

Nation Making:

A STORY OF

NEW ZEALAND SAVAGEISM AND CIVILIZATION.

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CHAPTER VI. THE MAORI NATION-MAKER.

William Thompson pursues his policy—Combination—Secrecy—A Maori witenagemot—The wharo runanga (council house)—Description—Carved ancestors—Woman's rights—The subject for discussion—Maori oratory—'Let us drive the white men into the sea'—A painted orator—The island ours—A silent oration—A great meeting—The fatal day—The election of the king—A bold protest—A prophetic warning—The contest commenced—The ten years' war—Heroic struggles—Enormous odds—The Maori remnant—All is lost save honour—The broken-hearted patriot—Destruction of his nation—A wasted life—The noblest of the Maoris—The dying patriot—'I die, but let my words remain'—At the resting place of the sea.



DURING the next two years, William Thompson actively prosecuted his great policy of making the Maori people into a nation. From the native districts where his influence was paramount nearly all the Pakeha Maoris (white squatters) were driven away. Not long afterwards the missionaries were ordered to depart. The Maoris were proving the truth of my surmise, that they could both combine and keep a secret, for the son of Te Waharoa had welded many of the most powerful tribes into a great combination, who kept their plans so secret that very little reliable information of their intentions or actions reached the New Zealand Government.

Notwithstanding Thompson's efforts, however, the Arawa tribes did not join the confederation, though many of their chiefs were shaken in their loyalty to English rule. In many of the Arawa villages meetings were held to discuss their relations towards the proposed Maori king and the colonists.

One of these meetings I may describe, as it conveys a fair idea of the gravity and decorum with which the Maoris conducted their assemblies. Like our Saxon ancestors, the whole people—men and women—had the right to attend and speak if they had anything to say. There was no representative system amongst them, nor were there any secret conclaves which exercised any compulsory powers. I therefore readily describe the proceedings at this particular assembly, because it gives a fair idea of Maori meetings, and it contrasts favourably with the rudeness and uproar which are marked features in most of our colonial parliaments, and for which the great parliament of the Empire, the British House of Commons itself, is becoming notorious.

The meeting was held at a village on the western shore of Lake Taupo, in a large *wharo runanga* (council house), which I more particularly describe here because these 'carved houses' are rapidly disappearing.

The 'council house' was a low-eaved building of wood, one hundred and fifty feet long by forty-five feet wide, with a high gable roof and a verandah or porch at one end. The front gable was ornamented by deep barge-boards, boldly and richly carved in open scroll work, the terminal at the peak of the gable being the figure-head of a renowned ancestor of the tribe, the face tattooed with the *moko* (practically 'the tartan') of the tribe. Within the porch were a low doorway and two small square openings to admit light and air, closed when required by sliding panels. Six massive posts, twenty-five feet in length, running down the centre, supported the heavy roof-tree. From this roof-tree, rafters, usually six feet apart, came down to a heavy wallplate, this being supported by carved massive wooden figures six feet apart, each representing an ancestor, and every face tattooed with the *moko* of the tribe. These figures were carved in a grotesque, sometimes in a hideous manner, but considering the rude implements employed, not without great artistic skill and boldness. Every face wore a strange, placid gravity, almost Egyptian in character. The eyes were represented by pieces of mutton-fish shell, like mother-of-pearl, the usual three-fingered hands resting on the breast. The walls between the carved figures were filled in with reeds, plain and coloured, arranged in various patterns. The spaces in the roof between the rafters were filled with fronds of the *nikau* palm, and were blackened with the smoke of many council fires.

In this council hall the meeting I am about to describe was held. Like all important assemblies, it was held at night. A lighted candle was attached to each of the carved figures round the runanga house. In these halls, as I may call them, there were no seats, the people—men and women—squatting or lying on the earthen floor. In such meetings the women take part and sometimes speak. I may perhaps best notice here that amongst the Maoris 'women's rights' are recognized, one reason arising probably from the safe custom of tracing descent through the female line. The women rarely took part in a battle, but they were the chief cultivators of the ground—they doing the work, their lords the fighting.

The hall was well filled with men and women, some in native costume, many in European clothing.

The subject for discussion was:—
'What was to be done with the *pakehas* (colonists).'
The usual grave and dignified demeanour pervaded the

assembly. Smoking was not 'strictly prohibited,' for many, both men and women, were smoking, the short black pipes being passed from mouth to mouth as occasion required.

