett, as Pahiatua Correspondent of the Wellington Press. Now we hear of another glaring instance which shows that Mr Richardson does not want settlement. He wants the land for his friends and acquaintances if we are to judge by his policy and he wants to draw a big salary for doing all he can to injure the country. He is without exception the biggest failure ever witnessed in a Ministerial Cabinet. The other day Mr Horace Baker, as agent for an excellent intending settler, applied for 500 acres of unsurveyed land in the Tiraumea district under the free selection system. The Minister thought this was a grand chance to show what a public humbug he is. The rules for sales of public lands for cash under the free selection system are that survey fees shall be included in the final charges to be paid. The gentleman for whom Mr Baker was acting wisely preferred to take up the land on the leasing system so as to have his capital available for the heavy preliminary improvements requiring to be effected, and for stocking. On Mr Baker putting in the application he was immediately informed that he must pay a heavy deposit for survey fees, although in other cases these fees have been made a final charge. The intending settler objected as he could not tell how long he might have to wait to get on the land and he had sufficient experience of the present land administration to know that if the Department once got the money it was very doubtful when he would get his land surveyed or whether he would ever hear any more about it. Besides, why

should this exception be made against leaseholders as to payment of survey fees? The intending settler was naturally disgusted and remarked “Oh your Government don’t want settlers! I shall have to go elsewhere.” Such a state of things is shameful at a time when the colony wants all the capital and sound population that can be got. If Mr Richardson had any feeling about him he would resign in favor of a better man when he finds the Press and the people holding up his administration as a shame and a disgrace to the country. He should give place to a better man; but no! says he, “Here I am and here I’ll stick and settlement can go to Jericho, while I draw a fine screw and good travelling expenses. I won’t budge an inch till I can’t help it.” This is the man whose absurdities and mismanagement the colony has to put up with.³¹

1 *Hawke’s Bay Weekly Courier* 20 April 1886.

2 *Woodville Examiner* 5 & 9 March 1886.

3 *Woodville Examiner* 30 March 1886.

4 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 5 May 1886

5 *Pahiatua Star* 11 June 1886.

6 Tim McIvor. “Ballance, John”, from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. *Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 4 June 2013.

7 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 22 February 1887.

8 Probably his cousin William Russell Russell

9 His cousin Stewart Bridge.

10 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 18 April 1887.

11 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 15 August 1888.

12 *Bush Advocate* 13 October 1888.

13 The creation of a monopoly by undercutting opposition prices.

14 *Woodville Examiner* 22 June 1887.

15 *Lake Wakatip Mail* 1 July 1887.

16 *Patea Mail* 9 February 1885.

17 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 30 April 1887.

18 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 13 May 1887.

19 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 16 May 1887.

20 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 16 June 1887.

21 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 24 June 1887.

22 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 25 June 1887.

23 *Evening Post* 12 July 1887.

24 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 15 July 1887.

25 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 4 August 1887.

26 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 12 July 1887

27 *NZ Herald* 3 August 1887. I cannot locate Howlett’s fabled article on soap.

28 George Frederick Richardson.

29 NZ National Archives, C293 320, LS–W2 51.

30 *Evening Post* 24 July 1888.

31 *Woodville Examiner* 26 November 1888.

CHAPTER 8: BACK TO MAKARETU AND ONGAONGA 1889-90

The *Pahiatua Star* reported Howlett had been elected to the Council of the local Acclimatisation Society,¹ but later in 1888 he would leave Pahiatua and return to Makaretu.

Makaretu Cash Store.

Until 8. pm on Tuesday 18th December, all stock will be for sale at reduced prices, and the Store finally closed on the 19th. The remaining stock will be auctioned on Thursday the 20th December at 10.30 am. The stock to date includes considerable quantities of general goods. Carpenters, Builders, and all in want of small house furnishings would do well to look in. And under mentioned is a selection of the goods on sale:—

Groceries and Sundries. Arrowroot (6d), black lead, blacking, sago, candles, cocoa, coffee, lollies, and milk (1s), cocoa and milk (1s), lobster, kippered herrings (1s), sardines, blue ruddle (2d), fancy ornaments, boots (watertights and shooters nos. 9, 10, and 11, at 10s), feeding bottles, garden and flower seeds, seed pockets.

Hardware. Axes (5s), Augers, billies, basins, baking tins, braces and bits (8-16s to 14-16s), barbing tools, bill hooks (3s), tower bolts, japanned brackets, bridle hooks, candle moulds, chisels, castors, cattle bells, cup hooks, ceiling hooks, churns, clothes lines, files, fly traps (1s), forks, frypans (1s), hinges—both tee and butt, hat and coat hooks, hatchets, irons, knives, milk dishes, oil stones, plaster of paris, sash weights (4 lb), reaping hooks, screws, spouting and downpiping, ridging, tin tacks, galvanized tubs, paints, guns, powder and ammunition generally, yellow paint 8d lb, acme wire strainers 3d, spade handles 1s, zinc 3d lb.

Drapery. American leather, moleskins, tweed trousers, suits, black coats, white coats, youth's suits, boys suits, American duck riveted goods, sewing cotton, cretonne carpet, flowers, feathers, linoleum flannel, fingerling, gloves, silk handkerchiefs, men's hats, summer straw hats, lace, crape muslin, mosquito netting,

ribbons, scarfs, shirts (white and Oxford, half price), undershirts pants, red and green and beize, fringe.

Goods not delivered. Hours 8.am to 8.pm. No trade on Sundays.

W.F. Howlett.²

Campbell & Scott were instructed to sell the whole of the stock of the Makaretu Store at Pahiatua, "including Groceries, Drapery, Crockery, Hardware and General Goods." ³

Howlett had been back to Makaretu before December 1888, as he, the *Herald's* correspondent, wrote in March,

The Makaretu children had their school feast last Friday. Pastor Sass presided, and Mr H.H. Bridge liberally provided a grand display of fireworks, part from Sew Hoy, of Dunedin, and part from Messrs Brody of London. Mr Howlett who resigned his position as Makaretu schoolmaster in 1886, was of course present to superintend the fizz-bang business.... The Chinese crackers were as delightful as ever: six dozen Catherine wheels were handed round; mines, tourbillons, rockets, all were extremely exhilarating. How one hankers after the scenes of one's past work. One visitor who used to reside in the Makaretu, but now lives miles away, was seen writing on a fence with chalk "*dulces moriens reminiscitur argos.*" ⁴

The *Pahiatua Star* mourned his leaving,

There is not another man in the Forty-mile Bush that has done as much as he to bring this district into prominence, by his outspoken and intelligent letters to various papers on the land and other questions, and for this reason, as well as for the fact of his being a thorough good citizen, he will be greatly missed.⁵

So did the *Wairarapa Daily Times*,

We have lost one of our settlers who was a most prominent man here. Though rather eccentric, Mr Howlett was generally liked and is therefore missed from amongst us.⁶

Mr Howlett late storekeeper of Pahiatua writes to us denying that he has gone to Sydney, as reported in a Wairarapa paper. The statement was not circulated by us.⁷

In November 1889 he advertised the reopening of his store at Makaretu,

MAKARETU SCHOOL STORE

This is a Store for Groceries, Boots, Crockery, Drapery, &c., and is a revival of the Store carried on under the same management from 1883 to 1886. It is situated opposite the school. Address for letters "Waipawa," and for goods or parcels "Takapau." I have a small partly improved Farm of over 600 acres for sale, about five miles from Pahiatua; it is in no other dealer's hands. Local agent, Mr John Gregory. Price about 35s.

W.F. HOWLETT,

Manager.⁸

The new teacher at Makaretu was Frederick Batson and evidently he and Howlett were at odds,

An Explanation.

SIR,—Will you kindly find space for the following in your valuable paper? A portion of a copy of the Weekly Courier of the 22nd November, has just been placed in my hands by a friend who happened to see in it an attempt of that paper's egotistical Makaretu correspondent to cast an aspersion on me. Writing of the school he says: "I sent a polite note to the master to ask how many were on the school roll, and received a verbal reply that he didn't know." The facts are these.—A small boy came to me from Mr Howlett, who, by the way was master here up to the early part of 1886, and delivered himself as follows: "Mr Howlett says will you tell him how many children are on the roll." On enquiring why does Mr Howlett wish to know, a scrap of paper, unenclosed, and not scrupulously clean, was thrust into my hand, on which I read a few words couched in patronising terms, introduced in an uncourteous manner and signed "W.F. Howlett." I returned the "polite" note by the boy, but not the information asked for. Had he come to me and asked in a manly way for what he wanted, or had he sent an

ordinarily polite note, I would with pleasure, have supplied him with any information respecting the school.—I am &c,

Fredk. T.W. Batson. Makaretu, 4th December, 1889.⁹

Howlett's regular "Makaretu Correspondent" column was published in the *Herald* on 11 December; again he sought refuge in using the third person for himself,

There is quite an awful feud here between the schoolmaster and a storekeeper whom said schoolmaster imagines to be the correspondent either of your own journal or the *Waipawa Mail*. Anyhow the school has been accused somewhere of various evil things; the anonymous scribbler or scribbles say the children get more in their heads than the master is paid to put there; that they are taught to draw with pens instead of pencils, and allowed to wipe their faces on one towel when ophthalmia is epidemic; so the result is that the dominie leans on the fence, and when he sees the storekeeper delivering a pound of tea (we are all within hailing distance) he growls out, "Hullo, Keen-wit!" Which is an expression of contempt familiar to third standard children. The storekeeper retaliates by washing the dominie's currants in dirty water, and gives his sugar a little extra sand. You will have to send a constable up: it will be a sort of war of factions, Green v. Red, Guelph v. Ghibelline....¹⁰

Howlett's formal reply to Batson's letter was published on Christmas Eve,

SIR,—I received last night a copy of your issue of 5th instant, in which the master of this school identifies me by name, and states that he refused to inform me how many children attended his school because I applied in an improper or informal manner....

Now, with regard to our master. As soon as I had read his letter, I wrote a formal letter asking him to make good his promise therein, and give me the information I required. His reply is, "Sir,—... I decline to give you any information whatever." It is clear that there is something seriously wrong with the school. All the registers, reports, &c., from 1882 to 1886 have been in my hands repeatedly, and were freely accessible to the public. Why should they now be kept secret? In the present condition of the funds of the Education Board extreme economy is

necessary. Am I to surmise that expenditure is taking place here which would be at once stopped, if the facts were known? Or, to put it in a far more general way, suppose you sent your reporter to any Napier school to make an enquiry as to the number of pupils, and the information was refused? What would you do? I think you would characterise the master's behavior in terms of some severity. In my case... he has thereby given my subsequent criticisms much additional weight, as anyone may see who will read the report of the Board for 1885.—I am, &c.,

MAKARETU CORRESPONDENT OF H.B. HERALD.

December 21, 1889.¹¹

Howlett's "Olla podrida" column of 3 April 1890 may have been a further dig at the Makaretu teacher,

I picked up a child the other day on his way to a school in the Hawke's Bay district, and offered to hear his lesson. It consisted of learning by rote the following words:—"Looking rabbits lily pretty feasting hungry edges either evening amongst running hundreds houses perhaps creatures." I tried to get out of him some explanation of such an extraordinary task, but could learn only that it was his lesson. Are we drifting back to the dark ages? It recalls the accounts given by Eastern travellers of the instruction given in up country Egyptian towns to Arab boys by Moolahs. You understand that the "task" was to repeat the words in the above order; not to know the meaning; that is never expected! It would, in my opinion, be far more stimulating to a child's intelligence to make him learn "Ching Chong Chinaman, wash his head in a frying-pan." But the ordinary country teacher lives and moves in an intellectual atmosphere which would not keep your youngest reporter alive ten minutes.¹²

He moved swiftly to gain the upper hand,

At the meeting of householders at Makaretu the outgoing school committee submitted their report, and a new committee was elected as follows:—Messrs Crombie, Gradwell, Howlett, Hans Hemmingsen, J. Connor, Thomsen, and Madsen. The newly-elected committee met immediately afterwards, and elected Mr Howlett chairmen for the ensuing year. It was

arranged that the first regular meeting should be about the 7th of June, notice to be given by postcard.¹³

Meanwhile Howlett was hassling the County Council, who had received a letter,

From W. F. Howlett, Makaretu, stating that for the past eight years, he had been endeavouring to ascertain the boundaries of the road which goes eastward from the Makaretu school, and that a road is now apparently pegged out, and the first use it has been put to by the owner of the land it passes through is to fence off a portion for his own use, and asking the Council if it would suit the Council either (1) to mark the road out finally and stop encroachments, or (2) grant him permission to fence off a similar portion for his own use, as he was without land and would like a small piece. He enclosed plan of the road.—Moved by Cr Herrick, that Mr Howlett's letter be received. Seconded and carried.¹⁴

Of himself, Howlett wrote,

A noted wag here, who observed that about two months ago a certain settler erected a fence encroaching on a road, thereby acquiring a nice additional piece of garden, has written to the County Council asking permission to enclose a portion of the Makaretu-Blackburn road. I hope the Council will see their way to accede to his request, as the man, though poor, is tolerably honest, and yet of course what an old identity may do is not to be taken as a precedent for the landless to follow. "To him that hath shall be given."¹⁵

Then in June,

A CURIOUS CIRCULAR.

The teacher of a country school in Hawke's Bay,—at Makaretu—who had received from the outgoing committee a warm vote of thanks for his work, sent in his resignation immediately that he learnt an eccentric named Howlett had been elected chairman of the new committee. Thereupon Mr Howlett, it appears, drew up a circular for the information of possible candidates for the teachership as follows:—

PARTICULARS *re* MAKARETU SCHOOL.

About 50 children, salary about £150. Nice four-roomed house, small garden, wash house, large shed, close to school. Paddock for horse. School 12 miles from Takapau, where the Chairman can meet teacher with cart. Makaretu is on lower spurs of Ruahine Ranges, within short distance of Forest Reserve and Alpine flora. Master, if provided with good introductions, would find agreeable society on Ruataniwha Plains. The simplicity of country life makes expenses low, and a student or naturalist might live well, keep buggy, botanise, garden, etc., and save money. It is desired to introduce Science, and the Chairman is prepared, if necessary, to control this, drawing up syllabus, arranging practical work, and starting museum. It is believed that the absence of certificate would not bar teacher, but these particulars must be taken as drawn up by the chairman, not binding on committee or board. Further information from the undersigned, who, personally attaches no weight whatever to testimonials, and would prefer one reference to any gentleman of good position in the colony. Applications should be made at once, to allow of correspondence, but appointment will not be made before June 20, and duties begin after mid-winter holidays; exact date not yet known.

W. F. HOWLETT,

Chairman, Makaretu School Committee,

Makaretu, 12th May, 1890.

Telegraphic address, Makaretu, Onga Onga."

This circular is treated with quite serious jocularly by one of the Napier papers, but as Mr Howlett has been the victim of literary chaff lately, it may be suspected that the circular is a forgery.¹⁶

It was not a forgery; in fact Howlett enclosed it with a letter to Sir John Hall at Leeston,

A Mr. Ronaldson of Ohaiawa refers me to you as knowing his antecedents etc.

He is applying for this (Makaretu) school.

Is there anything distinctly against him? Can I rely on his statements about himself? I fancy he would do well as he writes a nice letter, but for all I know there may be some absolute bar.

You will see from enclosed that I am anxious to get a decent man. Most of the applicants hitherto seem perfectly hopeless people.

If you mark your letter private you may rely on my discretion. You probably do not remember me, but I had the pleasure of an introduction to Lady Hall when I was staying with my cousin, Mrs Randall Johnson,¹⁷ so I trust you will feel you may speak freely.

W.F. Howlett

(Chairman Makaretu School Committee)

P.S. I am writing in haste, away from home—no decent paper or ink—please excuse this. Please also reply at once. You are at liberty to send collect telegram if you like; if so, you address it “Makaretu, Onga Onga”. I am a Christ Church (Oxford) man—Math. Scholar etc, & can read between the lines. It simply comes to this, will Mr Ronaldson, if he has a fair show, be able to teach small children the rudiments of accurate thought. I attach no importance whatever to the details of Calligraphy, Drill, Singing etc.

W.F.H.¹⁸

On 8 July the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote,

We have received a letter from Mr W. F. Howlett, chairman of the Makaretu School Committee, on the subject of teachers' testimonials. It is almost a copy of a communication that we refused to publish a few days ago on the ground that we do not insert what our contemporaries have rejected. The reason for the rejection, we imagine, was that the letter was libellous. Certainly the one now sent us would speedily involve us in a libel action if we were so ill-advised as to publish it. If Mr Howlett had confined himself to the general principle of his contention that testimonials afforded no evidence as to the desirability of employing a teacher, his letter would have been of value. Unfortunately he has furnished instances in proof of what he says, and though he mentions no names it would not be difficult for any one of those parties to whom he alludes to fit the cap on and bring his action. Mr Howlett says, “It is possible that my correspondence and enquiries may lead to some good if School Committees will accept my advice and

resolutely refuse even to read testimonials. Let them ask in every case for a 'reference;' and then institute private enquiries. As long as ineligible men can obtain appointments, how are cleanly, modest young men to get into the profession? I know several teachers who, if promoted on their merits, could be in far more honorable positions than those they occupy. Leniency to the bad is injustice to the good."¹⁹

On 4 August the *Daily Telegraph* wrote, "It is stated that Mr W.F. Howlett chairman of Makaretu School Committee has been appointed teacher at Matamau".²⁰ He must also have applied for Takapau, for on 17 January 1891 the *Bush Advocate* reported that none of the members of the Takapau School Committee were in favour of Mr Howlett's application "as they wanted a married teacher so that the lady may be able to teach the sewing."²¹

But by now the Hawke's Bay Education Board members were growing sick of Howlett,

On August 19, the Hawkes Bay Herald says a letter was read at the Education Board meeting from "Makaretu Howlett" in regard to the Maraketu (*sic*) school. He said there were infants in the school who disturbed the neighborhood by their screams for "titty," and they ought to be ejected. The children were infected with lice, or said to be so. There should be no squalling babies in the school, and the children should not be "lousy." A second letter from the same writer was read re the children calling him objectionable names, and that the committee had informed him he might take his own steps against them.—The Board laughed at Howlett's letters but did not discuss them, merely "receiving" them.²²

Even the newspapers were having second thoughts about Howlett's writing,

Mr W.F. Howlett having been refused the insertion of letters in both the Waipawa Mail and the Hawke's Bay Herald, has written a third for insertion here or to be dropped into the waste paper basket as the editor may decide. The basket gets the prize for the reason that other howls would follow insertion of the letters in these columns. The paragraph quoted from a Hawke's Bay journal sufficiently indicated the nature of the dispute, "An

abusive man is bad; a vituperative woman is the d—l; but young children of five or six, taught to revile, are shocking even to the most callous.” That is Mr Howlett’s opinion.²³

The *Observer* weighed in, in its own peculiar style,

MR HOWLETT, the Makaretu prophet, is not a schoolteacher, but for some years has been a storekeeper. A short time ago he was Chairman of the Makaretu School Committee, but resigned owing to dissensions with the committee and the teacher. Besides being a Tirenist, Atheist, and Republican, Mr Howlett is a noted Anti-Red Tapist, and worries the livers out of the officials of the Railway, Post and Telegraph Offices, Land Boards, Education Boards, &c., between Napier and Wellington until they all wish him or themselves dead and at peace. The Red Tapists find the Tirenist a regular terror. He is a great authority, too, on beetles, bugs, bull ants, snails, &c., and eats them with great gusto. Rat pies are his favourite food. Altogether, the Tirenist is an original cuss, and sometimes an “amoozin” one.²⁴

Howlett’s cousin HH Bridge took over as chairman of the Makaretu School Committee.

Meantime Howlett had begun (20 June 1890) a weekly column in the *Pahiatua Star* called “Anecdota”; each began with the Zola quotation, “You have an immense fault which will close all doors against you; you cannot converse for two minutes with a fool without showing him that he is one.” The first began,

The idea of this column is to say things that are *anecdotal* in the true sense; that of being *anekdota* or “not yet said.” A fool is allowed a certain licence; and the motley garb will occasionally be assumed in order to claim this licence. It must be remembered that in a distant colony, much more in a remote country township, one has to hazard much, and often out of three or four statements (while two or three, however startling, are true and valuable), one or two will prove mistaken. Hence while some things said here will be *anekdota* in the true sense—that of deserving to be said, but still as yet remaining unsaid—some will be *anekdota* in the sense of not having yet been said, because they ought never to be said at all. Correspondence will

be welcomed, and the address “Pablo, Makaretu, New Zealand,” will be found sufficient.²⁵

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- 1 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 14 May 1888.
 - 2 *Pahiatua Star* 14 December 1888.
 - 3 *Bush Advocate* 18 December 1888.
 - 4 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 29 March 1888. “As he dies, he remembers his beloved Argos” (Virgil). The visitor was surely the homesick Howlett.
 - 5 Quoted in *Hawke's Bay Herald* 3 December 1888.
 - 6 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 8 January 1889.
 - 7 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 8 May 1889.
 - 8 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 30 November 1889. The 600 acres may have been Howlett's, but probably it was the 780 acres Stewart Bridge had bought and mostly cleared.
 - 9 *Daily Telegraph* 5 December 1889.
 - 10 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 11 December 1889.
 - 11 *Daily Telegraph* 24 December 1889.
 - 12 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 3 April 1890.
 - 13 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 30 April 1890.
 - 14 *Bush Advocate* 3 May 1890.
 - 15 Olla podrida, *Hawke's Bay Herald* 17 March 1890.
 - 16 *Timaru Herald* 4 June 1890.
 - 17 George and Lucy Randall Johnson farmed Wairakaia Station in Poverty Bay. She was Lucy Russell, daughter of the AH Russell who married Howlett's aunt Eliza Howlett.
 - 18 Alexander Turnbull Library, Sir John Hall papers 1836–1907: MS-Copy_Micro-0694 Reel 51.
 - 19 *Daily Telegraph* 8 July 1890.
 - 20 *Daily Telegraph* 4 August 1890.
 - 21 *Bush Advocate* 17 January 1891.
 - 22 *Wanganui Herald* 23 August 1890.
 - 23 *Wanganui Herald* 2 September 1890.
 - 24 *The Observer* 6 December 1890.
 - 25 *Pahiatua Star* 20 June 1890.
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CHAPTER 9: TIRENICS

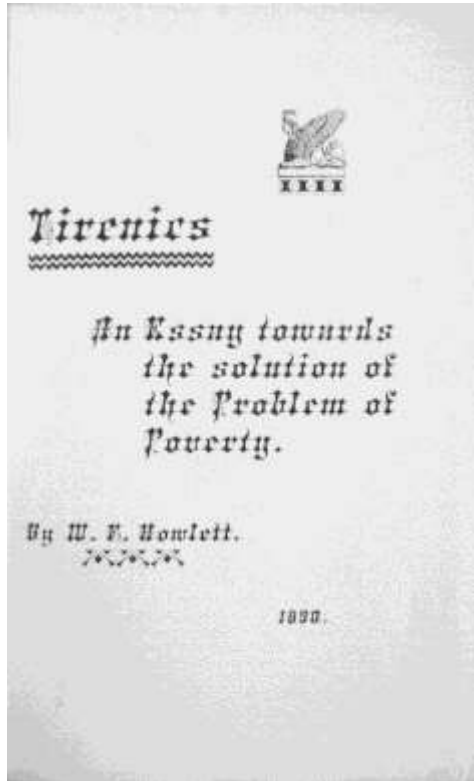
The 1890 general election was looming and Howlett put his name forward for the Masterton electorate (see Chapter 1) as a “Tirenist”. The word is derived from a te reo neologism “Niu Tireni” for New Zealand. He published an “explanatory leaflet,” nicely printed by Lyon & Blair of Wellington and it puzzled commentators: was it a genuine, if misguided, attempt at social reform?⁹ or was it political satire?

Howlett gave plenty of clues. The opening verse is from Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ædipus Tyrannus: or Swellfoot the tyrant*. Mary Shelley described it as a “political-satirical drama on the circumstances of the day”. In starting with this verse Howlett was surely stating his own

satirical purpose and perhaps suggesting “Tirenics” might also be interpreted as “Tyrannies”.

The whole text of *Tirenics* is reproduced here.

*Cut close and deep.
Moral restraint, I see, has no effect,
Nor prostitution, nor our own example,
Starvation, typhus-fever, war, nor prison.
This was the art which the Arch-priest of Famine
Hinted at in his charge to the Theban clergy,
Cut close and deep, good Moses.*



The title page of Howlett's *Tirenics*.

The object of the writer is to show that the Problem of Poverty is now susceptible of an easy solution. He will first define it. Most men have observed that working men are generally discontented. If, in China, they get 3d a day, we mildly compassionate them.

The Indian laborer, on 6d, we pity. The Belgian artisan, on 1s, we warmly commiserate. The starving Indian tailor on 2s, our heart bleeds for. As to the New Zealand unemployed on 4s 6d, we are ready to rise in our manhood and abolish a government that pays him so shabbily. It must be tolerably clear to business men, that if the Chinaman does not lose weight on 3d, the New Zealander will have a very reasonable belly-full on 4s 6d. And we may therefore state the problem very shortly. Some men live *on* labour, some *by* labour. The latter would like to exploit the former, and I am prepared to show them how to do it.

Limit the population. All you have to do is to fix the population of New Zealand at a certain number, and the problem solves itself.

First, let us clear up the existing delusion about Mr. Malthus. That estimable clergyman, in an essay which no one ever reads, but everyone misrepresents, simply elaborates the truism that men, like other animals, breed fast, and have to be thinned out by war, pestilence, famine, or other means. He draws no profitable conclusion from this. The conclusions people commonly attribute to him are not his, and certainly are not mine. Put the case, that in England some unimaginable law hindered men from having any children at all, would it affect wages in the least? The answer is so obvious that the subject need not be discussed here. Wages in England are determined by the fact that she has to compete in the markets of the world with the products of German, Belgian, and Austrian labour. Malthus, then, is not now in question.

The old idea was, that limiting population simply meant not producing children. Tirenism means fixing the population of a country at a certain number, and refusing admittance to others.

A few definitions may now be profitably introduced. Tirenia means the future political organisation in the country now called New Zealand. Tirenism, the study of, or enthusiasm for, the peculiar features of that organisation. Tirenics, the branch of political economy dealt with (in) this treatise. Tirenians, are those who believe in and promulgate Tirenism. It is a new Cult, and I am its prophet.

The essential doctrines of Tirenism may be put shortly. Limit the population of Tirenia to say 700,000. Issue Tirenic Rights to all the

present inhabitants. Make it part of our law, that anyone at large without a Right has his chance of clearing out or being put to work on the roads. These Rights would be transferable, attachable, devisible, much as land is at present. After issuing one to every human being (not an alien, felon, or lunatic) breathing Tirenian air on a fixed date, the rest, say 200,000, would be treated like Crown Lands; options, all leased.

Observe the result. As everyone who wished to travel or reside in Tirenia would have to lease or purchase a Right, these would soon command a certain price. The absolute cessation of pauper immigration of course follows. The population being fixed at a certain number, labour is in a position to make its own terms with capital. The only industries in New Zealand worth mention at present are Wool, Meat, and Minerals. None of these would be smothered by wages of 10s or even £1 per day. Suppose our system in operation, and a married couple contemplate an increase to their family. They have the choice: either buy the child a Right or don't beget it; or deport it; or clear out. There is no hardship in this. If a Right is too expensive for the parents to purchase, they can sell their own Rights and clear out; other countries are open to them.

The one thing to be grasped is that high wages and unrestricted breeding are incompatible. Hence Tirenists say, Breed as much as you like; but in Tirenia the number of our offspring is limited by the length of your purse. If you are rich, you will not lower wages, however many children you may beget; if you are poor, you shall not lower wages generally for the sake of your own brief indulgence; breed, but clear out. If you wish to stay here you must remain childless.

It will now be apparent that the writer, in stating that the Problem of Poverty admitted of an easy solution, introduced the little word "an" advisedly. He has really, if he may be allowed the language of algebra, attached an equation of a high degree—say a quarter—and found one root. Or, if you like, he has attached the solution of a triangle, and obtained a solution in a special case. Was it Cardan, or one of his pupils, who noted first that *one* kind of cubic could be solved by methods then known? The Problem of Poverty is world-wide, and to find a general solution we should stop unrestricted breeding all over the world, and in order to allow some children to be born we should commence a widespread crusade against the criminal, the drunkard, the vagrant. These we should fusillade, and so raise the physique of the world. But a solution which is impracticable is like an answer with a

$\sqrt{-1}$ in it. So the general solution is not touched here. I take the special case of New Zealand; I propound the solution of Tirenism.

In this short introduction to Tirenics, I have not gone into details of the necessary Act. They would be left to those conversant with the existing details of land-registration, census-enumeration, &c. It is enough to say that after Rights had been issued to the whole population, it would be an offence to be at large without one. Any person without a Right would be termed an alien. He might be fined, or imprisoned, or deported. He would be incapable of holding property or exercising any civil right whatever.

As our wealth increases, as by mere efflux of time land becomes more valuable, labour will gradually command better rates. Rights will be continually offered for sale; this probably will be effected by Government agencies, in much the same way as the Bank rate of discount is fixed at home. There will be a publication of the current price in the Gazette. Any person who wishes to sell his Right will simply hand it in to his banker or solicitor, and receive a draft on Melbourne for the current value. Any person arriving in New Zealand will be at liberty to go freely throughout the Colony; but liable to arrest on a charge of being an alien, whenever the police think proper. In the case of passengers by ocean steamers, they might proclaim the fact of their being aliens by wearing a small white rosette, in which case the police would not interfere at once; or they could hire Tirenic Rights from the State, at a price of varying from 10 to 13 per cent. per annum on the current value.

A few results of Tirenism may now be noted. First, it is axiomatic with serious political thinkers that the great effective practical results of any Act are certain to be what the framers did not contemplate. Hence it is well to say: Granting that Tirenism might result in such an alteration of the average age that we should become a colony of adults, and hence population change too rapidly for strong *esprit de corps* to develop. But I do not fear this. The probable immediate results are as follows:—Insolvency and the system of “tick” would vanish. A man who contracted a debt and failed to pay it would have his Right sold by order of any Court having jurisdiction, and be given the balance to clear out with. Direct taxation would be possible, as everyone would possess property. The ordinary administration of justice would cost a mere fraction of what it does now, as petty debt cases would seldom occur. All the scum of our population would be eliminated. No casual, shiftless, tipsy person would resist the everyday temptation of selling

his right and going over to Melbourne for a spree. Marriage would be regarded with a solemnity hardly realisable at present. Since both parties to the contract must be Tirenians, they would in every case be extremely anxious to foresee any obstacles. They would be keenly alive to the fact that for every child born to them they would have to buy a right; and also they would know that any lapse from sobriety and discretion on the part of either parent would lead to loss of Rights and consequent deportation. It is also probable that it would become usual for both parties to effect a small insurance, simply to get a certificate of reasonably good health. With regard to the Native race, their imaginative natures would be profoundly impressed by the visible certificate of citizenship, and as long as they hold land no tribe would permit a member to be deprived of his Right unless he was quite a good-for-nothing. For many years the large areas of land held by the Natives would enable them to hold their Rights without working; when the land they possess was ultimately individualised, they would have learned the lesson of self-control, and would maintain their solvency by either cultivating their lands, living on the interest of their money, or working like a white man.

