

THE MERCER REGATTA.

SPORTS ON THE WAIKATO.

Patron - Mr F. W. Lang, M.H.R. President - Mahuta. Executive Committee - Messrs M. Gallen, C. T. Edwards, T. E. Hallett, S. Hunter, H. Hodge, D. C. Shethell, Ngawharau, Poutapu, W. Maki, and P. Maxwell. Judge of Canoe Races - Mr D. Shethell. Judge of Rowing Races - Mr Walter Jones. Starter and Umpire of Canoe Races: Mr M. Gallen. Starter and Umpire of Rowing Races - Mr F. W. Lang. Hon. Sec. and Treasurer - Mr C. T. Edwards.

The Mercer annual regatta, which has been so popular in past years, and which was revived successfully last year, was again held on the waters of the Waikato River on Saturday afternoon last, and proved a most successful and enjoyable affair. The weather was beautiful, and a great number of visitors, chiefly from country districts on the Waikato, gathered on the banks of the river at Mercer (or 'Te Paina,' as the Maoris call it) to witness the native canoe races and the European rowing contests. No more suitable place for sports of this kind could be found than the smooth waters of the wide flowing Waikato at Mercer, and the banks near the township afforded the spectators an excellent view of the races, while many of the visitors crossed over by the steam-launch Irene to the pretty wooded island of Tuoro, opposite the village, and enjoyed themselves in picnic fashion. The railway arrangements were very satisfactory and were under the personal supervision of Mr A. Grant, the District Manager of the railways. Financially, as well as in other ways, the regatta was attended with success, and great credit is due to Mr C. T. Edwards, the honorary secretary and treasurer, and the committee for the excellence of the arrangements and the carrying out of the water-sports. The most interesting feature of the day's outing, to the European visitors, was the Maori element, several hundreds of Waikato natives being present from their riverside villages; and the gay attire of the Maori ladies lent brilliant colour to the assemblage. The "Kia Ora" Maori brass band, from the Rangiriri district, discoursed up-to-date music during the day from their elevated station on the top of a railway truck. Amongst the natives present were a number of prominent Waikato chiefs, including Te Whero-whero (brother of "King" Mahuta); Hori Kukutani, Te Rawhiti, Ngawharau, Hori Herewini, and Te Whare-roa. Mr F. W. Lang, M.H.R., Patron of the regatta, was present during the day, and took great interest in the regatta.

MAORI CANOE EVENTS.

As on previous occasions at Waikato regattas, the public interest centred in the Maori canoe races, and these events all proved to be splendid contests, well worth the journey from town. The Waikato natives are par excellence the canoeists of New Zealand, and their constant practice with the paddle has rendered both men and women exceedingly expert in the handling of their long, narrow "dug-outs." The Mercer Committee devoted on this occasion the sum of £34 to prizes for canoe races, of which there were seven on the programme, four of them being hurdle races. The river Maoris had made great preparations for the regatta, and had built a number of new canoes, chiefly small ones, for the hurdle races, or "pake-taipapa." The largest of the new canoes were the Whawhakia and the Taraiwaru. The latter, however, was only built and launched a few weeks ago, and, being too sappy and heavy as yet, she did not take part in the races. The Taraiwaru, which is sixty feet long, was cut out of a rimu tree in the bush near Pukekawa, on the western side of the river, and is owned by a Ngatitipa chief named Te Whareroa, who lives at Pungapunga, above Mercer.

The water-sports opened at noon with a procession of canoes up and down the river. Owing to some misunderstanding the whole of the canoes did not take part in the procession, but the big Papatara and three other large canoes (including the Papatara and Erino Parana) put in an appearance and paddled down-stream and up again. As the canoes, led by the Papatara, passed the landing-wharf, where most of the spectators were gathered, the canoeists gave an exhibition of the "fancy" paddling peculiar to the Waikato. Te Katipa, the veteran "Kai-hautu-waka," or fuleman, of the Papatara, stood amidst his crew in his craft, giving the time to his men. As the long canoes swept past in mid-stream, the old chief, with a wave of

