

Fire In Kaiapoi 1859

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The strong north-west winds of last week were the cause of a fearful destruction of property at Kaiapoi, the whole of the valuable bush known as the "Native Bush," having been destroyed by fire, as well as a large portion of the Church Bush; in addition to which, nearly all the houses in and near the bush have been destroyed, as well as both of the Maori pahs, and an immense quantity of sawn and split timber. The fire commenced on Wednesday, at the northeast end of the bush—in what manner has not; been clearly ascertained—and by Thursday morning had burnt right through the bush to the south-west end. At this time the wind increased to a perfect storm, and the fire appeared to leap at one bound a distance of nearly a mile, to the Maori pah nearest to Kaiapoi. Five, houses were instantly in flames, and speedily reduced to ashes, -with nearly all they contained at the same time the hush and homestead belonging to Mr. Harrison, one of our earliest settlers, was ignited, and the whole speedily consumed. Several very large stacks of timber and firewood lying on the banks of the river at the head of the navigation were also destroyed. On Friday the wind veer.cd to the southward for a few hours, and drove the fire through the remaining portion of the bush lying towards Wood-end. A more sad picture of desolation than is presented by the scene of this disaster can scarcely be conceived. What was a few days ago one of the most attractive and pleasing districts on the plains, is now a charred and blackened waste. But the most distressing sight is to see the number of hard-working, industrious men, with their families, reduced to a state of destitution, without a roof to cover them. A surprising number of bush houses had sprung up lately, many of them tenanted by large families but the sites of those houses can now be discovered only by an occasional heap of iron utensils, or tools, or perhaps some slight signs of a chimney; all else has disappeared. Two children had been put into a canoe, and had drifted down the river; but even the water was not a safe refuge, for at one spot might be seen a canoe which had been burnt to the water's edge. Some commiseration has been expressed for the Maoris who have lost their houses and whares, as well an their bush; but they seem quite happy—the usual remark from them being "Oh! now we sell bush to white man, and we go away to Port Levy, or somewhere else!" And really this seems the best thing that can be done for it the white man's energy be not at once employed in sawing up the scorched trees which are loft standing, in a few months' time they will be utterly worthless. Amongst so many sufferers it is difficult to distinguish particular cases, but I cannot help mentioning a few whose losses have come under my own observation—such as Mr Harrison, whose beautiful and well known bush property, together with large stores of timber are destroyed, the three Heywood brothers, who had accumulated a great quantity of timber, all of which is gone, as well as their household goods also Mr. A. Weston, who had large stacks of firewood burnt; Bryan, Horrell, Mayhew, Waring, and others, who have all suffered severely.

Two or three of the bullock drivers had barely time to unhitch, their bullocks from the drays and leave them to take care of themselves. Whilst the fire was thus raging in the Maori bush, the sparks were carried by the gale over 30 chains of cultivated land to Harrison's bush, which instantaneously ignited. In this bush there were upwards of 50,000 feet of sawn timber, in two stacks, besides a large quantity of slabs, all lying, close to one sawpit.