'At length a chief rose and said:

'Salutations to you, O chiefs of Taupo. The pakehas are many. Every day a *kai-puke* (ship) brings a tribe of men and women to the anchorage of the sea at Auckland. Hearken! I hear the tramp of their horses as they spread over the plains. They cut down the forests, and make their roads over the mountains. They bring axes and ploughs, guns and tobacco, rum and clothing. The waters of Lake Taupo ripple on the shore, but they never overflow the lands. The pakehas have crossed the *moemau* (the ocean). They rise like the tide. Hearken! This is my word. They will cover the land, and sweep the Maoris away. Enough, I have spoken.'

After this oration, listened to in profound silence, a young chief rose and said:

'This is my word. The pakehas will eat us up. Let us drive them into the sea.'

Grunts of approbation followed. The next speaker said: 'This island is mine. I love not the white faces. Their rum and their guns and tobacco are good. Hearken! This is my word. Let us take all the rum and guns, all the tobacco and blankets they have, and drive the white faces into the sea.'

At short intervals chief followed chief to the same purport, amongst them being a young chief with painted cheeks and feather-plumed head. Brandishing a tomahawk, he said:

'Listen, I will kill them all. I will drink their rum.'

An old chief now stood up, leaning on a spear, whose face was black with deeply-scared lines of tattoo, and whose eyes were red with the smoke of a hundred council fires. He said:

'Let the pakehas be driven into the sea. Then the voices of the white-faced strangers will be no more heard in the land. The graves where our ancestors sleep will be sacred from the hated feet of the stranger. The island will be ours. Our sacred river (Waikato) carries the worthless punice stones into the salt water. Hearken! This is my word. In like manner let the pakehas be swept into the sea. *Kati!* (I have finished).

This speech met the approval of the assembly, evidenced by general cries of '*Kapoti, kapoti, kamupai!*' (Good, good, very good.)

Silence once more reigned in the hall, in the midst of which stood up an aged chief, renowned for his warlike deeds and for his wise counsels. Leaning on his spear, with grave dignity he looked round the assemblage. For a few moments he stood silent and motionless, then turning to the carved ancestral pillar nearest him, he put out the lighted candle attached to it. Slowly moving to the next light he extinguished that also. With stately step he passed round the hall, putting out every light.

The assembly was in darkness, save the glow from the fires. Not a sound broke the profound silence.

Then the voice of the venerable chief was heard:

'I have driven the pakeha and all his works into the sea. Enough, I have ended.'

A Maori does not need a surgical operation to enable him to set a joke. If its point or moral lie a little below the surface he loves it the better.

Not a word more was spoken. One by one, every man and woman silently left the council hall. The wise old man, with his grave humour, had reversed the opinions of the assembly more completely than if, with many words, he had explained that if the colonists were driven from the island, the Maoris would be deprived of every article they had brought with them, many of which had become indispensable to the Maori people.

Thus, this parliament of gentlemen savages conducted its proceedings and dispersed, setting an example worthy of imitation by the parliaments of savage gentlemen nearer home.

In almost every runanga house south of the city of Auckland, meeting of Maoris were held to discuss the questions of making the Maori people into a nation, and of electing a King as the natural consequence. After endless *korero* (talk), it was at length decided to elect a king, and a great meeting of the Maori tribes was held at Ngaruawahia in 1858 for the purpose.

For war or woe the ir retrievable step was then to be taken.

Nor was William Thompson without warning that his proposal to set up a king would be attended with disastrous results to the young nation he was endeavouring with such patient energy to make. For on many previous occasions, and specially at the great meeting of the Maori tribes held at Ngaruawahia in 1858, for the purpose of electing a king, a near kinsman of his own, the chief Te Raihi, who—without Thompson's higher nature possessed a clearer discernment, and a more practical recognition of probabilities, and with more hard-headed common sense than any Maori chief I have ever known—resolutely stood alone on the fatal day which decided the fortunes and the future of the Maori nation; he on one side and the whole people on the other, and boldly protested against the step about to be taken.

He was a chief of rank, and renowned for his courage, wisdom and eloquence.

