

# A TRIP TO PIPIRIKI, WANGANUI RIVER.



'HAVE been all over the world,' said, lately, an enthusiastic visitor here, 'and have "done" river scenery in all countries, but I've never met anything more beautiful than your grand river. Why, the Rhine itself isn't to be compared with it.'

Had our visitor come after Stanley we might have suspected that he was 'getting at' us, but he preceded the great explorer, probably had yet to visit the 'Congo,' and was undoubtedly quite sincere in his admiration. Anyway his words recurred to me many a time, and of last week during a trip up the Wanganui as far as Pipiriki, a small settlement about sixty miles from Wanganui town. I had often hankered after a trip up

the river, knowing by report the extreme beauty of the scenery, but my courage was not equal to the inconvenience, and even danger, of a canoe journey over some scores of perilous rapids, even though the polers were natives of experience and muscle. Wherefore, the chance of a passage in Mr A. Hatrick's new steamer, the pretty little *Wairere* (swift water) was seized with avidity, and now I can, to a certain extent, speak from experience in vouching for the appropriateness of the adjectives 'grand' and 'glorious' when applied to the river Wanganui.

Hitherto the pleasure of viewing the charming scenes shut in by the curves of the stonous stream has been the reward of courage and endurance, and therefore limited to the few whose health and nerves were equal to canoe risks by day and camp fires by night. Now, however, through the enterprise of one of Wanganui's leading business men, a more satisfactory state of things is about to prevail, and our grand river, for a distance of at least sixty miles, will shortly be thrown open for the delight of all who can appreciate the beautiful in nature.

The *Wairere*, which was built to Mr Hatrick's order by the well-known firm of shipbuilders, Yarrow and Co., London, and put together here in Wanganui, made her trial trip about a month since. She is a pretty little boat, is nicely fitted up, easy to handle, and a good goer, and did the journey to Pipiriki without difficulty, but as her draught was found to be somewhat heavier than was expected, it has been decided to add sixteen feet to her length (now eighty feet), by which means her carrying capacity and passenger accommodation will be increased and her draught lightened. Mr Hatrick is under contract to carry mails as far as Pipiriki from March next, so we are looking forward to a considerably increased tourist traffic after that date.

But to my trip. We were fortunate and unfortunate on the day of starting. Unfortunate in that the river was somewhat low, thus making it more than questionable whether we should successfully negotiate the more difficult rapids, of which there are over fifty between town and our destination, and fortunate in that the Captain elected to stay the night at Parekino (a native settlement about twenty-five miles up the river) to await the 'fresh,' which he assured us would swell the river ere the next day broke.

Captain Marshal is a man of considerable experience in river navigation, a half caste of powerful frame and self-possessed demeanour. Some years back he was engaged on the Waikato, but for a considerable time past has superintended snagging operations here, with the result that he is fully acquainted with every obstacle, difficulty, and characteristic of our river and climate, and therefore, just the man for the post he fills. We smiled, incredulous, when he told us there would be 'plenty of water to-morrow,' that it was 'raining in the interior now,' for to us the sky gave no indication of rain, and the river seemed to be sinking visibly, but the seignior proved his presence, and riveted the confidence in him aroused by his masterly handling of his bonnie wee craft.

And at Parekino we were consoled for the delay, for there was a great native meeting on for the discussion of matters of import to the Maori race, and we were thus afforded an opportunity of seeing 'the Maori at home,' in the character of hospitable host. He had hosts to entertain, too, for there must have been at least a thousand native visitors in and around the pa—if it is not a mis-application of terms to apply the name to such a motley and uninclosed assemblage of sawn-timber wharves. We were welcomed with heat of drama, for the Parekino natives are musical, and boast an excellent band, which, posted on a sandbank at the water's edge, played ashore a dusky reinforcement who, abundantly provided with dried shark and such like dainty edibles to assist at the feast, had patronised the steamer. The little view below shows the village as it appeared from the steamer's deck, with houses a *V'anglais* on the edge of the bank, and the Union Jack floating on the breeze, convincing proof of the *hapu's* loyalty, despite the presence amongst them of the notorious ex-rebel and murderer, Te Kooti. The place presented a curious aspect as we approached, the people swarming like beetles on the edge of the bank to give their friends a right royal welcome. The entire village covers about ten acres of flat, which runs back level to the base of the hill. Alongside were pitched the tents of the visiting natives—scores of them—and the scene which greeted our eyes when we had climbed the sandy pathway was both lively and novel. Standing, sitting, squatting, lying, dancing, jabbering, were natives of all ages, sizes, and degrees of colour; in all stages of civilization too, from matted savagery, to covert coats and smoked eyeglasses. Here, in a temporary booth was a native vendor exhibiting and vociferously cracking up his wares: there a 'sporting card' with a moveable target, hawling entreaties to 'take a shot, the 'pool' being 'two pounds! two pounds!! two pounds!!!' Under spacious marquees the indolent were snowing, in the open motley crowds discussed congenial topics, while in the background the women of the *hapu* cooked industriously, the air, as the afternoon waned, becoming impregnated with a variety of steaming odours, which, added to those already in evidence, were anything but agreeable to our olfactory organs.