The whole question of finance in Tirenia can only be glanced at here. Without going into detail, if the value of property in New Zealand is now one hundred millions, there is no doubt it will be far greater in A.D. 1900, whether Tirenism is introduced or not. This property will be as taxable then as now. The difference will be that direct taxation will be possible. Probably a poll-tax of sixpence a week would yield nearly a million a year, and the revenue derived from Crown lands and other sources would yield the rest. There would be no Customs dues whatever. The "other sources" are two in number, and demand each a paragraph.

As soon as Rights commanded a price of say £100, the Government would introduce a Bill legalising the creation of 50,000 more. The question of their issue would be the test question at an election. Every voter would say, Is a cash payment of five millions sufficient equivalent for an increase in population of 50,000? If they thought that a great reduction in the wages of labour would result, they would vote against the increase. It would, I think, be practicable to obtain at least a million a year by the issue of new Rights.

The partial confiscation of the unearned increment is not an essential of Tirenism. I recommend it here as simple and lucrative. It would be worked thus. A complete list of all properties would be

prepared showing values. In three years it would be revised, and if increase had taken place, any portion of this due to merely general causes would be confiscated in part. Suppose a section of 4000 acres near Pahiatua now valued at £3 an acre, and in three years valued at £6. The Commissioner would decide how much of this was due to the owner's exertions, and how much was unearned. Suppose £2 an acre was unearned, then the owner would be asked for a contribution of £1 an acre, or £4,000. He could let it stay on mortgage if he like, and pay interest at 5 per cent.

With such sources of revenue, we should be certainly wealthy. It will be asked whether it is not economically absurd to talk of creating wealth by an Act. The reply is that directly you limit to, say, 700,000 you acquire the right practically to hypothecate the unearned increment. You give labour the power to exploit capital, and you can therefore tax labour as much as you like.

There being no Customs duties, most articles of consumption would fall enormously in price. Postage would be reduced to a nominal charge, say 4d. a pound for all classes of matter. Railway tickets would be free, and goods carried at a uniform rate of about one farthing per ton-mile. Hotels would all be under Government management, and simple living would be free to all, charge being made for private rooms, horse-hire, &c. This would be practicable, because there would be no drunkards, or loafing, sottish men.

Tirenism is, I have said, a Cult. There is no reason why it should not be called a religion. For what do we mean by a religion but a wave of popular enthusiasm in a direction of world-wide social reform? To say that a religion must be concerned with morals is absurd, in face of the fact that we call Buddhism a religion. A religion does not necessarily include any theory as to an after-life: witness the religion of Moses and David.

If my new religion becomes, as I have no doubt it will, the established Cult in New Zealand, a crucial question presents itself at once. Suppose it is adopted elsewhere, what shall we do with those who lose or sell their Rights? It is no real objection to Tirenism that this question, crucial as it is, cannot now be answered. I have already said that the practical results will unquestionably differ much from any possible forecast. It is enough now to say that Tirenism cannot be adopted in such countries as England, France, or Germany, because any rise in wages there would shut up their manufactories. Hence our refugees would find an asylum there for many years.

This short treatise is only intended as a popular explanation of the main features of Tirenism. No doubt whole volumes might be written about the details in practice. I have labelled it “No. 1,” because it is proposed to issue a No. 2, consisting of extracts from newspapers and other criticisms, with notes; and probably a No. 3, consisting of a draft Bill, to be introduced in the House with annotations and remarks by various Tirenians. It may be convenient shortly to issue a monthly journal entitled the *Tirenist*, but this not as yet decided on as certain.

Many newspapers commented; the editor of the *Wanganui Herald* got the name wrong but devoted considerable space to a long comment on “*PIRENICS AND ITS PROPHECY*”, which ended with,

If Pirenics was meant in seriousness, which we do not for a moment believe, it would at the best be but a shuffle, and no cure for poverty. It would be the extremest of selfish action.... Mr Howlett’s method might purify Pirenica, but it would not lessen the general evil, and would not improve humanity at large....

His “Tirenics” as it stands is stupid.¹

The *Herald* was claiming to be aware of the nature of satire and “did not for a moment believe” it was serious, but nonetheless treated it as if it were. Others were also unsure,

After reading the little work it is difficult to gather from its contents whether the author writes in earnest or in a satirical vein; but we cannot help thinking it is the latter.²

The more literal minded took it seriously. The *Observer* leader writer wrote,

Walking the plank is a complication and a mystery when compared with the beautiful simplicity of Tirenism....

I also learn that Mr Howlett aspires to a seat in Parliament, apparently on tirenian lines. My advice to Mr Howlett is to stick to school teaching, and let politics and philosophy severely alone.... To be frank with Mr Howlett, his so-called Cult is an

inhuman device worthy of a tyrannical barbarian (which suggests that ‘Tyrannies’ would be a more appropriate title for the pamphlet)....

Does he expect a democratic people to swallow a doctrine which declares that they must pay for the privilege of breathing New Zealand’s air? Does he think poor people will believe that the cure for their grievances is... to leave the bliss of matrimony and ‘the rapture of creating’ to be enjoyed by the rich only? Does he imagine that any sane person will accept such wild theories as a ‘world-wide social reform?’ No, no, Mr Howlett. If you can find no other remedy for poverty than the expatriation and ultimate extermination of the poor, you had better leave them alone. Starvation, prostitution, typhus fever, war and prison, have doubtless failed to solve the problem, but Tirenics would fail still more signally, inasmuch as human nature would revolt at the inhuman principles upon which it is founded.³

The Observer just wouldn’t let it lie there, however: a fortnight later,

Tirenist, Republican, Atheist and Malthusian.

MR HOWLETT, the Makaretu Prophet, is in the field as a candidate for Masterton electorate, and as I anticipated, he is running as an exponent of the new Cult of Tirenism....

Of course there is not the most remote possibility of the Masterton electors returning Mr Howlett to Parliament; but an address so extraordinary calls for some notice. The first reflection that strikes me is one of increased surprise that a man who so eminently answers to King David’s description of a “fool” should be able to hold the position of public school teacher in a Christian community. Verily we New Zealanders have reached the acme of religious liberty and toleration, when an avowed atheist is allowed to instruct the rising generation. I say this, not by way of reproach to Mr Howlett, but in undisguised admiration of the tolerant spirit of the New Zealand public.

A word or two as to the “platform” of Mr Howlett. His definition of the term Republican has the merit of originality. It means that he regards “all accumulation of capital as an insult

and a menace.” That is rank nonsense. If a boy puts a shilling in the savings bank, he accumulates capital, but he neither insults nor threatens any one. And the person who accumulates may be, and (as in France) actually is, a better Republican than the Socialists of Chicago and elsewhere, who neither toil nor spin, and who accumulate nothing but dirt. Mr Howlett’s giant brain conceives that accumulation “can’t be helped,” so it seems that his Republicanism is nothing but a growl against the inevitable, and that the suffering millions must continue to be insulted and menaced till the end of the chapter.

Then the atheism of the Makaretu Prophet means that he “never came across any God.” The blind earth worm might with equal reason deny the existence of the Sun. It is hard to see the bearing of negative philosophy of this kind upon New Zealand politics, or Tirenism, as Mr Howlett would prefer to say. Possibly on the assumption that “the other fellow” bosses New Zealand’s public affairs, the candidate may consider it a strong point in his favour that he is absolutely irreligious. His vulgar and brutal jest about placing God under the microscope is as stale as it is offensive to good sense and good taste. The Seer of Makaretu claims to be a “scientific man,” and with the usual boundless dogmatism and assumption of these teachers of physical superstition, he asserts that he knows more than all the Jews, Christians, Mahommedans and Buddhists, on the subject of a Supreme Being.

After this, it is something of a surprise to find that Prophet Howlett is a follower of the gentle and pious Mr Malthus on the subject of population and poverty. According to the Makaretu Malthusian, “over-breeding” is responsible for all the poverty and crime in the world. I do not know whether Mr Howlett is married or not; but assuming the truth of the adage that “One fool makes many,” the probability is that he has a large family. At all events, Malthusianism is opposed to a primary instinct of our nature, and is one of the most completely exploded fallacies of modern times. But it is from Malthus that Howlett borrows all his “Tirenian” ideas, and he is at least honest in acknowledging his indebtedness. The Tirenian Prophet’s platform may be briefly described as consisting of (1) bastard Republicanism, (2) ignorant atheism, (3) unnatural Malthusianism. If I thought

these were in any danger of becoming “practical politics” in New Zealand, I would (in the historical language of J. A. Millar) “clear out of the country.”⁴

“Civis” wrote in the *Otago Witness*,

Can this be the gentleman who once lived and moved and had his being in Dunedin, wrote long letters to the papers, and was known to fame as W.F. Howlett, B.A.? Not that his B.A. was absolutely the only one in the town, but he walked with it, talked with it, ate with it, and drank with it, until Howlett and his B.A., became one and indivisible. The pamphlet puzzles me. There is the same bold grasp of great principles and the same magnificent scorn of small details that used to mark W.F.H., B.A., at his best; but there is no B.A. The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.⁵

Some time later, Howlett wrote, in reply to a letter to the editor by “Naturopath”, “Not a single review or criticism rose above the region of fatuous imbecility.”⁶

Politicians took it seriously enough to attempt at least parts of it: that very conservative liberal Richard Seddon and his Labour Minister William Pember Reeves introduced their “Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Bill” in October 1894, to the amazement of the *Evening Post*,

APPLIED “TIRENICS.”

AN EXTRAORDINARY BILL.

BETTER THAN “THE WASHERS AND MANGLERS.”

A Hawkes Bay resident once wrote a pamphlet entitled “Tirenics,” in which he proposed to place a certain price upon citizenship in New Zealand and charge that price to all newcomers. That pamphlet was looked upon as an elaborate eccentricity, but evidently the Minister for Labour has studied it earnestly, and the result is one of the most remarkable Bills of a remarkable series. It is called the Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Bill, and is looked upon by the Government as an urgent measure. It created quite a sensation when circulated last night.

The article listed details of the clauses of the Bill and ended with Seddon running for cover,

The Bill has created a sensation in the lobbies, and it is generally felt that the Government has at last fairly beaten the Washers and Manglers Bill on its own ground. As in the case of that notorious measure, the issue was exhausted within a few minutes. As first issued it bore the Premier's name, but this issue was immediately called in, and one with the name of the Minister for Labour substituted.⁷

1 *Wanganui Herald* 6 September 1890.

2 *Taranaki Herald* 29 September 1890.

3 *The Observer* 25 October 1890.

4 *The Observer* 8 November 1890.

5 *Otago Witness* 18 September 1890.

6 *Evening Press* 5 October 1894.

7 *Evening Post* 3 October 1894. The Washers and Manglers Bill had attempted to reduce prostitution in those occupations by registering all workers.

CHAPTER 10: MAKURI 1891

A new town, Makuri, was proposed east of Pahiatua and in 1889 Howlett, as author of the *Pahiatua Star* column "Out and About" wrote a lengthy series about it.¹

In the 1890 electoral roll he gave his address as Makaretu and his occupation as commission agent. His letters to editors gave his address as Ashcott and Ongaonga.

He posted a notice at the Makaretu Store,

For sale. The section now occupied by Lauritz Larsen; £3 10s an acre would probably be accepted at once, but I am willing to receive lower offers. It seems to me it would be an excellent speculation to cut the section into four parts and sell or let them to newly married couples. If I had the money I would do it myself. Offers to be addressed to W.F. Howlett, Ashcott.²

Nonetheless, by March 1891 “Mr Howlett (was) permitted to have the temporary use of one acre... in the Makuri township” by the Lands Board.³

Three months later, in June 1891,

A Manawatu paper says the Pahiatua Licensing Committee have granted an accommodation house licence to Mr. W.F. Howlett, for a house at Makuri, in spite of the opposition of the police. Replying to a question from the bench, Mr. Howlett stated that the house consists of a slab whare, the sleeping accommodation being provided for by means of tents.⁴

Howlett’s accommodation house was

... a two roomed slab whare that did not require windows (the light came in through the cracks) was the only place of accommodation for man and beast (the beast taking the outside for shelter). This place received a licence and the accommodation was added to by having a dozen tents struck, which were part of the licensed premises, lodgers having to supply their own bedding. The licence was transferred to the Makuri Hotel and the old “Willow Bank Hotel” as it was called is now a black-smith’s shop and a bachelors whare where surreptitious “crow” concerts are held.⁵

Surveyor RH Wilson wrote in his journal,

On getting out of the gorge, the valley widens out for a mile. The Makuri township, a village settlement, occupies the valley, but has not yet been opened up for settlement. There is an accommodation house, consisting of two slab huts, and several sleeping tents, with walls built up with punga, kept by Mr. W.F. Howlett in conjunction with a store.⁶

The police opposition had perhaps resulted from an incident in Woodville earlier in 1891,

About 2 a.m. yesterday Mr Howlett went to the police station and demanded admittance to the cells and accommodation for the night. Constable Treanor of course demurred to such an extraordinary request and Mr Howlett demanded his name and threatened to report him for refusing accommodation.⁷

Howlett “explained” the incident a few days later,

SIR,—A local in your issue of 9th January has just been pointed out to me. You say that early on the 8th I went to the lock-up and asked to lie down. You add that I was turned away and that I demanded the constable’s name. This is all correct, but you do not mention that the Constable refused to give me his name.

This seems to a grave breach of duty, and you having published the matter compel me to report it to head quarters.

The Constable told me I was “half drunk.” You can easily ascertain from either Messrs Churton, Gothard, or Bickerton, whether this was true, I had just left a little musical party, I found the Club Hotel shut up, the place was all wrapped in dense cold white fog; I was terribly sleepy, and merely wanted to lie down in any dry place until say 7 a.m.

Had the Constable referred me to the night watchman, all would have been right. He evidently recognised me, and if he believed that I was drunk (I have no doubt that as I had no witnesses he will deny the word) it was cruel indeed to refuse assistance.

I do not wonder that when gentlemen are treated in this insolent way, roughs, who are treated worse, consider constables their natural enemies and occasionally knock them about.—I am, &c.,

W. F. HOWLETT.

Pahiatua, Jan. 13th., 1891.⁸

Some locals were getting sick of Howlett’s attacks,

SIR,—I see a letter in to-day’s issue from Mr Howlett explaining matters in reference to his recent nocturnal visit to the police station. Mr Howlett must indeed be a most unfortunate gentleman, and is deserving of the utmost sympathy. If rumour is true this is not by any means the first time this same gentleman has been subjected to much annoyance, and (this time) serious inconvenience from our public servants, who have become pretty well acquainted with him. Dear Mr Editor, will you kindly endeavor to induce Mr Howlett to change the subject for a while, and give your readers the benefit of his knowledge and experience on some of his pet themes, such for instance as the

Malthusian doctrine. As a reformer of our Civil Service I should say he has found out by now that he is just a hundred years in advance of the times.—I am, &c.,

OBSERVER.⁹

Makuri is east of Pahiatua. It was part of the Pahiatua-Puketoi Special Settlement Association, surveyed in 1885. John Ballance was Minister of Lands and his Land Act 1885 was a major piece of legislation, seeking to place as many people as possible on the land by encouraging leasehold tenure and establishing government-assisted special settlement schemes. No doubt Howlett seized the opportunity offered, but probably his accommodation house was a brief financial investment in the planned new town, for in June 1892 he transferred his Makuri publican's licence to one Jeremiah O'Neill.¹⁰



Postcard: "View in Makuri Gorge, near Pahiatua, N.Z."

By January 1894 the Wellington *Evening Post's* "Own Correspondent" would boast,

THE MAKURI

Until lately the Makuri has simply been the land of mud, mud that could be felt—it lightened the pockets of the settlers, who

had to pay an exceedingly high price to effect their improvements, also preventing them from getting in stock when it was most needed—mud which took the cream of the earnings of the bushmen and roadmen. The unfortunate packers and their horses also suffered, and during the past two years over 20 horses died in harness; their bones now lie at the bottom of one of the most beautiful gorges in New Zealand. The road through the Makuri Gorge is cut almost out of solid limestone, perpendicular cliffs on either side rising fully 600 ft high, in most parts covered with light bush and underscrub, and at this season of the year, when the ratas are in full bloom, they add a peculiar charm, which I cannot describe. Hundreds of pigeons are all along the gorge shooting up like rockets—poising gracefully, swooping down again—and quite safe from the wretched pothunters who pursue them at all seasons of the year. Then there is the river, white and foaming, tumbling over rocks, forming whirlpools, eddies, and waterfalls. In summer or in winter the Makuri Gorge is well worth a visit from all who care for wild and rugged scenery. But mud has given place to metal, and now you have an excellent road into the township, which was sold some 15 months ago, and since then has been going ahead by leaps and bounds, and property is quickly changing hands. Messrs. Dwan Bros, have erected a good hotel, where you are fairly well provided for. Good beds and an excellent table are quite new to the Makuri. Very different to what it was two years ago, when Mr. W.F. Howlett's River Bank Hotel was the only building in the township. After a long and muddy ride you could get a cup of black tea in a pannikin, and if your teeth were particularly good you could manage just one slice of his famous bread. But to Mr. Howlett's credit you could get a glass of good whisky. Mr. Collier has been running the hotel for about twelve months, but has parted with his interest to Mr. Tucker, of Wellington, late of the Royal Tiger. I hope Mr. Tucker will see that a private sittingroom is kept for those who do not wish to hang about the bar. Mr. Collier has taken up land near the township, having purchased Messrs. Naismiths and Muir's interest. Trueby Bros, have sold their store to Mr. E. C. Tuckey. Mr. D. Cockburn still does his share of the trade, and Mr. Murphy has opened a blacksmith's shop. His garden is a credit, and would gladden the hearts of the almond-eyed

gentlemen from the Flowery Land. The Malmanches have almost given up packing, and now run a coach and waggon three times a week to Pahiatua. They also carry the mail. A brick kiln is also in full swing, turning out a very fair article, while dwellinghouses, women, and children, are seen everywhere. Next year a school must be built. A cricket club has been started, consisting of 57 members, and the goal posts proclaim the fact that football was not forgotten during the winter. From the excellent country round, Makuri must become a very important centre.¹¹

In 1893 the *Hawke's Bay Herald's* Waipawa Correspondent (Howlett) reported,

It is intended to form a Ruahine Special Settlement somewhere in the forest reserve west of Makaretu. Mr W.F. Howlett is the promoter, but the affair has not yet taken a tangible form.¹²

Locals petitioned to stop the scheme, however,

MAKARETU FOREST RESERVE.

A very important matter came before the Waste Lands Committee on Monday morning in the form of a petition from 26 residents of Makaretu and Blackburn Districts who stated that application had been made for a portion of forest reserve as a special settlement. The petitioners alleged the land was not suitable for the purpose and that the movement had been originated not in the interests of the persons whose signatures were attached, but by a person who had undertaken to form a special settlement in consideration of receiving 6d per acre if the application was granted. They asked that the application should not be granted until full enquiry was made in reference to the *bona fide* character of the applicant and suitability of the land. The Surveyor-general has furnished a report to the Committee, the effect of which was that a certain W.F. Howlett had applied on behalf of the Ruahine Special Settlement Association for 4500 acres behind Blackburn, but that nothing definite had been done in the matter. The Committee fully considered all circumstances of the case, and finally decided to recommend that effect should be given by Government to the prayer of the petitioners.¹³

Nonetheless, by the end of the year Howlett was writing angrily and at length to the *Hawke's Bay Herald* about bureaucratic demands and delays.¹⁴ "I am naturally so inoffensive that I can't do justice to the situation," he complained, "But you are not inoffensive; you can be vitriolic if you like; be vitriolic now."¹⁵

He must have spurred some action, for the Surveyor-General wrote to the Hawke's Bay Land Board requesting that the survey of the land applied for by the Ruahine Special Settlement Association be put in hand at once.¹⁶ Nonetheless,

The Ruahine special settlement expect to ballot for their sections shortly, but as yet have seen no plan, and consequently cannot ascertain whether the pegs are in or not. They say, or at least some of them do, that it is very necessary to be sure about this before paying for land. They notice in the *Gazette* of 16th August the regulations of other special settlements, and in every case it appears that the cash demanded was 10s per member, while in the case of the Ruahine special settlement the sum demanded was £25, of which £12 10s has actually been paid, and the rest is demanded before the ballot! Why this thushness no one appears to know. The regulations of the Ruahine Special settlement have not yet been gazetted, consequently the members do not know whether there are any regulations.¹⁷

Howlett blamed the bureaucrats, blustering to the *Herald*,

Sir,—I sent enclosed letter to the *Evening News*, and they won't publish it. That makes an end of my endeavor to believe that the present Government have been treating us fairly. It also makes an end of my idea that the Minister ever wished to appear honest. The present Government are simply a gang of [— —] to find the missing word read my letter. It pretty well explains itself. What a dull dog Mackenzie must be to think he can choke me off by delay, and evasion, and refusal to reply to me. I wonder whether when Gabriel blows the last trumpet, the Minister will answer feebly from beneath the sod that he "cannot entertain communications unless in writing." If he does, you may safely bet that Gabriel will have him out, and put him where he won't want blankets, with reasonable despatch; and I think you will agree that in the present case he is being

tackled by a pretty rough customer, and the sooner he lets his milk down the better for his peace of mind.—I am, &c.,

W. F. HOWLETT.

Ruahine Special Settlement, Makaretu,

27th September, 1891.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands,

Wellington,—

Sir,—My telegram of 13th instant remains unanswered. You are aware that we have recently had reason to think that the deposit you demand of £25 per member has not been demanded from other associations. My settlement think they have been fraudulently induced to pay it. It is your duty as well as your interest to disabuse them of this idea if you can. It is my privilege to assist you. With this end I applied at the Commissioner's office at Napier, and asked what your demand of 2s 6d per acre was based on? Whether on the "instructions" of February, 1893? The clerk in charge absolutely refused to answer, or obtain an answer to this very simple question. I then telegraphed to you to "quote enabling powers under which instructions acquire validity." Your failure to reply to this is an admission that the instructions were "gratuitous." Why do you keep us in the dark and affect not to understand plain English? On the 17th September you wrote to Captain Russell that I ought to "consult my own solicitor" if I doubted the "legality of the regulations." You are perfectly aware that what I doubted was the legality of the "instructions" of February, 1893. I have taken the legal advice you suggest, and I am satisfied these instructions are not only gratuitous, but in part absolutely repugnant to the Act of 1892. The point then is, did you by issuing instructions which you must have known were illegal, fraudulently induce us to agree to a money payment of £300? Your refusing to answer telegrams and affecting to misunderstand my meaning place you in a position which some Ministers would hardly care to occupy. If you wish to make us believe that all associations formed up to February, 1893, paid 10s per member, and later ones £25, please at once furnish me with a correct official list of all associations formed since October, 1893, with the amount of deposit paid by each,

whether so much an acre or a lump sum. We shall then consider whether such payments were legally made. At present I do not believe there were any such associations, and I think—or at least the members do, for as their secretary of course I have no opinions of my own—that we have been cheated out of £150 for some political reason, or by the mere blunder of some well paid clerk. With regard to the delay and red tape you love, one word. You affect to be ahead of English statesmen in some matters. Now I can forgive a small man for copying the current vices of a great one, but not his discarded vices. Lord Rosebery has got beyond the red tape period; try and get abreast of him in this if you really imagine you have got in front in other respects.—I am, obediently yours,

W. F. Howlett.

Secretary Ruahine Special Settlement.

Postscript.—Please note that if you do not comply with my request for a “correct official list of all associations formed since February, 1893, &c.”, in such a manner that I receive it on or before Friday, 5th October, this letter will be published locally. What I require is in the power of any clerk to supply, and unless I receive it I cannot possibly persuade our members that they are being fairly treated. They don’t understand all this fencing and delay; they are plain working men, and the more you shuffle the more they think they are being had.—W. F. H.¹⁸

The members had had enough and they blamed Howlett. He wrote to the *Herald* in December,

SIR,—I have just seen your leader on this subject. My duties as secretary terminated in November, 1894, and I then received my commission, tied up the papers in a bundle, and offered to go on again as secretary at, I think, 10s a week. This offer was refused, and the settlers, having no organisation, keep making irregular inquiries about matters that were settled in committee long ago. Had they kept me on, there would have been no trouble. Directly the authorities found out that the association had no mouthpiece they went to sleep, and since I retired not a thing has been done. The roads ought to have been made long ago, and concerted action taken in many ways. The settlers don’t want any titles—the idea is absurd. Each man wants a

working plan, and the title will do, say, in three or four years. Any secretary would have done as well as I; I merely mean that one, of some sort, was needed. There all the papers lay and nobody looks at them.—I am, &c,

W. F. HOWLETT,

December 8th, 1895.

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- 1 *Pahiatua Star* 18, 20 & 22 September 1889.
 - 2 *Daily Telegraph* 11 February 1889.
 - 3 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 28 March 1891.
 - 4 *Evening Post* 6 June 1891.
 - 5 *NZ Mail* 7 November 1895, *ibid*.
 - 6 Quoted by Angus McCallum. *Tui country: a history of the Pahiatua County*.
 - 7 *Woodville Examiner* 9 January 1891.
 - 8 *Woodville Examiner* 14 January 1891.
 - 9 *Woodville Examiner* 16 January 1891.
 - 10 *Woodville Examiner* 9 May 1892. In the same month WF Howlett sold land at Mangahao, west of Pahiatua, to one LM Monckton.
 - 11 *Evening Post* 13 January 1894.
 - 12 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 15 July 1893.
 - 13 *Woodville Examiner* 14 August 1893.
 - 14 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 9 December 1893.
 - 15 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 16 December 1893.
 - 16 *Woodville Examiner* 22 December 1893.
 - 17 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 31 August 1894.
 - 18 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 13 October 1894.
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CHAPTER 11: THE NATURALIST

As a biologist Howlett was well informed and had an extensive library. He collected extensively and corresponded with Kirk, Cockayne and Colenso. The Colenso herbarium at the National Museum has the type specimen of *Podocarpus montana* Colenso¹ collected by Howlett, and Kirk's collection includes the type specimen of *Aciphylla squarrosa* var. *flaccida*. He also exported fern spores to England at high prices and botanical specimens and plants as well.²

Apart from his membership of the Nelson Association for the Promotion of Science and Industry (forerunner of the Nelson

Philosophical Society) in 1876–7–8 and of the Otago Institute in 1878–9 there is no record of interest or participation in natural history pursuits during Howlett's years in Nelson, Otago or Taranaki, but in 1882 he sent worm capsules to Colenso via John Drummond³ and at Makaretu 1883–1886 he reportedly taught the children to identify trees and brought botanical specimens to the store before school to show them.⁴

The late Mr Stenberg stated that he (Howlett) could provide scientific and popular names for most of the plants they met with in the Ruahines.⁵

Stenberg accompanied Howlett into the Ruahine in the 1890s.

Howlett often included naturalist notes in his regular newspaper columns,

Near the Makaretu school there is a splendid specimen of scarlet mistletoe (*Loranthus tetrapetala*) in flower. This plant, one of the most beautiful known to botanists either in New Zealand or any other country, is rare in the colony, and probably has never been seen anywhere else. Would not some of your horticulturalists like to try to propagate it? It grows as a parasite on the black birch, and as this is a very hardy tree, would it not be easy to grow a few in Napier, and then bud them with *Loranthus*, or sow seeds in the bark, and finally ship them Home? I should not be at all surprised if such a plant, if exhibited in London in full flower, fetched £20, or even more. The orange-scarlet waxy flowers contrast so well with the bright green foliage that its mere beauty is great, while its rarity is comparable to that of the costliest orchids. If it could be got to grow on English beeches (our black birch is a *Fagus* or beech) or oaks, it would form in a landscape a patch of color that would adorn the proudest park.⁶

He sold seeds...

Several inquiries for seed of scarlet mistletoe have reached me, and shall be attended to when the seed is ripe.⁷

... and observed insects,

On Friday, driven out by cold—thermometer 50deg—I visited an aphid colony on a rose tree. *Coccinella* was there, lazily munching one; her larva, the aphidion, was absent. He is very voracious, but always too late to do much damage, or rather, from a human point of view, much good. But what fascinated me was an ichneumon. With intense rapidity and alacrity she traversed the whole loaded stem, running over the aphides and touching every one with vibrating antennae. Suddenly her exquisitely balanced progress was arrested and her long abdomen curled round. Before you could say Jack Robinson she had slipped her double-bladed ovipositor into the selected victim and laid an egg in her fat stomach. Seems to me we mortals have much to be thankful for. Hydatids are bad, but fortunately rare. But, Lord, how I should run if an ichneumon three times as big as myself were to come and select me!... In case any curious inquirer wants to know how I ascertained the sex of the aphid, I may say that females only are bred during summer. When the cold weather comes males are born, eggs subsequently laid, and the race thus preserved through winter. If the theory of design in creation is true, it seems a lot of trouble has been wasted in getting out plans and specifications for various blights and bugs. Note, to ask the ichneumon what her view of the matter is....

I found *Asaroe rubra* to-day in a cool green hollow by a creek. It is a fungus exactly like a red starfish on a stalk. Like the crinoid larval form of *comatula*, if I remember the name. But in the middle of the star where the clean fish would have its body with a sharp marine smell, is a horrid festering mass intended to attract flies. Fancy pretending to be worse than one really is! The most immoral sort of affectation.⁸

I found *Hymenophyllum multifidum* in fruit the other day. It was in a Wardian case; possibly it came with some kidney fern procured years ago from Eketahuna. The fruit is a lovely object under a low power, like a “cob” of Indian corn, but black, and arising from a green affair like an acorn cup; absolutely unlike any other fern I ever saw or heard of.⁹

The *Pahiatua Star* published the following,

Mr H King discovered a peculiar disease upon a wild pigeon he shot the other day. From the neck all along the breast to the tail was a sort of plaster nearly half-an-inch thick, which on being taken off and examined was found to be composed of a solid mass of tiny maggots. What these maggots came from is a mystery Mr King has decided to ask Dr Hector to solve, for which purpose he has sent the “plaster” to Wellington.¹⁰

Four weeks later,

Our Makaretu correspondence sends us a characteristic note on Mr H King’s maggoty pigeon. He says:— “Hector won’t know what they are, nor will any of his people. I enclose full particulars for Mr King, and you see whether I am not right about Hector being out of it.”¹¹

The following is the letter sent by Mr Howlett to Mr H King:— “your maggots are well-known to every habitue of a dissecting room, as *not* worms, *not* maggots, but, what is entirely different, low arachnidans; in fact acarids, allied to *Demodex* I believe. With this clue, that they are acarids or mites, you can easily trace them in any library. They are believed not to hurt the pigeons, and have no particular life history, at least they hadn’t in 1875. You know *Demodex*? He lives in the fat-ducts of the human nose. I bet Hector won’t spot them—only practical naturalists would.”¹²

Mr H. King has received the following reply from Dr Hector:— “I fancy your pigeon must have had an old wound in its breast, and that what you found was a clot of blood and matter; at least I can see nothing else in what you have sent me.” Mr Howlett was quite right; the learned doctor doesn’t know everything.¹³

Between 1885 and 1897 he wrote six letters to the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, then WT Thistelton-Dyer,

Makaretu, Waipawa, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand
10th Nov 85.

My dear Sir

I was a boy at Clifton when you lectured there.

Would you like any seeds? They are rather difficult to collect. I suggest as possibly worth attention (1) White clematis, flowers 6

inches across when well grown. Lovely. (2) *Fuchsia*. Not pretty but possibly hybridisable. (3) "*Cineraria*". This is just like greenhouse cinerarias but yellow & better foliage. I think it is *Senecio latifolius*. (5) Scarlet Mistletoe. This is a most lovely thing. I must ascertain what it will grow on. I know as a rule this is only on *Fagus fusca*, but you could try it on an English *Fagus* & meanwhile I could grow some strong pot plants of *Fagus fusca* and grow it on that. But I don't know how to apply the seeds to the bark, especially of a young tree. If I got some good pot specimens I might send them home in a refrigerating chamber at about 40° & also try one or two without protection. Are there any others you want? There are in some cases peculiar difficulties. I never yet got *Senecio latifolius* to germinate, and the *Clematis* is generally destroyed before ripe by worms.