his greenstone "mere," shouted to the crews, "Aue! Tarianga whakarongo!" ("Oh, ears, listen!") This was by way of preparatory word or caution. Then the "hautu-tu" gave the orders: "Hikiti-tia!" ("Lift up!") and "Paki-tia!" ("Slap it!") whereupon every canoeist deftly raised his paddle clear above the canoe-side, missing one stroke, and with the other hand smartly clapped the dripping blade of the paddle. The next moment each man once more dipped his paddle deep, and the canoes sped on along the shining water-way. This performance was repeated several times with good effect. As the big canoes paddled up-stream the crews joined in the chorus of an ancient song. Brandishing his glistening greenstone club the Papatara's chieftain chanted the opening words of a well-known war-canoes song or "ngeri" of old:

Waikato e, ngunuru nei ("Oh Waikato waters, rumbling here") whereupon the paddlers shouted with one voice the rousing chorus:

Aue! aue! aue-ha! The final word, "nekebia," is equivalent to the English "Move her along!" Then the crews paddled back to the bank for a short rest before the great race of the day came on.

A SPLENDID RACE.

No more keenly-fought big canoe race has been seen on the Waikato River than the splendid struggle which took place shortly after one p.m. between the Papatara and the Whawhakia. The Papatara is a large kahikatea canoe, about 80ft. long, which has on numerous previous occasions been steered to victory. She is about eleven years old, and is owned by the Ngatimaho and Ngatitamaoho tribes, of Rangiriri, Waiangamarina, and Mercer. On the occasion of the Ngawharau regatta last March, the Papatara won both the large races, beating the Pupurikana, the well-known crack canoe of the Huntly and Taupiri natives. The Pupurikana being now discarded through age, after a long and successful career, the Huntly Maoris (Ngatiwhawhakia tribe) replaced her for the Mercer regatta with the Whawhakia, a new kahikatea canoe, built last season at the foot of the Hakurimata Range. The Whawhakia is about 75ft. in length, and her native owners had great expectations of defeating the Rangiriri canoe.

An excellent start of this "war" canoe race was effected from opposite the Mercer wharf, the Papatara and Whawhakia getting away well together. The Taraiwaru was entered, but did not start. The Papatara was manned by forty-three picked canoeists, most of them handling two oars. Amidships in this canoe stood Te Katipa, a grizzled, gaunt old rangatira from Rangiriri, flourishing a fine "mere-pounamu." Katipa, who is a relation of the late Major Te Wheroa, acted as "hautu-waka," or time-giver, for his canoe. The Whawhakia's crew, who all wore white singlets, consisted of 28 men, members of the N'Whawhakia, Ngatitipa, and Ngatimahuta tribes, and a young man named Waikato acted as her "hautu-tu" in the absence of the veteran Te Paki through illness. The course for the race was two miles, with two turns.

Going up the river to the first turning-mark, the two canoes kept very close together, the Papatara's men paddling a somewhat quicker stroke than the others. The seventy keeponed manuka paddles of the rival tribesmen dipped with machine-like precision as the long canoes shot up to the mark half-a-mile up the river, and the men at the steering paddles strained all their energies to gain the advantage in the sharp turn. The Papatara was the first to turn, gaining about half-a-length's advantage at this point. Then the bows of the low-sided Maori craft were pointed down stream, and away they dashed side by side at a great rate down the swift-flowing Waikato. The two "hautu-waka" standing amidstships, flourished their weapons in rhythmic measure, and encouraged their men with voice and hand, and now and again burst into short, sharp, snatches of well-known canoe chants. The Papatara's crew put on a great spurt passing the wharf, and edged their rival somewhat over to the opposite bank of the river near the island. Very little change took place in the positions of the canoes on the run down stream to the lower turning-flag, and the spectators watched with growing excitement the flashing of the three score and ten paddles in the sun as the sharp blades glistened for an instant and dipped again. Away down at the turning-mark the canoes were seen to round the flag almost together, and then commenced a beautiful race of speed. The Whawhakia steadily crept up her dark-browed crew working as if for their lives. Instead of for a few pounds prize-money. Muscles strained

and cracked, and the splendid physique of the river-men was called on to do its uttermost. Now came the call for the "hautu-tu" and the frenzied leaders were for the time being back in the days of old Maoriland. They waved and flourished their hands—now on this side, now on that, and the veteran red-capped Katipa was in his element. Balancing himself amidstships, his greenstone weapon (a family treasure) quivering and flashing in the sun, the old moustache of the Papatara raised his voice in stentorian exhortations to his crew. This was one of the songs he chanted, an ancient canoe lull, often used on the Waikato:—

