

Holidaying in the Far North

A NEW CHUM'S FIRST EXPERIENCE OF COLONIAL UNCONVENTIONALITY.

(By "Red Berry.")

HOKIANGA! How many pleasant memories surge in upon one's mind at the thought. Everything was so fresh and new to us who are only recent arrivals in "God's own country," as it is called.

We passed out of the Manukau Harbour on one of those delightful calm afternoons, when nature is in her kindest mood, and the sea appearing to forget for awhile its burden of countless dead, and the sorrows and shipwrecks it has caused in its fits of rage, plays "let's pretend," as it vies with the surrounding scenery, by reflecting the glory of mountains and rocks, vivified by the departing sun, even the pink tinted cloudlets taking part in Mimichaba's playful little farce.

Reaching Omapere in the early hours of the day, nature in her smiling morning face looking so fresh and clean, made one feel that it was truly good to be alive just to see the grand old hills waking at the gentle touch of the sun, rising so stately from their white sheets of mist, the sand hills being already up and burnished, in strong contrast to their furrowed and bush covered neighbours.

I have sometimes thought since coming here that the beauties of the English Lake District, the Bay of Naples, the Mountains of Donegal, and the wild grandeur of New Zealand scenery seem to be blended in one perfect whole—Hokianga.

Passing Opononi, which consists of a jetty, a hotel, a store, and a house or two, we arrived at Koutu, and were taken ashore in a Maori canoe—just the trunk of a tree hollowed out, with little seats laid across in which one had to practise the art of balance, even to one's smile, which had to be exactly in the middle of one's face, or the result might have been disastrous.

We wasted no time in throwing ourselves heartily into the enjoyment of our holiday, and from the moment of our arrival until now, while we are waiting for the bar to calm down sufficiently for the Claymore to convey us once more safely back to Auckland, we have drunk deep of the pleasures and delights to be had in a country house in New Zealand, where hospitality reigns supreme.

One fine day we went up the river in a motor launch to Manganuka Gorge, a perfect Garden of Eden, with its beautiful tree ferns, where the despoiling hand of man has not yet attacked Nature's inimitable handiwork.

There was some difficulty in finding a suitable landing place, but eventually after some demur, we were carried hollows, like sacks of potatoes, and deposited high and dry on the bank. The gentlemen then made a fire to boil the "billy" for tea, while we prepared lunch, consisting of wild turkey shot on the premises.

Lunch over, it was decided that we had better embark once more, but the tide had receded considerably, leaving a great waste of slimy mud between us and our barque, and since flying machines are not the fashion in this remote corner of the world, it was easier said than done. Our skipper managed to get the launch afloat after a good deal of energy had been expended in persuading it, but the most difficult part was yet to come in getting the passengers on board, which couldn't be managed with a fishing-rod, and since there was not a crane handy, we were each trundled, pick-a-back fashion, across the perilous and treacherous dividing line, between us and safety amid peals of laughter from the lookers-on, while they watched our gallant equestrians floundering, knee-deep through some twenty yards of soft, slimy mud. Even after arriving at the boat there was great difficulty in hoisting us in, many unsuccessful attempts being made before we were bundled in, both rider and ridden

having had many narrow escapes from taking an unpromised mud bath. My only regret on this expedition was that I had not my camera with me.

One glorious moonlight evening three of us embarked in the Maori canoe and glided up the river, through the avenues of mangroves, the moon casting her spell over the earth, the mountains and trees all repeating themselves in the silvery water! There was no sound, save the splashing of the paddle, and now and then the cry of the wild duck, and the weird, plaintive wail of the morepork. We coo-ed, and the silent mountains sent the echoes back with a hollow, vault-like reverberation. Then, as if in tune with the eeriness of our surroundings, our pilot told us some of the weird Maori legends and folk lore of this part of the country. On we glided in the shimmering light, till we reached a little green island, where we landed and played "tip" like school children. I think this was partly to shake off the ghostly feeling that had taken possession of us, and partly to wait for the turning of the tide, when we once more boarded our tiny vessel, and glided back through the silent, solemn mangroves, singing softly, keeping time to our captain's paddle.

