

Kerry-Nicholls, meanwhile, outwardly polite and unruffled, was still trying to be helpful. On the same day as his publishers put up their proposition he sent off a lengthy four-page letter about the probability of gold and coal discoveries in the King Country and Kaimanawa ranges. As an earnest of his wish to give every possible assistance he sent 155 copies of the map published with his Geographical Society paper on which he had lithographed encouraging information about where exactly prospectors should search. The maps could prove useful to prospecting parties and to committees in the towns from which they set out. He was sure that extensive deposits of gold would be found in Kaimanawa.

If, as implied earlier, it is difficult to accept that he did not find out something of the work of his predecessors in exploration and survey before printing the first edition of *The King Country* the innocent disingenuousness of his action is at first quite staggering. Fourteen years before Kerry-Nicholls made his 'Kaimanawa' camp at Mamoenui on the Mangaio stream, not far from the present Desert Road, and completed his assessment from a hill a few hundred feet higher, as many as eight parties at one time had been in the heart of the range for months at a time. James Hector, director of the Geological Survey and by then no mean traveller, again fourteen years before in 1869, had climbed Umukarikari and inspected the Wanganui El Dorado, Bracken's Reef. Nicholls probably never met him as he perhaps had never spoken to any of the numerous old diggers from Wanganui and Hawke's Bay who made up the central North Island prospecting parties at this time. True, it was only when he was leaving New Zealand that reluctant permission was being given to these men to enter the King Country around which they had been poised for some time. His well-meaning hints about gold being found east of Taumarunui in the head of the Pungapunga was by February 1886 about as valuable to the twenty or so men who had glided through it 20 months before as telling them to suck eggs.³⁸

At home, he continued to develop his role as the leading English authority on the thermal regions, his London address for the few years remaining to him being 5, Suffolk Place, by a minor quirk of history just across the road from the Haymarket where the New Zealand House of the future was to rise eighty years later. In January 1887, six months after the Tarawera eruption he addressed the Foreign and Colonial section of the Society of Arts on the event.³⁹ In July 1887, with his last known letter so far traced, he sent to Bates of the Royal Geographical Society a copy of the *British-Australasian* in which was published a poetic effusion *Australia's ode to the Queen*.⁴⁰ He may have been no more entitled to speak for Australia than for New Zealand but his request to Bates to