I have plenty seed of *Entalea arborescens*, the wood of which according to Hector has a sp. gr. of .18.

That seems rather odd? I think the tree has other properties too, but as yet I cannot germinate the seed though saved carefully by myself. I went more than 100 miles to get it. *Knightia excelsa* is a very fine tree. Flowers most handsome.

If you send me a line on receipt of this, I shall probably have some seeds in hand. Yours truly,

W.F. Howlett.

P.S. on examining a Scarlet Mistletoe growing near my house, I find it agrees with none of Hookers species, so I shall enclose a small specimen. I am living right in the forest; my stores are packed up on the backs of horses; so I can observe more deliberately than an ordinary collector. W.F.H.

Pahiatua, Wellington, New Zealand
22nd Feb '89.

W.T.T. Dyer &c
Kew.

Dear Sir — (Alumina present—
 (as essential ingredient
 (in Fern Box.

I am in the habit of examining ashes of N.Z. trees, as far as I can without a laboratory. My object is to convince a pig-headed government that it is most idiotic to pay government botanists to urge people to go in for making potash, when there are actually reliable

*analyses of our ashes; & probably I am the only person in New Zealand who knows how much potash you get from 1 Gm of ashes of *Dacrydium cupressinum*.*

However, this is by the way. The other day I found a half burnt Punga or tree fern. The ashes were pure white, very tenacious, and retained the structure of the wood. They were obviously not in any way contaminated with accidental impurities; nor had they been rained on. My only reagent being a little nitric acid, I amused myself by trying to find potash & lime, & found neither. I wrote to a chemical student who said the ashes were chiefly alumina. This is very new. I noted today three samples of ash, origin unknown, all (1) saline, (2) insipid (3) powerfully caustic.

The reason I go out for ashes is that in calm weather, when big burns are on, you get lovely specimens and can distinguish between bark, wood, & branches, easily; whereas when I incinerate, I cannot get rid of carbon.

If you make any use of this send me copy of paper, or a note—

Yrs truly

W.F. Howlett

P.S. I cannot get in any book whether Caustic lime is ever an ingredient in fresh warm ashes. If so, when one leaches them one would get Caustic potash instead of carbonate, a fact utilisable for household purposes.

Makaretu, Waipawa, New Zealand

1st. October 1890.

Sir—having recently heard of your Bulletin I ordered same, as its interest is obvious to any man of liberal education. Messrs. Eyre & Spottiswoode now mail it regularly, but “cannot procure” the volume for 1888. It is a public scandal that so valuable a record should be incomplete just as it is beginning to be ordered & consulted. If you can send me the missing volume, I shall be grateful, as I have all the rest from 1887 to August 1890.

Your account of the Onion disease is interesting, but the remedy 1/10% of Fe_2SO_4 , demands explanation. If it really is effective why not use it for the similar diseases of Holly pick & Anemone, for which the remedy (Sutton in Gardening) is known. I enclose a leaf of an anemone. The symptoms of the disease are that the foliage abandons its flat, low, & distinct habit, becomes taller, more robust, less ornamental. No flowers are produced. It is of little moment that

anemones are destroyed, but were any one person in a locality to successfully cure such a disease he might be able to deal successfully with the fungi that infect economic plants. I enclose a leaf of a tuberous plant cultivated here. Name quite unknown. Said to be a native of South Seas. I should like to know the name, if easily recognised.

I want a few seeds, say ½ ounce of Ramia to use for silkworm and Rumex Hymenosepalus.

If you care to glance through Hookers Flora of New Zealand, and mention seeds you want, I will endeavour to procure. It seems hardly advisable to spend time & money (I have ridden 100 miles after Entelea arborescens), on seeds you do not want. It is excessively difficult here to get hold of local botanists. There is no means but advertising, which is costly.

A mistletoe, quite hardy, easily grown on apples, grows near me, and I shall enclose some fruit. The flowers were objects of remarkable beauty in November, orange-scarlet, waxy. Why the fruit is not yet ripe I cannot surmise. Perhaps it will ripen en route. The method of cultivation is well known, but has never been tried here, I believe. The name is Loranthus tetrapetalus. You would I presume not use the seed until April.

Among seeds that might interest you I will mention a few. They mostly grow as high as 1500 feet above sea, and stand frost & snow. Hence should be hardy.

Aciphylla—Areca—Aristotelia—Calceolaria—Celmisia—Cineraria (Senecio)—Clematis (seed as yet always infertile)—Coprosma—Cordyline—Drosera—Entelea—Fuchsia—Knightia—Loranthus—Panax—Passiflora—Pernantia—Pittosporum—Ranunculus (Lyallii)—

I should endeavour as a rule to gather seed about February, ascertain % of germination & forward in time for you to plant in spring. I need not remind you that your spring follows close on our autumn.

I am living on the spurs of the Ruahine ranges, often mentioned in Hooker, and am now forming a camp some way up the Tuki Tuki, with the object of making a track over the ranges. Probably we shall explore the Alpine flora in a more leisurely manner than has been done before, and though I do not myself know anything about the details, or care one iota about "new species" it is probable something of interest will occur. Previous botanists have been very ill-equipped; they have paid flying visits. I shall be able, I hope, to go up once a

month at least, & as Mountain floras change very quickly, shall see several successive lots of flowers.

I do not know whether such a letter as this interests you, or whether your engagements allow you to answer such letters. If not, perhaps it would not be too much to ask you to acknowledge on Post Card? You might say "Letter received, cannot undertake to reply" or similar words.

I am, Sir

Yrs truly

W.F. Howlett.

Makaretu, Waipawa, New Zealand

28 Dec 95.

Dear Sir

I am in receipt of your hand list of Ferns, which shall go up to my mountain abode, and if I can procure spores of any not in list I will send them.

*I shall also send other seeds; it is a fact that most absolutely refused to germinate here, though I sow them with care. I have always failed with *Aciphylla*, *Phormium*, *Pimelea*, *Diniys*, *Dacrydium*, *Myrtus*, *Entelea* etc.*

If the seeds I send are, on careful examination, apparently healthy, you may be able to find some simple reason.

*I generally select seeds when most abundant, and examine with a lens for a firm ripe kernel. As to Fern spores, I take every precaution, but can guarantee nothing, as my only lens (**** 12 diameter) hardly defines the spores at all. I can only hope that if the capsules 'shed' freely soon after gathering, they are right.*

Yours truly W.F. Howlett

Makaretu, Takapau, New Zealand

24 Sep 97.

Dear Sir,

*Some time ago I sent you a root of *Hymenophyllum malingii*, which you acknowledged, but I have not heard whether it survived the journey. I now make a similar experiment with *Nothoclaena distans*, which I found in a dormant state on dry stony ridges in open country. It is just commencing to make its spring growth. I think that in a month from receipt you should send me a postcard. If it grows I can send others.*

I am trying to arrange with an officer of the N.Z. Shipping Coy to bring your pot plants, and have left with them a nice well established plant of Veronica tetragona, showing the dimorphic foliage well.

This plant mimics Dacrydium colensoi so closely that even I, who see both plants growing together daily, cannot readily distinguish them.

If I can persuade them to take this plant, and all goes well, I feel sure I can send whatever of our Alpines you wish, by getting them established in pots at Makaretu, and shipping when dormant.

*I am sure you will fail with many of our seeds. I have sown them again & again, & they never grow, while I hardly ever fail with ordinary garden seeds, when procured from a good house. I got all of them from Martin Trashott *****.*

If you happen to know any seedsman who can be relied on to supply seeds a little out of the common way, which he might have to procure, such as best Alpine auricula—Hyacinth—Camellia—Lily of the Valley—I wish you would ask him to send me a catalogue.

I enclose seed of Astelia linearis which grows easily. I sow it in a pot, and let pot stand in a dish of water in full sun. The plant from a dense sward altitude 4500' to 6000'.

W.F. Howlett.

*Makaretu, Takapau, New Zealand
18 Nov. 97.*

Dear Sir—

When I sent you a Nothoclaena distans on Sep 24, I planted 2 clumps in the open. The new fronds are just showing. Another clump, potted, & placed in more heat in glass house, among Geranium etc, has new fronds 9" long.

This shows I sent you a well dormant clump. I now send another, fresh from the ground. Although in appearance dead, I think it is alive. I shall soon know, as I have potted one similar and will give it a little heat. The temperature the last two months has been that of April in England.

I am anxious to add Nothoclaena to your collection, as it does not appear in your list dated 1895, and being so hardy should be valuable as a garden plant in rockeries, & perhaps would do well in cool greenhouses.

*If I do not soon hear from you that the *Hymenophyllum malingii* succeeded, I will try & procure ripe spores.*

*I believe I told you it grows nowhere but on trunk of *Libocedrus Bidwillii*.*

Yrs truly

W.F. Howlett.

The first botanical specimens Howlett sent to Colenso were in 1894; his first letter to the Dominion Museum was in 1896 (enclosing a fowl's crop stones for identification); Kirk described his *Aciphylla* (speargrass) in 1899 from specimens collected by Howlett in 1895-7.

The earliest record of any specimen is a zoological one reported in 1883 and it suggests Howlett was already a careful and well equipped observer. A report appeared in Dunedin schoolmaster GM Thomson's short lived *New Zealand Journal of Science*,

CLASPING ORGANS IN MALE SPIDER AND MITES.—Mr. W.F. Howlett has forwarded from Waipawa, Hawke's Bay, a male specimen of *Macrothele huttonii* (a spider described and figured by the Rev. O. P. Cambridge in the N.Z. Inst. Trans., vol. vi., p. 200) and he suggests that the great development of the tibiae and metatarsi of the first pair of legs is to enable the male to seize and hold the female. The latter is described by Mr. Cambridge as being larger than the male, but wanting the above abnormal development. A comparison of the figures in the volume referred to (pl. vi., figs. 10 and 17) showing the normal structure of the legs of first pair, and also the structure in *Macrothele*, certainly bears out Mr. Howlett's idea. Hitherto, as far as is known, no such peculiar modification of structure among the males has been observed among spiders, though familiar enough in many other animals. Mr. Howlett also states that a similar structure is to be found in a mite (*Acarus* sp.?) which infects Tuis. This observation we also believe to be new for the Acarida.¹⁴

In 1893 the *Bay of Plenty Times* reported,

Mr W.P. Howlett, of Pahiatua, has discovered a new pest. He recently sent to the Agricultural Department a portion of an apple tree slit open and containing eggs. Mr T.W. Kirk has sent the following information concerning it:— The peculiar cuts on the specimen are caused by the female cicada. She makes a

longitudinal slit in the bark of the tree and proceeds to saw a number of V shaped cuts in the wood so as to raise the fibres and prevent the bark from healing. She then lays her eggs in pairs in each wound. The female then dies, the eggs hatch out and the young grubs drop to the ground and there undergo their transformation. The cicada prefers the Manuka, but nothing comes amiss and the young shoots of orchard trees sometimes suffer considerably; the damaged shoots, if not killed, generally break off when the fruit begins to swell. Spraying the trees with kerosene emulsion would probably prevent the damage.¹⁵

In an undated letter (but probably written in 1894) Colenso wrote to Harding, "I have lately received some strange letters! One from Howlett yesterday w. 20 spns. of alpine plants, to be named, &c, &c, right away!"¹⁶

Again, on 30 May 1894, Colenso to Harding,

Among the many local letters recd. of late.... one is from... Howlett—which, has surprised me not a little: perhaps I told you, how, 4–5 wks. ago, he had sent me sundry small spns. of alpine plants to be named (pretending to a sup. kn. of Boty. &c)—those were left at N., but I got them, & worked hard at them: all mere bits; no flrs., & succeeded in naming them all—adding, 2 might be new, & if he woud. send me a spn. or two (or even a leaf or two) more, I should be certain, & if new, would describe, w. some of Hill's (from E. Cape), & nine, from Dvk.—Recd. a long ramble, in reply, of what he is going to do next season,—barely thankg. me for my note— "being unwell & in bed (?) could not write"—without replying to requests in my letter, & closing w., "Dont reply to this."—H. may rest assured—it will be long, ere he hears from me again.¹⁷

It is hard to know what to make of Colenso's comment that Howlett was "pretending to a superior knowledge of Botany". Colenso regarded himself as the foremost authority on New Zealand plants and would expect a degree of deference, unlikely to be forthcoming in the iconoclastic Howlett.

None of the letters between Colenso and Howlett have survived, but they did continue, as Colenso wrote in his diary, or to Harding—29 December 1894, "A lot of newly gathered alpine plants, by post this day from Mr Howlett, gathered on Ruahine by him on Xmas day."

31 December 1894, “examd. alpine plants from Mr Howlett & wrote him respecting them.”—3 January 1895, “Examd. Howlett’s *Podocarpus*, & drew up description of same as a *sp. nov.*”¹⁸—12 August 1895, “writing... to Mr Howlett (long) in reply.”—21 August 1895, “more letters from him to me—reqg. long answers.”—2 September 1895, “letters inland—to Howlett.”—5 November 1895, “Morning a letter to Howlett (2nd.)—on plants.”—8 June 1898, “Howlett (very many packets).”—

Howlett sent gizzard “stones” from a fowl for analysis to James Hector in Wellington in 1896,

*They appear to be nothing but pieces of glass, but I have no means of testing the hardness, and they scratch window glass easily. If they are not glass, I should be glad to know whether it would be worthwhile examining the place where the fowl ran, and what one might expect to find there.*¹⁹

Hector replied shortly, “The specimens you find from the fowl’s gizzard are as you suspect only fragments of glass.”

So... glass, not diamonds.



Howlett’s fowl’s cropstones at Te Papa: glass, not diamonds.

The correspondence between Howlett and Thomas Kirk has not survived. Kirk mentioned Howlett's Ruahine specimens in describing *Aciphylla colensoi* var. *conspicua* and var. *flaccida* (the type specimen of the latter is Howlett's), in his 1899 *Students Flora*.²⁰

FW Hutton wrote, of the weta *Talitropsis sedilotti* in 1898, "I have received a female of this species from Makaretu, in Hawke's Bay, collected by Mr. W.F. Howlett..."; of the cave weta *Pleioplectron diversum*, "I have received from Mr. W.F. Howlett, of Makaretu, Hawke's Bay, a male specimen of this species..." and of the cave weta *Miotopus diversus*, "Locality.—Makaretu, Hawke's Bay (W.F. Howlett)." ²¹

Charles Chilton wrote of the freshwater crustacean *Paraleptamphopus subterraneus*, "In January, 1911, Mr. W.F. Howlett sent me specimens from Eketahuna, which had been obtained from a well."²²

A letter to Howlett from WB Benham, Professor of Biology at Otago and dated 28 June 1910 makes it clear Howlett also wrote to Leonard Cockayne about mites.²³

Howlett had written to the editor of the *Lyttelton Times*,

MITES

SIR,—As far as I can learn, nobody has collected mites in New Zealand, yet the notion of their importance may be got from the mere fact that the ravages of mites once seriously threatened our main industry. The "scab" in sheep is caused by them. I had long wanted to take the matter up but could get no assistance in any quarter. At last a fairly modern book (only 20 years old—quite recent that, for the colonies!) has been lent me by your Museum and it enabled me to make a start. The first mite I found was apparently not only a new species but a new genus. It is closely allied to Oribata. The next was a new species of Oribata. That represents practically one hours work.

My object in writing is to invite anyone who has collected to let me know, and also to explain why I do not record observations in your Christchurch Philosophical Transactions. The Rock of premature publication is the one on which all, or nearly all,

English and Continental acarologists have split. I have sent my notes to an old friend, Sir E. Lancaster, who will see they are revised. The one fatal thing is to record a species already observed under another name. Of course, it is quite possible my species have been recorded in some publication (say a Moscow Journal), quite inaccessible to me. If this is so my notes will be burned and much confusion prevented. Were it otherwise I should have felt bound to acknowledge my debt to your Institute by publishing my observations locally.—I am, etc.,

W.F. HOWLETT

Tane, Eketahuna, June 22, 1910.²⁴

In 1910 he wrote to Reginald Innes Pocock a zoologist at the British Museum, about water-mites,

I note in the Index Faunae N.Z. that certain arachnida [Hydrachnidae, Rede, palpida,] are all mixed up, and after much cursing got A & M.N.H. May 1903 wherein I perceive that you know what you are after.

I have an uncanny habit of getting to the bottom of subjects I know nothing of.

I feel almost sure that the Harvestmen in our deep caves are undescribed. May I venture to consider you a fixture for the next year or two and send you things? I know several Hydrachnidae here; they are quite happy in a bottle, say esp etc. Then there are chelifers, and plenty of harvestmen. It is midwinter now, but soon spring will come & I shall find things. Probably the first lot will be familiar to you, but I'll engage that the next won't. If I send any thing really new, I shall expect something in return; possibly the loan of a monograph, if such exist. The Cam. Nat. Hist. is a useless affair. No proper bibliography. I don't care about the phylogenetic business simply because I am not equipped, it is over my head.

I am just an old man with an eye, and all I care about is to find new things for competent men. Be careful to say in precise terms how you want them sent. It seems to me simply humbug to send (for instance) large orthoptera in alcohol, it makes them rigid & you cant set them.

Well, you seem to want Harvest men. They can be very nicely killed in warm water, say 125°.

What next? Will any mixture of alcohol, water, & glycerine keep them limp for you to set up, or don't you want to set them up? and if so what strength. The formalin I have is called "10%". I don't know what that means. I thought formaldehyde was a gas?

I suppose you want only arachnida & not acarina. Hence there remain only Harvestmen & Chelifers. As to Phrynia, I wish you would look first at Index Faunae N.Z. page 140, & then P.Z.S. 1849. 6. and if you think its all right tell me the habitat. If it only occurs in extreme north, I cant get it. If it is anywhere south of Napier, I shall be sure to drop on it, and if I do I will look out for allied species. I never saw any of the Phrynidae, alive or dead.

Yrs truly, W.F. Howlett.²⁵

Letters between Howlett and the Director of the Dominion Museum Augustus Hamilton (and after his death Acting Director James Ingram McDonald) between 1909 and 1913 survive in the Te Papa collections and they show a good deal about Howlett's scientific ideas and pursuits.²⁶

Howlett to Hamilton 11 December 1909,

Am running over Acarina and reviving old memories of 1868-1871, when I knew about all that was then known about them.²⁷

Can spot all my friends in new classn. except the mite that lives in masses of fat over pectoral muscles of pigeon.

Can you locate him? He does not seem to be in Demodex.²⁸

If you had Andrew Wilson's "Aptica" it would tell you.

Howlett to Hamilton 7 July 1910,

You said Mr. Justice Chapman wanted assistance with microscope. Should be happy to help him if expenses paid. I am doing nothing and probably £2 a week would cover everything if accommodation found for self & wife, or £4 if wife not desired. As to her social stakes, no doubt Mrs Chapman could ascertain that from Miss M.E. Richmond, or Mr Arthur Russell or any of his relations. I used to know a lot more than the judge could want—and if you cared to see copy of paper on Oribatidae sent to Sir Edwin Lancaster you would see at a glance I am not exactly an amateur.

But as to modern Bacteriology, that's out of the question; also elaborate staining & microtome work.

All he wants is the careful display of living things under best conditions. Rotifers—Aphis—Acari—Pycnogus—Reproduction of Ferns etc—

Hamilton to Howlett 13 July 1910,

I have seen the Judge and find that he cannot spare the time to take up microscopical work which he hoped to be able to do. Therefore I fear you have no opportunity in that direction.

Howlett to Hamilton 22 July 1910,

Chance has led me in an enquiry that may prove of no moment, yet it can do no harm to briefly run over the facts.

I see to a wood fire and do not remove the ashes. They seem to remain almost stationary in bulk. I enclose a sample. Am I to conclude that "ashes" as commonly understood, go up the chimney, and that what I send is merely burned earth?

If so, many American recipes that call for "ashes" would fail in New Zealand. Again, what must be the condition of our so-called "rain" water? On examining ours, I tried the effect of a current of say 3 volts between silver electrodes. The result was very marked milky opalescence. I have no chemicals, so could not examine further. If you think the matter worth any notice, you might write me at your leisure.

Howlett to the Librarian 11 February 1913,

Kindly post me "Chalcididae" p. 59 of catalogue.

I do not remember seeing any "rules" of library. If any exist, kindly post them.

I understood from you (I believe I am addressing Miss Wilson?) That there exists no catalogue, either MS or printed, later than 1900. One is astonished at nothing in N.Z. I wonder if you could give me a rough idea as to whether any additions have been made since 1900?

Because if there have, perhaps if I made a rough note of what I want, you might get some visitor, or perhaps Mr Hamilton, to suggest books.

I am hardly a serious student—in fact I am never quite serious—but it seems to me more human, more rational, to puzzle out details of bugs than grow 100 different kinds of peas, or collect postage stamps.

My present amusement consists in rearing certain dipterous larvae, which ought to develop into flies which have 2 wings. Without exception, they all hatch out into Chalcids, which are small Ichneumons with 4 wings.

Presumably, every larva contains an internal parasite, & the fly never comes out at all.

Howlett to Hamilton 20 February 1913,

Very kind of you to answer my letter personally.

Your note (dated 17th) impells me to quote Schiller—whether adequately translated I don't know—

“Science to me is holy, a heavenly goddess; to another, only an excellent cow, existing to butter his bread”.

The translator thinks he has made a hexameter & pentameter I suppose.

Ray Lankester says weightily that—A.J. Balfour is the only English Statesman that takes science seriously.²⁹

I return the book. When I wrote for it I of course supposed (per catalogue) that it was a monograph, and dealt with classification, probably with pictures. It turns out to be a sort of running comment, & implies knowledge of subfamilies etc.

Curiously, it does deal with the very point I wanted next, whether Chalcids are ever phytophagous, and decides that one unquestionably is. My Chalcid I hatched out from a leaf-mower, and as 30 pupae in dissection all gave Chalcids I was perplexed. No larvae showed any internal traces of a parasite.

However at last a pupa has given me a true fly, so I suppose the Chalcid must be a parasite.

I mean to keep on examining larvae until I find an internal parasite; also I may try to get the Chalcid to lay eggs, & see if they will burrow in the plant—sowthistle.

As yet, all the Chalcids have been males except one. The female is very different, longer wings & antennae tipped with white.

I am not, as you politely express it, “working” at Chalcids. I am only playing. But amateurs, dilettante people, can be of service to science. Goethe, who was no worker, made an ass of himself about colour, but his noticing the intermaxillary bone was a triumph. And how his dabbings must have made him encourage science! Though I never read that he actually did officially assist it—

Hamilton to Howlett 3 March 1913,

“Papa” is one of the most indefinite terms used in this country. I personally happen to know the origin of the term and in the first instance it was simply applied by the Maori when Sir James Hector asked him what he called that beastly slippery place he had come over. He said it was papa, which simply means a flattish expanse, probably slippery. After that it has been applied to almost every kind of tertiary formation. Now it is generally restricted to the blue clay of the Wanganui formation. Your tiny nodules are probably foraminifera, but I should say that if they have hard black filling that they are from “green sand” and that the dark substance is glauconite or silicate of iron.

Howlett to the Librarian 17 October 1913,

If you are not experienced in correspondence I am sure you will not be offended if I remark that your note (enclosed) is not dated, bears no address, & is apparently not copied.

Kindly examine the foresaid again, and be careful to return it. I think the reference given, “Sec.4, J vii p355” is probably sufficient. In such publications the date is often not given.

I never sent any letter to “Zoologist,” and I expect the observation, which I sent a friend some years ago—possibly ten years—was handed on without my permission. The observation in itself was made in 1871, and a careful camera drawing was attached. The Mites (or Acarina) have been very little studied; probably nobody in N.Z. but myself takes any interest in them, & there is precious little to be got

from "books". The best observations are recorded in Italian—Dutch etc., & very inaccessible.

Howlett to the Acting Director 10 November 1913,

Is there a librarian in the Museum Library? If I want a book out of the library to whom do I apply?

I have the catalogue published 1900 and apparently not revised since & consequently practically useless.

Have I a right to borrow books as member of Well. Phil. Soc.?

McDonald replied to Howlett at considerable length on 13 November, patiently addressing his questions in detail.

Howlett to the Acting Director 17 November 1913,

Many thanks for your careful and very interesting letter of the 13th.

You really strike the note is remarkable in HG Wells' later work, that the disease of society today is just "muddle". In an official letter I cannot well say what I think.

It is unseemly to ask you to file in your records a statement that the progress of science is retarded by the apathy of a clique of comfortable old sillies, who do not see that they ought long ago to have shrieked with indignation.

And this of course is not in the least what I really want to say. And there is really no use in saying anything. I do not see that you can help me in any practical immediate way.

I am attempting to ventilate matters in Lyttelton Times; the two Wellington morning dailies are from my point of view so venal and ignorant that I do not care to approach them. After all what does it matter.

I have plenty of tobacco, warm clothes, tucker. That is the really important thing.

Science may go to the Devil, and I will read Poetry and get spiritual comfort that way.

I advise you to take refuge in something; I daresay you do. The world is only apathetic. 300 years ago it would have burned me at the stake.

after all, what does it-
matter.

I have plenty of Tobacs,
warm clothes, Turkey.
That is the really important-
thing.

Science means to be the
Devil, and I will
read Poetry and
get spiritual comfort
that way.

I advise you to take
refuge in socialism;
I don't say you do.
The world is only apathetic.
30 years ago I would
have burned me at
the stake.

Yours
W. F. Howlett.

A sample of Howlett's handwriting

McDonald to Howlett 19 November 1913,

It is refreshing to get a frank expression of opinion but the curse of the times is that truth is not always appreciated. Personally I sigh for the time when men shall work for the joy of the doing and when every man's motto will be accuracy in all things. The laissez-faire doctrine of followers on the line of least resistance is irritating no doubt, but the case is not altogether hopeless. Far from it. It is surprising what can be accomplished by a gentle shove and kindly kick, and I look forward to the time when you will come to us for a book or publication and we shall at once be able to say "Yes Sir, here is what you want."

I beg your acceptance of the pictures herewith. These will serve to indicate my refuge from the little worries of life.

Howlett to McDonald 23 November 1913,

Many thanks for your sympathetic letter of the 19th covering Maori drawings which we admired very much.

If you procure a copy of Lytt. Times of Thursday 20th Nov. you will see my views on page 2.

The star means the letter has been "edited"; that is, the real gist has been cut out.

I presume the Lytt. Times is on sale in W'ton. Anyhow I can't get a copy here.

Howlett to the editor, *Lyttelton Times*, 20 November 1913,

DOMINION MUSEUM LIBRARY

SIR,—There is one scientific library in New Zealand, and I joined the Wellington Philosophical Society thinking that I could easily get the value of my guinea by borrowing books from it. Here are a few facts. There is such a library; the books belong, some to the Museum, some to the New Zealand Institute, some to the "Geological Survey," some to the Philosophical Society. The catalogue has not been revised since 1900 and is practically valueless. There is no librarian, and any books received are just stowed away. Anyone on the spot is, I believe, allowed to browse on what is on the shelves. There is not the least use writing for books, because there is no means

of even surmising what books are there, or whether, if there, they are “stowed away” and unfindable. Also, there is no librarian to write to.

New Zealand is indeed a terrible country for research. Everyone here is contented and imagines we are in the van of progress. If you could only open people’s eyes! When I was a boy at school in England in 1869, everyone knew what “research” meant, and it was easy. I was no more privileged than any other boy who really wanted books. I simply sent a line to a porter (yes, a porter) at Jesus College, Cambridge, and he sent me any book in the University Library without demur. No catalogue was needed, because from a boy’s point of view the library was complete. I remember, among others, Machiavelli’s “Il Principe,” ordered because strictly forbidden by our pious headmaster, and Curtis’s “Entomology,” a luxury to a boy, because it was then worth, secondhand, all of £20.

This “Dominion Museum Library” has not, I am told, any book on natural history, probably none on chemistry or geology. I console myself with the reflection that it contains Mr E. Tregear’s “Aryan Maori,” a book of some interest in connection with the “Outcast Scum” discussion.³⁰

So far as I can gather from the catalogue there are many valuable books in the library, and if, under the Science and Art Bill recently passed, a Board is appointed to manage it, I wish you would let me explain a few elementary things. In fact, one thing will do: that is, that these old busters in power know nothing at all about a library. They ought to get out some young fellow who will take a pride in it and will insist on having recent manuals of natural history and chemistry. But the one cardinal thing is to recognise their ignorance.

McDonald replied placatingly; Howlett to McDonald 28 November 1913,

I am glad that your letter of the 25th does not exhibit active resentment of my letter in Lytt. Times 20th. My subjects are generally “out of the way”. As a boy, I could always get at the heart of a thing, and it amused me, & then I dropped it & took up another. Nobody in the colony would understand. I note at random:—

Modern color in pyrotechnics. Is it all rule of thumb or does anyone really know why Barium chlorate is used & not Strontium chlorate? Why is there no book, no essay, no allusion to the reason why certain complicated formulae are recommended? Why is sulphur used at all?

*Water-mites. Is there any sort of book at all on these except the monograph in *Das Tierreich*³¹ and if not, must a humble student pay £1 or more for a book weighing about 8 ounces? Can't he borrow it? There are any amount of water-mites in the colony.*

Morphology of stem of tree Fern. The scleroderm contains quantities of (illegible) bodies insoluble in nitric acid, probably only known to myself. I want to know what has been written re morphology and histology of stem. Somebody, surely, must have examined stems. What did they see, or think they saw?

Preventive measures. Is it an offence to advise people as to the best methods of limiting families? I am going shortly to circulate a leaflet, and want to know exactly how long I shall get in the "cooler" for doing so.

You well I think see that all this is science, but all a little out of the beaten track. I can hear of nothing in colour in pyrotechnics since Chertier who wrote in 1840 (?) and I certainly shan't read him.³²

There is one little matter you might help me in but it is not science as I know science, it is my "popular" business. A friend sent me 3 hedgehogs. I never saw any before and am utterly puzzled. Could you find in library or elsewhere any popular account (100 years old will do) of the mere outside look of the hedgehog? What does he eat? Does he moult? Can he bite? How tell male from female? Can he burrow? Has he enemies? Does he hibernate? I don't want any modern business re phylogeny etc. Can they do harm if I liberate them in garden? Why do the neighbours here say "don't let them go, they will destroy our fowls"? They were caught wild, & yet let me handle them and will eat bread, milk out of my fingers. If you can post me any sort of account of hedgehogs, I shall be greatly obliged.

As to my saying (Lytt. Times) the library has no book on Nat. Hist, chemistry, geology, it hasn't! I meant, of course, general manuals. There are I believe two manuals of "Nat. Hist" now in use. One is the

Cam. Nat. Hist. This is not in library?² Nor is any other! The accepted book on chemistry is I believe Roscoe & Schlemme (?).³³ Library has only the 1878 edition, obviously worthless. Etc!!

I don't know the accepted manual in geology. No doubt it is not in library!

On 5 December McDonald copied out and sent the *Encyclopedia Britannica* account of hedgehogs, along with a letter including other offers of help and concluding with a wish that Howlett could come down and have a browse round the Museum library, where he was sure Howlett would find much that would be interesting.

Howlett to McDonald 8 December 1913,

It is very good of you to send me notes re hedgehogs, also note of books received.

I wish I could arrange to come down to Wellington.

It will take years to get the library really efficient.

