

Barnet Burns, the Tattooed Trader.

Strange Story of Old New Zealand— A Pakeha-Maori's Adventures Amongst the Cannibals.

(Specially written for the "Weekly Graphic" by James Cowan.)

A FEW days ago I unearthed in the Carter collection in the Dominion Museum, through the courtesy of Mr. A. Hamilton, director, a rare little pamphlet containing an account of probably the most interesting pakeha-Maori that ever lived in New Zealand—not even excepting the famous, or notorious, John Rutherford. It is a 26-page booklet, bound up for some inscrutable reason with a number of articles on scientific subjects by Sir Walter Buller. This is how the title page of the pamphlet reads:—

"A brief narrative of a New Zealand chief, being the remarkable history of Barnet Burns, an English sailor, with a faithful account of the way in which he became a chief of one of the tribes of New Zealand, together with a few remarks on the manners and customs of the people, and other interesting matter. Written by himself. Belfast: Printed by R. and D. Read, Crown entry, 1844."

A quaint title, brimful of suggestions, and certainly enticing to a student of early New Zealand history. I imagined I had read pretty well everything in print bearing on the lives of the early pakeha-Maori, but here was one quite new to me, as I fancy it will be to most of my readers. The story is a strange one, but it is undoubtedly quite authentic—far more so, at any rate, than the adventures of Rutherford—and it is backed up by a couple of very curious woodcut illustrations. One picture, the front-piece, is a portrait of Barnet Burns, showing him to have been wonderfully closely tattooed, from the top of his forehead to his chin, as thickly and elaborately tattooed, in fact, as ever any Maori chief ever was. His head would have been a prize for any museum. His curly hair is worn very long, falling down to his shoulders. The other principal picture is a full page block at the end of the book, showing "B. Burns, a New Zealand chief," dressed in what appears to be either a kiwi-feather or dog-skin-covered cloak, with a short flax mat round his waist, Maori ornaments hanging from his neck, and the topknot of his long hair dressed up in chief-like fashion and adorned with three feathers, while the rest of it flows down over his shoulders. In his left is thrust a stone mace; in his hand he holds a long tongue-pointed and be-feathered taiaha. Not only is his face tattooed, but there are spiral tattoo-patterns on the calves of his legs. Round his ankles he wears some peculiar ornaments like a row of white stones, after an ancient Polynesian fashion. All the accessories of "A New Zealand chief" of the cannibal era are there; on the ground at his feet is a human thigh bone, on the other side lies a decapitated tattooed Maori head. There is a Maori whare, too; and in the background is a wrecked and battered ship with the waves breaking over her.

In the preface or "address" written by some long-sighted sympathiser with the pakeha-Maori, there occurs this explanation of the publication:—

"The severe hardships and great cruelties which the subject of this short history underwent during his ten years' detention in New Zealand, (Burns' own statement gives a shorter term), the change of habits, harassing away of life and other circumstances, which it has been his misfortune to be subject to, has so broken up his constitution as to render him no longer an able seaman or capable of earning his livelihood by

his labour. He, therefore, by the advice of several persons who have interested themselves in his behalf, has published this, his history, hoping that the British public will hold out the hand of humanity to one of her sons of the ocean, and assist in alleviating the cares and troubles which he must endure for the remainder of his existence."

The tattooed author also explains why he ventured into print. "Since I find it impossible," he writes, "to walk the streets without exciting the curiosity of all who see me, from my remarkable appearance, and not always having an opportunity of satisfying them, I have been advised by my friends to present the public with a short account of my adventures since I first left England until my return from New Zealand,

on the New Zealand coast for nearly eight months, during which time Burns picked up the Maori language, and was able to speak it fairly fluently. Peculiarly, though, the word "Maori" never occurs anywhere in his narrative; he invariably speaks of the people as "New Zealanders," or "Natives." He took a great fancy to New Zealand and determined to return from Sydney and settle here.

Eventually, in February, 1829, Burns was appointed a trading master for a Sydney merchant, L. Baron Montifore, and under agreement with that gentleman proceeded to Mahia Peninsula, on the East Coast of the North Island, to trade for flax and other New Zealand commodities. ("Dried" are not mentioned in the agreement, a copy of which Burns prints, but no doubt they came in handy all the same in those days). Burns' wages were fixed at £4 per month, together with a commission of five per cent. on all flax, to be valued at £12 per ton. Burns sailed from Sydney for Mahia in the schooner Darling, which caller at "Corrier" (Kawhia is meant; Burns' spelling of Maori names is erratic) and "Mocaw" (Mokau) to land a trading master at each place, then at "Paranackia" and at Entry Island (Mana), arriving at last at the Mahia after a voyage of four months. At the Mahia settlement the schooner landed Burns, with his trade goods, and sailed for the bay of Islands.

Trading at the Mahia.

