

WILLIAM FOX IN WESTLAND

The naming of the Fox Glacier

Few premiers have had time or talent to paint during a political walk-about. The Fox paintings of Westland some of which are now held by the Library are all the more interesting because of the hazards of his tour: trial by floods of water; trial by floods of words. Fox's original exploration of part of the Buller watershed in February 1846 with Thomas Brunner, Charles Heaphy, and the Maori guide Kehu, had exciting incidents. Fox nearly drowned¹; his visit in February 1872 was also somewhat aquatic. And the words incidental to that visit amounted to a fluid mass of some weight and bombast.²

As citizen John Cross of Hokitika expressed it on 5 February 'He [Fox] comes here as the chief of a Government whose policy has ruined Westland... Mr Fox and his arch-plotter, Mr Vogel, have despoiled us all.' In thus asking for Fox to be confronted with the wrongs and the requirements of Westland, citizen Cross was spelling out the word welcome as a synonym for accusation.³ Other correspondents rushed into print in the manner of boys leaping over a fence when they hear a dogfight in the street. *Vulpecula* wrote 'In common decency then, and in the name of hospitality, let our bore be muzzled this time, and though in all meekness bearing it ourselves, let not our guest be asked to bear our Cross.⁴ *Publicola*, too, was anti-Cross and anti 'the presentation of flatulent addresses' and claimed 'Mr Fox is visiting the West Coast in order to make himself acquainted with its condition and prospects... the less we molest Mr Fox during his visit the better...'.⁵

Meantime, at Westport on 6 February, a deputation waited on Fox and asked for a dray road to connect the Buller and the Grey. A sub-editor invented a new knowledge, that of 'Cross-Ology' and *Vulpecula* was again rude about Cross and his verses.⁶ Cross, of course was indignant, and, under 'Cross Purposes', pointed out that his writings had been approved of by four Colonial Governors.⁷ On 9 February Greymouth suffered a flood described as one of its worst ever.⁸ And four days later a correspondent *Citizen* wrote against any deputation 'hastily got up'.⁹

Fox and his party arrived in Greymouth on 13 February: 'He has abandoned his intended overland trip, as all the roads and bridges are washed away' but the Hokitika Borough Council discussed 'the expediency of arranging for a deputation to wait upon the Premier'.¹⁰

Telegrams from Fox to the Hon William Gisborne, Colonial Secretary, featured trial by flood and the need for a road from the Buller to the Grey. On 23 February, Fox telegraphed: 'I have made the inland journey from Greymouth — visiting Reefs inspected Road lines etc — I think the reefs will prove a great fact.... The present population ...