Probably if it were any good, the number of books would be small, and hardly justify the expense.

From some points of view it's a pity we have not one chief town instead of four.

Don't post me "Colour" at present, I have a lot of reading in hand. Thanks very much for offer.

Howlett to McDonald 24 December 1913

Will you kindly send me "Science" N.S. vol xxxii, ns 855 and 856. The pages I want are 753-765 and 801-808. I mention this in case the numbers are not bound.

I wish to read a paper by "Poincaré", whoever he may be.³⁴ The dates are May 19 and 26, 1911.

F.W. Frankland,³⁵ who is as mad as a March Hare, is greatly concerned that Gauss was too cowardly to draw two straight lines both parallel to a third. You know Gauss was a professor.³⁶ Lobatchewsky also finished it.³⁷

At last they got a soldier called Bolyai,³⁸ who cared for neither man nor science, and he drew his line! They apparently kicked him out of the Army for it. Ever hear such a queer yarn?

The two straight lines must of course (I forgot) pass through a point. Like this:— Here is our first straight line:—

Here are the two, both parallel to it.



No wonder Gauss gibbed! The paper in Science refers in some way to Bolyai, who seems the hero of certain mystics.

McDonald to Howlett 29 December 1913

.... I am not surprised at Bolyai being kicked out of the Army. He knew too much and such men are dangerous. They should have given him a chair in the local university. The parallel line problem is one at which any self-respecting professor ought to jib, don't you think....

Howlett explained weta collecting in 1910,

Mr W. F. Howlett, of Eketahuna, having been rebuked by one of his Christchurch friends for giving up his ease to search for a rare specimen of the weta in the wild places of the North Island, makes the following characteristic reply:— “You sniff a little at my spending time and money ‘collecting’ wetas. You obviously rank me with people who ‘collect’ postage stamps or old china. Now I could justify my hobby philosophically, aesthetically and hygienically, but I prefer to do so on economic grounds. I make it just a matter of value. Look at it this way. All our great money-saving devices are the result, not of discovery, but of application. Wireless telegraphy was discovered when I was a boy. It is the application that renders it a commercial fact. Now, science is a thing that cannot be extended in any direction at will. You must extend it in every direction, and you get your profit where you do not expect it. My object in ‘collecting’ wetas is to get a correct

list of all the species properly named, and then gradually work out the life-history of each. Do not imagine I merely want rare specimens in my cabinet, as a stamp collector prides himself on a penny Mauritius. Well, now, you ask how it will benefit us if the species are worked out. That I cannot yet tell. But let me ask, suppose the species of fleas and rats had not been properly worked out by centuries of patient unrewarded labour, how about the bubonic plague? And if the hundreds of mosquitoes and scores of trypanosomes had not been worked out, how about clearing the Panama Canal of Yellow Jack? It may be that my work at wetas will never bring in any money return. But there is the chance, and I think it is worth taking. And now you ask, am I such an ass as to spend a lot of time on the mere chance of recording facts that may be of value to posterity? My dear boy, I am not such a flat; I confess it! Wisdom is justified of her children. The solid defence of weta-hunting is as given above; the actual momentary attraction is the close contact with Nature. Up at 5.30, tub and tea done by 6. Then the elastic tread through deep moss and kidney fern, the penetrating origin bush— Eh? I am sure now you take me entirely.”³⁹



Spaniard, speargrass/karama, *Aciphylla squarrosa* var. *flaccida* Kirk, collected 15 January 1897, [Ruahine Range], Headwaters of Oroua River., New Zealand. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Te Papa (SP048322).

Plants collected by W.F. Howlett

Auckland Museum collections

Aciphylla colensoi conspicua (Ruahine)

National Museum collections

Aciphylla colensoi Hook.f. (Ruahine) 1896 11 specimens

Aciphylla squarrosa J.R.Forst. & G.Forst. (Headwaters of Oroua River, Ruahine) 1897 11 specimens

Arthropodium candidum Raoul (Makaretu)

Colobanthus affinis (Hook.) Hook.f. (Ruahine, Parke's Peak) 1895

Coprosma colensoi Hook.f. (Ruahine) 1895

Coprosma lucida J.R.Forst. & G.Forst. (Ruahine) 1895

Coprosma tenuifolia Cheeseman (Ruahine) 1895

Dracophyllum recurvum Hook.f. (Ruahine) 1895

Euphrasia cuneata G.Forst. (Moorcock's Flat) 1896

Euphrasia cuneata G.Forst. (Ruahine) 1895

Libocedrus bidwillii Hook.f. (Ruahine, Parke's Peak) 1895

Myrsine divaricata A.Cunn. (Makaretu) 1895

Ourisia macrophylla Hook. subsp. *macrophylla* (Ruahine) 1897

Pittosporum cornifolium A.Cunn. (Makaretu) 1895

Pittosporum rigidum Hook.f. (Ruahine) 1895

Podocarpus hallii Kirk (Ruahine) 1895

Podocarpus nivalis Hook. (Ruahine)

Prasophyllum colensoi Hook.f. (Ruahine) 1897

Pseudopanax arboreus (Murray) Philipson (Hawke's Bay) 1895

Pseudowintera colorata (Raoul) Dandy (Makaretu) 1895

Raukaua edgerleyi (Hook.f.) Seem. (Ruahine) 1896

Uncinia affinis (C.B.Clarke) Hamlin (Makaretu) 1896

1 Now regarded as a synonym for *Podocarpus nivalis*, the alpine totara.

2 Howlett—the man. *Pohokura*, Heretaunga Tramping Club Bulletin No 147, April 1981, pp.17–18.

3 Alexander Turnbull Library 88-103-1/13.

4 AM Finnerty, M Skipworth, J Springer. William Frederick Howlett c1850–1915, Schoolteacher and botanist. Report for the Manawatu Group of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists 1979. Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-2012.

5 Findlay JF. W.F. Howlett pioneer Ruahine botanist. Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin 1981; 41: 35–41. Quoting Stenberg A. Some reminiscences of pioneering days in the Ruahine Ranges. *Ruahine Rambler*, Journal of the Ruahine Tramping Club No. 4. 1938.

6 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 10 December 1889.

7 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 18 December 1889.

8 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 30 December 1889..

- 9 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 20 January 1890.
 - 10 *Pahiatua Star* 20 May 1890.
 - 11 *Pahiatua Star* 27 May 1890.
 - 12 *Pahiatua Star* 30 May 1890.
 - 13 *Pahiatua Star* 13 June 1890.
 - 14 *New Zealand Journal of Science* 1883; 1:213, probably written by GM Thomson or Thomas Kirk.
 - 15 *Bay of Plenty Times* 7 April 1893.
 - 16 Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Copy-Micro-0485-1.
 - 17 Alexander Turnbull Library qMS-0498.
 - 18 Colenso described the snow totara as *Podocarpus montana* (now identified with *P. nivalis* Hook., as Colenso suspected it would be) in 1895: *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute* 27: 383-399. He wrote, "High up on Ruahine mountain-range, east side, County of Waipawa; April and December, 1894: Mr. W. F. Howlett."
 - 19 Te Papa MU000095/011/0001
 - 20 Kirk T. The Students' Flora of New Zealand and the Outlying Islands. Government Printer, Wellington, 1899, p.207.
 - 21 Hutton FW. Supplement to the Stenopelmaticidae of New Zealand. *Trans. N.Z. I.* 1898; 31: 40.
 - 22 Chilton C. Miscellaneous notes on some New Zealand crustacea. *Trans. N.Z. I.* 1911; 44: 128.
 - 23 Te Papa MU000152/005/0087
 - 24 *Lyttelton Times* 25 June 1910.
 - 25 Alexander Turnbull Library Micro-MS-Coll-20-2708. A footnote in another hand reads, "Phrynus listeria was described as Phalangium listeria by Adam White. Mr. Colenso describes his species under the name Phalangium (Phrynus) cheliferoides."
 - 26 Te Papa MU000095/011/0001, MU000095/015/0066, MU000095/016/0084, MU000152/003/0069, MU000152/005/0087.
 - 27 This suggests Howlett started his study of mites at Oxford.
 - 28 Demodex is a genus of tiny parasitic mites that live in or near hair follicles of mammals.
 - 29 Sir Edwin Ray Lankester, whom Howlett referred to as a friend in a letter to the *Lyttelton Times* of 22 June 1910 and in a letter to Augustus Hamilton of 7 July 1910. Lankester was at Christ Church, Oxford, graduating in 1868, so may have known Howlett there.
 - 30 During a major strike Tregear was reported as referring to Special Constables as "outcast scum". The *Dominion* called it "outrageous language". *Dominion* 6, 7, 8 November 1913.
 - 31 Das Tierreich published a series of monographs on mites.
 - 32 François-Marie Chertier was a French pyrotechnist.
 - 33 Henry Enfield Roscoe & Carl Schorlemmer. *The Treatise on Chemistry*. 1874.
 - 34 Jules Henri Poincaré was a French mathematician.
 - 35 Frederick William Frankland, mathematician and statistician, lived in Foxton.
 - 36 Johann Carl Friedrich Gauss was a German mathematician.
 - 37 Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky was a Russian mathematician.
 - 38 János Bolyai was a Hungarian mathematician.
 - 39 *The Star* 21 September 1910.
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CHAPTER 12: THE ALPINIST¹

Makaretu, in the Ruahine foothills, was still largely bush clad in Howlett's time. His love affair with the high Ruahine appears to have started in the late 1880s. On 16 February 1890 he wrote,

When I wrote you jauntily (in your issue of 6th) that you “want to go up the Tuki Tuki three miles above Moorcock’s Flat,” and again (yours of 13th) that “we hope to set foot on Parkes’ Peak,” how little I knew! Certainly, on the 15th I arranged with some friends that they should go up and camp on Moorcock’s Flat, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles above the Kyber Pass. I went myself as usual round Trig. C on foot, with a guide, and over into Moorcock’s Gully, and then over the dividing range into the Tuki Tuki. The place was full of disused cattle tracks, and so easy to travel that a mere child could have enjoyed the walk. We struck the Tuki Tuki a little above the Driblet (I always name creeks when I can discover no local appellation) and walked down past False Creek. My guide said the dividing range between these two was the spur I wanted. Hence our subsequent failure. Arriving at Moorcock’s Flat I found my friends all right, tent pitched, tea ready, horses feeding. We let the guide go, and passed a comfortable night. At 7 a.m. on 16th we started (on foot) up the Tuki Tuki, but instead of going 3 (?) miles up, we went only about a mile or less, past False Creek, which pours into the Tuki Tuki as a waterfall about two feet high and three feet wide, and then turned into bush to our right (left bank of river, of course) and went up a spur. When we got to the top it was only a *peak* (you can’t of course *ever* get to the *top* of a spur), and as we turned and faced the Tuki Tuki there on our left was False Creek and its gully, on our right another gully, which I thought contained the Driblet. Across this we saw an immense spur, and concluded it was *the* spur, seen on the 2nd February, leading to Parkes’ Peak. So down we plunged and up we climbed. No more cattle tracks now! We were going up the *side* of a spur, not up its crest. It was 2.40 p.m. before we reached the crest, only to see on the other side a terrible gully, and across it another immense spur, leading, we faintly imagine, to Parke’s Peak. It was too late to go on. We started down the crest, and I lagged a little to botanise and smoke. Near the bottom I found I could not keep on the crest. The spur flattened. My friends found the same, and finally went down to *right*, got into a small creek, reached Tuki Tuki and made the camp (in Moorcock’s Flat) at 6 p.m. As for me, I kept getting off the crest and climbing laboriously up to it; at last I thought I was near the bottom and it couldn’t matter, so I went down to

left, got into the Driblet, and immediately discovered slimy cliffs on each side and a 30ft waterfall below. Well, I climbed round. I don't know whether the particular person who is now reading this (does the foreign sentence convey, I wonder, any logical meaning at all?) ever tried to climb round a waterfall. If not, please take it for granted it is rather a long job. After this, the creek seemed very dangerous; sides precipitous and crumbling, bed full of deep holes, a waterfall evidently in prospect. More climbing round. Notice on left a spur; thought it must lead to Tuki Tuki; but it turned out to be only the dividing range between the Driblet and another creek, so in an hour or so I was in the Driblet again. No more big waterfalls, but it grew dark. No matches, no tucker, except whisky and cream, which I happened to be carrying. I want to describe the night, but must say first that I do so well knowing that nine out of ten will think me a bit "touched." If, however, the tenth is a genuine explorer, or a sailor who has been in real peril, he will sympathise with my sensations. Pitchy darkness, roaring water, spectra corpse-like all around, shiny rocks under foot. To stand without handhold was never possible. Do you know what standing means? The spinal column is like a pile of draughtsmen, loosely connected by ligaments. It is kept upright by the simultaneous action of a lot of muscles, guided partly by the sense of muscular resistance (resistance to gravity), and partly by the eye. Bandage the eyes and you can walk on a level road, but not on an uneven surface. It was so dark that I could not see my white drill coat, nor any object at all, save white patches of foam, which seemed somewhat phosphorescent. The sky could always be seen, but only by holding on to a rock and throwing the head back. The creek seemed interminable. "Up" and "down" lost all meaning. I was continually putting my fingers down to ascertain which way I was going, and five times found I was going up stream! Twice I went face first up into a waterfall, and the sensation of getting about half a ton of water against one's stomach (buttons off coat, long ago) and down both legs (inside) at once is exasperating. In absolute darkness you can't run away. You can only turn round so as to get it behind, and then very gingerly explore the basin below it. You have first to realise that you have been solemnly marching up stream; then that this waterfall may not be the main stream; then to listen and interpret the various roarings; finally

to crawl slowly away. The creek, though icy cold to drink, did not chill me. To avoid sleep was my difficulty. The whisky and cream (I mixed them) were a help. To smoke would not have been possible, even if I had had matches. I believe I *was* asleep for hours, or partly so, as I was conscious of a long discussion about the anxious hospitality of the Driblet (personified) who did his level best to guide my steps, but lacked his ancient power. I kept waking up and scolding myself, and then if I fell into a waterhole, I would remark, "Really this Driblet has no thaumaturgic power, meaning that he could not guide me, now that the old gods have been ousted by the Galilean." On considering the matter, I see I was dreaming of Mrs Browning's poem, "The Dead Pan."

O, ye vain false gods of Hellas,
Ye are silent evermore !

It was not feasible to sit down, because when one is dripping all over the position is not more comfortable than standing, and one gets cold. When you fall, you have no idea when you will fetch up, and the best line is to curl up and make yourself slack. Any stiffened muscle is in danger; a perfectly slack one runs less risk. When you crawl over a boulder, and reach for foothold and can't find any, you have to carefully listen to the roarings and decide whether to let go. It doesn't much matter what your decision is, because you have got to let go sooner or later, and in my case I never had a final drop of more than about six inches. Then those corpse lights! Palest electric blue, their tiny candles, only dazzled the eye without illuminating the ravine. Seen close, there is a wet sickly worm an inch long and as thick as thin twine. At a distance they seem yellow. One fellow moved like a bush lantern, and I cooed to him and rubbed my eyes and punched myself. "E pur si muove" I kept saying,² but after all *it was I that moved*. Much moral in this. You see, without eye-control the neck muscles rely entirely on gravity; and in slippery places, full of roarings, gravity is quite out of it. Hence a variety of involuntary notions; hence to keep a corpse light in central focus the eyeballs move, and this is optically translated into motion of the *light*. What a figure of fun I must have seemed to any disembodied spirit hovering near!

If all the gentlest-hearted friends I know
 Centred in one heart their gentleness,
 I should yet be slow
 To bring my heart nakedly below
 The palm of such a friend, that he should press
 my fickle woe
 Out to full light and knowledge.³

Is it profanity to quote these exquisitely womanly lines when after all I am half in joke? Or may I say with one of the Fathers that no man really believes his religion till he can afford to jest at it? Well, the end of it all was that I reached the Tuki Tuki by starlight, lay down on some sand, slept perhaps ten minutes, pushed on, moonlight came, then dawn, got enough light to find a stick, found much succour therein, reached camp 5.30 a.m., made hot coffee with cream, turned my friends out, got a night-shirt, didn't require a wash, being washed already as clean as a blanched almond all over, turned in, rolled in all their blankets, was half asleep on the road home, did another big sleep, and by 2 p.m. became rational, or as much so as usual. Never experienced strong fatigue, but only intense sleepiness. I saw all sorts of lovely things, and we all enjoyed ourselves. The tucker was horrid, as my friends (juvenile) had no idea of the minutiae of camping. But I think a permanent camp with comforts can be established at Moorcock's Flat, and a second one higher up when we have found the right spur. Take this for certain, you must go up beyond False creek and the Driblet, the first two tributaries of Tuki Tuki on your right as you go up, consequently on left bank of river. What creeks there are after these I know not. Also, keep on crest of spur at any cost, and don't try to follow a creek down unless you have unlimited time, or at any rate matches, fine weather, and food. Moorcock's Flat is ideal. Lovely bush, nice terrace, soft green carpet, bathing hole, fuel, early sun. Saw traces of pigs, cats, dogs, rats. No trout. No eels. Pigeons and kaka. On crest of spur some beginnings of Alpine flora. Hymenophyllums all in fruit. Celery-leaved pine abundant. There is no reason whatever why ladies and children should not camp at the flat for weeks. They could have their mail three times a week just as we do here, baker's bread, &c.⁴

He wrote to the *Feilding Star*,

OVER THE RANGES.

SIR,—I live at Makaretu on the east of the Ruahine ranges. Last year I made several attempts to get across to you but failed. One reason was that I did not know the character of the country your side. I now find that when I get to the top of the range, three post offices will be below, namely, Apiti, Mangaone, and Pemberton. Would any one of your readers kindly send, for publication in your columns, a short description of Apiti? Is there any accommodation house? What river runs near Apiti? How far can you go from Apiti towards the ranges on horseback? Are any maps or sale plans procurable showing Apiti, and rivers and roads near it? In a few days I shall have a camp situated in a bend of the Tuki Tuki river, about 10 miles from the point where Longitude 176 and Latitude 40 intersect. This point, I conjecture, is 4 miles from Apiti. In a month more I shall have a second camp about 5 miles further up Tuki Tuki, so as to be within an easy walk of Apiti, if we can only make out what spur or saddle to make for on this side so as to come down to Apiti the easiest way. Perhaps by January one or two Apiti settlers might arrange to come over and strike our camp. If we could prove that an easy track exists, or can be made, I think a road should be put through. It would not be much use at present but as the country gets settled it would. My object at present is scientific, as I am after flowers and ferns, but this need not deter any of my companions from prospecting for copper or silver. I hope very soon to have a fair lot of blankets, potatoes, etc., up the river, and if any one came over, having given due notice, I would provide dry clothes, etc., at the camp, so that he need carry nothing. It may interest your bush readers to know that from Makaretu we go first to the Tuki Tuki river, about 2 miles, then up the bed (shingle) to Kyber Pass, about 4 miles, then up the bed again about 4 miles (more shingle) to Moorcock's Flat; here we made the first camp, as horses cannot go further. The next camp will be about 5 miles further up, wherever we can find a nice flat. The river bed is level but too full of boulders for horses. From this second camp I am certain a saddle can be very easily reached when once we find the way. The difficulty is that you can see nothing from the bed, and it is very hard to select the easiest spurs.—I am, &c.

W. F. HOWLETT.⁵

He had first mentioned the idea of a Ruahine camp in January 1890,

I often lock up my abode and ride down on the plains to see a settler who, regarding me I suppose much as the “great woman” of Shunem did Elisha, in the days when mad folk were considered under the special protection of Heaven, has placed an upper chamber at my disposal. Thence, riding to Makaretu at odd hours (I prefer the early morning or the cool night), I often look at the immense Ruahine ranges. To know and love them you must be familiar with their every aspect. The purple gullies and sullen lower hills have more attraction for me than the glittering summits far withdrawn, which never in this country light up at sunset with the roseate blush that makes Alpine peaks so beloved of Englishmen. What is really to be seen when one gets up? I quote a line or two from a hasty note addressed to me by a friend who has been above the region of forest trees (not here, but in a similar place): “The mountains were a mass of flowers of all kinds and varieties. The ranunculas were splendidly represented, and your soul would have rejoiced at the sight of some of the larger species in full bloom. The Edelweiss charmingly beautiful.” My impression is that as alpine floras are extremely transient, and alter their whole aspect in a few weeks, it will be necessary to establish a permanent camp at an altitude of say 4000 ft, and spend a day or two there every fortnight. Such a camp, on a leading spur, would be within two hours of the actual summit, and yet not more than an hour’s walk from the furthest point accessible at present to pack-horses.⁶

It was his cousin HH Bridge at Ongaonga who kept an upper bedroom at Ashcott for Howlett. The reference is to 2 Kings 4 and it suggests Howlett saw himself as an Elisha, as a prophet...

8 And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

9 And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.

10 Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

11 And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.

During 1893–1894 he did build a summer camp at the Oroua-Tukituki headwaters, a hut at 1220 metres on the main range opposite the foot of the Daphne Spur.⁷ The original hut was strongly built from local split pahautea (mountain cedar) which grew prolifically above the beech forest. It was roofed with split shingles of cedar. Howlett employed the skilled services of a local bushman carpenter.

He called it Daphne hut after the native daphne abundant in the central Ruahine and the steep ridge leading to the divide was known as Daphne Spur.⁸ The current Department of Conservation (DoC) “Howlett Hut” is at 1365 metres, up the spur from Howlett’s Daphne hut.

Howlett employed local shepherds to pack stores and liquor to Daphne hut. He was regarded as something of a hermit, and apparently spent long periods alone in the ranges, but he often had companions too.

It was a beautiful spot. The late Tony Gates transcribed verses from the Howlett Hut log book,⁹

Sunrise, Howletts. By E.R.P. 1981.

Glowing the air now, the colour up running
Shining the peak above soft morning cloud,
Below are the flatlands, still covered with darkness
There the snow glistens, the brilliance bursts forth.

Mountain beech shimmers, the frost on the leaf edge
Gilded with light, ice golden and rose.
Ridges catch light as the cornice, transparent,
Shines like a sword edge transfixing the peak.

An address by Alf Stenberg was printed in *Ruahine Rambler*, and transcribed by Tony Gates. It is reproduced in full here,

Mr. Howlett was the son of an English Clergyman at Torquay, England. After passing through Clifton and Marlborough Colleges, I believe for a term at Oxford University, he came out as an assistant teacher at Nelson College.



"Howlett Hut" (photo Tony Gates)

It was not till about the year 1892 onward that his main activity was given over to camping, and the study of the flora and fauna on the Ruahines. It was at this time that I became more closely associated with him as his assistant in carrying out his various prospects connected with his hobby and chief pastime. Although quite young (I hadn't left school yet), I was very strong, and had the bush sense well developed.

He was a botanist of no mean order, collaborating with such well known scientists as Professor Kirk, Dr Cockayne, Colenso, etc. As well as finding some new specimens, I think I am safe in saying that he could name every plant among the hundreds existing on the Ruahines, giving them their Latin botanical names as well as their common ones. In this connection, I remember one occasion we had a couple of H.B. rabbit board inspectors with us. An argument arose as to whether a certain tree was a totara or cedar. A bet of £5 was made with one of the men, which, needless to say, was won by Mr. Howlett. It is also interesting to note that from this particular variety of Cedar, Camp Daphne was built. Daphne, as the proposed site of the new camp, got its name from the fact that growing in the vicinity were plants similar in appearance to the common garden variety by that name.

As a biologist, he also made a study of the fauna, being however, mainly interested in the ornithological section, though bug hunting was included. His library on these, and many other scientific subjects, was very extensive; to all of which I had access and found full of interest.

Our first camp was established in the early nineties at Moorcocks flat, a small river bed clearing at the intersections of Moorcocks Creek and the Tukituki River. Our access was mainly up the river through the Kyber Pass, known to some of you. Transit was not by lorry in those far away days, but on horse back, or across country on foot. As camps were established further on up the river, it became unnecessary to employ pack horses as far as Moorcocks flats. The horses being kept from straying down the river bed by a couple of barbed wires across a narrow part. The camp at Moorcocks flat was a very pretty and interesting spot. Try and visualize such a place at the confluence of the two streams (till then unspoiled by the hand of man), with veronica, manuka, red and white rangiora, etc. all in bloom, with a background of stately tree ferns, and huge rimu, matai, totara, miro etc, often interspersed with flaring red and clinging vine of rata, as well as the pearly white clematis here and there. The whole scene making a picture of perfect harmony, and which having once seen could not readily be forgotten.

Some while after, there was the establishment of the upper camp on the North branch of the Tukituki, beside a small stream. This was at the bottom of the face leading up to the spur, which finally took us up to Daphne. Although fully equipped, this was more or less a half-way house for recharging loads and storing material. As the climb from the river here for the first half mile is somewhat precipitous, it was not possible to carry very large loads. Eventually Daphne was established in 1893 or 1894. For the laborious work of splitting and felling the mountain cedars, already referred to, the services of a competent bushman was made use of.

Refreshing my memory, I now know the walls of the hut were well and strongly constructed of slabs, lined with a strong hessian material. The roof was covered with shingles split from the same trees which lent themselves admirably for the purpose. I recollect getting beside a wage of 10/ a hundred carrying the shingles up to the site, the going being pretty good but for the exception of a bad stretch of what was commonly known there as leather jacket, and halting ones progress, had almost equal merit to a barbed wire entanglement.

Daphne was very complete with bunks and fireplace, and the usual camp amenities. Although a summer residence, it had to withstand the rigors of winters storms and weight of snow, so it was necessary to fortify the roof with extra timber. Finally, from here many expeditions were made where nature was seen at its best. Magnificent vistas on every hand, above the snow line a great profusion of nature, ranunculus, primrose, eidelweiss, etc. In all, a very colorful picture, with yellow and white predominating.

Having completed the camp, some of our trips took us to the head waters of the Pohangina, Oroua, Tukituki, and Waipawa rivers, besides making numerous ascents to Parks Peak and other trigs. He knew the peaks and their magnificent views well. It may not be generally known that the campsite is the watershed and dividing line between Wellington and Hawkes Bay provinces.

In conclusion, I note with interest that your club has chosen the same site for a hut. And so, from the old will rise a new, and in

some respects a better Daphne, the early association of which has been to me a happy memory through the passing of the years. My last trip was to lead a party of young ladies, assisted by an elder brother, just 30 years ago this year. We stayed about a week, and had a wonderful time. The ascent of Parks Peak was made on the second day.

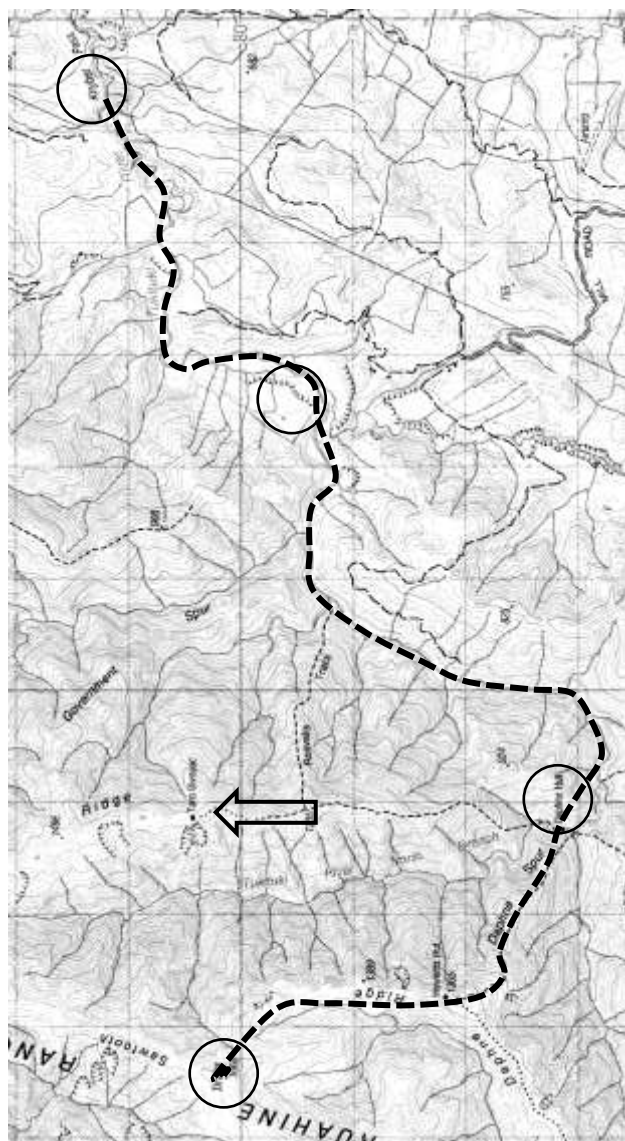
As far as my memory serves me, Mr Howlett gave up mountaineering about the year 1906, leaving the district about this time. He passed away 4 years ago (1935) at the age of 85.

Yes, undoubtedly the Ruahines have a grandeur all their own. Who would not enjoy a glorious morning scene, as the sun in all its majesty, rises out of the Pacific, or standing on top of the world, as it were, and not get some inspiration from the pervading silence, and in contemplation being brought nearer nature.

I wish the Club every success, and trust some day I may be privileged to again visit these bygone scenes of happy memory.¹⁰

A letter from Howlett to the *Evening News* reads,

SIR,—In March 1893, I started a sort of Alpine Club, the idea being to make the headwaters of the Tukituki accessible. The objects of so doing were (1) recreation, (2) investigation of alpine flora, (3) prospecting for minerals, (4) making a stock track or road over into the Oroua basin. I have met with much sympathy and some support locally.... I hoped the Makaretu people would have helped, as a stock trade would be of benefit to them, but they remain perfectly apathetic. Mr H.H. Bridge helped me, but he is now in England.¹¹ The rest of the money was subscribed by runholders on the place, who care nothing for new flowers....¹²



Khyber Pass, Moorcock's Flat, Daphne Hut, Tiraha (Parke's Peak).

