

THE WAIKATO DELTA . . .

mutu. (Hochstetter's description of the Te Awamutu agriculture was given in a previous article in this series, "Subsistence Farming.") A year or two afterward Morgan was swept away in the turmoil of intrigue which developed into the Waikato War, and nothing remained of his work except the clover plants and the peach trees which he had propagated throughout his district. He used to carry a saddlebag filled with clover seed and pierced with a hole through which the seed trickled as he rode (3). The prevalence of red clover in the Waikato led to its adoption as a staple fodder crop by the first European settlers. The Waikato also became noted for its groves of wild peach trees, but these were destroyed after 1880 by an epidemic of leaf curl and die back.

As a result of the war of 1863-64 the delta region changed hands, being mostly divided out among the military according to the promise of the Government during the recruiting campaign. "The acquisition of the valley of the Waikato was a great thing done," said Anthony Trollope, the English novelist, who came round in 1872. "The Natives, by the Treaty of Waitangi, had been declared to be the owners of the land, and the difficulty in buying land from them was great. There was trouble in getting it from them unfairly—more trouble in getting it fairly. But acquisition by war settled all this." Trollope's summing-up is mercifully realistic and covers a multitude of sins.

The fruits of victory proved to be generally disappointing. The amount of good land acquired by confiscation was found to be very small. The Arawas got their land back as a reward for changing their allegiance

from the Maori king movement to Queen Victoria, but it was not fit for agriculture. Nor was the rest much better. Andrew Kay, a Scottish storekeeper of the period, wrote that "the flat country land round Cambridge had a hungry look in 1864, being covered with short, stunted fern, and was generally considered barren and worthless.

"One fine spring morning William Buckland called all hands to a spot in front of the National Hotel, just about where the War Memorial now stands. He had discovered a solitary plant of clover. It looked quite healthy and was much admired. This find helped to instil some confidence in the district." Nevertheless, "of the eleven hundred emigrants who came to Cambridge in 1864, there were only fourteen actually on the land at the end of three years" (4).

Anthony Trollope found in 1872 that the delta region had been completely transformed. "The military settlers have not generally succeeded as farmers in New Zealand," he wrote, "but the general process has been successful. After a short period of occupation the old soldiers were enabled to sell their lands, and have very generally done so. The purchasers have gone upon it with true colonising intentions, and now the upper part of the Lower Waikato, and the valley of the Waipa which runs into it, the districts around the new towns of Cambridge, Alexandra (Pirongia), Hamilton, and Newcastle (Ngaruahia) are smiling with English grasses" (5).

Farming Development

For some years after the victory over the Maoris there was a state of

tension in the Auckland Province, and military outposts were maintained at Cambridge, Kihikihi, and Pirongia. The few small settlers who did not sell their land were those who succeeded in obtaining Government contracts for the supply of chaff, potatoes, meat, etc., to the armed constabulary. But the remnant of the Waikato Maoris, who had found sanctuary with the Ngatimaniapoto tribe in the King Country, did not venture outside the confiscation boundary, though they remained sullen and hostile and not only prevented the erection of telegraph poles on their territory, but actually shot a surveyor who was engaged on that work. So the colonists were able "to assume the power of conquerors," as Trollope put it, and use the land as they thought fit.

Two influences guided the development of the Waikato—the farming influence and the speculative influence. After the military settlers sold out, their holdings were largely aggregated by the new owners into grazing properties of 250 to 1000 acres divided by post-and-rail fences into large paddocks on which sheep and cattle were fattened. The aim of the owners was gradually to introduce the English system of mixed arable farming, but what spoiled their aim as much as anything was the fact that the available farm labourers were of a type which had left England to escape from that system.

Twelve years after the war the editor of the "Waikato Times" remarked that the large majority of settlers followed the rough-and-ready colonial system where grass, sheep, and cattle were the rule, and the crop, whether root or cereal, the exceptional departure. "As a matter of safe speculation," he went on, "it is far more profitable for a man to buy five hundred acres, even though he can only roughly work a hundred, and wait till the increased value of the whole enables him to sell out at a profit, than, instead of buying the extra four hundred acres, to apply the capital to the thorough working of the farm . . . Those settlers who have made money have made it from the sale not of produce but of the land itself." The following year (1878) he referred to the sale of 260 acres between Hamilton and Cambridge at £15 an acre, and added that "everywhere throughout the district land whether improved or unimproved is on the rise, and what four or five years ago could have been purchased for £2 to £4 cannot now be obtained for less than treble the money. . . . there is good reason to believe that . . . land has a far higher price to go before it reaches anything like a fixed standard of value. . . . The soil has met its liabilities fourfold" (6). That last remark was straight-out propaganda in favour of specula-



Waikato Delta showing the area at the junction of the Waikato and Waipa Rivers; after map drawn by Colonel Mould, R. E., from Military Surveys, 1864.