It was a trying time for the young trader, those first few nights on shore. There was not another white man within

land, I felt frightened at my situation; I knew I was not sure of my life as a hour.

"In the course of a few days my trading chief returned with a large quantity of flax. I traded with him by giving him powder, muskets, shot, blankets, tobacco, etc. I stopped here for nearly eleven months before I received any news from my employer, when at last a vessel arrived from Sydney, sent down to receive the stock that I might have on hand. At the time the ship arrived, it was a poor time for the trade in the place, so they had orders to take away the trade."

Burns' troubles were now beginning. He gave up all the flax and the balance of the trade to the agent on the ship. The natives grew troublesome when they found the trade was to be removed. Burns was under the protection of a chief named "Awhaawhe"; he had married the chief's daughter, who at the time the ship arrived was about to have a child. He decided to stay at the Mahia, and take trade in lieu of the money due to him. "The vessel soon after sailed, and I was left behind. Words cannot express in what state my feelings were; suffice it to say it would have been better if I had been dead. The ship, which contained all my friends and countrymen, leaving me at one side and on the other my wife, who would not quit her native country; and as she was on the point of lying-in I could not bring myself to leave the country with the ship."

So the down-hearted young trader watched the sails of the ship that was his last link with civilisation fade out of sight. He was now, it seemed, a pakeha Maori for good. Henceforth his lot was cast in the smoky huts of the cannibals.

In a few days trouble came. He was warned that spies had come from a tribe who lived some distance away—Burns calls them the "Wattihabities," which apparently means the people from the Whaiti-Apiti, in the Wairoa district—with the object of ascertaining whether it would be possible to plunder his establishment. He told his chief, who "began to cry," lamenting that his tribesmen were so far distant that it would be no use Burns trying to defend his property. He counselled flight to Poverty Bay, where he and his white man would be amongst friends.

In a Canoe to Poverty Bay.

So preparations were immediately made for the removal to Turanganui, or Poverty Bay. A large canoe was got ready, and Burns loaded her with what trade goods he had, and put to sea, with his wife and father-in-law and six slaves. The Mahia women, whose husbands were absent, stood on the beach making dolorous farewell; they wept and cut their faces and bodies with sharp stones "until the blood came streaming from them, it grieved them so much that we should leave them for want of protection."

Burns and his crew had a perilous voyage. A strong southerly wind sprang up, and the sea began to run so heavy that they were forced to run for shelter for the night. The next day they "steered" for a place called "Wyslue" (Waiki), which they could not leave because of the heavy seas running in. They, therefore, tramped to Poverty Bay on foot, the local Maoris, who were friendly and who looked round them in hundreds, carrying Burns' property.

At Poverty Bay Burns was safe—for a while. He made his home about twelve miles inland, where he could enjoy the protection of the strong and populous fortified villages. "This part of New Zealand," he wrote, "I think is the finest and most beautiful of all the island—at least what I saw of it. Here I found plenty of game, such as ducks, pigeons, and other kinds of birds; plenty of pork, potatoes, melons, and Indian corn, and every kind of vegetable in abundance."

Burns on the Warpath.

Before many weeks had passed war broke out between Burns' tribe and another, mustering nearly six hundred fighting men, whose headquarters were about twenty miles away. "It was now for the first time I went to battle, it being my chief's particular wish for me to accompany him. I needed but very little pressing to take this step, as I thought it was better to go than stop behind by myself. I gave them all the muskets I had, also all the powder and shot. So we set out from here for a place called Marliathe; I dare say nearly seven hundred of us. We had to strike right through the country about twenty miles to where we heard the enemy were. On the day we arrived we perceived a great deal of smoke arise in different places, from which we thought the enemy were



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which I hope will prove acceptable to all who may feel anxious to hear something about New Zealand, as well as to those who may wish to have an account of the circumstances which led to my adoption as a Chief by the natives of that remarkable island."

"I left England," Baited Burns' narrative opens, "in the year 1827, in the brig Wilna, with Captain Tate, bound for Rio de Janeiro, touching at the Western Islands." At Rio, he explains, all hands were paid off, and he reached Sydney, N.S.W., in the barque Nimrod. At Sydney he spent two years in the service of the Bank of Australia. He then joined the brig Elizabeth, Captain Browne, bound on a trading voyage to New Zealand for flax. The brig was

a hundred miles of him. He was alone amongst thousands of cannibal savages. It was a period when ferocious inter-tribal wars, made more sanguinary still by the introduction of firearms, were waged almost continually. The Maoris welcomed the white man only for the goods he brought, and he was liable at any time to be robbed and killed and eaten. Burns loaded his trade in canoes, and placed it in a Maori whare. "Directly I landed," he says, "the chief whom I had particularly selected to trade with left me; so I had the whole charge on my hands. I was obliged to carry my musket and constantly sleep with it by my side; in fact, I had to keep watch all the time. Then, for the first time since I took my fancy to visit New Zea-