In the late summer of 1894 he gave an account of that “recreation” in an article titled “Parke’s Peak Ascended by Ladies”.¹³ The prose is deceptively simple—at times colloquial, at times lyrical—but in 1894, the year after women’s suffrage, it is playful in its consideration of “the emancipated ones”, sardonically cheerful in its gender bias,

Many attempts have been made to scale the highest peak of the Ruahine range behind Makaretu. Some wished to ascertain the possibility of a stock road to the Birmingham district; others to find out the best spots for the botanist or prospector. On 14 March Mr Stewart Bridge and two others reached the top. This was the last of many trials made since 1890, in the course of which tents were erected, tracks cut, &c. Encouraged by his success, Mr Bridge invited a few friends to “camp out” for a day or two, and on the 19th the attempt was made with ladies. Two of the party went on in advance of the Tuki Tuki past Morecock’s Flat to a place called the Fork, which is where the main Tuki Tuki splits into two branches, running North and South. They carried 80lb of stuff and made what preparation they could in the rain. The total weight carried up reached in the end about 240lb. next day, March 22, they returned to Morecock’s Flat, and met the ladies. The party now consisted of Mr and Mrs J Rhodes, Miss Miller, Miss Madge Rhodes (aged 11), Mr Stewart Bridge, Mr Howlett, and Messrs W. Fargher and J. Petterson as “guides.” Horses were turned loose, as a fence of barbed wire now crosses the river and prevents their escape. The ladies found lunch ready, and afterwards retired to a substantial tent, when the removal of their habits and capes disclosed more appropriate costume;— call it “fish-wife.” Strong nailed boots, cloth gaiters, tweed knickerbockers, short Galatea skirts, covert coats, and tweed caps. They enjoyed the luxury of eleven pockets each, and tasted for the first time one of the most cherished privileges of manhood. Madge came out in her cousin Allan’s clothes, and it was a treat to observe how naturally her hands went into her trousers pockets (the said garment decorated with a patch about a foot square). The general appearance of the party was that of a “variety” troupe as conceived by a caricaturist. Strong poles were cut for use in water, and start was made up the river. Some difficulty was found, as the clambering over great boulders and across natural

bridges made of tree trunks was new to the ladies. Madge was the only one who caused no anxiety. After nearly three hours' work the Fork was reached, and the ladies then made a hasty toilette in their (as yet empty) tent, which was about 50 yards from the main camp, close to a brawling crystal creek, known as the South Fork, for just above the camp the Tuki Tuki splits into two nearly equal branches. When dressed, they came to the camp for afternoon tea and a biscuit. The men then arranged them a big 4 x 6 bunk on the floor, with sheaves of *Astelia* leaves for a mattress, covered with a waterproof sheet. Armfuls of blankets and a pair of large sheets were handed in, for the ladies to arrange, and right in front of their tent a big fire was fitted with rails to dry clothes. The next move was to direct a similar tent for the guides, and tea was ready about 7 o'clock. The party formed a horseshoe in front of the camp; a big fire in front of them; overhead a large tent fly. Everyone was hungry, and a large frying pan made of a little milk dish hung on wires was full of thick collops of mutton. Everyone marked their pannikins, plates, knives and forks, and put them aside, as "washing-up" was voted superfluous. Very soon after 8 o'clock the usual bush lantern was made (white bottle cut by methylated spirits, bottom reserved for salt-cellar) and the ladies retired. The men concocted rum-punch and smoked. All preparations were made for the morrow; then turned in; and next morning at 3.20 the fire was started, billy boiled, ladies' fire made to exalt its horn at 3.45; hot water at ladies tent 4, much beating of tin cans at same time; at 4.30 precisely breakfast, with strong coffee (roasted and ground at Makaretu), cream (sterilised and good to keep a week), mutton collops again (very badly fried, but eaten all the same), the creeks wishing away, clear starlight overhead. In front of the great camp fire casting its golden glitter into the greenery of the trees. The meal done all hands were piped to "sack" blankets, as it is necessary to put every scrap of bedding and clothing, including caps, out of the reach of the omnipresent fly; then pockets and satchels were filled with such odds and ends as compass, aneroid, telescope, strong knives, fern portfolios, chocolate, ribston pippins, and biscuits. The swag containing tucker and water stood ready, when the guide who was to have carried it announced his disinclination to go up the mountain, and was soon away down the river at the rate

of knots. The swag was at once assumed by Mr W Fargher whose proper allotted tack had been to assist the ladies, and the care of their frail beings devolved on Mr Bridge (leg gone years ago) and Mr Rhodes (ditto ditto). 'Twas a critical moment! 'Twas an occasion, and they rose to it. They wouldn't be assisted! Dawn broke; one silver planet hung in the east; a pale violet hue spread up; and as soon as it was light enough to distinguish the stones from the water they all waded up the North Fork some half a mile to the toe of "Middle Spur." Here a change of stockings, and the climb began. Up a wall of dense dripping bush they all went—W Fargher first, Madge next, Mr Howlett next, then the others, all in single file. Frequent spells had to be made, for it was a real hard climb, and the grade was only realised on the return. All were charmed with the new kinds of ferns and trees, and the grand views. On the east a vast spur was seen leading up to the main range; on the south the real central cradle of the Tuki Tuki, known as the Middle Fork. When sunlight was reached all were joyful, the smallest jokes were received with applause, and the repeated cry of "shoes off" from in front was echoed from behind with "holey ground." This caution was necessary, as you may in a moment plunge waist deep through treacherous moss between the roots of some forest giant. Bites of chocolate and bread-crust were found most sustaining; some had an apple in a bit of calico to nibble now and then. Emerging from the forest, a tract of *Olearia* (sp?)—[sp. is short for species: sp? means "species unknown,"]—put the fear of God into the emancipated ones. Dense, contorted, impregnable, with slippery trunks and serrated leaves, it threw down its challenge to the skirt. "What is it?" was the cry. The men confessed not knowing the proper name. They had christened it, *pro tem* "*Olearia damnabilis*," and when, after heroic struggles, the skirts were triumphant, the ladies agreed that the name was no exaggeration. The sooner some botanist sends you the correct name the better, but it will live in the memories of the party as "*damnabilis*," I fear. Pouf! They *tumbled* out of it into a patch of deep peat, covered with Alpine plants of exquisite form. They lay and panted; the swag was opened. Pouf! "We die"—"We go no further"—"Give us tea"—"Large pieces of meat"—"More butter"—"Bread ere we expire"—"Madge, you silly, I *never* said I was tired

— “what a heavenly thing cold tea is”— “*fill* my handkerchief with snowberries”— “let’s dig up celmisias and gentian”— “Why, Joe, of *course* you can carry them.” Joe takes a thimblefull of mountain dew, fills his pipe, and privily throws the roots away. The guide leisurely rises, resumes his swag, and the party, crossing the peat, attack another tract of *damnabilis*. This time it is on a sidling, and a case of swimming. Over it they sprawl, holding on by both hands, until a cry from the rear like a small pig under a gate announces the dreaded *aciphylla*. The leader now cries “Ware spear-grass!” When he notes a concealed clump; the *olearia* is passed; the ascent becomes steep, and the *aciphylla* frequent. The crest of the main spur is reached. Not that it is really a spur; correctly speaking it is a low part of the main dividing range, the height about 5000 feet, and an easy walk through dense dwarf scrub of birch takes them to the open. They are on a razor-back which goes straight to the peak. On a slope of shale Madge collapses; the soles of her boots were too thin, and it was not thought prudent to take her further. Height still 5000 feet. All is easy walking now for a mile or so; then a terrible ascent over tussock appals every heart, and at 5500 feet Miss Miller doubts her power to reach the summit by 2.15, which is the very last moment possible for return. She hesitates—she is lost. Mrs Rhodes thinks she will have a try—she climbs five minutes and lies exhausted three; she climbs one minute and sits down for two; she looks back; Madge is a speck, and Miss Miller a mere spot; she realises that the grade is much steeper than ordinary stairs; the hand-hold is good, the thing can be done. At 1.40 Parkes is reached, and the desire of her heart realized. Whew! what a height up! Altitude by aneroid 6400, but corrections not made; nor is official name of “Parkes’ Peak” known, though there is a trig station on it. Surely the dense official mind can tell where they were! Chief Surveyor to note. If he says they were in the provincial district of Wellington, and he has no “official” knowledge of that district, can’t you screw some unofficial idea out of him? Northward the towering snowcapped square block called Ruapehu. Egmont was not visible, probably hidden by a spur to the north-west. Eastward the blue horizon line for 100 miles. *Chocolate and bread are very sustaining*. What a pity there is so much haze. The South Island should be visible. An elaborate “name-plate” is put up,

attached firmly to a stone, and at 2 p.m., to the minute Parkes is quitted. "*Facilis descensus*" is realized! It is a case of a *glissade*. The grass is smooth, and tobogganing is nothing to it. Like logs down a chute—like potatoes out of the sack—like the herd of—but I grow tedious. In ten minutes they have reached Miss Miller, and an easy stroll takes them back to where Madge has been snoring peacefully for an hour or more. Here another great feed is done. Above 5500 feet lagoons are frequent, and so there is lots of water. A great glossy black rat here sends one gentle creature nearly into hysterics. If the rat had only known, what side he would have put on! The party then went on down the spur. Future excursionists can call it, I suppose, the watershed. It is rather difficult to convey what I mean. Going down, the party had on their left Hawke's Bay, with directly below them precipices and awful ravines. On their rights were grassy valleys, with creeks running into the Oroua and away to the West Coast. At a certain point they left the watershed, and went down the "Middle Spur." Time went on; the pace increased, the last 400 yards was a rumble tumble. The leader would go on, the rest would let go; the spur was broad and very steep, the ground slippery, the fern dense; they went down like coals into a cellar. Cries as of many pigs under many gates were *not* (a lady informant says) ever audible. It is *not* true that *anyone ever* said, "You, next behind me but two, that's *my* foot hooked upside down into a root." At 6 o'clock exactly the last plunge was made, into the very bowels of the earth, as it seemed; it was simply the mercy of heaven watching over, etc., that nobody was killed. Anyhow they all fetched up on the shingle, and realised they had left the Middle Spur and were in the creek. There were the familiar stockings spread on sticks to dry. Change—don't change—catch hold and off. They wade down as the darkness deepens. It is a race against time. Ten minutes more and the men would have had to plant the ladies and go for candles. The devil takes the hindmost. Mr Bridge spreads himself and clears for home to make a fire up and if necessary get lanterns. Fargher discovers somebody has been monkeying with his slasher, and has to go back for it. Madge assumes the lead, and as night closes in the party stagger demoralised into camp. Change? Toilette? Madge is a mere heap of rags by the fire. Mrs Rhodes has sunk on her husband's bunk (in the main

camp where she has no business to be), and says she can never move, not for several weeks. Miss Miller declares she can neither eat nor change her things; her funeral is to be quiet and simple. She bears no malice. She expects a peaceful end. Now there is such a thing as finesse. The men held a consultation with W Fargher as senior medical officer, and it was decided to take strong measures and exhibit pork sausages. So a great smell was made, and the emancipated ones were duly informed by their natural protector that, unless they did as they were told, that Smell would never blossom into Taste. And he showed them mustard in a spoon, and it is duly reported and believed that they became docile, and got “into dry things” somehow. And when they had got into the said “things” it was perfectly astonishing how certain things got into them! You see, the bread was *nuttty*, specially made at Ashcott, and the subject of innumerable quarrels, one unreasonable man saying Makaretu bread was better, and the butter cold and hard, lying golden in its wet cloth, and the tea was Ceylon (if I say they got it at Makaretu what does it matter? I suppose good tea can be got at Napier if you know where to go), and the sausages, all sputtering, made of pork. And though the ladies thought they were tired, cooked, baked, that was merely their interpretation of a new sensation, namely, that of really wanting rest and food. And in about half an hour every one was as fit as possible, and the ladies went to their proper quarters. The men made another great brew of punch, and smoked many pipes, and so to bed. On Thursday morning the beating of tin cans commenced at 8 o’clock, and everyone was ready for a good breakfast. The despair of the previous night was ignored by common consent, and instead of a street Arab half expiring by the fire, everyone saw a demure young lady in a cardinal blouse with navy sleeves, &c, while instead of a fish girl, pale and staggering, grateful for the smell of a spoon with mustard on it, there appears a rather stately young person in a correct white flannel—(what? I am not your lady correspondent)—larky blue tie, and deliciously soft indigo sateen skirt. It is quite clear that they can go home easily. After breakfast everyone has his or her work given. The inventories of equipment, food, &c., is gone over; the ladies have to wash immense quantities of plates, knives, tins, rags, &c., all is stowed away properly in the camp, minute precautions

being taken against rain, damp, rats, and blowflies; during which process the ladies are startled at the oddments it is thought necessary to keep catalogued in writing; they mentioned such things as 7 kinds of nails, clothespegs, No 16 wire, tinman's snips, soldering gear, trowel, bottled matches, lemon juice, boric acid, Calcium bisulphite (the only really good camp meat preserver), seed pockets, fern portfolio, court plaister, spring balance, rhubarb, cocoa, arsenic. Before leaving, a dose of the latter is always left for the rats. The spirits are deftly transported some 100 yards and hidden up in a fork of a tree. Away they go down the Tuki Tuki. The ladies here show signs that they have had about enough of it. However, they do eventually reach Morecock's Flat, and feed very adequately on sheep's tongues, about the only tinned stuff that is good cold. The men here send out a party to prospect for horses. Presently a great drove comes, everybody gets their own somehow, and away they go down the river to the Khyber, (Khyber means Khyber Pass) and the plains and civilisation. One suggestion about Parkes' Peak. Supposing that isn't the proper name? Suppose it has no name? Would the Christian name of the first lady who visited it be much amiss? And in conclusion, I think you will admit the ladies concerned have really achieved something, due chiefly to the fact that they obeyed orders to the letter, and did exactly as they were told. It is too late to have many more trips this year, but the whole business has been now reduced to such a simple form that a party of any number can be taken up any time provided the days are long enough, the weather fine, and a porter procurable. This latter could be dispensed with if the party included men who would pump heavy swags, but it is not a pleasant thing to go along under 40 or 50 pounds and try to make things agreeable to ladies at the same time. There is ample paddock accommodation for 50 horses at Morecock's Flat, and so the porters only have to carry swags from there to the camp at the Fork, a two hours' journey. Possibly within a month a track will be cut right up to the Fork, which will simplify matters still more.

Makaretu, March 22, 1894.¹⁴

Apparently Howlett's 1890 letter to the *Feilding Star* had been noticed. The Napier *Evening News* of 21 April 1894 carried "Over the

Mountains”, Howlett’s account of a west to east crossing of the Ruahine,

After the ascent of Parke’s Peak by ladies, as recorded in yours of 30th of March, a party of men arranged to go up Parke’s and descend on the Wanganui side by a spur leading west, but for various reasons this fell through. However, a few days later a certain Mr A.R. Oldham (son of the Nelson people) wrote over and suggested a trip across, starting from his property on the Wanganui side. Everyone on this side was busy and no porters could be got; the end of it was that Mr Howlett went round alone by rail to Feilding. Thence to Birmingham by a grand metalled road and a four-horse coach. Birmingham, which the Postal authorities call Fowler’s, has an excellent hotel; from it a good four-horse coach goes to Apati. From this township a walk of three or four miles to Mr Oldham’s whare (he is not a lily-handed cadet), and you are in the centre of the fringe of advancing Aryan civilization. The retreating Maori has gone; the bush is falling, roads are being pushed on, wild cattle being killed, pigs hunted. The place is like what Makaretu was 15 years ago, Pahiatua eight years ago, Makuri four years. At Oldham’s place a rude swag was made, and the two started up a Creek on Sunday, April 15, and camped at the foot of what they thought was the ranges. Next morning they left everything behind but a little food, and pushed up a spur. At the top of the “range” turned out to be merely a great spur, running parallel to the dividing range and 1000 feet higher. Following the spur Northwood, trig 88A was reached. Here Norsewood lay at their feet. Walking Northward for some hours, the spur ran into the dividing range, and Takapau and Ashley-Clinton came in sight. Northward again, they reached the top of Sinclair’s spur at 4.50. This spur is the south boundary of the Middle Fork, and Mr Howlett’s camp is at its toe. They pushed down the spur through dense scrub, and were stopped by the darkness about 6. Fortunately they were now below the scrub and could get some shelter and firewood, and crouched over a miserable fire until day break. Then they pushed on downwards and got into the South Fork at last. Two hours wading brought them to Mr Howlett’s camp at 11 a.m, and they had a good feed and sleep. Next day they walked down the Tuki Tuki to Morecock’s Flat,

where they found the tent all in a muddle, and some of the provisions stolen. This will be made a police matter, as it won't do for men to arrive from over the mountains half starved and find their tinned provisions have been taken by wandering shooters from Makaretu. The steps of two men and a dog were traced, and possibly they can give some clue. After this the return to Makaretu was easy. From Makaretu Mr Oldham returned by train to Feilding.

Those who have followed this account will see that the party started too far south. They should have gone from Apiti about 10 miles north, and gone up a creek from the Oroua river. This would have brought them to a spur leading to Parke's Peak.

Next year, if money can be raised, one or more good open tracks will be cut, so that people can walk from this side over the dividing range and down into the Oroua, and a camp will be made on the Oroua, so that the whole thing can be done easily. The object is (1) recreation, (2) investigation of alpine flora, (3) prospecting for minerals, (4) stock track or road from Makaretu to the Oroua country.

In the above brief account I have hardly touched on what was seen; both of the parties were too tired and too pressed for time to look at things. Ruapehu, Egmont, Kapiti, were seen. Lagoons occur all along the top. The fact of the "Mountain" as seen from the Ruataniwha Plains, being really a high subordinate spur on the *other* side of the Pohangina, is startling. It is noteworthy that the absence of any decent maps of New Zealand renders it impossible for people in any one district to get information about another. Hawke's Bay people, for instance, are amazed to learn that on the other side of the Ruahines are a string of prosperous townships running parallel with Norsewood, Ashley-Clinton, Makaretu, &c. The very names of Birmingham, Apiti, Pemberton, Rangiwahia, Marshall's, Salisbury are unknown here. Part of the summit is flat and broad, and would make a carriage road commanding a finer view, I suppose, than any road in the world. There will be no more explorations to speak of this year. In November the matter will be taken in hand again, and any aspiring botanist should visit Makaretu and make arrangements to go up and spend a day among the plants.¹⁵

“If Howlett and his small group of local enthusiasts can in fact be described as a tramping club, it must surely have been one of the first tramping clubs in New Zealand. The N.Z. Alpine Club was founded in 1892 and the Tararua Tramping Club in 1919.”¹⁶

In 1908 Howlett was 58 years old, married and still taking parties into the Ruahine (including this time his old companion Alf Stenberg and his family),

RUAHINE MOUNTAIN EXPEDITION

A company of nine persons comprising Messrs J. and A. Stenberg, two Misses Stenberg, Misses Lanauze and Pinny, Miss E. Anderson, schoolmistress at Makaretu, left Highgrove, Makaretu, for the Ruahine mountains on Friday morning, December 27th.

It was a glorious morning, and we all set out in high spirits about 5.30 a.m., with a fixed determination to reach the highest point on the ranges, Park’s Peak. Mr A. Stenberg, who acted as our guide, was of a very jovial disposition, and seemed nothing daunted at the prospect of piloting seven young ladies on such a perilous undertaking. The route chosen was certainly one of the most difficult, but one which led us through some beautiful scenery. Leaving Makaretu we soon came upon some very rugged hills, which to most of us seemed like mountains, but we scaled them with such ease that our guide felt very hopeful of our success. Crossing the Tuki Tuki river we arrived at Mawcawk’s Flat,¹⁷ where Mr Bowers lives, at 10.30 a.m. Here we were very hospitably entertained, and after lunch and a rest we continued our journey up the river. Mr Bowers, whose packhorse we had had from Makaretu, kindly accompanied us with three horses a couple of miles on our way. Then our “swags” were allotted us and we commenced our wading. This was quite a novel experience for the ladies, but we very soon got accustomed to it. The scenery along this river is the grandest I have ever seen, and it would delight the eye of the artist. The river runs through a narrow gorge, the sides of which are densely wooded and rise hundreds of feet above our heads. In places the water would be placid, and others a rushing torrent. We were continually crossing and re-crossing, stepping across huge boulders and rocks, or wading almost waist deep in water.

Though this part of the journey was perhaps the most dangerous, we all thoroughly enjoyed it, and could have finished our river journey that day had not the lengthening shadows warned us that day was declining. We therefore looked about for a suitable camping place. Finding a delightful spot in a bend of the river, we very soon had our camp fire burning brightly. Here, under the wide spreading branches of two beautiful beech trees, we prepared for our night's repose. Next morning we commenced our March again at 7.45 a.m., wading the river till we reached the foot of the ridge which led us to camp Daphne. Here, after a short rest, we said good-bye to the river, seeing no more of it on our ascent.

Now our real mountain climbing began. Up and up we toiled, working our way by means of the dense undergrowth of the bush. Our greatest hardship up this ridge was the absence of water. The heat was intense, the halts became more and more frequent, and the spirits of some of us were beginning to flag. Before we were half-way, the cry would arise from members of the party, "Alf., how much further?" When he would cheerily reply, "We are soon there." After climbing nearly six hours the guide, who was a little in advance, reached an open space where he found water. This was a veritable oasis in the desert, as some of the party were by now well-nigh exhausted. How joyfully we hailed the cry "water"! and how our drooping spirits revived. After a long rest and refreshments we pressed on to Camp Daphne, which we reached about half-past six. Here a little hut nestles peacefully in a slight depression of the ridge, and a more delightful spot could scarcely be imagined. From that one has a splendid view. Looking eastward, we could see Makaretu lying far below us, and far away in the distance the blue Pacific Ocean. The only drawback to this place is the want of water. Next morning we were up early to see the sunrise, and felt more than repaid for denying ourselves a little longer repose. It was a grand sight to see him, like a huge ball of fire, emerging, as it appeared to us, out of the ocean. This sight, alone, would more than recompense one for all the toil. Our next consideration was water, so leaving the watershed we descended into the Wellington Province, breakfasting near the source of the Oroua river. Then up again we climbed towards Park's Peak. The

Peak was gained about 10 o'clock, after some very hard climbing. But we forgot all about that when we stood on the summit and gazed around us. To the Northwest we had a splendid view of the snow-capped Mt. Ruapehu. Around and below us were mountain ranges—some bare, jagged and rocky, others covered with forest to the very crest. There was a gay profusion of flowers on every hand. In fact, our whole way from Daphne was like a beautiful garden. Here bloomed the mountain lily, the daphne, edelweiss and others. Close by in the chasms lay the pure, white snow, and after lunch we hurried along thither to enjoy a game of snow-balling. With the hot sun beaming down upon us it was a rare treat to be amongst the snow. In the afternoon the soft, downy clouds began ascending the mountain sides, and it seemed very strange to be looking down upon them. We were, in very truth, above the clouds. We stayed at Park's Peak as long as we could, loth to leave it. We could not gaze upon these wonders of Nature without remembering the Creator of all things, and our grateful hearts went out to Him in songs of praise. Our farewell hymn I shall never forget. It seemed to lift our souls away from here and to draw us nearer to our God. Truly, we could say with the poet—

Lord, it is good for us to be
 High on the mountain here with thee
 Here in an ampler purer air
 Above the stir of toil and care.¹⁸

At half-past five we reluctantly turned our faces homewards and reached Camp Daphne again about 7 o'clock Sunday evening. Monday morning we bade farewell to camp Daphne at 5.30, and reached the Tuki Tuki river again at 8.35. Our descent had been comparatively easy, and we had greater opportunities of admiring the lovely scenery we passed through. At our feet were lovely ferns, chief amongst them being the Prince of Wales' feathers. Here and there were cool, mossy beds inviting us to rest. Above our heads rose the stately mountain cedars and beeches, with occasional glimpses of the gay mistletoe in full bloom. At the river we breakfasted. After a long rest we again began our wading. We arrived at Mawcawk's Flat at 4.30 p.m. after 5¼ hours in the river. Again we pitched camp in a delightful spot near the water. Next morning we found the sky

overcast, and ere we started on our march the rain came—the first we had had since our departure from Highgrove. This however, did not dampen our spirits. It rather added to our enjoyment. We continued down the river, taking a different course to see the noted Kyber pass. This is a very narrow, rocky defile, a couple of hundred feet high, through which the river peacefully flows. Most of the party continued their wading though the river here was nearly four feet deep. A little further down we left the river for a four miles' tramp across country, finally reaching Highgrove about 1 p.m. on Tuesday. Here we were most hospitably received by our hostess, Mrs Stenberg, and though very tired, we all agreed that this was the grandest holiday we had ever spent. Our difficulties had but served to make our enjoyment the keener, while our daily contact with the wonders of God's creation could not but make a lasting impression on our lives.¹⁹

1 For much of this information I am indebted to papers by the late Tony Gates ["Following the footsteps of William Colenso". *eColenso* 2011; 2 (April): 14–18] and JF Findlay ["W.F. Howlett pioneer Ruahine botanist". Wellington Botanical Society *Bulletin* 1981; 41: 35–41].

2 Galileo: "And yet it moves".

3 Elizabeth Barret Browning: *Apprehension*.

4 Olla podrida, *Hawke's Bay Herald* 21 February 1890.

5 *Feilding Star* 4 October 1890.

6 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 28 January 1890.

7 The tarn was said to have been destroyed by the Napier earthquake in 1931. The hut was destroyed by a falling tree in 1940.

8 The name did not originate from his wife's name, nor from the finding of an old cardboard wrapper marked "Daphne Dates" on the Daphne Spur.

9 *eColenso* April 2011: 17.

10 Alf Stenberg 1938. Reminiscences of pioneering days in the Ruahine Ranges. *Ruahine Rambler* No 4. I have been unable to find the original and rely fully on Tony Gates' transcription.

11 On a visit: Bridge would leave New Zealand finally in 1899.

12 *Evening News and H.B. Advertiser* (EA Haggen, proprietor) 10 January 1895.

13 Parke's Peak is now Tiraha.

14 *Evening News* 30 March 1894.

15 *Evening News* 21 April 1894.

16 JF Findlay. W.F. Howlett pioneer Ruahine botanist. Wellington Botanical Society *Bulletin* 1981; 41: 35–41.

17 Howlett's spelling.

18 From a hymn by Arthur Penrhyn Stanley

19 *Bush Advocate* 11 January 1908. Howlett the professed atheist, has changed!

CHAPTER 13: THE JOURNALIST & SATIRIST

It is hard to say exactly when Howlett started a regular newspaper column in addition to his frequent letters to editors—because he often did not sign his writing, wrote of himself in the third person or used a range of pen names, not all of them known.

Rollo Arnold wrote in 1994,

By the 1880s the press was already localised by the multiplying of small newspapers throughout the colony. A mushroom growth had seen a widespread founding of papers with many casualties but also a surprising number of survivors. The strength of local feeling which underlay this diffusion of the press found a further expression at an even more localised level with the “Our Own Correspondent” tradition. Every week hundreds of letters from these voices of localism appeared in print.¹

The *Hawke’s Bay Herald’s* “Own Correspondent” from Makaretu began in the 22 January 1880 issue and continued every month or two, replaced by the *Herald’s* Waipawa “Own Correspondent” in 1881; then both in 1883–4. In 1885 the Waipawa and Makaretu Correspondents were at times the *Daily Telegraph’s* “Own” and at times the *Herald’s*. In January 1886 the Makaretu correspondent was the *Woodville Examiner’s* own, now fortnightly. The Waipawa correspondent was writing twice weekly for the *Daily Telegraph*. All appear to have been Howlett: when he was not their “own” correspondent he was their “occasional” one. His output was prodigious.

Although he did not move to Pahiatua till 1886, Howlett seems to be the *Wairarapa Daily Times’s* own correspondent thence, starting in 1884.

He read the English newspapers and magazines, often quoting from them. He began a twice weekly column called “Olla Podrida” for the *Hawke’s Bay Herald* on 16 December 1889 (initially “by our Makaretu correspondent”) and continued it till April 1890. Howlett explained,

A correspondent (who writes like a washerwoman) wants to know what is the meaning of *Olla Podrida*. I believe he knows

very well, and I will tell you why. A certain resident here who is believed by some to contribute to this column was out riding and met a genuine Makaretu native, a stout man of great local *mana*, who accosted him with “Rotten, O, rotten stuff, rotten in paper,” and after he had passed continued to cry “Rotten, rotten” till his voice was lost in the distance. Now that is exactly what *Olla Podrida* (putrid or rotten pot) does mean. Its secondary meaning is similar to that of the French *pot-pourri* or Scottish *hotch-pot*, namely, a miscellaneous assortment.²

He began each column with a couplet from Oliver Wendell Holmes,

If the wild filly, “Progress,” thou wouldst ride,
Have young companions ever at thy side...

Perhaps tellingly, he didn’t add Holmes’s next couplet,

But wouldst thou stride the staunch old mare, “Success,”
Go with thine elders, though they please thee less.³

Wildness and progress trumped staunchness and success in his values.

He wrote many columns for the *Pahiatua Star* over the pen name “Pablo”.

His scrapbooks at the Alexander Turnbull Library contain clippings of much of his newspaper writing for the years 1889-1908; perhaps earlier and later scrapbooks existed. Certainly he was still writing letters to the editor in 1914.

Not all of his writing is readily identifiable. In a collection of brief handwritten forms called “autobiographies” and written by 168 Australian and New Zealand authors, journalists, artists and musicians (many of whom contributed to the Sydney *Bulletin*) is a form filled in by Howlett in 1901 at Wairima. Asked for his pen names he wrote, “Ignotus, and very likely others. No record kept.”

Yet we know he used “Pablo”, “Wairima”, and “W.F.H.” in his letters to editors: I suspect he was also “Supplejack”, “Anglicanus” and “Wanderer”.

Asked about “published works with dates of publication” he answered, “None that I can remember. Cannot recall publishing anything but scraps of ephemeral interest. Think this form must have been sent me by mistake.”⁴

Some of the clippings in the scrapbooks were certainly written by him, but related clippings were written by others—and there are a good number in his style, but unattributed, so written either by him or by writers he admired.

The rest of this chapter is itself an *olla podrida*—a miscellany of excerpts from Howlett’s columns. His preoccupations are evident: observations of natural things, the inefficiency of public servants, education, religion, the cocksfoot seed harvest, the Ruahine, gardening, land sales, corporal punishment in schools, local body incompetence, the greed of the rich. There was much petty bickering, but there was often evidence of a gifted writer of a clear simple English unadorned by long latinisms but adorned with occasional drifts of the lyrical prose only an astute and talented onlooker can write...

Near my kaikomako tree I found young quail. They are the size of half a walnut, extremely agile, and it is most amusing to see the old-fashioned way they squat and hide. I heard them compared to butterflies, and really they are very like certain fritillaries in coloring. While they squat, the old ones endeavor to distract any wayfarer’s attention by absurd antics, pretending to be lame, &c.⁵

The Makaretu correspondent of the Waipawa Mail has been requested, to discontinue his observations on the alleged disregard of certain sanitary matters in the school, on the ground that it does not admit of proof, and gives needless offence. The correspondent in question wishes me to say for him here that he is certain that every mother worthy of the name who read his letters will agree that, as the alleged grossly unclean state of certain children does admit of immediate proof or disproof, the master of the school ought to be instructed by the Board to report. No runholder would retain the services of a manager who allowed the sheep to suffer (for it entails suffering) in a similar way, nor would he for an instant allow considerations of delicacy to interfere. And as to the impropriety of now alluding to the matter in print, I say in the sonorous words of Milton (I imagine them addressed to the delinquent parents), “‘Tis you that say it, not I. You do the deeds, and your ungodly deeds find me the words.”⁶

The honeysuckle (*Knightia excelsa*) is in full bloom now. It is an escape from a large Australian family, and illustrates the weird character of the flora there as described by Marcus Clarke in his well-known introduction to Gordon's poems. The bunches of flowers are of lurid red hue, very bristly, and smell like a sick sea anemone.

