

On their return home they found that they had had visitors. "... a party of natives had coolly [sic] made themselves at home at our house, they had bought a load of potatoes maize kumeras etc to sell us – their impudence passes all description, they exchanged their dirty blankets for our clothes and rigged themselves from head to foot cutting the most grotesque figures imaginable. We found nothing Missing, honesty being a great trait in the character of the natives – But they out of curiosity, ransacked the house. When we purchased their produce we had occasion for a sixpence to give them change, the natives coolly told us there was one in my brothers old coat pocket!" The brothers nevertheless were greatly indebted to the Maoris for supplies, labour and general advice although they cavilled at the cost.

Maungatapere sported a large pigeon population in 1858. "In fine weather we go pigeon shooting – and have these birds every day at our meals – the natives are very expert shooting them . . . [and] will not infrequently shoot one hundred of them in a day – One native called at our house with an immense swag of them . . . and asked for some kai kai . . ."

But despite the compensation of cheap food Robert's doubts about the success of the enterprise deepened. In early September he recorded that John's expectations were "confined . . . to raising pigs and curing pork for the Melbourne Markets – I am much afraid his sanguine expectations will not be accomplished – It is plain a large Capital is required to work the farm to make it pay at all, which we have not got." He continued to note that "besides a catalogue of the most incredible difficulties we have to contend with" a runaway soldier was threatening the lives of settlers in Whangarei and the countryside. As the house was nearly finished a week's incessant rain gave them the opportunity to begin making tables, stools, a carpenter's bench and "a large granary". And the spring planting was unpropitious – "Cultivating maize, but the swarms of bush rats eat every grain that was planted the same night. very vexatious." Hence the final decision for Robert at least was not long deferred.

"Taking a general view of this farming Concern, I was convinced all our labour would be lost, My brother had up to this time expended his whole funds with the exception of two or three pounds, and I see no prospect of a penny being returned for a long time yet. The fact is the land is too far from a market, and there is no prospect of any roads being made for many years to come . . . I considered I was spending time and labour to no purpose and resolved much against my brothers wishes to return to Auckland to try and get employment."

So on the morning of 15 November 1858 Robert left the farm "with feelings much the same as when I left Richmond for Wellington three years ago. I had a swag of about 50 lbs containing all my worldly