Not the least interesting of our experiences was a patiki spearing expedition. We were suitably attired in short skirts, and with unstockinged feet set out with the torch and spear to the happy hunting ground at the edge of the incoming tide; and as we ran along the damp sand, the cool night air fanning our faces, and the phosphorous sparkling under our feet, we felt like mermaids out on the spree, till we found ourselves sinking in the soft, black mud as we went farther out to meet the tide. Then the excitement commenced; we looked on and caught sight every now and then of the white bodies of the fatfish gleaming in the torch-light, dazzled by the glare, while the deadly spear came down swiftly and surely, bringing up on its point the wriggling mass which was promptly deposited in the bag, and we stepped on noiselessly looking for more prey, till we bagged a goodly number of fine fish.

Another great source of enjoyment were the horses, perfectly trained to go up hills, over bogs, through what seems at first sight almost impenetrable bush, and down gullies with the greatest ease. Many were the rides we had, scouring the country, sometimes passing through Maori settlements, where pigs and chickens appear to be friends of the family, and for whom they seem to keep open house, until the time comes for them to be killed, when the aforesaid friends are devoured with relish; sometimes scrambling through the bush, when one's position in the saddle seems very precarious and uncertain, and where we ate nikau heart, and cut rata boughs for swings; sometimes tearing along the hard, smooth sand on the beach at a gallop, the blood tingling in our veins with the unwanted exercise.

The New Zealand bush is indescribable. Its huge kauri and puriri giants make one feel very insignificant as they spread their great branches, and afford welcome shelter to the delicate maiden-hair, kidney, and gippe ferns from the broiling sun. There is a calm, solemn sense of peace here, where it would be impossible to feel lonely, and there is so much to keep one continually interested.

Then there came the day for hauling in wood. Although it was pouring with rain, the horse was harnessed to the wooden sledge, and off we started, in this altogether novel conveyance, along the beach, to the bush, where we watched the trees being dexterously cut and piled on the sledge, and since we were well mackintoshed we rather enjoyed the rain than otherwise, riding back on the load of wood.

Now, I must pay my tribute to the

ever-courteous Maori, always happy and good-natured, and always ready with a kindly "Kia Ora" or "Tena Koe" for the passer-by. Here is an old Maori woman with her child wrapped in a shawl on her back coming along the beach with two ragged, but picturesque little urchins in the rear, and as she passes wishes me good morning, as I suppose, with a string of Maori words which I fail to understand, but I nod and smile, and she continues her journey. How the small boys make me laugh with their grotesque attitudes. Here is the husband, with his kind old furrowed face, and he, too, stops for a word or two; then I wish I could speak Maori, but I can't, so on he goes. Here is a merry group of Maori children, one on horse-back, all laughing and chatting happily together. How beautiful many of them are, with their bright mischievous black eyes, and gleaming white teeth. On they pass, casting shadows in the wet sand. What a picture for an artist, of happy, careless, palpitating human life. So they keep passing as I sit on the sand and write, each equally interesting and good humoured.

Our delightful holiday has come to an end, and even now we find ourselves looking forward to our next visit to Hokianga.

Nelson's Signals Bungled.

FAMOUS FLAGS WHICH WERE NEVER FLOWN.

MR. W. G. PERRIN, the Admiralty Librarian, has made the remarkable discovery that Nelson has been grossly libelled for more than a hundred years.

Biographers, historians, marine painters, and the decorators of the Nelson column and the Admiralty buildings have confused the two signal books in use

The same combination is shown at the masthead of the Victory in all the pictures of Trafalgar.

Every one knows that Nelson's favourite signal was "Engage the enemy more closely." He flew it at Trafalgar, and he flew it at Copenhagen when, after putting his telescope to his blind eye, he declared that he was "d—d if he saw" Sir Ilyde Parker's signal of recall.