We were riding over a paddock after sheep when a hare appeared, "loping" along with its hindquarters sticking up. It circled until it met our dogs face to face; they are trained not to follow game, and manifested only slight surprise. When within a yard or so, it saw them; stood right up on end, and then faced round and spread itself. You see it is a wise provision of nature that hares can not see behind them. It looked very absurd to us. Perhaps we mortals who can only see backwards in temporal matters appear equally ridiculous to higher intelligence to whom the future is as clear as the past.⁷

I received a few days ago an official letter, measuring sixteen inches by twenty, containing a calendar and show card published by the Public Trust Office. Of course it was battered almost beyond recognition in the post! There you are! The utter lack of brains of these officials sticks out so that any business man would ask, can a man be got to administer estates who hasn't sense to pack a card for the mail? The thing is a dreadful object, consists of a rude though vigorous chromo of some books, an ink pot (empty), a pencil (out of perspective), and a jar of water with birds swimming in it. It would pass as an advertisement of local produce of jam or soap, but the idea of a Public Trust Office sending the gaudy puff round is really "too utter."⁸

About a week ago I noticed at 6 o'clock one morning clouds of smoke driving over the cocksfoot in front of my window. I thought it was a fire and my thoughts ran back to that terrible Christmas when we were all burnt out. But it was only the pollen of the grass blown by the wind. It is only seen in the very early morning, and shows that the grass will soon be ripe. Tennyson alludes to the same curious appearance in the "Holy Grail." When washed down from the air by rain, pollen has been mistaken for sulphur and caused alarm.⁹

The Onga Onga races on the 28th ulto. were a “bit off” according to a sporting friend. There were horses, truly, but the great business of the day was gambling at roulette tables and similar games of chance. If it is true that the meeting was in some way affiliated to the Metropolitan, a man should be sent up next year to inspect. Race meetings of this sort become mere gatherings of spielers and larrikins and decent folk gradually forsake them.¹⁰

On New Year’s Day the school children had their annual school feast and the prizes were distributed, I begin to see why information is refused to the Press. Every child got a prize, not for anything in particular, but simply for “going to school.” The most advanced pupil received a horse with a string to draw along the floor! What a centre of intellectual life the school must be! I suppose other country schools are the same. One almost regrets the old-fashioned English style, where there was always the parson with some tincture education, and with enough influence to put his foot on such absurdities as this. Here, it is only the children who see the humbug of it. The parents have no idea that a proper prize list should be drawn up, showing what prizes are awarded, to whom, and why. Nor do they understand that prizes should be books, or at any rate something less destructible than a wooden horse.¹¹

I often think that the hardest things to understand are those that lie nearest to one’s hand. The religious sects here baffle me. There are (1) Church of England, (2) Roman Catholic, (3) Lutheran (*sic*), (4) Methodist, (5) Salvation Army. There may be more. I have endeavored to gather from the adherents of each what the difference is, but I can make nothing of what they tell me. They all seem to select certain texts and emphasise them, taking them from their context and wresting the natural meaning to suit their own purposes. Why people who can only read very simple English, and that with difficulty and uncertainty, cannot all be gathered into the ample bosom of some broad simple faith, passes my comprehension. To the learned, churches that differ little in doctrine may have historical origins of profound significance; but when we notice how readily European princesses adopt any religion that will make them acceptable to an eligible *parti*, we must harbor a

suspicion that most people, whether gentle or simple, are anchored to their faith by a cable that is easily slipped. I have no intention of discussing theological questions, but I think one cannot offend anyone but bigots by warning the young to avoid relying on single detached texts. An excellent friend was lecturing me about whisky the other day (I drink like a fish), and I fired off Proverbs xxxi., 6, 7, at her:— “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.” To one who knows the meaning of the parallelism of Hebrew poetry—their substitute for modern metre and rhyme—the text seems at first sight conclusive. But the scholar will refuse to accept it without a long *excursus* on context, &c, and that I have no skill to provide. Lest I give the least cause for offence, let me add that when I said I drank “like a fish” I meant that I indulged principally in the same beverage as they do, and hence my friend had no need to lecture me.¹²

There was a cable some weeks ago about 80 women in Hungary who poisoned their husbands. A London exchange says that in all ages there have been leagues of women established for the purpose, who invariably got the materials from fortune-tellers, and as invariably were betrayed by a female accomplice. I do not know what poison was used in the recent Servo-Magyar cases. Phrasyas of Mantinea used aconite; Locusta, who supplied Nero, query? The Brinvilliers used mercury and antimony; LaVoisine, lead and antimony; Aqua Tophana was morphia, cantharadine, and arsenic. I have given enough clues to enable anyone who has access to a library to get on the track of the matter. What I should really like to know is whether the mere fact of husbands being so intolerably distasteful to their wives does not argue for more freedom of divorce. In America do they poison in this wholesale way?¹³

I had to procure two skins of tuis for England the other day, and treated the insides thus: Fry in butter, put in saucepan with herbs, onions, carrots, lettuce, gooseberries, mushrooms, sugar, flour cream, &c., stew for five hours. Of course it was delicious, and I am told that it has one singular merit, namely, you can omit the tuis, and the dish will be little the worse. Wekas, I know of old, are immense this way.¹⁴

After the visit of a fellow Oxford graduate, Howlett wrote,

But what struck me most was the enormous intellectual stimulus afforded me by the mere presence of a man who, though no scholar, had ranged a little outside sheep and cocksfoot. New Zealand settlers as a rule are decent people (I allude now to the wealthy), and though “self-made” are quite presentable, and their women curiously so. But in the place where travelled Englishmen keep their brains the ordinary runholder has a sort of automatism for talking sheep and bullock, and perhaps racing and lawn tennis. As to the subjects which are continually turning up at Home, even in Turkish baths or at garden parties, such as the new writers, science, pictures, foreign politics, they know nothing of them.¹⁵

The Makaretu School Store, advertised in your columns since November, has died of inanition. The proprietor says his last week’s sales were under three shillings, and as he won’t give credit save to people who have security to offer, while his possible or would-be customers never have a red cent to spend, one cannot feel surprise. But why have they never a sixpence to jingle on a tombstone? Enter their cottages and you find tea, coffee, jam, salmon—all the expensive luxuries that are unknown to the English poor. Surely the most ordinary thrift would enable them not to be always impecunious?

(When camping) keep No. 6 (billy) as a stock-pot; put in cold potatoes, bread crusts, emptyings of jam tins, liquor in which meat is boiled, eels, berries, sour cream, pigeons (in *season*, you know), odds and ends of tinned meat, carcasses of cold fowls, apple parings. Every morning before heating it remove fat.¹⁶

Up the Tuki Tuki I found under a stone a very large *Lycosa* (wolf spider) and near her a partly eaten carcase. Of course I thought it was her husband, as zoologists believe that it is the usual thing among all spiders for the female to eat her spouse shortly after marriage. They are monogamic, and the male’s eternal fidelity is assured by this simple method. It is very Swinburnian. “Ah, Ah, thy beauty, like a beast, it bites. Stings like a serpent, like an arrow smites.” The female is strong enough, for, as in the case of Ospreys, &c., she is far the most powerful. But then I never believed the theory, which rests on

the unsupported observations of Rumphius or some such obscure Dutch savant, dated 1650. I can't imagine why Swinburne runs in my head up the Tuki Tuki, just as Matthew Arnold did on the slopes of Egmont. I think the latter suggests powerfully Etna, the "Mother mine, polydendric Aetna" of early Sicilian poetry. Swinburne makes Sappho say of her love that she wants to eat her, to munch her up without any salt or bread and butter, so that she might be really come to stay "and in my flesh thy very flesh entombed." Similarly in J. A. Froude's "Caesar" the author says of Pompey "He was a high-spirited ornamental youth, and so delightful to women that it was said they all longed to bite him." For myself I prefer tomatoes, grilled chicken, &c.; I can't abide raw meat except oysters. However, "revenons a nos araignees,"¹⁷ and now ye naturalists, mark how a plain tale shall put you down. I examined the carcase for the indications of sex (clubbed antennae) and found none. Pondering, I observed an unmistakable female hovering round a flat stone, and "peeking" under it. So we turned the stone up, and beheld two young and sinewy males in a death grapple. Their strong limbs were interlocked, their falces plunged into each other's bodies, and the lady love was waiting to——eat the victor? Never, never! Here I finally dispose of the legend and Rumphius.¹⁸

A good dictionary for common use might be got from Chambers' by cutting out all the words that are unnecessary, or whose meaning is obvious, and adding a few new ones. Such a work, if issued by our Government at cost, would immensely assist the rising generation, many of whom could in a few days master a few hundred words that would be useful to them. How many girls in a social position could on their bridal day spell and explain the word "knout"? How many of the bridegrooms "puisne?" Yet I think a moderate degree of intelligence conduces to marital felicity. It gives both husband and wife power to read, and prevents them boring one another.

A prospectus of the Sydney Jockey Club's consultation on the Queen's Birthday Cup, to be run 24th May, is before me. £20,000 is to be divided in prizes, less 10 per cent. commission. Our simple natives are sending away their coin. You will note that, supposing the sweep is on the square, the cash value of a

ticket is about 18s. Say 17s 6d, as if you do get a prize you still have to pay exchange, etc. The price, or cost, is £1 1s 6d, made up thus:—Ticket, £1; money order, 1s; postage, 2d; stamps for reply, 4d. Do you know—just listen while I whisper—if I had a note to spare I would sooner buy ten good apple trees. You cannot buy a decent apple here, and if, as soon as a man gets a pound, he must put it in a sweep; “we never shall have apples.” I can understand shearers and bush-whackers, if unmarried, putting money in sweeps, because they can’t invest it, and I know well how stupid it seems to save money pound by pound. But I don’t think small settlers have this excuse. Every shilling can be expended profitably. Most of them still lack such useful tools as chisels, oilstones, pliers, saw-sets; and few keep a box of screws, nails, staples, hinges, hooks, &c. None possess the plant for making beer or gooseberry wine. Can you tell me, from your Sydney exchanges, whether the prospectus of this “sweep” is straight? I thought it was well known to be bogus? If not, I apologise to Mr Walter Graham, the promoter.

[We should advise people not to send money to the “Sydney Jockey Turf Club.”—Ed.]¹⁹

1 Rollo Arnold. New Zealand’s burning—the settlers’ world in the mid1880s. VU Press, 1994.

2 Olla Podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 8 January 1890.

3 Oliver Wendell Holmes. *Urania: a rhymed lesson* 1846.

4 Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Copy-Micro-0752.

5 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 23 December 1889.

6 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 23 December 1889. Howlett wrote about himself: the Waipawa correspondent.

7 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 24 December 1889.

8 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 31 December 1889.

9 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 3 January 1890.

10 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 4 January 1890.

11 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 4 January 1890.

12 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 4 January 1890.

13 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 16 January 1890.

14 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 16 January 1890.

15 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 8 February 1890.

16 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 17 March 1890.

17 “Back to our spiders”.

18 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 20 March 1890.

19 Olla podrida, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 28 April 1890.

CHAPTER 14: EKETAHUNA

On the 1900 electoral roll Howlett's residential address is "Wairiama (*sic*), Pahiataua" and his occupation "Gentleman". Stewart Bridge built a 16 room house with stabling and coachhouse at Wairiama in the Mangaone valley east of Eketahuna in 1896. Howlett may again have been staying with his cousin, or he may have acquired land there himself. Nonetheless he was still involved with Makaretu: the Lands Board approved his application for section 2, block 5, Makaretu district in February 1903.¹ The following year he invited tenders for the felling of 50 acres of bush.²

In October 1894 WC Robinson and WF Howlett applied for a patent for their invention of "Improvements in apparatus for accurate weighing".³

In November 1894 he wrote to the Minister of Justice in Wellington,

Dear Sir—wish strongly to recommend appointment of one or more J.P.'s here. Believe Mr Armstrong wrote you similarly 10th June. The only J.P. near here is an old gentleman named Ross. He is over 70 and I think unaware of the ordinary courtesies practised by gentlemen holding a commission of the peace.

*I enclose (1) a letter to him which he has never answered
(2) my receipt for same
(3) memo from postmaster
(4) Mr Ross' receipt.*

If you can unravel the dates you will see that he is useless for our purpose.

As to whom you may appoint, I cannot presume to advise. Ask someone you know. I shall esteem it a favour if you will return enclosures when you have noted them.

Yours truly

W.F. Howlett

*P.S. you will of course understand that Mr Ross' behaviour has given us a lot of trouble—W.F.H.*⁴

The 1890s and 1910s were journalistically Howlett's most productive: the National Library scrapbooks are bulging with his clippings from the

period. Here we will browse only a few themes—Edward Tregear, alternative medicines, consumer protection, censorship, religion and bimetallism,

Tregear

In 1891 Lyon & Blair of Wellington published *The Maori-Polynesian comparative dictionary* by Edward Tregear, “husband, father, poet, novelist, surveyor, soldier, senior public servant, industrial reformer, administrator, political activist.”⁵

Long before this, William Colenso had written of Europeans’ misconceptions of te reo,

Some Europeans have even ventured to write “learnedly” upon it! using (without acknowledgment) the material obtained by others, and racking and distorting by turns Hebrew, Sanscrit, Arabic, Greek, Coptic, Spanish, and many others; never once suspecting their own ignorance of that of New Zealand! It is surprising how few words—and those of the common every-day sort—suffice to talk daily with natives (or ourselves), especially when that intercourse is mainly of one kind. It is also remarkable how very soon natives get to know the true mental calibre of a white man; to gauge, as it were, his knowledge of their language and of themselves, and to say and act accordingly. Setting wholly aside for the time, with him, their own true grammar, pronunciation, and idiom, to suit and accommodate him; while he does not perceive or suspect it. Not a few of our old missionaries, officials, and settlers, are thus continually being politely treated by them—from the old native woman down to her little toddling grandchild.⁶

Maori scholar Arthur Samuel Atkinson, who had criticised Tregear’s work previously,⁷ attacked the dictionary in a series of three papers presented to the Nelson Philosophical Society in 1892 and published privately by the Society.⁸ Atkinson was a lawyer in Nelson when Howlett taught there, both were members of the Nelson Association for the Promotion of Science and Industry 1876-1878 and there is one letter to Atkinson from Howlett in 1895, indicating they knew each other. Certainly they were similar: Atkinson had “a tendency to

vacillate and a fondness for satire.... He could be ‘facetiously aggravating’; he himself commented: ‘The substance of what I say is serious though the surface of it looks only absurd.’”⁹

Howlett:

MR TREGEAR’S NEW BOOK

SIR,—In 1886 Mr Tregear wrote a book called “The Aryan Maori,” and induced the Government to print it as a scientific work. It was really a “skit” or joke, but must have completely gulled Sir James Hector and the so-called scientific people in Wellington, or they would not have had it printed by the Government printer. The book purports to be an elaborate proof that the Maori language is an Aryan tongue, related to Sanskrit, just as Greek, Latin, and English are; in the sense that all these languages have some common parent, and are closely akin, while they are not related at all, or not discoverably so, to Chinese or Arabic. The proof is, of course, a philologic one, and philologists describe Mr Tregear’s book as “rubbish.”

Last year Mr Tregear published a new book called “The Maori Polynesian Comparative Dictionary.” This passes as a scientific work too, and is being bought and “put on their shelves” by innocent people who like to keep up an appearance of being well read. It is a matter of no personal interest to me, for I care nothing for barbarous languages, but I like to know whether a book is sound, and I asked a friend with some notions of Maori whether the book was any good. He replied that Mr Tregear’s dictionary is merely a hash-up of Archdeacon Williams’ Maori Dictionary, so far as the Maori part goes. And it is hashed up all wrong, in a manner that proves Mr Tregear to be quite unacquainted with Maori. I would like Mr Colenso, or anyone who knows Maori, to look at the book.

[He listed a number of errors in the book and went on...]

Is the Maori part of this new dictionary really all rubbish? And if so, would it not be well for some one who knows Maori to say so plainly? I have appealed to Mr Colenso; if he cannot oblige me, perhaps some friend of Archdeacon Williams will take the matter up. It only affects me in this way, that many people at Home regard New Zealand as a barbarous country, where

everyone goes about in moleskins and is perfectly uneducated. If I were to go Home, and met an educated man, and he asked me whether I had ever seen a “puff-puff,” and offered to show me a railway as a curiosity, how could I be angry? He would naturally think that in a country where Mr Tregear’s books pass for science the inhabitants must be intellectually mere children. Then, on the other hand, perhaps Mr Tregear’s dictionary is really sound? I would very much like to hear that it is, but must confess that the errors pointed out to me in it appear conclusive.—I am, &c,

W. F. HOWLETT.¹⁰

June 26, 1893.

Tregear replied,

SIR,—Somone has sent me a copy of your issue of July 4th containing a letter by a Mr W.F. Howlett concerning my writings, especially the Maori-Polynesian Dictionary. Perhaps before Mr Howlett (if it is not a *nom de plume*) exposes himself again in print he may consult the opinions of Maori experts, as expressed in a pamphlet issued by Messrs Lyon and Blair to all members of scientific societies in New Zealand. Although it does not contain the name of Howlett, it records the opinion on the book of a few minor scholars, such as Sir George Grey, Judge Gudgeon, Judge Monro, Archdeacon Williams, Sir Waller Buller, H. Hadfield, G.T. Wilkinson, George Davies, and Captain Butler, interpreters; Professor F. Max Müller and Horatio Hale, philologists; Rev. Dr. W.W. Gill, and Dr. Codrington, missionaries, &c., &c. I beg to enclose this pamphlet for the editor’s perusal.—I am, &c.,

EDWARD TREGEAR, Wellington, 5th July, 1893.¹¹

Howlett came back,

SIR,—Mr Tregear’s letter in your issue of the 8th instant is much to the point for he tells you that he has elicited expressions of approval from Sir George Grey, Archdeacon Williams, and Max Müller. If this be so, perhaps Archdeacon Williams will answer my question as to whether really the Maori part of the dictionary is all rubbish. I do not know any Maori, and I appealed to Mr Colenso. You see he holds his tongue. Now, I appeal to Archdeacon Williams. I ask him whether Mr

Tregear's book is bristling with mistakes, full of them, mistakes due to ignorantly copying the Archdeacon's own book....

This is all rather dry hash for the general public who do not know that Mr Tregear is a most subtle humorist, and to get the average Britisher to tumble to Mr Tregear's methods I must quote, not from his dictionary, but from his previous work, "The Aryan Maori." On page 31 of that book I find Mr Tregear saying that the analogy between Maori and Sanskrit may be seen in the word *kautete*, for it evidently means "cow-titty," from *whakatete*, to milk.

What *kautete* really means I do not know. The word is not in Williams's dictionary. Whether *whakatete* means to milk, to "whack a titty," I cannot say. But I think the most benevolent person that ever penned a puff for a publisher will hesitate a *little* before he will believe that *because* there exists a Maori word *kautete* and an English word cow-titty, *therefore* Sanskrit is the common ancestor of the Maori and English languages.

What Max Müller really thinks about Mr Tregear's dictionary I shall probably know in a few months. In the meantime, if you have received a pamphlet from Mr Tregear containing any statement purporting to come from Archdeacon Williams, to the effect that the Maori Polynesian dictionary is a reliable work, I hope you will print that statement, and I hope the Archdeacon will explain, and also answer frankly the question I have addressed to him above.—I am, &c, W. F. HOWLETT.¹²
July 10, 1893.

Taylor White wrote in response,¹³ that Howlett had made a most uncalled for and spiteful attack and Howlett accepted the challenge,

SIR,—Mr Taylor White's letter in your issue of the 25th contains, so far as I can discover, no single definite statement to reply to....

The position is this: I assert that "The Aryan Maori" is rubbish from a scientific point of view, but is really an ingenious hoax; and am prepared to prove this to the satisfaction of any expert Mr White may choose. Such an expert must be reputed to know a little comparative philology; enough, say, to teach

schoolboys at Rugby, or University honors men out here; and his opinion must carry weight in the colony. He need know no Maori.

With regard to the Maori Polynesian dictionary I am prepared to prove, to the satisfaction of any expert Mr White may choose, that it is, as far as the Maori part goes, worthless and unreliable, being full of mistakes, in many cases caused by ignorantly copying Williams, and that the Maori part is simply Williams diluted and mangled. The said expert must know Maori.

This is what Mr White calls spite! I maintain nothing could be more liberal or generous. I wrote my previous letters to warn simple folk not to swallow all this rubbish. Now I repent me, and sincerely trust Mr White will buy largely of every book-fiend, and lay in a stock of every quack nostrum supported by "testimonials" similar to those printed in favor of Mr Tregear.

Permit me to add that unless Archdeacon Williams were thoroughly ashamed of the puff which Mr Tregear says he wrote, he would never permit such assertions as these to go uncontradicted. I have good reason for believing that the Archdeacon is aware of hundreds of mistakes in the Maori part; and if this be so, what rational person will care to test the accuracy of that part which refers to the far more obscure dialects of Samoa, Fiji, and other less known islands?

Why all this conspiracy of silence? The first man who tries to *use* Mr Tregear's dictionary, instead of simply talking about it, will know I am right.—I am, &c,

W. F. HOWLETT. July 28, 1893.¹⁴

In 1894 The Board of Governors of the New Zealand Institute refused to publish Atkinson's critique; Tregear was a member of the Board, though absent from that meeting. Letters to editors, Atkinson's among them, condemned the decision. The Nelson Society resolved: "That the attention of the Board of Governors of the New Zealand Institute be directed to the importance, in the interests of science, of Mr. Atkinson's criticism of Mr. Tregear's Maori-Polynesian Dictionary, and that the Board be asked to publish it in the Transactions of the Institute."

In the far away recesses of Makaretu, Howlett was incensed,

SIR,—It appears the Governors of the New Zealand Institute refused to publish Mr Atkinson's criticism of Mr Tregear's Dictionary. To understand the matter clearly, it will be necessary to explain a few things. Hector is sane and honest; he is besieged by a host of cranks who insist on inflicting their fads on the public. He has very little money, and rather than tell these gentlemen what he thinks of them he tries to rub along on the meagre funds allowed him by the Government. These cranks are what the Italian School call *mattoids*, *paranoics*, *hereditary neurotics*. They suffer from a distinct type of mental disease. I will enumerate a few.¹⁵

He went on to call Samuel Vaile, railways reformer, "mad", "cracked", a "crank"; Alexander William Bickerton a "graphomaniac"; he wrote that Frederick William Frankland wrote "a whole pack of rubbish"; that Charles Lemon's ideas were "an absurdity". All had been published in the *Transactions*. He concluded, "There is no doubt that Atkinson's criticism should have been given a place in the 'Transactions.' He is a scholar, though a somewhat isolated one, and his 'Notes' abound in luminous and suggestive thought."

Tony Ballantyne, who discusses recent appraisals of Tregear's work in the development of relations between Maori and pakeha, wrote, "Tregear's work and his exchange with Atkinson have assumed a central place in the intellectual history of New Zealand."¹⁶

Quack nostrums

Sir,—Dr. Moore, in his presidential address to the Medical Association at Napier, seems to have recommended publishing the formulae of these cure-alls in the daily press, and in "pamphlet form distributed broadcast." I wish to suggest a slight modification of this, which I have repeatedly urged for some twenty years. Let the Public Health Department buy a copy of "Truth's" Cautionary List. I enclose the last issue for your inspection. Let them imitate it, with such alterations as common sense suggests. Then those who care for knowledge can pay sixpence and get it, and those who do not wish to be wise can remain at the mercy of the quacks. If the list interests you, make a few extracts. You will observe that Mr. Labouchere does not

wait for a new Statute; he simply makes a list of the quacks and defies them to prosecute him. Do you really suppose that if Dr. Mason published a statement that Mr. Blank's Mauve Mixture for Meningitis consisted of nothing but Epsom Salts and cinnamon water, was worth one half-penny, was sold at 4s. 9d., and was quite useless, any libel action would lie? Or that any jury would convict?

The Health Department are either gagged by Ministers or influenced indirectly by the Association of Patent Medicine Vendors; or they are plain cowards, or lazy, or frankly ignorant.

To place the heavy foot of the policeman on such a daylight swindle as the _____ consumption cure is absolutely simple. All you have to do is not to be bribed, and the thing is practically done. Henry Labouchere is unbribeable.—I am, etc.,

W. F. HOWLETT.¹⁷

He wrote a series of columns for the *Maoriland Worker*,

While congratulating you on your resolve not to insert advertisements of these frauds, I should like to point out that by so doing you increase the gain of other papers, as the advertisements you refuse go to them. You hence increase the inducement offered them, and render them less likely to purge their columns. The only remedy, in my opinion, is to prohibit the publication of such advertisements in daily papers. I should allow weeklies to publish them, so that those who like them might know where to get them, their virtues, and their price. I should not define a "quack medicine," but leave that to the common sense of the Judge. The effect of this would be that once the dailies ceased to be in the pay of these rogues they would yield to their natural kindly impulses, and print the truth about them. After a year or two, people would see that their pretensions were so ludicrous that they would cease to buy them, and when the sale stopped the advertisements in the weeklies would be withdrawn. Few people realise that these quack remedies are engineered, on a large scale and mostly by criminals, that is, by men and women known to the police as having done their time in gaol, and having been involved in crimes of the most offensive character. To give a very simple instance of a harmless fraud, I will take that of a hair-restorer.

The really horrible class of swindles I cannot deal with here; the details are only for medical journals. Well, I saw an advertisement of a woman I will call Madame Ethel. She said that if anyone sent combings of their hair, she would make a careful microscopical examination and prescribe. I accordingly sent her a cut lock (not combings) of a dog's hair. Now, you can tell combings from cut hair at a glance, while under the microscope dog's hair is quite unlike human hair. As I expected, I got back a "stock letter" full of sympathy, and telling me exactly what was the matter with me. Now surely nothing is more impudent than this? The woman bottles any wash, spends hundreds of pounds on advertisements and booklets and sham testimonials, deludes silly women, and gets 12s 6d a bottle for what costs her twopence at the outside. There is really no concealment about the matter. The facts as stated would not be published by any large daily, because they get well paid for the woman's advertisements. If they were not allowed to publish her advertisements, they would enjoy publishing the truth about her. Perhaps some of your readers wonder how these rogues can invent such cunning devices. One explanation is that many are worked out Yankee swindles. A man is engaged in Chicago as a clerk, assisting to run a fraud liver pill. He simply studies how it is done, appropriates what cash he can, annexes the "literature" in the form of booklets and stock letters, and comes to Australia or New Zealand and starts for himself. You must remember America has a population of eighty millions, and consequently it pays to employ talent to compose attractive booklets and clever stock letters. To show how the medical quacks can influence Governments, I may mention that the leading men have an association in London. The secretary is a smart man, and if the New Zealand Health Department tries to get an Act passed to suppress them, he writes to all the great dailies, threatening to withdraw advertisements. Then the dailies ear-wig the members of Parliament, and they in their turn refuse to support the Bill. I will now give an instance that will convince most clear-headed men of this. I wrote in very straight language to the Minister of Health, saying that he was "squared" by the patent medicine people. I said I did not mean that money had necessarily been paid, but that "influence" had been exerted; and that I wished him to show me an analysis he

had made of a certain notorious “drink cure.” He replied that he could not show me his copy of the analysis, but would have a fresh analysis made specially for me at a cost of £3 13s 6d. Now I ask any common-sense man if the Minister is not shamelessly supporting what he knows to be a fraud? Of course he knows I am not going to give £3 13s 6d for what is merely a copy of what he has on his files. He knows, also, that if I did pay that sum no daily paper would publish the result, for fear of losing the advertisement of the “cure.” You observe that if he really thought the proprietor of the drink cure had a right to keep his formula secret, he would not have offered to supply me with an analysis on any terms.

Tane, Eketahuna,
20th September, 1910.¹⁸



Eketahuna. Photographed by James Bragge, reproduced in William Main 1974.
Bragge's Wellington and the Wairarapa. Millwood Press.

Consumer protection

When I said in your issue of 15th October that quack remedies were mostly engineered by criminals, men known to the police, I did not anticipate having a good instance for you; as it chances,

I am able to take Crippen, the murderer. The evidence at the trial showed that he was agent for Munyon's "remedies."

I am informed, that since my letter about the hair restorer was published in your journal, others have sent "combing" to "Hygeia" for microscopical examination. One man sent some cotton wool. All get back the same stock letter expressing sympathy and wanting 12s 10d.

Properly speaking, I ought to confine my remarks to medicines. But they are only part of a far wider field. When common sense gets a show in government, all public swindling will be a matter of public care. At present, everyone who is interested in the matter knows that the swindling that goes on in the trade, bleeds the public in an immense turn every year. I will take a very simple instance, that of a "Cloth-ball," which I believe has made a fortune for its "proprietors." It is a lump of white stuff in a box, sold as containing "the materials hitherto used by dry cleaners and kept a trade secret." The price is 1s for a lump weighing 4 ounces. To analyze it required no more apparatus than a match and a little spirits of salt, and some Epsom Salts. It proved to consist of commercial carbonate of magnesia, worth, say, 6d a lb. It cleans clothes, certainly, to a certain extent. To use it intelligently, you need to know what it is, otherwise you cannot know when it will succeed and when it won't. I compared it with flour and found little difference in their action. Any white powder will clean clothes, and I suppose any powder, whether white or coloured, provided you can brush it out. Yet, owing to the reluctance of our newspapers to discuss these matters, the man who "invented" the cloth ball lives on it, at the expense of thousands of men, many poorer than himself, who believe they get value for their money.

Sewing machines are another kind of fraud. The kind mostly used now in New Zealand cost about £15. The actual cost to manufacture is about £3, including table and accessories. Equally good ones can be bought at the Army and Navy Stores in London, without table (I mean to work by hand), for about £3.

Most bicycles and typewriters of the better grades cost about £3 to make.

The line I take about all these frauds is that governments should make it their business to investigate them, and publish details. The effect on quack medicines would be that people would cease to buy them. The effect on such things as sewing machines and typewriters would be that either governments or private associations would go direct to the makers and contract for a supply of several thousands at about £3, and retail them at cost.

Cannot any worker see that when he pays £30 for a typewriter he benefits nobody? The real maker only gets his £3, the rest goes into the hands of agent behind agent, who don't earn any better money at that game than they could earn if healthfully employed in the country opening up land and producing mutton or wool or butter.¹⁹

Censorship

A Christchurch man, DN Adams, had asked Sir Joseph Ward to suppress "gross and licentious books and literature" and *Truth* (whose editor must have seemed a kindred spirit to Howlett) published Howlett's correspondence with Adams,

Estcourt, Tane,
Pahiatua, 16th May, '09.

D. N. Adams,
Christchurch,—

Dear Sir,—Will you oblige me with the names of some of the books you consider "the filthiest conceivable," and if possible the name of some agent who will supply them. I have never come across any filthy book in New Zealand, and I venture to think you must be in some way abnormal.

I enclose cutting which suggested writing to you. You see without names you may be thinking of "Venus and Adonis" or "Genesis."—Yours truly,

W. F. HOWLETT.

The letter speaks for itself. "Truth" has no interest in Mr Howlett, to whom, however, this paper is indebted for the correspondence. The following is Adams' reply. On a bill-head or memo. form, setting forth the various things the firm is agent for; and under date May, 20, Adams says:—

W. F. Howlett, Esq.,
 Estcourt, Tane,
 Pahiataua.

Dear Sir,—Replying to your favor of the 16th inst., asking for the name of some agent who would supply you with the books referred to by the deputation which waited upon the Right Hon. the Premier. I do not know of any decent bookseller who now stocks these works. Perhaps the Editor of, “Wellington Truth,” who seems to be a man of like mind with the authors of the books referred to, might be able to give you the information you desire.—Yours faithfully,

D. N. ADAMS.

Mr Howlett, on May 27, wrote the following to the impossible Adams:—

D. N. Adams, Esq.,
 Christchurch.

Dear Sir,—Your letter of the 16th is in my opinion one which no gentleman would write to another. It’s a mere evasion of my question.