By and bye, we had a sight in this connection which interested and amused us. Cloths in the shape of long strips of China matting, had been laid for the visitors on the level ground in their own quarters, and at a given signal the waitresses appeared, at least a hundred strong, each bearing in either hand a large tin baking dish filled with steaming potatoes crowned with a lump of fish. Advancing with dancing step, and singing as they went, they laid the dishes in place with faces as radiant as if nothing in the world on a broiling day exceeded the pleasure of cooking and serving. Then gaily they made way for others with beef and pork, sausages, tea, and bread and butter.

Before the feeding of the lions, however, we had some examples of native oratory, and of the *sany froid* with which a native auditory receives and listens to even men of mark and influence, for on this day, the 4th, the *Korero* opened. The speakers, however, were few, and their speeches brief, and as to me they were 'Greek.' I shall not attempt to explain their purport. Enough that Te Kooti opened the ball, and Major Kemp, whose last relations with the erstwhile fugitive had been those of pursuer and pursued, succeeded him, but nothing in the aspect of the listeners squatted round, nor any applause at the finish, afforded any indication either of the rank of the speakers, or of the impression made by their remarks.

'What is Major Kemp saying?' I inquired of a fine-looking, well-dressed native, whose kindly intelligent face invited confidence.

'I can't explain to you,' he replied with a perfect accent. 'He is using language that it would be difficult for me to make clear to you.'

'What is the object of this meeting?' I ventured further. 'Oh, it is for various things, but chiefly about the land laws, which press too hard on the native people.'

'Is the meeting opposed to the Government?' 'No, but the Government must give us better land laws. At present they are all in favour of the Europeans.'

'Think you the natives should have greater facilities for disposing of their land?'

'No, I think it should be made illegal for them to sell any land, for everywhere the Europeans have already got the best land, and we have not enough left for our people.'

'But I thought the natives still held hundreds of thousands of acres.'

'You consider. A European must have five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand acres for himself. Take the land we have, and divide it among our people, and how much does it give to each? No, we must stop the sale of land, or

by-and-bye we'll be without any for our people's children.'

Some further talk about land ensued, in which I had the temerity to pledge the Hon. Mr Cadman to bring in next session a really good Native Land Bill, and then we spoke of Te Kooti.

'A bad man!' said we.

'He did not want war, but he received great provocation, and his blood was up. A man does strange things when he is angry.'

'Oh!' we urged, 'a man need not commit murder. You would not have done so.'

'I don't know what I might have done,' he returned, calmly. 'How can a man tell what he might have done under certain circumstances, or what he may do to-day or to-morrow? Can you tell what you will do to-morrow?'

'I couldn't murder women and children!' cried one of us impetuously.

'No,' he gently responded, 'because you are a woman. If you were a man it might be different.'

'I couldn't kill women and children,' I interposed, 'but I could kill a man, I think, if he angered me greatly,' whereat he turned and smiled into my eyes as if he relished the announcement.

'You know,' he resumed, presently, 'the Maori people were much like dogs.'

'Oh, no,' we dissented in chorus.

'Yes; they ate, and drank, and slept, and knew nothing. How could they know? In former days they had no Bible, and no one to teach them right; but now they understand better, and they will not again do evil deeds. I think myself they do better than the Europeans. You have laws and goals for those who disobey them. We have no goals; we do not need them. Our people are not thieves and pick-pockets. They live quietly in their own villages, minding their own affairs. There are none of them in your goals. And none of our people suffer want, or go hungry, for those who are rich share with the others. It is not so among Europeans. And the Maori is more hospitable. Any of these houses here you may walk into and be welcome, but what would be done to a Maori if he should walk into one of your houses?'

'I should not like to go into one of these houses here,' I remarked, somewhat thoughtlessly.

'You would not like to? No; but that is not the point. You would be made welcome.'

'But—I mean—I hastened to explain, afraid I had 'put my foot' in it, 'I should fear to be considered intrusive.'

He laughed, a trifle sardonically, and just then a group of his friends, who had been watching, and no doubt discussing, his *Korero* with the *wahine pakahas*, beckoned him away. We watched his departure with eyes full of profound respect. He was a handsome fellow, and hailed from the Wairarapa, but whether a 'personage' or not we had at the time no means of discovery. He was a man of some education, however, evidently, and of thoughtful, kindly temperament, and we parted from him with real regret, for



TE ERINGA TOKI GORGE, NEAR PIPIRIKI.