

# New Zealand in 1827

## GRAPHIC PICTURE OF OLD MAORI LIFE

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Draughtsman to His Majesty's Surveying Ship  
"The Beagle."

[CONTINUED.]

### WANT OF REGULAR GOVERNMENT.

The great and leading defect in this country, and the principal cause of their frequent wars and disturbances, which harass and depopulate the tribes, and puts a stop to all improvement, is the want of some regular system of government. There are only two classes of people—chiefs and slaves; and, as consanguinity constitutes a high claim, the eldest son of a large family, who can bring the greatest number of warriors of his own name into the field, is considered the chief of that district or tribe; and as he, by reason of his followers, can take possession of the greatest number of prisoners or slaves, he becomes the ruling man. Every other man of his tribe considers himself on an equality with him in everything, except that he shows him obedience, and follows him to battle.

Each is independent in his own family, and holds uncontrolled power of life and death over every individual it contains. They seem not to exercise any coercion over the younger branches of a family, who are allowed unbounded liberty till the girls have sweethearts and the boys are strong enough to go to war. They are kind and hospitable to strangers, and are excessively fond of their children. On a journey, it is more usual to see the father carrying his infant than the mother; and all the little offices of a nurse are performed by him with the tenderest care and good humour. In many instances (wherein they differ from most savage tribes) I have seen the wife treated as an equal and companion. In fact, when not engaged in war, the New Zealander is quite a domestic, cheerful, harmless character; but once roused his anger, or turn him into ridicule, and his disposition is instantly changed. A being, whose passions have never been curbed from infancy, and whose only notion of what he conceives to be his right is to retaliate for an offence with blood, must naturally form a cruel and vindictive character. Such these islanders seemed to us on our first visiting them. The sight of beings so extraordinary (for thus we Europeans must have appeared to them) excited in their savage minds the greatest wonder; and they thought we were sent as a scourge and an enemy; and though Cook, one of their earliest visitors, adopted every method his ingenuity could devise to conciliate them, yet, as they never could thoroughly understand his intentions, they were always on the alert to attack him. Hence arose the horror and disgust expressed formerly at the mere mention of the name of "a New Zealander."

### MAORIS AND AUSTRALIAN BLACKS COMPARED.

I have often, tried, in vain, to account for there being such a decided dissimilarity between the natives of New Holland and New Zealand. So trifling is the difference in their situation on the globe, and so similar their climates—both having remained so long unknown to the great continents, and so devoid of intercourse with the rest of the world—that one would be led to imagine a great resemblance must be the result. But the natives of the former seem of the lowest grade—the last link in the great chain of existence which unites man with the monkey. Their limbs are long, thin, and flat, with large, bony knees and elbows, a projecting forehead, and pot-belly. The mind, too, seems adapted to this mean configuration; they have neither energy, enterprise, nor industry; and their curiosity can scarcely be excited. A few exceptions may be met with; but these are their general characteristics. While the

natives of the latter island are "cast in beauty's perfect mould;" the children are so fine and powerfully made, that each might serve as a model for a statue of "the Infant Hercules;" nothing can exceed the graceful and athletic forms of the men, or the rounded limbs of their young women. These possess eyes beautiful and eloquent, and a profusion of long, silky, curling hair; while the intellects of both sexes seem of a superior order; all appear eager for improvement, full of energy, and indefatigably industrious, and possessing amongst themselves several arts which are totally unknown to their neighbours.

### DEPARTURE OF THE BRIG.

On April the 14th, our brig being stored with planks, flax, and potatoes, and ready for sea, I went on board of her. We had fine weather till we dropped down to the entrance of the river, where we intended taking in our stock of water for the voyage, when the scene suddenly changed, and a severe gale came on, right out to sea, which we could not avail ourselves of: neither could we get the water off, as our rafts of casks got adrift in the attempt to get them on board. To add to our disasters, one of our cables parted, and we had to ride out the gale (of two days' continuance) with one only, the sea rolling heavily right open before us, and we in momentary expectation of the remaining cable's going: we had not a single day's allowance of water on board, and at one period all hands (except the carpenter and passengers) were out of the brig, on shore, filling the casks. Fortunately for us, the cable proved a tough one; had it parted, we should have been in a most perilous situation.

April 20th.—For the last week we were stationary at the river's mouth, waiting for a fair wind to carry us over the bar; and during that time there was no appearance of any change; we also heard that vessels had been detained here for six weeks before they could accomplish it. We were visited daily by parties of natives, who seemed to rejoice at our being delayed, as it gave them more of our company than they had calculated upon. They were more delighted with our society than we were with theirs; in a small vessel they are a serious nuisance, on account of the swarms of vermin they bring with them, and which they communicate liberally to all. Myself and all the passengers on board had our leisure time fully occupied in dislodging these "little familiars" from their strongholds in different parts of our apparel.