If you refuse to name even one of the books you call filthy you give your whole case away. I am, however, forwarding your letter to the editor of “Truth,” and I presume you have his authority to use his name.—Yours truly,

W. F. HOWLETT.

For Mr Howlett’s own information it is here mentioned that Adams had no authority whatever to quote the editor of “Truth” as being the person likely to give Mr Howlett the information he sought. The action of Adams in writing as he did is THAT OF A CRAVEN CUR, if not that of a blackguard, and “Truth” hereby is thankful to Mr Howlett for having forwarded to it the correspondence, so that Christchurch in particular, and New Zealand in general, can form some idea of the gentleness of the wowsers who seek to purify the world and want a newspaper suppressed because of the habit it has of telling the truth about wowsers of the Adams type. As it happens, “Truth” doesn’t know the particular books referred to by Adams.... Some books certainly there are that are naughty; nevertheless, it is really remarkable that such books never come the way of bad-minded

men as the editor of "Truth," but which in a marvelously-mysterious manner always are in the possession of the wowser.²⁰

Religion

His writing on religion in general and Christianity in particular suggest Howlett changed from atheist to agnostic,

CHRISTIANITY

SIR,—this is a serious letter, and meant for thinkers. I do not mean necessarily people who have academic education, but for those who look beneath the surface. Christianity is a mere delusion, a form of hysteria, for this reason. Any impostor has only to talk pious and he is accepted. Now, if you take any genuine pursuit such as electricity the elect (such as Lord Kelvin) spot an impostor at once. He uses such words as "potential" or "quantity" in an absurd sense. The same applies to chemistry or oil painting. But in quack sciences such as palmistry, or theosophy, or phrenology, any ignorant impostor can deceive experts. Why? Because in a pseudo science there are and can be no experts. Similarly, in the various forms of Christianity, any impostor can deceive the "elect". Hence I conclude that the "Harmy", the Adventists, the Roman Church are all imposters, more or less consciously so. Take another instance. A mother's love for children is a scientific fact. Set a woman who has not that love to simulate it, and who will she deceive? Not many, and certainly not me. But any ignorant charlatan can imitate this "love of Christ," and grow fat on the subscriptions of his dupes. My conclusion is that Christ is as much a myth as King Arthur, and his cult is mere hysteria. Another proof of the utter brainlessness of the ordinary Christian is the arguments he uses. He says men have died for Christianity. Well? Have not Anarchists died for Anarchy? Yet the ordinary Christian says that the ideal for which Santo died was nothing but morbid vanity. What Christian martyrs died for, I suppose, was a mixture of vanity and obstinacy and hysteria.—I am, &c.,

W.F. HOWLETT.²¹

The *New Zealand Times* refused to print a letter from Howlett, telling him, "If I published your communication I would be compelled to read a cartload of letters in reply, and find time to receive at least one hundred callers. Need I tell you that these are terrors I shrink from...?" So Howlett sent it to *Truth*, whose editor published it in full,

Sir,—While staying in Wellington for the purpose of attending Mr McCabe's lecture, I found that his subject was so much misunderstood that I think a few words of explanation may be useful to your younger readers. Let me say first in the plainest terms that you live in an intellectual backwater, where most men hold the sort of beliefs that were obsolete in London, Paris, Vienna, when I was a boy.

The following brief sketch of Haeckel's ideas is much as I should have written when in the sixth form at school in 1869. Western religion, whether Christian or Jewish, or even Mohametan, is based on three ideas: God, free-will, the soul. Haeckel denies all three.

"God," to take Him first, means a personal director of things. Now, it is a mere matter of opinion whether there is any such person, and almost a matter of certainty that if there were, we could not know anything about Him. The parsons deliberately mislead their congregations. They turn their eyes up and groan about "poor heathens" when they ought to know that the whole Buddhist world denies His existence. This they carefully conceal from their "flocks." The whole Chinese and Japanese world deny Him. In fact, He is a purely western invention. I have no quarrel with a parson who believes in God, so long as he is sufficiently educated to know, and honest enough to admit, that giant minds in all ages have denied His existence. I have a very large quarrel with Matthew Arnold, who continually professes belief in God, and then defines Him as a "tendency." He was really, I suppose, just as much an atheist as Haeckel, but he was an inspector of schools and had to conciliate his masters.

Free-will is quite an open question. Men who believe we are automatic are called determinists. They believe that, there is no

such thing as moral responsibility. Nearly all the men at the top are determinists. The subject is not elementary. The late "Parson Andrew" said he could not reconcile determinism with a good moral life. To me there is no difficulty. When I behave myself it is because I like a clean soul, just as I tub myself because I like a clean body. That is all I can see in it. I don't always behave myself any more than your most pious Christian; I don't always keep myself clean; the most advanced hygienist sometimes forgets to clean his teeth; but when I do the motive is not ethic but aesthetic, so far as I can tell. If, however, a parson believes in free-will, that's all right, provided he has been taught as he ought to have been, that determinism is a respectable belief, and not to be scoffed at by young men so poorly educated that they can't even read the literature of the subject.

The soul, again, is a western notion. The Jews had no idea of it, and the celebrated verse in Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth... and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" is an impudent fake. If you don't believe me, ask the next parson you meet. Cross question him, and make him show you any learned commentary he likes. The best Romans considered it an open question: I name only Lucretius, Cicero, Seneca. The whole Eastern world rejects it. The ordinary parson cannot understand the difficulties inherent in the idea, and if you ask him any pointed questions he says that what he calls the "soul" is a sort of bogey or spook that lives inside you. You are like a piano, and the spook like a fellow who plays the keys. When inside the body this spook can only feel, see, think by the use of the body. When the body sickens and dies, the spook, although it seems to get quite enfeebled and silly, really is going strong, and when the body dies it flies out, and immediately can see, feel, think without using any body. Where it goes, the parson can't tell. It doesn't go to heaven, or else the judgment day would be a farce. By this time the parson has got so hot, he retires and tells his lady devotees that you are not a gentleman. As to more difficult questions, take only this: When does the soul begin? At conception, or birth, or when? And if it is sown or implanted in our frame by

“God,” can we conceive the Deity compelled to such an act by mere human, often brutal, violation?

The sum of the matter is this, that there are many religions; all save one must be false; you or I have a perfect right to profess any one and deny all the rest. I met a lot of parsons in Wellington, of the better type, not mere country sky-pilots, all good fellows, self-deceived, I think, but still, men of integrity. Not one said a harsh word to me. I believe nine English bishops out of ten would endorse this present screed.

W. F. HOWLETT.

Tane, Eketahuna.²²

Another letter refused by the *New Zealand Times* was accepted by the *Maoriland Worker*,

Dear Editor,—There are a great many topics tabooed in New Zealand papers. Suppose you set apart a space for their discussion. I enclose a letter refused by the “New Zealand Times.” The editor probably didn’t want to arouse any ill-feeling. But how can one make omelettes without breaking eggs? Can you name, offhand, any subject more calculated to interest your readers? Certainly, I grant you that it will get them by the ear. But surely Truth is the one thing we all want, and Truth is reached by facing unpleasant facts. If you agree to publish letters on tabooed subjects, I suggest you should exercise a vigorous censorship. Of course, you mustn’t publish letters unfit for family reading. There are subjects of vast importance which are discussed at home in medical journals; here they can’t be discussed at all, to any advantage. There are no medical papers, and any letters in ordinary newspapers have to be expressed so timorously that all their force is lost. Again, you must not print uninteresting or ill-informed letters. And you must make it a condition that any letter admitted to your “Tapu” column either has been refused by a paper of good standing, or, in your opinion, certainly would be refused.—Yours, etc

W. F. HOWLETT.

Mr Howlett sends the following letter, which was refused publication by the "New Zealand Times":—

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

Some time ago you were good enough to let me say that there did not exist any good book in defence of Christianity. I put it stronger, but that was the sense of it. Since then no clergyman has offered me any such book, though I am personally known to many of your leading divines. One layman sent me books, but of so unlearned a type that they would not bear examination. Now let me once more put my question in a different form. I address, you know, any priest of any creed. Suppose a young man brought up as an apostle wished to investigate the claims of Christianity, what book do you recommend him? There is my question, in an inoffensive form. Surely the priests don't admit that their creed does not admit of proof? You notice I am not attempting to get up a controversy. I merely want the name of a book. Had I this, I should know what Christianity is. At present, some say it means believing the whole Bible. Some say the Old Testament is piffle, and the New Testament divine. Others say it merely means following Christ. It doesn't matter if He was only a man, or whether there is a God, or whether the soul is immortal. All you have to do is to follow Christ. Now amid this confusion, I naturally expect priests of an established church to have some manual which states clearly what their creed is, and then proves that it is true.

Contrast with the silence of the clergy the zeal of men like McCabe. His little threepenny book, "From Rome to Rationalism" is hard reading, but it is all closely reasoned, and every Christian should read it, if only to know why men leave the Church. Again, take Vivian's "The Churches and Modern Thought," at sixpence. You have 416 pages of careful analysis. It is obviously the work of a very cultured and capable man. Opposed to these, the priests can produce nothing. I can hardly believe you will refuse to insert this letter, because I am not saying Christianity is untrue; I only say it is beset on all sides, and has no defenders. Surely if it is true that there is a God, and He will save his righteous in heaven, and damn the wicked in hell, it is worth anyone's while to explain the mistakes in

McCabe's reasoning? I heard a priest in Wellington (I think his name was Coffey?) explaining in a sermon how absurd and untrue evolution was. Think of that! And next day his hearers (some of them) went to a lecture, and Professor Kirk simply took evolution for granted and implied that anyone who didn't accept it was a back number. How is a young man to avoid the dilemma? One of the two is clean out of it, from an intellectual point of view. Coffey or Kirk, which?

And I conclude with the hope that some priest will name some book on the evidences." ²³

A few years later the editor of *Truth* would publish another letter, under the explanation,

The following letter was refused insertion in the "Dominion," and we do not at all wonder at that. The squatters' organ naturally hates the very idea of free thought. If the mind becomes free, it won't be long before the body does.

BIBLE IN SCHOOLS.

Sir,—Canon Garland says that as long as the Bible is not taught in the schools, the State "withholds" from them "the knowledge" of that Book which is the "foundation of all English literature."

This is a new claim. English literature dates back about 1200 years. The Bible, as an English book, is only 300 years old. Shakespeare, for instance, could not have read it. As to whether our English Bible is good English, there can be no room for two opinions. Taking it as a whole, a child could hardly have a worse model. I don't say that there are not good things in it; but, as a rule, it is full of repetitions, tediousness, irrelevance. Much of it is totally devoid of meaning. Some is deliberately mistranslated. You can't "teach" it in schools because free critical discussion alarms the parents.

When I read Tennyson and the children ask what is meant by the "Ringing grooves of change," I reply that Tennyson thought railways ran in grooves, as tramways do. The children say, "Oh, what a stupid man," and I have a great chance to explain how nobody is a hero to his valet. Now, if I read the Bible, and I find the four accounts of the Resurrection hopelessly contradictory,

what can I say? Can I do as I should when I read Livy, who says Hannibal got over the Alps by lighting fires on the cliffs and then pouring on vinegar? In the latter case, I pooh-pooh it, and say old Livy was a credulous ass.

When I read Paul and he says. "Thou fool, that which thee sowest is not quickened, except it die," am I to explain that Paul didn't know any vegetable physiology? The seed no more dies when it germinates than a child dies when it grows up into a man. If a seed does die, it doesn't germinate. Any explanation would make the parents wild, and sow in the children's minds the seeds of free thought.

Let me make a complete change of front. Wake up, brothers! Let us have the Bible in Schools by all means, and read it critically. In ten years' time there will not be a professing Christian (under twenty) in the Dominion.—I am. etc..

W. F. Howlett.

Tane, Eketahuna.

August 23, 1913.²⁴

Bimetallism

The "Long Depression" of the 1880s and 90s prompted advocates of various monetary solutions, among them a return to bimetallism, where the value of money is fixed to certain amounts of gold and silver, with a fixed rate of exchange between the two metals.

Labour Member of the Legislative Council John Rigg advocated bimetallism,²⁵ and Howlett analysed the system in a series of articles in the Napier *Evening News* in January and February 1895. He was not in favour, but, he said, he would listen to arguments,

...While I am about it I may as well mention that in my opinion gold has not appreciated during the last 40 years, or during the last 20 or 10. Those who think it has are people who don't understand currency questions. If anyone wants me to explain, of course I will, but Gladstone has done it once for all, and my explanation would sound whimp after his clarion note. When I read Gladstone first, I thought I knew better than he did. Ass

that I was! Anyhow, I have repented. The old man had a bit up his sleeve.

If any of your readers can detect any error above, I should deem it a favour if he (the reader) will write to you and expose the said error in fully intemperate language, and let him stick to one error, and so thoroughly scarify me that I may never make it again, for the important thing is, not that the reader (aforesaid) may show off his knowledge, nor that he may make me look a fool, but that he may, by convincing me of error, make me wiser. Most men who aspire to be leaders of men are guilty of follies. He would gradually knock it out of them, and then they lead to some purpose.²⁶

Howlett addressed the 10 June 1895 meeting of the Hawke's Bay Philosophical Institute on bimetallism; Henry Hill was one of the other speakers.²⁷

Howlett's publisher friend EA Haggen was an advocate of bimetallism, but his Wellington paper *People* quickly died, as Coupland Harding reported,

The journalistic obituary includes the *People*, a weekly paper established in Wellington about a year ago by Mr. E.A. Haggen to advocate protection, bimetallism, state banking, land nationalization, collectivism, and a number of other ideas too "advanced" for the daily press. With the *People*, a number of other ventures pass out of existence, as during its career it absorbed a variety of small organs, all more or less shaky—*Daybreak*, a woman's paper, the *Fancier's Gazette*, and lastly the *Weekly Herald*, of which the less said the better. In November last, business suddenly and unexpectedly called Mr. Haggen to the United States. The *People* was then in difficulties, and the concern is now in liquidation.²⁸

1 *Bush Advocate* 29 February 1903.

2 *Bush Advocate* 9 September 1904.

3 Patent no. 7083, 1894. See Epilogue 2.

4 NZ National Archives C 490 395, J1 529.

5 Howe KR 1991. *Singer in a songless land: a life of Edward Tregear 1846-1931*. Auckland University Press.

6 William Colenso 1868. On the Maori Races of New Zealand. *Trans. N.Z. I.* 1: 5-75.

7 Atkinson AS 1886. The Aryo-Semitic Maori. *Trans. N.Z. I.* 19: 552-576.

- 8 Atkinson AS 1893. Notes on the Maori-Polynesian comparative dictionary of Mr E. Tregear, F.R.G.S., F.R.H.S., M.A.I.G.B., M. Ph. S., &c., &c. / by A.S. Atkinson, being a paper read before the Nelson Philosophical Society, April 11th, May 16th, and Dec. 12th, 1892. Bond, Finney & Co, Nelson.
 - 9 Frances Porter. "Atkinson, Arthur Samuel", from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2a15/atkinson-arthur-samuel> (accessed 6 February 2017)
 - 10 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 4 July 1893.
 - 11 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 8 July 1893.
 - 12 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 11 July 1883.
 - 13 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 25 July 1893. Colenso called him an "irrepressible" and "inexpressible" man who wrote "wretched.... rubbish" on Māori matters.
 - 14 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 1 August 1893.
 - 15 *Evening Press* 27 August 1894.
 - 16 Tony Ballantyne, 2014. *Webs of Empire: locating New Zealand's colonial past*. UBC Press.
 - 17 *Dominion* 13 March 1909. The *Dominion* had reported, "The president (Dr. T. C. Moore of Napier) devoted the main portion of his address to evils of certain classes of patent and proprietary medicines. He said the medical profession had been strangely apathetic in the matter, and expressed the opinion that they owed a duty to the public, and that it was only right that they should give warning to the public against the unscrupulous rogues who are not only robbing them of their money, but, by holding out fallacious hopes of curing them of their ailments, often cause them to lose precious time while they are taking their worthless or injurious nostrums...." In 1879 Henry Labouchere had ridiculed the London *Daily Telegraph* for having been "a kind of official gazette... for baby farmers or quack medicine advertisers". He was assaulted and sued for libel.
 - 18 *Maoriland Worker* 15 October 1910.
 - 19 *Maoriland Worker* 15 December 1910.
 - 20 *NZ Truth* 31 July 1909.
 - 21 *Evening News & Hawke's Bay Advertiser* 27 November 1894.
 - 22 *NZ Truth* 23 July 1910.
 - 23 *Maoriland Worker* 15 December 1910.
 - 24 *NZ Truth* 6 September 1913.
 - 25 John Rigg 1895. *Bimetallism and Paper Money*. Wellington: Samuel Costall, Government Printer. Vol. 46, no. 2. J. T. Paul Pamphlets. Hocken Library.
 - 26 *Evening News* 30 January 1895.
 - 27 *Trans. N.Z. Inst.* 1895; 28: 760.
 - 28 *Typo* 27 February 1897.
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CHAPTER 15: OLIVE 1902-1922

On the 1905 electoral roll William Frederick and Olive Helen Howlett were living at Tane, he a "settler" and she a "married woman". He had married Olive Helen Suisted in 1902; he was nearly 52 and she 21.

HOWLETT—SJOSTEDT.—On 5th March, 1902, at the English Church, Pahiatua, New Zealand, by the Rev. H.S. Leach, William Frederick Howlett, grandson of the late John Howlett, of Jamaica, to Olive Helen Sjostedt (spelt in the colony Suisted), third daughter of R.R.S. Suisted, settler, of Tane, New Zealand.¹

Wairima in the Mangaone valley east of Eketahuna,² was close to the Suisted farm at Estcourt.

As memories fade, and first-hand sources of information pass away, it is often the case that only “romantic” trivia survive. So it has been with Howlett. Old trampers and local Makaretu identities tell of Howlett marrying a young girl, carrying her on his back up the Tukituki river, to a honeymoon at his hut high in the Ruahine Ranges.³

Others said Howlett used his bearers to carry her.

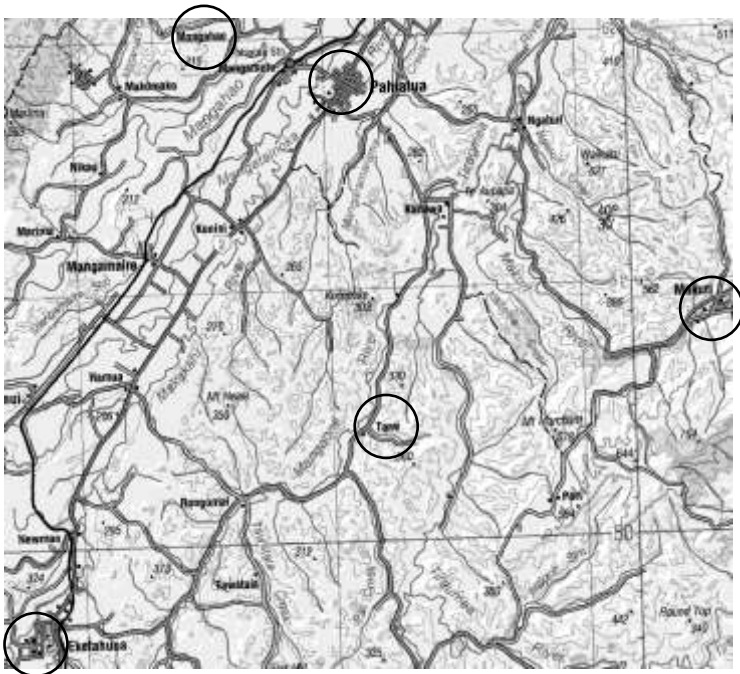
Little is known of Olive Howlett. She was born in Karori in 1881, daughter of Robert Richmond Secundus Suisted and Helen Suisted (née Donald). Howlett’s occupation on the marriage certificate is “journalist”. They lived for a time in Wellington, at Bolton St and later at 75 Ingestre St.⁴

Olive won prizes for cut flowers and “best collection of sweet peas” at the NZ Farmers’ union Eketahuna Show in 1909,⁵ and held a garden party shortly afterwards,

Tane Doings.

On Saturday a garden party was given by Mrs. Howlett at “Estcourt,” the residence of her mother-in-law, Mrs. Suisted. The proceedings commenced with a bush hunt. The married ladies were given two minutes’ start, then the girls followed, and in a minute and a half more the men. Flags and strings led them to the centre, and in about half an hour the hunted had been brought back to the judge, who notified the event by firing a gun. The successful finders were; Mr. Cooper, Mrs. Hodgins, Mrs. Suisted, Miss Waldin, Miss Kate Waldin, and Mrs. Waldin. After this a sandwich tea was served on the lawn. The menu contained among others, tongue, bloater, cucumber, tomato, ginger, cherry, almond, and lettuce sandwiches.⁶

The marriage was reportedly unhappy. Writers who interviewed people who knew them hinted at Howlett's infidelity, mentioned frequent absences in the Ruahine and men-only parties at Ongaonga with the bachelor Bridge brothers (and their cook Joseph Webb, ex Royal Navy). They said Howlett wore a semi-transparent white satin suit that gave offence. Certainly Ashcott, now a homestay, lent itself to partying, with its ballroom and billiards room. Olive was never seen again with Howlett around Makaretu or in the Ruahine.



Pahiatua, Eketahuna, Mangahao, Makuri, Tane

The Howletts were staying at “Balmoral” in Mulgrave St Wellington when he wrote to Augustus Hamilton at the museum on 3 July 1910; he ended his brief letter with,

My wife (30 years younger than I) has reasons for wishing an introduction which I am sure you will kindly allow.⁷

Hamilton must have replied a little warily, for Howlett wrote again on 7 July, back at Tane, Eketahuna,

As to her social status, no doubt Mrs Chapman could ascertain that from Miss M.E. Richmond,⁸ or Mr Arthur Russell or any of his relations....⁹

Arthur Russell was his cousin and Miss Richmond a friend—to whom he wrote in 1912, seeking her advice on the Montessori Method. He added, “I am in an aesthetic mood today; a great handful of *Boronia* is in front of me, and in the middle a new Pheasants’ eye *Narcissus* that I got from Holland. I always wish I could draw.”¹⁰

Olive, too, tried her hand at writing for the newspapers,¹¹

THE INIQUITIES OF THE FATHERS.

[BY OLIVE H. HOWLETT.]

In windy Wellington, when the streets are crowded, children from four to fourteen, girls and boys, may be heard crying newspapers. And oh! the shudders one gets from their different nerve-torturing twangs!

I have often wanted to follow home and know some of the tiny mites of five and six who carry their bundles of papers along the streets, so happy and ragged. Their funny little baby faces look very wise and old-fashioned.

One girl of ten I did make friends with, for she was “runner” in our street. I petted her and gave her sweets. She was strange and uncanny to look at; frowsy, freckled, and (my husband’s expression) “not violets.” I might add as a matter of detail that she was a thief, a liar, a vagabond. She stole, weka-fashion, anything she could detach and carry.

Every day she had some story to tell me, and most of her yarns were obviously inventions. One day when she knew I was out

she rapped loudly, asked for my husband, and begged him to give her three sheets of paper and three envelopes for a penny.

The stupid man gave her them; she put them behind her back and looked up cunningly.

“Got no penny.”

He was checkmated.

Once I let her come in my sitting-room; she roamed about fingering, things, and at last saw my violin case.

“I want that; you give it to me?”

“Why, that is a baby’s coffin,” I replied, “what do you want with that?”

“Taint, I know it’s a violin.”

I said that if I gave it to her I should have to buy myself another one; then she said someone might give me a new one, and turned to my husband suggesting impishly—

“Pretty lady—someone might take a fancy.”

She managed to annex a small piece of pencil and a reel of cotton that day.

I could never get her to tell me where she lived. I have often met her in most unaccountable places. One summer evening at dusk I was having an outskirting ramble. I went slowly up some funny wooden zig-zag steps, pondering over the initials carved on the shining rails, and wondering how many hands had helped to make them so smooth. On reaching the top I found my little news girl, sitting on a grassy patch counting a huge bag of marbles. She looked up, sideways at me and said:—

“Lost six to-day; give me penny to buy more.”

I threw her one, and she gave me an elfish leering look, and ran away down the thistle-covered slope, crossed a gully that was littered with old broken pots and pans, rusty- kerosene tins, and many other kinds of slum debris, then gained a block of grimy-looking hovels and disappeared.

On the way she looked back many times, to see if I was following her, but whether she was going to her home or not I cannot tell.

Next day a different “runner” left our paper, and I have never seen her since.

Certainly eleven lobelias in bloom were lifted from our garden during the night, but that, I suppose, was her p.p.c. card.

After that not even a card.

I often think of my own carefully-guarded childhood, and find it easy to forgive my little news girl for stealing my trifles

* * * *

This small impression of a child-life was jotted down one lazy morning, and thrown carelessly among a pile of accumulated notes.

I had forgotten.

Then suddenly my little news girl was again recalled.

We were travelling up, north on a bicycling tour, and one night, at a small country hotel, I happened to pick up an old paper.

I was glancing at it casually when my eye fell on a police report about the time the lobelias disappeared.

A child who gave the name of Clara Brinker, and said her age was 13, was charged with living with disorderly persons reputed to be thieves.

Inspector Devine deposed that when he arrested her she said her father was Lord Brinker; he could not find such a name in the peerage. His Worship committed her to the Te Oranga Home. A member of the Salvation Army asked to interview the child and returned saying Clara was willing to go, but begged first to go home and fetch some blue, “abelias” and see a pretty lady who promised her a violin.

Inspector Devine said there were no such flowers as “abelias,” and he believed the “pretty lady” was a pure invention. So the child was sent to Te Oranga.

About a month after this I was visiting friends in Christchurch, and it seemed natural I should go and see my little news girl.

I called on the matron and showed the report. She was a quiet, sweet woman with a very kind face, and she looked pityingly as she told me the child was dead.

She suggested we should walk together and see the grave. There was a small cross with just the name and date.

She was a wild, imaginative child, and fretted in captivity; had lost the power of resistance and succumbed to pneumonia.

When we returned, the matron showed me a photo of the little waif. She said they always photographed children whose names were doubtful. I looked at the funny, ugly, strange face, and felt sad; then she handed me a second one—of the child’s shoulder—with a curious birthmark like a hammer. Evidence enough to identify, but what could it matter! And yet I borrowed them, and had them copied.

Some six or eight months afterwards I was staying in a country house. Visitors to lunch.

“Let me introduce Lord Brinkhampton.”

I stared long before I bowed. I had been reading “Our Manifold Nature,” and he seemed to have stepped straight out of “Eugenia.”

The same artificial complexion, flabby muscle, suggestion of some unusual scent. I felt perplexed.

After lunch he walked with me in the garden. What fatality made our talk turn on birth-marks? He told me how in England a girl of ungovernable passion, a blacksmith’s daughter, fought another village girl who had attempted to rob her of her lover. After both were nearly exhausted, the former used one of her father’s hammers with fatal effect. A heavy storm came on, she got drenched to the skin and apparently made some attempt to fly, and remained long without shelter. The result was

pneumonia, and in a month she died. In the meantime a baby was born with the distinct mark of a hammer on its shoulder.

"Poor Clara," said the repentant peer, "she wasn't a virtuous girl, but we could have spared others better."

I showed him the photograph of my little waif's shoulder. Never did I see a man blanch and lose all nerve so rapidly.

I showed him her face. There was written on the back just her name and place of burial. Then we talked of other matters.

The next time I was in Christchurch I went to the cemetery. On the little grave was a cross of faded blue lobelias; on the headstone had been added the real age of the child, and the words:—

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children."

And I suppose if I were to find out every conceivable detail, there would really be nothing more worth telling.

Was Olive trying to say something about herself? It is all pure melodramatic Victorian fiction of course: there was no such court case, no Inspector Devine (there *was* a Wellington lawyer called Devine). And no Lord Brinkhampton except in the turgid pages of *Eugenia*:

"Good Lord!" Brinkhampton ejaculated, quite forgetting himself. "If this is your modern maiden, then give me a good old-fashioned *womanly* woman, who knows nothing and cares less so long as you put her in a good position and let her have lots of money." ¹²

Sarah Grand's feminist/eugenics novellette *Eugenia* has antihero Brinkhampton as a dissolute rake and heroine Eugenia as beautiful and sexy. Freud was in Vienna developing psychoanalytic theory and he would have smiled at Grand's symbolism,

The horses, dark glossy bays with black points, were mettlesome beasts. They danced down the drive as if unaware of the slight encumbrance of the coach and its load behind them. It was a wonderful thing to see Eugenia, a slender girl, almost standing against her high seat with her feet planted firmly in front of her, controlling the four great prancing creatures

without apparent effort. One could not help calculating what the nerve-power must be behind such ease, and what the strength of the sinews which were masked by her “ivory skin”. She never looked better than on that occasion. Her riding habit, clinging close, showed the perfection of her figure. The sun was still hot, and she wore, slightly tilted back, a low-crowned white sailor hat, the roundness of which set off the delicate oval of her cheeks. Her ripe red lips were slightly parted in a smile showing the white teeth between, her eyes danced in liquid light; one could trace the course of the blue veins beneath the transparent skin, and the fresh air and exertion had brought a brilliant colour to her cheeks.¹³

The Howletts were living at “Estcourt, Tane” in 1911 and 1914.¹⁴

The *Hastings Standard* reported on 3 May 1911,

Mr. and Mrs. Howlett (Pahiatua) are the guests of Mrs. George Nelson.¹⁵

In the Napier Supreme Court in July 1911 Horace Ian Simson sued George Nelson proprietor of “The Tribune Ltd” for £3000, alleging libel. In the course of the hearing, Nelson stated that Howlett had been a guest in his house for a month or six weeks, “writing newspaper articles and enjoying himself”, but,

I found that while he was living under my roof and eating my food, he was plotting against me and had been to his lawyers and asked them whether he had not a case for damages against me through the paper in which I was a shareholder.¹⁶

That seems to have been a sideshow and the judge didn’t mention it further in his summing up so it is impossible now to understand what Howlett’s actions were about.

Olive Howlett donated three guineas to a patriotic fund hospital ship in 1915,¹⁷ but after that we know nothing of her life, except that on the 1919 electoral roll they were living together on “Main Street, Pahiatua”—he claiming “no occupation”, she “married”.

She was to die at age 41 in Porirua mental hospital on 22 April 1922, twelve years after writing her short story, written while she was reading

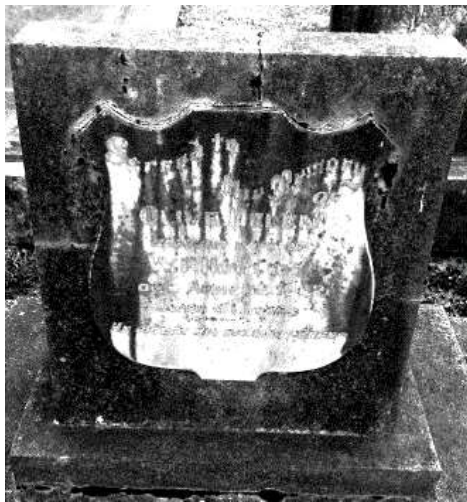
Eugenia. Dr PJ Monaghan was witness at the Coroner's inquest; he wrote that Olive was

*... committed on the 8th of Nov. 1921 by the order of two Justices of the Peace on the medical certificate of Drs HJ Dawson and H Paterson of Pahiatua. On admission she was found to be suffering from "Acute Melancholia". She has always been difficult to feed and has constantly been alternately tube-fed and spoon fed and generally maintained a resistive attitude. Consequently her condition has always remained more or less weak. On the 21st of this month (April) she caught a bad cold and died last night (22nd instant) at 12 o'clock in the presence of Nurse Fahey.*¹⁸

If, as the force feeding indicates, Olive was suffering from anorexia nervosa, perhaps we can understand why there was a common belief that Howlett had married a child of 16; why she had to be (and could easily be) carried up the Tukituki river; why the marriage was unhappy.

Perhaps it even explains why she would write a story called "The iniquities of the fathers", about an articulate, discerning but ugly waif mistreated and abandoned by her father—and why she had married a man the same age as her own father.

She was buried with her father, who had died twelve days earlier on 10 April 1922, in the Mangatainoka Pahiatua Cemetery. Olive left everything (amounting to less than £1000) to her husband.¹⁹



Olive Howlett's gravestone:
 "Sacred to the Memory of
 Olive Helen Howlett, died
 April 22 1922 aged 41 years.
 He giveth his beloved sleep."