Separating himself from the assembled multitude when the flagstaff had been erected, he said:

'O chiefs, warriors, and people, hearken! I am one, and you are many. There cannot be two masters in one house. There can be but one ruler in this land. That ruler must be the Queen of England. The flagstaff you have raised is the

signal for your destruction. In your mouths are words of peace. The message your flagstaff proclaims is a call to arms. If you desire to save the Maori nation, pull down your flagstaff. Go to your *kaingas* (villages). Elect no king. If you want peace, do you and your king go to work, and plant wheat and potatoes. Your king means war. On your side, I hear the shouts of the warriors. I see the war dance. The din of battle, the groans of the dying are in my ears. On the other side, I hear the tramp of the soldiers, the roar of the cannon. Your standard will be broken, your king a slave or a fugitive, your lands will go from you. Where your ancestors lie buried in their ancient graves will be the homes of the white men. Enough, I have spoken.'

His words were listened to with the usual grave attention, but they were not heeded. The king (Potatau) was elected.

No words of sage or statesmen were ever more prophetic than those spoken by Te Raihi.

In two short years the inevitable contest commenced. Ten years of war followed. Te Raihi, now an old man, has lived to see every one of his predictions fulfilled.

It is not necessary for me to repeat the story of the war. Has it not been recorded in despatches from the British General in command, and in the newspaper reports of the 'war correspondents' of the day? In these are recorded the brave deeds of the ten thousand soldiers and sailors, assisted by ten thousand colonial troops, supplied with Armstrong guns and all the appliances of modern warfare.

That is one side of the story.

The other side can never now be told.

The Maoris gallantly defending their native land, had no despatch writers, no newspaper correspondents to narrate how a few thousand half-naked savages with their double-barrelled guns and such ammunition as they had been able to buy and store in previous years, with no commissariat save such as isolated patches of potatoes and wild pigs from the forest could supply—had held at bay for so long the trained troops of a powerful nation.

Even more gallant struggles against such enormous odds have ever been made. Bravely defending every earthwork fortress, every stretch of fern-clad plain, every forest range; their numbers thinned in every engagement; the flower of their chiefs captured at the storming of Rangiriri; they contested every foot of ground, until the British Government having had enough of it, confiscated the lands their troops had overrun, and abandoned New Zealand.

The Colonial Government established fortified posts to hold the conquered country, and the unyielding Maori remnant, greatly reduced in numbers, but not broken in spirit, retreated across the frontier, sullen but unconquered, having lost everything but the love of their beautiful country.

No Greek epic ever recorded more gallant deeds, more patient suffering, more tragic events, more undying patriotism.

In the year 1865 William Thompson, feeling that the struggle was hopeless, made a partial truce with General Carey, the great majority of the king party continuing the contest in a desultory manner. (See illustration.)

Broken-hearted, this great chief, the king maker, the nation maker, the noblest Maori of them all, retired from the control of Maori affairs, and left the struggle to be carried on by the remnant of those whom his eloquence had fired to enter the unequal contest. For himself, he felt his work was done. His bright dreams, his patriotic designs had ended in disaster to his people, in destruction to his nation.

During the last two years of his life I had many opportunities of learning his hopes, his fears, his despair. He felt that his life and labours had been in vain. Full of a pathetic melancholy, unselfish as he had ever been, one of nature's noblemen, a true and simple-minded Christian, he slowly approached the end of a career, unstained by a crime, hardly by a fault, unless the loving his people 'not too wisely, but too well,' could be called a fault.

On December 24th, 1866, I received a letter from him, which I make no apology for quoting—

'Friend,' he wrote, 'greetings to you. Come to me. I am dying. I have words to speak to you. In three days you will see me no more. I shall die on the 27th. Come quickly.'

I took horse the same evening. On the 26th I arrived at Peria, his ancestral home, his favourite village, alas! a shorn of its former beauty. Its churches and schoolhouse destroyed, its simple dwellings deserted and in ruins, his own home falling to decay.

It was sunset. The purple mountains kept their silent watch over the great valley, as of old. The dying chief lay feebly under the shadow of a remnant of the primeval forest, surrounded by hundreds of his weeping retainers.

Dismounting, I knelt at his side. He opened his eyes, and wearily raising himself, feebly took my hand, and greeting me with his old gentle smile, he said:

'Do not leave me; continue to be the friend of my people.'

Then turning to his followers, he said: 'My children, I die, but let my words remain. Obey the laws of God and man.'

Then falling back exhausted, he closed his eyes and spoke no more.

He lingered wearily through the night. Next morning he was conveyed to Turanga-o-maua (the resting place of the sea), and there, on December 27th, as he had said, in the bright sunlight, with the blue sky above him, in the land he loved so well, his gentle, loving spirit departed.

So died one of nature's noblemen, the greatest and the best of his race.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)