

# Our Illustrations

## The Passing of a Brave Woman

AIRINI KARAURIA—MRS. GEORGE PRIOR DONNELLY.

(Specially Written for the "Weekly Graphic.")

**D**EWS was received on Monday that Mrs. G. P. Donnelly died at midnight on Sunday at her residence, Otatara, near Napier, after a long illness.

To write a review of the life of this lady one's hand unconsciously turns to the chapters of the unwritten history of Heretaunga, a history picturesque and tragic—picturesque in that every hill and glade, each river and brooklet, speak of the home of a great people; tragic, in that with the march of our boasted Christian civilisation we find to-day a race slowly drifting down the stream of life to the ocean of oblivion, leaving monuments of what has been, what might have been, but dim spectres in the vale of Shadowland.

In glancing at the subject of this sketch, one is vividly impressed with this startling feature—that embodied in her was the blending and fusion of the blood of the giants of her race. Possibly there is no similar case existing in Maoriland. The lay European mind has no doubt wondered at her personality, tact, forcefulness, and, above all, that great, indescribable something embraced in the comprehensive word "Rangatira." Again, reverting to mundane affairs, why was she rich in landed possessions extending from Taupo and Patea, in the North, to Napier, in the South—from the banks of the Wairoa to the plains of Wairarapa? These are excusable problems to be propounded by the great mass of those who but live to-day; but to those who have lifted the dark curtains of the past the mystery is explained. In Airini Tonore we find there flows through her veins the blood of warriors, tacticians, men who, if born under other skies, would have been diplomats, orators, statesmen. This is no highly-coloured picture, for the older generation of the Pakeha will relate the savage splendour—physically and mentally—of such men as Moananui, Tiakita, Tareha, Karauria, Renata Kawepo, and others, and from them we find in Airini an eloquent illustration of hereditary transmission.

Let us recall our recollections of some of these ancestors. Moananui, the leading chief of his day, who will easily be remembered for his determined opposition to the insidious encroachments of Te Hapuku upon the Heretaunga lands, which culminated in 1857 in a series of engagements at Pakiaka (Bush near Clive), from which Te Hapuku was eventually driven to Poukawa, where he resided until his death. In these affairs Te Moananui had as his lieutenants Tareha, Karauria, and Renata Kawepo. Tiakita was Mrs. Donnelly's grandfather, and held sway over Waimarama, the adjoining lands and their people. He married Erana, a sister of Renata Kawepo's, from whom came Haromi, who married Karauria. As an example of the fearlessness of the race and their knowledge of sea-craft, it was no unusual undertaking for Tiakita and his people to journey by canoes from Waimarama to Wairoa, Mahia, and Turanga, and it was one fatal day in 1847, when on an expedition to the latter locality, that Tiaki-

ta and his craft disappeared, a tragic but poetic exit, returning to the Hawaiki of his ancestors.

Karauria, Airini's father, lives among the heroes of our colony, for, when hostilities commenced in 1868 on the escape of Te Kooti from the Chatham Islands, he was immediately in the field to uphold the mana of the Great White Mother, and, with the typical fighting instincts of a line of "toa" ancestors, fought bravely in many engagements, eventually finding a soldier's death at Mangakaretu, a few days before the overthrow of Ngatapa Pa, in January, 1869. This pa was held by Te Kooti, and after a siege of six days by the colonial forces and friendly natives under Colonel Whitmore and Major Ropata, was captured, and the rebels dispersed, leaving 136 of their number killed.

Renata Kawepo, the principal chief of Omaha, who died in 1888, was another chief to whom the colony owes much. His name is well remembered as that of a man of strength, loyalty and integrity. Among other instances of his friendship to the settlers may be recorded that when Te Kooti, after being expelled by Major Ropata and his Ngata Porou followers from the Urewera Country, took up a position near Tokaanu, Lake Taupo, which threatened the settlements of Hawke's Bay and the West Coast. Renata, acting with Tareha and other Hawke's Bay chiefs, raised a force at their own expense, went to Taupo, and, joining the Wanganui under Major Kemp, and a small European force under Colonel McDonnell, attacked and defeated Te Kooti at Pourere, driving him a fugitive to Waikato, and thus ending a career of mischief and murder that had demoralised the country for some years. In this engagement Renata had an eye torn from his head in a hand-to-hand encounter with one of the rebels. In later years Renata's services were recognised by Her Majesty the Queen by the presentation of a sword of honour and a pension. In an eloquent tribute to him the "Hawke's Bay Herald" wrote at the time of his death: "Renata Kawepo was all that is conveyed in the expressive word 'Rangatira,' and this is as true of him with regard to the old days, prior to European settlement, as it is of him since with a rare sagacity he saw that it was for the good of his people that they and the Pakeha should live together in amity. The calibre of Renata's mind was great. To his people he was in the old days emphatically a 'cunning' man in the Carlylean sense—he was of the metal of which rulers are made. Had he been born in Europe under favourable social conditions he would have become a Bismarck, a Garibaldi, or a Napoleon; but Fate decided that his genesis should be in Southern latitudes, and he fulfilled his destiny by being Renata Kawepo, missionary and warrior. There is no exaggeration whatever in this panegyric, because natural abilities are kept distinct from what may be called polish, of which in the strict sense Renata had none. He was simply one of Nature's strong men, a head and shoulders above his Maori

contemporaries, and he stepped into the front rank of those to be feared for their prowess or to be courted as allies for their strategy." And, again, there was Tareha, the "Mananui" of Waiotiki and its environments, the brother of Te Wiki, grandmother of Airini. He was a man who, while intensely Maori and devoted to his people, early realised the advantages that would accrue to them by a cementing of racial differences, appreciating that the Maori to be a people must dissolve into the community, break his own ranks, and move in solid column with his friends of another race. We consequently find him the associate of the representative of Her Majesty in all matters appertaining to the peaceful settlement of the country. Nothing more pertinent could be said of the character of Tareha than the evidence of the Hon. J. D. Ormond, given some years ago, when he stated, inter alia, that when Superintendent of Hawke's Bay and Government Agent, acting with the late Sir Donald McLean, he received the most valuable assistance from Tareha, and, further, that at the time of the native rebellion in 1868-9, when Napier was threatened with attack by disloyal natives, Tareha was one of the most noted and powerful chiefs in the district, and rendered to the General and Provincial Government, as well as to the Europeans, most important services in resisting the attacks of the misguided fanatics, who were defeated and almost annihilated at Omaramu.