-
- 1 *Evening Post* 6 March 1902.
 - 2 *Manawatu Standard* 7 March 1902.
 - 3 JF Findlay. W.F. Howlett pioneer Ruahine botanist. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin* 1981; 41: 35-41.
 - 4 AM Finnerty, M Skipworth, J Springer. William Frederick Howlett c1850–1915, Schoolteacher and botanist. Report for the Manawatu Group of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists 1979. Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-2012.
 - 5 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 5 March 1909.
 - 6 *Dominion* 16 March 1909.
 - 7 WF Howlett to A Hamilton 3 July 1910. Museum of NZ Te Papa MU000152/005/0087
 - 8 The *Free Lance* of 16 July 1910 reported, "Still another private dance was given this week, when Miss M. E. Richmond was the hostess at her charming house in Hobson-street. No place could be more delightful for a dance, for the drawing-room and hall, with the folding doors wide open, make an excellent ball-room, while supper was served upstairs, and everywhere the place was decorated with fragrant spring flowers."
 - 9 WF Howlett to A Hamilton 7 July 1910. Museum of NZ Te Papa Tongarewa MU000152/005/0087
 - 10 Alexander Turnbull Library 77-173-69/01.
 - 11 "The iniquities of the fathers" appeared in the *Dominion* of 17 October 1910.
 - 12 Sarah Grand. *Eugenia*. In *Our manifold nature: stories from life*. Appleton, New York, 1894.
 - 13 ditto
 - 14 1911 and 1914 electoral rolls.
 - 15 *Hastings Standard* 3 May 1911.
 - 16 *Hastings Standard* 5 July 1911.
 - 17 *Evening Post* 3 June 1915.
 - 18 NZ Archives, Wellington; ref. no. J46 Box 672, COR 1922/457.
 - 19 NZ Archives, Wellington, probate file Howlett Olive Helen (R22976299).
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CHAPTER 16: WELLINGTON c.1920–1935

Howlett had been a member of the Wellington Philosophical Society 1912–14. Stone's Directory gives his address as "Pahiatua" until 1923 and some time after that (and after Olive's death) he moved back to Wellington, whether because of his own infirmity we do not know.

On the 1928 electoral roll 78 year old William Frederick Howlett gave his address as 8 Davis St, Thorndon, Wellington. This was a private hospital built in 1905 for nurse Nina Palmer by her father. Louisa Catherine Kohn took over in 1910 and was matron until 1924.¹

When Howlett was there in 1828 it appears to have become a lodging house, under the management of a Mrs. Elsie Mary Barrett from 1926.

Howlett was to die in Wellington in 1835, some time after fracturing his femur. He was said to have been demented, but he broke his leg in

an accident on his way to a lecture at the university, suggesting his brain was still receptive then.

Mr. W. F. Howlett, who died in Wellington yesterday at the age of 85, was the only son of the Rev. William Howlett, of Torquay, England. One sister is resident in England. He married Miss Olive Helen Suisted, of Pahiatua, who died some years ago, and he was a cousin of the late Mr. H.H. Bridge, formerly of Onga Onga, Hawke's Bay. Mr. Howlett met with an accident while going to a lecture at Victoria College, and had been in hospital up till the time of his death. He was a great scholar, and when at Christchurch, Oxford, he passed three examinations at one time, an unparalleled feat. At one time he was a school teacher in Hawke's Bay.²



8 Davis St Thorndon Wellington today: a private hospital,
then perhaps a lodging house in Howlett's time.

Doris Taur Pedersen 1907–2001, of Bush Scandinavian settler stock herself, would become Deputy Director of Nursing (Public Health) at the Department of Health, Wellington. At age 72 she wrote from Napier to John F. Findlay when he was gathering information for his essay on Howlett,

Napier, 1979

Dear Mr Findlay

I received your letter today and yes I did nurse a Mr Howlett who had earlier in his life lived at Makaretu. This was in 1927 in Wellington Hospital and at that time I was a very junior nurse in training at that time.

Mr Howlett was a learned but rather eccentric old man and Ward 4 to all intents and purposes was his home at that time and as far as I know for many years. As far as I can recall Mr Howlett had few visitors but seemed content and I would think quite happy. He had earlier on fractured a femur and was not really mobile requiring assistance to get in and out of bed and so on. He occasionally talked to me about Makaretu and the Ruahines and he knew my relatives up there. However I feel sure that many nurses well remember him as a great stickler for time. For example every new nurse had written on her list—left side of ward—Bed 1, Mr Howlett—Morning tea 10am sharp, tea with two teaspoons of sugar—one slice of bread, butter and jam cut into squares which he eats with a fork. If this didn't appear at 10am he would watch the door closely, and each nurse, almost willing her to produce the goods. The same applied to getting up—going back to bed—all at a set time, but I must add that he was liked by the nurses, and the younger patients in the ward also, who were interested in him & enjoyed talking to him.

As far as I know he ended his days in Wellington Hospital and so records of his death would be in Wellington. You asked if Mr Howlett had married again. As far as I know there was no wife, in fact no real family in Wellington.

I trust this may be of help to you.

Yours sincerely

Doris T Pedersen.³

HOWLETT.—On July 14, 1935, at Wellington Hospital, William Frederick, son of the late William Howlett, Torquay, England; aged 85 years. Funeral to

leave Mortuary Chapel, 27 Wingfield Street, at 10 a.m.
Wednesday.⁴

Last name	HOWLETT
First name	WILLIAM FREDERICK
Age	85 Years
Service provided	Burial
Burial date	17/07/1935
Cemetery	Karori
Section	CH ENG2
Plot number	129 C
Record number	75383



Howlett's headstone in Karori Cemetery, Wellington.
His life an open book, with the epitaph

A LOVER OF ALL GOOD LITERATURE.



Ward 4 Wellington Hospital in 1930:
"Left side of ward—Bed 1, Mr Howlett"

His New Zealand cousins

Henry Hamilton Bridge →

sold Fairfield in 1899. He and brother Stewart applied for passports in 1904 to visit the East on their way home.⁵ The Ongaonga people presented him with a silver tea service and a scroll.⁶ In 1907 (at age 61) he married Laura Douglas⁷ (29 years younger; her father Sir Arthur Percy Douglas had been Under-Secretary for Defence in New Zealand 1894-1903).⁸ They lived at Fairfield House in Droxford, Hampshire and in 1935 (at 89, now living in London) he stated that he wished his sons should go to Cambridge University (and not Oxford);⁹ he died that year.¹⁰

Laura died in 1955, their sons in 2000 and 2002.



Mr Henry Hamilton Bridge,
15 June 1906, Alexander Bassano
(b.1829, d.1913), Collection of
Hawke's Bay Museums Trust,
Ruawhāro Tā-ū-rangi, 2938

Stewart Bridge built a 16 room house with stabling and coachhouse at Wairima in the Mangaone valley in 1896;¹¹ he sold to William Race Godfrey before returning to England in 1902 and 1904. He was a guest at a NZ High Commission event in London in 1907 and thereafter lived at May Hill House, Droxford,¹² near his brother Harry. From 1928 to 1935 he is listed as a visitor to Bath.¹³ He died in 1942. He is the dandy at right in a photograph of a gathering at "Lord Henry" Russell's (no relation to the Tūmanui Russells) Mt Herbert Station in 1876 (next page).

After spending a few years in Hawkes Bay ***Andrew Hamilton Russell*** went to Sandhurst and later returned to New Zealand attached to the 14th Regiment, but he afterwards exchanged to the 58th, his father's regiment. He married Katherine Tinsley and they farmed Tūmanui station north of Mahia peninsula¹⁴ with his brother William Russell Russell. His son was General Sir Andrew Hamilton Russell.



At Mt Herbert Station in 1876: Stewart Bridge is standing at right. Anna Spencer (back row, 3rd from right) wrote in her diary, "Thursday 17 February 1876: Started early for Mt Herbert. Frightful road. Waipukurau such a pretty village & Mt Herbert a lovely place. The picnic was a great success. Such hosts of people. The bush was delightful. We had a grand lunch and after the Circus amused us. After dusk we adjourned to the house & had a dance (band in attendance), & kept it up very late. Mrs Herrick, Miss Marshall & I slept together. They had such a number to put up.

We all enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. Such a lovely day & Lord Henry is a most agreeable host. Was introduced to Dr Ferord, Mr Stuart Bridge & a Mr Henderson."

William Russell Russell → became Leader of the Opposition to the Seddon Government 1894 to 1901. He was knighted in 1902.¹⁵

Arthur Edward Russell married missionary Henry Williams's granddaughter Ethel Williams and in 1882 they bought the property "Te Matai" between Palmerston North and Ashhurst. It is now part of the Massey University campus.

George and **Lucy Randall Johnson** (née Russell) farmed Wairakaia Station in Poverty Bay, before leaving for England about 1890. Their son Peter Randall Johnson was the first New Zealander to play County cricket in England. In keeping with his privileged upbringing, he would often turn up on match day elegantly dressed in a silk cravat, top hat and spotless morning coat.¹⁶



His journalist colleague → **Edward Alexander Haggen** first met Howlett when he was a pupil at Howlett's Dunedin Academy in 1878 or 1879. He was for a short time a reporter for the *Otago Daily Times*, at the *Wanganui Herald* during Howlett's Patea days, proprietor of the *Woodville Examiner*, *Pahiatua Star* and the Wellington paper *Evening Press* when Howlett was writing for those papers. He was outspoken, often in the courts and spent time in jail for criminal libel. He plagiarised



Wise's *Directory* to publish *Haggen's shilling almanac and directory*. When another Wellington venture, *The People* (established "to advocate protection, bimetalism, state banking, land nationalization, collectivism, and a number of other ideas too 'advanced' for the daily

press”) failed, he very suddenly left New Zealand for Canada, where he was a mining engineer, newspaper and journal editor and proprietor and a founder of the Canadian Alpine Club. He died in Vancouver, “the best-known mining engineer and publisher in British Columbia”, in 1929.

Haggen’s story will be the second in this series.

1 Thorndon Society *Newsletter* No. 160, September 2011.

2 *Evening Post* 15 July 1935.

3 Quoted by Tony Gates, *eColenso* April 2011.

4 *Evening Post* 15 July 1835.

5 NZ Archives Item No. R24846078.

6 *Woodville Examiner* 29 February 1904.

7 *Bedfordshire Mercury* 25 October 1907.

8 <http://www.douglashistory.co.uk/history/arthurdouglas3.htm>

9 *Sunderland Daily Echo & Shipping Gazette* 23 August 1935.

10 NZ Archives Item No. R23114060.

11 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 18 November 1896.

12 *Portsmouth Evening News* 17 November 1915.

13 *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 1928 to 1935.

14 Te Ara biography by Bernard John Foster, M.A., Research Officer, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington.

15 <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2r34/russell-william-russell>

16 <http://nzcricketmuseum.co.nz/peter-randall-johnson/>. The family papers are in the Alexander Turnbull Library (MS-Papers-0504).

EPILOGUE: 1. ON LIFE

OLLA PODRIDA.¹

(BY OUR MAKARETU CORRESPONDENT.)

When I touched, twice, lately on the perpetual life of nature, and said that life could not even in thought be dissociated from matter, what did I mean? Did I mean what I said? Not at all. Words are a mere literary effort to express thought. Suppose the thought is new! All these words are old; the thought, except as an esoteric doctrine, is new. Well, then, once again, what do I mean by life? I mean molecular as distinguished from molar motion. Outside my window hangs a guard or blind of heavy sacking. Inside the sacking, but outside the window, is mosquito

netting. When I wake at six I see on the netting sparkles of diamond brightness. The sun's rays, then, penetrate the sacking. But if I remove the netting and look at the sacking, I do not see the sun, nor even any holes. Our conception of light as travelling in straight lines requires considerable modification. A small pencil of parallel rays evidently can be shunted about and distorted and made to turn corners, and converted into a convergent or divergent pencil by the mere proximity of opaque non-reflective bodies. This I call line subtle molecular action. I picture the strands of sacking (ultimately of course transparent) continually throbbing internally, as the molecules must do as long as they are what we call warm, continually expanding and contracting as their temperature varies, at a rate which is profoundly influenced by hygrometric conditions, and by mechanical stresses. Upon them from a practically infinite distance rains a continual shower of waves (?) of ether (?) which somehow get through, and arouse a responding action in the netting, and all this is translated optically, and finally psychically, into the diamond sparkles. What a complicated thing it all is. The dogmatic person of daily life knows all about it. The psychic business goes on somewhere between the optic thalami and the cerebral lobes; that is life. All the rest of the affair is the interaction of brute matter. I have purposely omitted the neurosis pure and simple, as not now material. Now if you can attend a moment I will show you where the hitch is. The D.P. must define life either as the producer of consciousness or as the product of protoplasm. He can't get out of that. In the first case, he has to deny life to most animals and all plants; in the latter case he has to abandon all his legendary lore about souls and ghosts, angels and devils, gods and goddesses. "Life" as a philosophic term means motion, and in fact is outworn. As a mere literary terra it is useful enough, but its meaning varies indefinitely with the context. There is "life" in a cabbage. We mean that certain protoplasmic actions are going on. There is death in a rotten potato. Other protoplasmic actions. There is "life" in sparkling beer; in a well-cut diamond; in a child under chloroform; in a dead man's head (or how could the hair grow?); and these instances do but begin the task of illustration. The last one hints at it. When does life cease? The heart of a frog lives weeks after its removal from the body. When does life

begin? At birth? Before it? If so, how long before it? Long ago I asked a very capable anatomist, and a bit of a philosopher, too, whether Herbert Spencer's well-known definition of life would be a safe one to give in an examination. "Why not?" he queried. "Well," I said, "You know an examiner has a personal equation? Suppose my examiner was a Christian, or a Theosophist, or a Musselman, how would he like a definition that confined life to protoplasm?" He said that *of course proper caution was always safe*. Isn't it a lovely notion, making mere boys learn a definition by heart, and then as good as confess that if they let it off at a theologian he is as like as not to fly at them? The said anatomist was in front rank, and by no means unknown even out here, and as far as I could observe he considered that in ordinary life you might deny all the attributes of God separately (including existence) so long as you spell the name with a capital G. But in an examination? Well, observe caution. Fortunately at our examination we got an old stick who knew nothing but pathology, and was more interested in the presence of sugar in the liver than in the "animula, vagula, blandula." ² He had never handled a fee for sewing up rents in a wounded soul!

I foresee a question. If by "life" I mean "molecular motion," then naturally I confine it to matter. Naturally there are different kinds of life, which may (as we have never seen them in their ultimate manifestations) be supposed to graduate one into another. There is heat, light, nerve action; then the highest form is psychic action. When a fly lights on the nose of a sleeping child, and it brushes it off, neurosis, or nerve action, takes place. Similarly if you take a frog's heart (and throw the frog away) you can, by simply keeping it clean, maintain the action of the heart for weeks. This again is neurosis. It goes on better when psychosis is not involved. It can be observed in low animal forms where psychosis has never even been suspected. It is not limited in its scope to mere struggles or flaps. A somnambulist will do nearly as much asleep as awake. What then is psychosis? It is our word for whatever goes on when we are conscious of mental action. The commonest and readiest test of consciousness is memory. When a person puts sugar in his tea, if he does so consciously, psychic action goes on. Often, having

put it in, he does not remember it. That means that he never was aware of it. He acted automatically, and no psychic action was involved. Is there any *a priori* reason why we should not be born, earn our living, reproduce our species, and die, all without consciousness? None that I can see. Has this psychic action any centre in the brain? I do not know. Are animals conscious? No one can tell. Are manifestations of pain, such as sobs, cries, and struggles, any evidence of consciousness? Certainly not. They occur under chloroform. Does it not seem, then (this is the question I foresaw), that consciousness is a function of something different from matter? Of a something that during our "life" is geared on to the nervous system at pleasure—though not geared off so easily—but after "death" may survive, capable no longer of translating neurosis, but of psychic action alone? Certainly it does. The hypothesis is an old one, and there is only one objection to it. This objection is, that invariably experience tells us that thought never existed apart from that peculiar combination of fat and phosphorus which we call brain. If you told me that at the South Pole water was always purple, and much lighter than air, I should say, Who has seen it? So if you say life (the highest form, namely, consciousness) can exist apart from the brain, I simply say, Show it me. Spiritualists say they are continually talking to people long dead. They believe that the conversations are genuine, and not mere day dreams projected out of their own crazy imaginations. As far as I can see, they are right in believing in the supernatural. They have evidence. But I have none. No ghost of any departed ancestor ever talks to me. Sometimes some companion who has never learned to use words precisely, or to reason closely, asks me, "Who made the world?" How should I know? I do not know about infinity either in space, or in time, or heat, or magnitude, or in any other form. I cannot conceive a time when nothing was; nor can I conceive past eternity. Suppose the world made by X, then who made X? "Well, you see," says my companion, "I guess X was there all the time." "Ah, but if I had known you were going to say that," I reply, "I might as well have said the world was there all the time." Creeds arise and die. They used, that is, to die. Now they change insensibly. Their votaries generally persecute their opponents and call them opprobrious names, because they cannot appeal to logic or reason. Science

has been with us always. She goes on serenely from one conquest to another, never persecuting those who do not believe her. Why? Because she believes what she teaches, not on account of its beauty or desirability, but on account of its truth. If a man tells me that red, blue, and yellow are the three primary colors, I do not lust to injure him. I may think him an ass, but I merely say, "My dear sir, I doubt if you know what has been done in this matter, when you have read the subject up I will argue with you." But if I tell a Spaniard that I don't believe his priest can take souls out of purgatory at three for a shilling, he gets excited, and longs to burn me. If he were to say quietly "Oh, it's all right, the books are audited, and we know exactly how the money is spent, and the proofs are accessible to those who choose to read," I should begin to think there might be some truth in it. The reason, then, why I doubt the existence of any life above and apart from man's ordinary live life, is that I have no proof of it. Such doubt is similar to the doubt of the existence of the Moa. If you showed me a live Moa, I should quite simply acknowledge my error. So I wait, until someone can produce me evidence of thought apart from matter. When it is produced I shall believe. No rational dweller in a tropical climate believed in ice until evidence was produced. It is quite probable that our ancestors (arboreal, living in hot climates) heard crazy tales of solid water, and rightly disbelieved them. Their disbelief was scientific, and quite proper. Directly they migrated north, and saw ice, they believed in it, and their reports were believed by their friends. The scientific world at present is in exactly the same state about spirits, ghosts, or whatever you, may call them. Belief is withheld until proof is produced.

1 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 25 January 1890.

2 Hadrian's farewell: "Little soul, gentle and drifting" in Marguerite Yourcenar's translation.

EPILOGUE: 2. ON THE BALANCE

On 27 August 1894 “William Cowper Robison, Farmer, and William F Howlett, Gentleman, both of Makaretu” declared to the Patents Office that they had invented “Improvements in apparatus for accurate weighing,” and prayed that a Patent might be granted to them for the said invention, as described in the specification herewith.”

Our invention relates to an improved apparatus for accurately weighing the ingredients of mixtures such as occur in chemical analysis, medicinal prescriptions, mixtures of seeds and the like, and also minute quantities of matter.

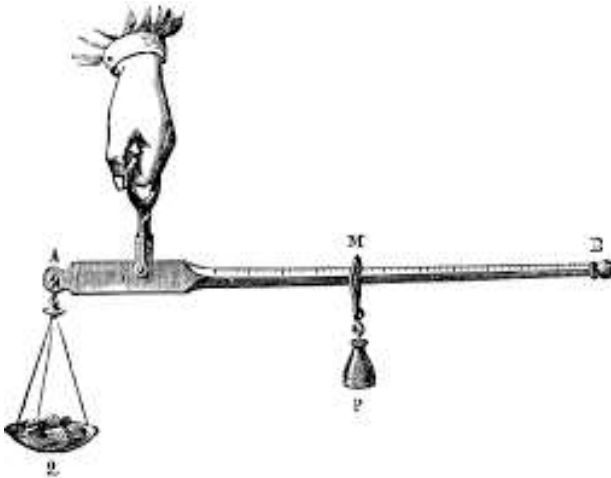
The objects of our invention are to perform these operations with greater accuracy, speed and facility without waste of material; to dispense with the usual variety of weights and calculations necessary in such operations when the ordinary scales are made use of; and to accurately and rapidly weigh a decimal part of any desired standard weight without the use of a number of various weights whether standard or otherwise; also to dispense with the use of standard weights if desired.

In carrying our invention into effect we prefer to make use of a steel yard or lever of the first order accurately made and fitted so as to oscillate upon a pivot or fulcrum dividing the lever into a long and short arm; the said arms being so adjusted by suitable means that the longer arm accurately balances the shorter arm plus the pan and its attachments.

In the most simple form of our apparatus we hang a pan on to the short arm of the lever at any convenient distance from the fulcrum. The longer arm on which the calculations are read is divided into equal divisions of such a size as may be suitable for the operation for which the apparatus is required, and on this arm is fitted a receptacle capable of hanging from and sliding upon the said arm and of being accurately placed upon any of its divisions.

When it is desired to form a mixture of ingredients of varying quantities having different weights, say a prescription of which the total number of parts is 48 and which is composed of four

ingredients, say in the proportion by weight of 10-11-12 & 15, we first place the receptacle which is fitted upon the longer arm of the lever accurately upon the number 48 on the mid lever.



A steelyard balance

We then place in the pan which is hung on the shorter arm a standard weight representing the total weight of the desired mixture; we then carefully place in the receptacle on the longer arm a load composed of a liquid, sand, fine shot or any suitable material, which load is of such a weight that when placed on the division 48 it exactly balances the weight in the pan on the shorter arm. We then remove the weight from the pan on the shorter arm taking care to support and steady the longer arm and its weight by suitable means. Now it will be evident that if one ingredient be placed in the empty pan on the shorter arm, say representing the No. 10, and be balanced therein by moving the receptacle on the longer arm from 48 to 10; on moving the said pan to the division 21 it will balance the two ingredients composed of 10 & 11; on moving the receptacle to 33 it will balance the ingredients 10, 11 & 12, and on moving it to 48 it

will balance the desired mixture which will then occupy the said pan.

If it be desired to remove each ingredient separately when weighed and afterwards mix them together it is only necessary to weigh each ingredient in the pan with the receptacle on Nos. 10, 11, 12 & 15 respectively removing the material separately and afterwards add them together to make the mixture 48.

We have heretofore described a method of using weights in the pan of the shorter arm to represent the total weight by which to gauge the weight on the longer arm, but another important part of our invention consists in graduating the smaller arm and fitting to it sliding and movable weight fitted with a pointer by which to indicate its position and by these means any weight may be indicated on the shorter arm by means of this weighted pointer only, and which weighted pointer can be removed at pleasure with as great facility as the weight and the pan hereinbefore described. By this arrangement the necessity of keeping a series of weights of different descriptions is dispensed with and a great cause of errors removed.

Another part of our invention refers to a ready means of weighing minute portions or decimal parts of substances which we accomplish in the following manner:— the scale on the longer arm commencing with zero at the pivot being divided into not less than a hundred parts a standard weight may be placed in the pan on the short arm or a weighted pointer may be caused to mark on the shorter arm the desired weight to be to be dissected; we then place a wait upon the point 100 which shall be so adjusted that it will exactly counterbalance the standard or desired weight in the pan.

It will be apparent that upon the adjustable weight being moved to any point between 100 and zero it will at that point counterbalance that decimal part of the standard weight originally placed in the pan.

It will be obvious that some other arrangements of weighing apparatus may be made use of for our purpose besides the ordinary simple form of steel yard, and moreover that the apparatus described may be used as an ordinary steelyard when desired if a suitable scale of measurements is indicated on the

longer arm. In some cases a fixed scale may be placed parallel to the longer arm of the lever and graduated in a similar manner to the said arm, and fitted with suitable indicators or pointers, by which means the proportions of a mixture may be indicated thereon before weighing and the operation facilitated.

We find the most convenient form of weight for our purpose to be ordinary metal shot, the small size being composed of that which is commonly called dust shot, and for the greater convenience of separating these when mixed together we make use of a particular form of seive attached to our apparatus.

In some cases we make use of hollowed weight pans fitting into the ordinary pan in order to substitute their weight for a corresponding weight of the substance to be weighed, thereby obviating the necessity of handling an inconveniently large amount of any scarce or valuable substance.

It was signed by Henry Hughes, Fellow of the Auckland Institute of Patent Attorneys, agent for the applicants.

EPILOGUE: 3. AFTER THOUGHTS

Nobody now alive knew him; there are no living descendants to treasure his possessions; he left no diary; there are no known letters of any intimacy, no ephemera, no record of caring or tenderness. Just the public record in newspapers, with the inescapable inference of careful selection of material fit for public scrutiny. We don't even know what his friends called him.

This is therefore a biography derived largely from that public record. The reports *about* Howlett will therefore emphasise that which was considered newsworthy, then as now the prurient, the exciting, the eye-catching, the notable.

Yet the writing *by* Howlett exposes his intelligence, his sensitivity, ideas and opinions with unusually illuminating familiarity. No doubt he said no more than he meant to but he was a frank, honest and self-revealing man who wrote literate and clear prose of articulate and sometimes startling candour.

Was he New Zealand's Thoreau? Perhaps in a minor way. Howlett had certainly read Thoreau—"a dear brother penman, now alas gone over to the great majority, who lived alone by the crystal waters of beautiful Walden." Each was from a wealthy family, each a university graduate—sufficiently equipped to insulate them against failed experiments in solitude, to aid them in the observation of nature, essay writing, ideas on environmentalism, realism. Each wanted to improve government: Thoreau advocated civil disobedience, Howlett repeatedly exposed the shortcomings of public servants. Both were progressive schoolteachers who taught children about nature. Each wrote largely in direct, active anglo-saxon English.

On the other hand Thoreau wrote against corporal punishment but Howlett was all for it. Thoreau was ascetic and Howlett hedonic. Thoreau a mystic, Howlett a pragmatist.

Howlett may have received remittances from England, but he made a living as a teacher, journalist, seller of native plants and seeds, from commissions on land sales and probably profits from land speculation. He sought clients to take to the Ruahine but there is no record of payment for mountain accommodation and guiding. He professed atheism, but wrote as an agnostic and sometimes attended church.

His life was essentially rooted in the local. After his initial forays into Nelson and Dunedin and before his final years in Wellington he spent his life in The Bush—the Seventy Mile Bush—in central Hawke's Bay and northern Wairarapa.

Perhaps he was naïve—too direct, too quixotic, too iconoclastic ("it is my peculiar task to ferret out abuses, abolish incompetent officials, and deny all received opinions"), too pleasure seeking ("I recognise nothing but hedonism pure & simple.... 'Ought' is to me... meaningless...."), too opinionated, too eccentric: out of touch with the real world. Perhaps he wore his privilege and his education too proudly on his sleeve.

As a satirist his writing is clever, but satire easily gives offence and he upset many, his irony too pointed—or too subtle—for his audience. He always headed his “Anecdota” column with this boast,

You have an immense fault which will close all doors against you: you cannot converse for two minutes with a fool without showing him that he is one.¹

Perhaps he flitted to much—from issue to issue, leaving serious matters unfinished, or, as often, worrying trivial issues to death. Many years later he would write,

*My “subjects” are generally “out of the way”. As a boy, I could always get at the heart of a thing, and it amused me, and then I dropped it & took up another.*²

He wrote of himself as an “unrestrainable dreamer of dreams” and as “fitful and eccentric”—though others described him as “honest and clever but eccentric to a fault”. He compared himself to “William the Bastard”.

But take the Victorian subject matter out of the writing and read between the lines and you find a man troubled by concerns similar to many we ponder today.

... the purely local gossip is really of no interest, while about once in three months I manage half a column or so of matter which, properly read, has a wider significance than lies on the surface.³

In the end, as William Carlos Williams wrote,

That is the poet’s business. Not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly [and] in the particular to discover the universal. John Dewey had said (I discovered it quite by chance), “The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds.”⁴

I cannot speak highly enough of “Papers Past”. Howlett often wrote for minor local papers though, and *Patea Evening News*, *Pahiatua Star*, *Pahiatua Herald*, *Waipawa Mail*, *Napier Evening News & Hawke’s Bay Advertiser* and *Hawke’s Bay Weekly Courier* are not yet included. Nor is the Wellington *Evening Press*. Perhaps they do not exist.

Miss AM Finnerty, Mrs M Skipworth and Mrs J Springer of the Manawatu Group of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists compiled a biographical report on Howlett in 1979,⁵ noting that they had been able to talk with people who had known him.

They were not able to check their conclusions on his English background. Easier online access to records held in the UK has clarified those events to some extent. “British Newspaper Archives” and other websites accessible at the Alexander Turnbull Library filled in most of the “new” material from England.

I cannot confirm a number of their observations.

1. He is said to have written a poem *Coronation Day* in connection with the death of a child, Dorothy Drake, at Otaki. The girl was tied to a fence, thrashed by her mother and sisters and died of her wounds in June 1902.⁶ Mrs Drake’s Wellington Supreme Court trial began in August. Edward VII’s coronation was delayed from 26 June till 9 August 1902 because of his appendicitis. The corporal punishment of children was a theme Howlett had written about at some length. Perhaps he did write verses to mark the child’s death in June or the mother’s trial in August, but if so they do not appear to have been published and are now lost.⁷
2. Finnerty and colleagues wrote that Howlett “was very good at pencil sketching” but he wrote to Miss Richardson, “I always wish I could draw,” and no drawings are now known.
3. There was said to be a permanent spring (Finnerty) or a tarn (Findlay) near the Daphne hut, but Howlett wrote, “... Camp Daphne.... Here a little hut nestles peacefully in a slight depression of the ridge, and a more delightful spot could scarcely be imagined.... The only drawback to this place is the want of water.” The tarn is said to have disappeared in the Napier earthquake of 1931, but perhaps it was never there.

Subsequent essayists have relied heavily on the Finnerty report. Some have added new material, importantly,

1. John F. Findlay 1981. W.F. Howlett Pioneer Ruahine Botanist. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin*, 41: 35-41;
2. Anonymous 1981. Howlett—the man. *Pohokura Bulletin* No. 147, April.

3. Kay Morris Matthews 1984. Henry Hill—Frontier Inspector. M.Ed. thesis, University of Waikato.
4. Nell Hartley 1993. In the classroom: Watkins, Howlett and Harris. In *Colonial outcasts—a search for the remittance men*. Arrow.
5. Rollo Arnold 1994. The “Our Own Correspondents”. In *New Zealand’s burning—the settlers’ world in the mid 1880s*. Victoria University Press. pp223–225.
6. Tony Gates 2011. Following the footsteps of William Colenso: William Howlett: dedicated Ruahine explorer / botanist / hut builder, teacher, store keeper, journalist, and Commission Agent. *eColenso*: 2 [4]: 14–18.

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This brief memoir only samples Howlett’s writing, highlighting a few pieces. He meant it to be ephemeral and would be surprised to find someone taking notice a century later.

William Frederick Howlett, eccentric iconoclast, was a literate satirist, a productive journalist, an innovative educator, a competent naturalist and a pioneer New Zealand alpine guide—not to forget occasional inventor and merry maker of fireworks.

1 Emil Zola *Thérèse Raquin*, 1867.

2 Howlett to the Director, Dominion Museum, 28 November 1913. Te Papa MU000095/016/0084.

3 *Hawke’s Bay Herald* 10 October 1885.

4 William Carlos Williams. “The poem Paterson” in *Autobiography*. New Directions, NY.

5 Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-2012.

6 *Evening Post* 14 August 1902.

7 “Coronation Day, 26th June 1902: ode” was, however, written by the Australian poet James Inglis (pen name “Maori” as he had spent years in New Zealand).