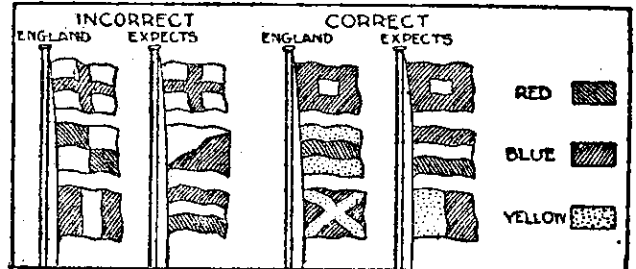
Scarcely a picture illustrating the greater events in the admiral's life has been painted without what was supposed to be a representation of this signal, flying from the flagship's mast-head. Now, after more than a hundred years of error, it has been discovered that the two flags shown in the pictures mean something entirely opposed to what Nelson intended.

The mistake arose from the fact that confidential naval signal books are printed in blank. Only the outlines of the flags are marked, and the colours are filled in at the Admiralty, the object being to let as few people into the secret as possible and to make it easy to keep pace with the frequent changes that are made in the confidential code.

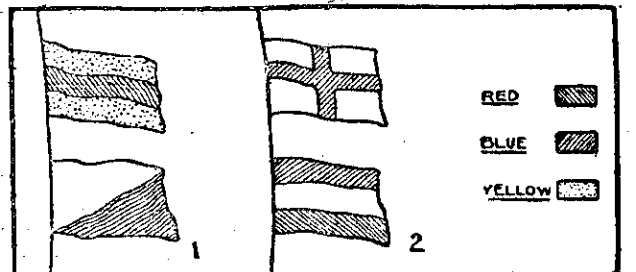
One series of blank books was printed in 1799, and the next in 1808, and consequently when a 1799 book was found it was taken for granted that the signals it contained were those that were in use at Trafalgar. It now appears, however, that a new code was issued in 1804, although the 1799 blanks were still used for the flags. It was the 1804 book that was in use at the time of Trafalgar, and as a result the flags with which the ships in the battle are usually bedecked, though correct enough for the 1799 code, are found to be all wrong—under that which superseded it in 1804.

The flags which mean "Engage the enemy more closely" in the 1799 code mean "Come to my assistance" in the 1804 code.

There can be no question about the correctness of Mr. Perrin's discovery. The book he has found is signed by Sir Thomas Troubridge, Rear-Admiral Markham, Captain Sir Harry Neale, and Mr.



THE RIGHT AND WRONG FLAGS IN NELSON'S FAMOUS SIGNAL.



NELSON'S FAVOURITE SIGNAL: "ENGAGE THE ENEMY MORE CLOSELY."

This signal is usually represented as shown in (1), which, it has now been discovered, actually meant, "Come to my assistance," in the code of 1804. (2) Is the correct signal, which Nelson really hoisted.

the Navy in Nelson's time, with the result that the great admiral's famous signal, "Engage the enemy more closely" has been rendered as "Come to my assistance"—probably the one signal that Nelson never could have made. More culpable still, the immortal "England expects that every man will do his duty" has been turned into:—

"Caution before — because neglect proceeding copy resist advance — America. [The blanks indicate flags for which the 1804 code does not provide a meaning.]

It is this extraordinary jumble that the combination of flags flown every 21st of October on the old Victory mean.

Benjamin Tucker—four officials who were serving together at the Admiralty only from January 21, 1804, to May 15 of the same year. Admiral Troubridge, it will be remembered, was one of Nelson's captains.

The discovery will necessitate the correction of thousands of books and pictures.

The Royal United Service Institution will take steps to see that the correct flags are flown in future, and this year the Victory will hoist Nelson's actual signal, and not one with the quaint combination of phrases pending "Advance—America," according to the code which Nelson used.