E pari ra koe te tai Whakaki ana mai Nua ngutu-wa. Hui nka ope au Ki te tai uru. Aue! Tiaia! Aue! Koa haki! Hukere, hukere! Aue, Ku-umua! Tūpara, Tūpara, Waikato! Tola, e!

(Flowing there is the ocean tide Surging towards me, Billowing up the mouth of the river, Gathering are the armies At the sea of the west. Now dip the paddles! This is it! Go along! Hasten, oh Waikato! Oh, a long pull! Now quickly, quickly Waikato! Pull away, oh!)

By this time the canoes are close up, and now begins the final struggle. Every nerve is strained for victory. There are only a few feet difference, and the Papatara's paddlers will need all their strength to claim the prize. The paddle-strokes come quicker and quicker, the "hautu-waka" urge on their crews with frantic cries of "Hukere, hukere, Waikato!" "Tena tiaia," and "Hoea, hoea!" ("paddle away"), and the excitement is intense. Steadily, inch by inch, the Whawhakia crawls up on her opponent, but she cannot reach her bows. Paddling like mad, bending almost double over their blades, and splashing the water over each other, the crews surge up to the finishing post, almost neck and neck—the Papatara's bow is only about six feet ahead of the Whawhakia's—the gun fires, and the race is won by a nose.

Papatara, £30..... 1 Whawhakia, £10..... 2

This race created great excitement, and the very close finish after a two-mile contest made it one of the finest struggles imaginable.

OTHER CANOE RACES.

The next canoe race of importance was the second race between the above mentioned large canoes. This was over a two-mile course with two turns, as in the previous race, but the crews were limited to thirty in each canoe. The Papatara carried twenty-nine paddlers and the Whawhakia twenty-six. This event proved to be another splendidly contested race, very closely fought from start to finish. Both canoes got away well together. The Whawhakia assumed a slight advantage at one period of the race, but the Papatara men by hard paddling deprived them of the lead. After rounding the last turn the final half-mile race home was a most exciting "go." Both canoes tore along bow and bow for the greater part of the distance, and then when near the

finishing-post the Whawhakia's white-uniformed crew put on a splendid spurt and just succeeded in winning by a few feet, her three bow paddlers being just ahead of the Papatara's bows as the canoes finished and the gun fired. Thus the honours of the day between the Papatara and Whawhakia were pretty evenly divided:—

Whawhakia, £15..... 1 Papatara, £5..... 2

As hitherto a very amusing feature of the regatta was the canoe hurdle races. There were four events of this class, and the efforts of the competitors (two in each canoe) to get their craft across the barriers fixed in the river caused great laughter. The hurdle races brought out large fields of canoes, eight competing in the first race. The canoe hurdle race for Maori women was won by Rotana's canoe Try Fluke, Hikurere second.

The two all-comers hurdle races in canoes were won by Wi Maki's Hikurere, and by the Rotana Brothers in the Emma.

(Geo. Jack won the greasy boom event, prize £1 10/.

HAD HEARD IT BEFORE.

He: How charming you look, dear, in that dress. It becomes you admirably.

She: Oh, yes; that's an old story. When the season is changing you always discover how charming I am in my old clothes.

AGE Why do you sit calmly and just let your hair all fall out or get gray and do nothing to stop it? Is this common sense? Not a bit of it. No need of losing your hair in this way. And there is no need of your looking old before your time, either. The hair may be preserved and made beautiful by giving it the food found in—



It always restores color to gray or faded hair. Your hair may have all the dark, rich color of early life. Then why not have it so?



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