



WEBSTER *and* BOYD

By R. M. BURDON

itinerant
republicans

JOHN WEBSTER, namesake only of William whose dealings in land were the subject of a previous article in this series, was born in Montrose, Scotland, in the year 1818. Intending that he should make business his career, his parents sent him to work in a mercantile office in Glasgow at the age of fifteen. Webster stood it for five years, at the end of which time he made his escape to Australia. With a dislike of permanent occupations, he preferred to wander about the world as circumstances decreed or opportunity offered and to engage recklessly in any activity that presented itself, without always caring to estimate the consequences. In the Pacific, during the early part of last century, there was no lack of opportunity for a man with such tendencies, and more than once Webster found himself engaged in strange adventures.

After spending a few years in New South Wales he went to New Zealand and joined his brother. When Heke's war broke out in 1845 he joined the Maori Auxiliary forces under Waka Nene, and fought as a volunteer until the close of the war. Finding himself at a loose end during the unsettled period that followed the making of peace, he went to sea and began trading with the Natives in the employ of Brown and Campbell. At this stage in his life no occupation seems to have held his interest

for long, and in 1850 we find him sailing for San Francisco as a supercargo in the barque "Noble." While there, he renewed acquaintance with one, Benjamin Boyd, whom he had met previously in New Zealand.

Boyd was a man considerably older than Webster, who had come to Sydney in the early "forties" after a career on the London Stock Exchange. In Australia his commercial ventures had been widely spread and on a vast scale. He had founded not only a bank, but also two townships named East Boyd and Boydtown, financed a whaling fleet, and bought several large sheep stations. It was said that his ambition was the possession of a million sheep. A contemporary writer describes him as "a fair specimen of the haughty, gentlemanly, selfish class he represented" who, when "he had been only eighteen months in the colony, employed two hundred shepherds and stockmen besides artificers . . . A man with an apparently unlimited capital, an imposing personal appearance, fluent oratory, and a fair share of commercial acuteness acquired on the Stock Exchange, at once and deservedly placed him at the head of the squatocracy . . . He was chief of the 10,000 sheepmen with whom he combined to obtain fixity of tenure for their sheep pastures, to put down small settlers, and to reduce wages."