

BURROWS AND HEKE'S WAR

On the face of it, a slim book with the cumbrous title of *Extracts from a Diary kept by the Reverend R. Burrows during Heke's War in the North in 1845* is one of the most useful sources of contemporary information about the early stages of the first clash of arms between British forces and Maori warriors. It is unique in providing what appears to be a contemporary record of the shadow fighting which broke out between Heke's and Nene's allies and followers before British forces attacked Heke at Puketutu on 9 May 1845, and continued until Heke was wounded and put out of action on 12 June. Maning's version of this contest, in his *War in the North*, is more colourful but lacks the precision of a journal entered up day by day. The view which Burrows had of the war as a whole was limited and in many respects prejudiced, as were also the accounts of other contemporary writers, including the military. No one however was in a better position to describe the events as seen locally than the cleric appointed to take charge of the Waimate Mission Station after Bishop Selwyn's departure for Auckland in November 1844, who was in constant touch with Heke himself as well as providing, unwillingly, a base for Despard's assault on Ohaeawai towards the end of June 1845. His journal is indeed a mine of detailed information. It tells, for instance, that Heke used the term *kupapa* (meaning a neutral, or fence-sitter) twenty years earlier than it has otherwise been recorded; it describes how a party of Heke's followers dragged two small cannon out of the Waimate mill-pond (where they had been hidden by a settler) for use against the British; it records that Colonel Despard, when Nene offered his support, insulted him with the reply, 'When I want the help of savages, I will ask for it' — a reply which the interpreter managed to avoid translating.¹

Burrows published the *Extracts from a Diary* in 1886. In the preface he wrote: 'Some years before the late Sir William Martin left New Zealand, he did me the honour to read the Diary, extracts from which are embodied in the following pages; and he advised me not to allow the manuscript to be lost, as it contained what might form a chapter in a future history of New Zealand.... Although I have allowed many years to pass away since these suggestions were made, I always had such implicit confidence in Sir William Martin's judgement, that I all along intended some day to act upon his advice. Having been confined to my home for the last month, I have employed my time in putting together what follows.' The book opens with a brief introduction recounting (not entirely accurately) some of the circumstances which led up to the war, and this section concludes with the statement: 'My journal dates from March 3 1845, from which time I kept a tolerably correct, and on some days a very full, account of events as they transpired. The follow-