### THE INTRODUCTION OF FIREARMS.

During the time we were lying here, I saw and conversed with several individuals who had attended the "Great Meeting," and their accounts gave rise to various opinions respecting the policy of supplying the natives with firearms. As I had always been an advocate for the measure, I was gratified by hearing that it was thought to be in consequence of each party's being possessed of a nearly equal quantity of muskets, that a general and exterminating war was avoided. Some may suppose that similar tranquillity would have been preserved, had they been equally well supplied with their native weapons of war; but that would not have been the case. When they found that each party could furnish forth the same number of European muskets, they paused, well knowing that it was contrary to the wish of all the white settlers that they should proceed to hostilities. Indeed, Europeans intrepidly mingled amongst them, urging them to a reconciliation, and threatening that, if they failed in their endeavours, the supplies of arms and ammunition should be discontinued. This threat had its desired effect on the minds of the natives; no blood was spilt, and each chief returned quietly to his own home.

### A TRIBAL WAR AVERTED.

On the night we heard of the death of George and his wife, "Revenge and war" was the universal cry. His party would not believe that it could be an accident, nor would they hear of any apology being received. At this time they imagined the tribes of Hokianga were possessed of but very few firearms; and, as the skirmish took place in that district, it was determined that an exterminating war should be carried into the heart of it. However, before all the preparations could be made to carry their intentions into effect, they received certain information that the people of Hokianga were even better supplied with muskets than those of the Bay of Islands. This intelligence occa-

sioned an assemblage of the different tribes to be proposed, and when it took place the friends of George saw their opponents so well prepared for the "tug of war" that they deemed it judicious to come forward and to shake hands and to acknowledge that the death of Shulitea proceeded either from accident or mistake. A curious circumstance took place in the midst of their debate. An old chief, who wished for a fight, and did not approve of the introduction of firearms, but was an advocate for the old method of New Zealand warfare, proposed that each party should send away all their muskets and ammunition, and engage manfully, with their own native weapons, and then it could be easily proved which were the "best men;" but this mode of settling the dispute, not being agreeable to the majority, was instantly negatived, and treated with disdain.

### A COLONY OF SCOTCH CARPENTERS.

The colony of Scotch carpenters, who had formed a settlement at the head of the river, and of whom I made "honourable mention" on my first journey, finding themselves so close to what they feared might become the seat of war, and having no means whatever of defending themselves, made an arrangement with Moetara, the chief of Parkungh (which is situated at the entrance of the same river), and placed themselves under his protection. They accordingly moved down here, which gave great satisfaction to that chief. Neither could their former protector, Patuone, feel offended at their removal, from the peculiar nature of the circumstances they were placed in. These hardy, North Britons were delighted to find a reasonable excuse for moving, their former establishment being situated too far from the sea for them to reap any advantage from ships coming into port. Nothing can be more gratifying than to behold the great anxiety of the natives to induce Englishmen to settle amongst them; it ensures their safety; and no one act of treachery is on record of their having practised towards those whom they had invited to reside with them.

Moetara is a man of great property and high rank, and is considered a very proud chief by the natives; yet he is to be seen every day working as hard as any slave in assisting in the erection of houses for the accommodation of his new settlers. He has actually removed from his old village of Parkungh (a strong and beautiful place), and is erecting huts for his tribe near the spot chosen by his new friends; so that, in a very short time, a barren point of land, hitherto without a vestige of a human habitation, will become a thriving and populous village, for it is incredible how quickly the orders of these chiefs are carried into effect. I was frequently a witness to the short space of time they took to erect their houses; and, though small, they are tight, weather-proof, and warm; their storehouses are put together in the most substantial and workmanlike manner.

### RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE MAORIS.

It is very difficult to make the New Zealanders explain the nature of their religious belief. One superstition seems general with all the tribes respecting the formation of the world, or, rather, of their own island, for that is the place of the first importance in their estimation. They say a man, or a god, or some great spirit, was fishing in his war-canoe, and pulled up a large fish, which instantly turned into an island; and a lizard came upon that, and brought up a man out of the water by his long hair; and he was the father of all the New Zealanders. Almost all their grotesque carvings are illustrations of this idea in some way or other. The favourite theme on which (I observed) the missionaries discoursed to them were "the torments of hell." This has become a subject of ridicule to most of the natives; they do not deny, that there may be such a place, but they add, it is not for them, for if Atua had intended it so he would have sent them word about it long before he sent the white men into their country; and they conclude by stating that they know perfectly well the situation of the island where they are to go to after this life.

### MASSACRE OF A SCHOONER'S CREW.

While remaining here wind-bound, in imaginary security, and amusing ourselves with noticing the curious customs and peculiarities of these islanders, a dreadful tragedy was taking place only a few miles' distance from us, and to which I be-