But suffice of reminiscent dreams, the dreams of things that were, though it is good at times that these dead past sentinels should, if even momentarily, be made our contemporaries. Their deeds, their actions, may give us pause.

It has been endeavoured to demonstrate that Airini Tonore was unique in her blood-relationship, in fact, if space allowed, the vista could be extended, but the illustrations given justify the conclusion that it was a natural corollary that she should develop into a woman brave, loyal, fearless, determined, and a lover and defender of her people. That these were her characteristics is known throughout the Dominion and beyond the seas. In passing, a strange indication seems to have been given by the chiefs of what was expected of her and the position she would eventually hold, for on the disposal of the huge Ahuriri estate to the Crown in the early fifties, among the signatures to the deed of cession will be found "Airini Karauria." Mrs. Donnelly was then a babe in arms. Standing out, clearly defined among many innate individualities, were Airini Tonore's allegiance to her people and her generosity and hospitality. She was by rank entitled to be her people's fortress, and when their land or their honour were at stake she was impregnable. Her consistent and persistent defence of their rights in our Courts for the last 25 or 30 years has been noble, and her brilliant advocacy and extensive knowledge of the history and lore of the tribe has been unrivalled by professional counsel and on an occasion been the means of wresting from the hands of exploiting and unscrupulous antagonists the laurels of victory. One of many illustrations may be cited. A Native Land Court was sitting in the Rangitikei District, when word came that the case was going against her people. Renata was ill and could not attend. Suddenly she announced that she would go and represent her uncle, herself and people. At first her determination to go was opposed, she being quite a young girl and unaccustomed to Court procedure. She, however, with the fighting instincts of her race, was adamant and ultimately set out for the "seat of war" with Renata's consent. On reaching the Court the case was practically over and the judgment about to be delivered in favour of her opponents. She claimed to be heard, the Court demurred, Counsel objected, but she persisted and

insisted on her right to speak for and represent herself and absent people. Courage won the day and after eight or ten hours of argument and history worthy of Portia, a judgment was recorded recognising substantial claims of Renata, Airini, and those associated with them. Her people, by her efforts, were made some of the wealthiest landed proprietors in the Island, and if they had followed her example and advice would be so to-day, as she was a non-seller. Nevertheless, many can still thank their chieftainess for their affluence and independence at the present moment.

There is still another marked instance of her honest allegiance to her people and their European friends. The older generation of the latter will remember the wave of unrest that swept this district when the notorious repudiation school commenced its operations. No one's title was safe. Inglorious Europeans cajoled, intimidated, and bribed the susceptible native to repudiate his legal obligation on the sale of land. The temptation was a great one, but Mrs. Donnelly, her husband, and her natives joined the ranks of the Europeans and successfully frustrated the machinations of the designing blackmailers and assisted in saving from possible ruin, many of our most estimable settlers.

The late Mrs. Donnelly's lavish hospitality at her home or at the various kangas of her people on any occasion of importance, whether to entertain European or Maori visitors, or to carry out the sacred rites of the "tang," were dignified expositions of the duties of a Maori chieftainess. Again, on the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York, Mrs. Donnelly was a conspicuous figure among those to welcome and entertain them, and subsequently, when visiting England, had the honour of having her rank and position in Maoriland royally recognised by their Majesties the King and Queen, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and other English notables.

Of late Mrs. Donnelly has resided at Otatara, a name pregnant with legend and history, a picture illustrative of Time's transformation changing the home of her ancestors, stern, defiant, unbeauteous, to the calm of refined civilisation. Yes, Otatara, like many a forgotten grave, has its history. One opens the windows of the past, and, glancing down the avenue of time, sees strange sights upon those sloping hills, with their terraced, frowning battlements, and strange earthworks, and learns the conquest of our plains. Some fourteen generations ago inter-tribal wars occurred at Turanga owing to the assassination of two leading young chiefs—deaths reminiscent of English history and similar in design. Disintegration ensued, and, with the nomadic instincts of the race, a section, headed by their chiefs Taraia and Aotamarahi, set forth to conquer new territory. The romance of their successes, their reverses, as they carved their path from Turanga to Otatara, is enchanting, and recalls the exploits of the Crusaders. Through Mahia, Wairoa, Aroapouani, unto the mystic pa, Heipipi—the remains are still to be seen near Tangoio—they, by strategy and strength of arm, defeated or forced surrender from those who would stem their rushing tide. Their Mecca was the heights of Otatara, and with it and its chief, Turauwha beneath their feet, Heretaunga would become "Te Ipu o Taraia." And so it came to pass, Turauwha and his legions fell to the prowess of Taraia and his fellow-colonisers, and with that the ownership, the "mana," of Heretaunga changed, and ever since has remained with the conquerors. The lineal descendant of Taraia, Airini Tonore, now resides and will breathe her last on the heights from where her ancestors, taking a panoramic view of hills, plains, stream, and sea, exclaimed, "This is mine." It is true—Heretaunga is a canvas, picturesque and tragic.

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