

Tales of Bush and Ocean.

The Story of a Stone Axe—A Memory of the Rotorua Country.

By JAMES COWAN.

IT was from old Wāhoroa, one of the few reliable historians and legend-keepers of the Arawa tribe, who died not long since, that I heard this tale of the times of old. Some of us had been on an exploring trip through the thick forest to the northward of Lake Rotorua, in search of the ancient cave-dwellings at Te Pehu pa, concerning which many vague traditions were current amongst the lakeside Maoris. With the help of two Natives we came upon the storied caves, and on our return we unearthed something of their history from Wāhoroa. The story was an excellent illustration of the serious results which often sprang from trivial causes in ancient Maoridom. The provoking cause of a terrible clan vendetta was a case of "robbery from the person," which in these peaceful pakeha times would have ended in a prosaic police court. It was all over a little stone axe. As far as the word-of-mouth Maori narrative goes, it wasn't even a greenstone axe.

First of all, though, let me give a brief description of the cave-dwellings of Te Pehu. An uncommonly interesting spot, in a romantically beautiful environment, but so far the Lakeland tourist knows not of it, for the sightseer needs roads, and there is no road to Te Pehu, though it is within, I should say, 20 miles of Rotorua town. It lies in the dense woods almost due north of Rotorua, on the volcanic plateau which divides the lake basin from the Tauranga country. To reach it we first drove 11 miles along the main road to Tauranga, passing the Awahou on the way; then we turned off to the right along the new road, which led to the recently-opened sections between Hamurana and the Manga-o-Rewa stream. The rest of the journey, three or four miles, was a tramp over a very rough track—sometimes no track at all—through the bush. At last we came to the edge of a huge cleft in the wooded hills, a great gorge, hundreds of feet deep, wooded from hilltop to ravine bottom. The sound of a rapid river, tumbling over a rocky bed, came to us from the leafy depths. And here, when our track ended, we were able to trace the outlines, albeit covered by a thick growth of native vegetation, of the old hill fort Te Pehu, which stood on a commanding summit directly overlooking the river of the wilderness. It was evidently a pa of great age, for in its earthworks grew some rimu and rata trees of large size. Our trail led between the main pa and the tree-covered ruins of a koukou, or bastion, or outwork. And then, on the steep hillside overlooking the gorge, we found a long row of curious beehive-like openings in the rocky cliff, fronting a narrow terrace cut out of the hill—a terrace on which, no doubt, native huts originally stood. There were nine of these cave doors, as far as we could discover. Possibly there were others, but if so they were hidden in the dense jungle of the bush. One of the caves we entered and measured. It was 5 ft high, 1 ft long, and between 8 ft and 9 ft in width. The rectangular door opening which gave access to these rua or ana, as the Maoris called them, were from 3 ft to 4 ft high. We had to stoop low to enter. The roof was rounded. It had been clipped out of soft rock with obsidian axes and knives. The marks of the tools of the ancient tattooed troglodytes were still plainly visible. The floors of the "rua" were sunken to the depth of about a foot below the level of the terrace. Some of the tiny underground dwellings were connected by small holes cut through the rocky walls. Originally, our Maoris told us, these hillside caves were cut out as store-houses for the keeping of kumara and fern root and other foods of the old-time Maori. Subsequently they were enlarged within and used as secret dwelling-places by the broken tribe that once occupied the palisaded fort above. Nowadays, the roving pig hunter, the stray pakeha settler, as well as the Maori, occasionally used the lonely caves as snug places for a night's shelter; also, the

wild poker himself makes use of some of them; and it would be as well, should you ever investigate the ruins of Te Pehu for yourself, to make sure that some delirious old boar isn't already in possession.

The history of Te Pehu and its ruins goes back, as far as one can trace, something between 250 and 300 years. Once it was a populous place, a little centre of life and love and all the activities of a self-sufficing aboriginal commune, a townlet cut out of the vast forest; and the song of the villagers and the loud alarm of the wooden wargong sounded here in the days of long ago. The forest has long reclaimed its own, and for many a generation the wilderness has had its way with Te Pehu pa, and the Fort of the Caves has lain unvisited and almost forgotten even by the Maoris. But the white settler is at hand, with his axe and his burning-off fire, and presently, no doubt, there will be such a clearance of these ancient woods as will reveal even more of these curious storage caves and carved-out dwelling-places of the vanished people.

It was all over a stone axe, a much-treasured toki of many legendary and tapu memories. So said grey old Wāhoroa, telling of the fate which befell the arrogant ones of Te Pehu pa. This forest fortress belonged to the Tapuika tribe, a clan of the Arawas. They built it there, on the wild banks of the Manga-o-Rewa, about 11 generations ago. Their nikau and fern-frond dwellings stood on the hilltop and on the terraces above the gorge, and these hollowed-out caves in the hillside they used for the storage of their winter food-stock. And there they lived in peace until the time of Te Koata, who lived about seven generations ago—approximately 175 years from the present time.

Well, about this time—seven generations ago—there lived a chief of the Arawas, and his name was Katu. His home was over yonder at Waiteti, where a stream flows into Lake Rotorua from the slopes of Mount Ngongotaha. Also he had a home at Puhirua, a large village of the Ngati-Rangiwewehi tribe, which stood between Te Awahou and the famous spring which is known to-day as Hamurana; its ancient name was Te Pura-i-Hangarua (the Fount of Hangarua). It was to Puhirua that his wife belonged. His own tribe was Ngati-Hanga, whose descendants live at Waiteti and Weriwiri to this day. Now, this Katu was a great traveller. He was for ever on the go, visiting his tribe and that, taking presents and receiving presents, raising a dismal voice at Tangi and making eloquent speeches at tribal gatherings. He was an independent sort of fellow, and often made long pilgrimages alone or with but one or two attendants to carry food and gifts, a sometimes risky fashion of travelling in olden Maori Land.

It happened that Katu took the notion one day to pay a visit to some of his friends who lived in the distant Waikato country. They were Ngati-Ihama, and their home was near the foot of Maungakawa hill. With them he sojourned a while, and before he left for his Lakeland home the Ngati-Ihama chief presented him, as a token of "aroha," with a valuable and celebrated toki, or axe (it may have been one of the adze-shaped "taki-holohoupu" so much prized in other days), and with a shark's tooth ear pendant, or "makotauwha." With these treasures he departed for his kainga, over the hills and through the forests, greatly rejoicing. He had with him but a single attendant, a slave.

Now, it befell that at this time there were also on a visit to the Ngati-Ihama people two chiefs of the Tapuika bushmen, from the pa of which I have told, the forest hold of Te Pehu. Their names were Rakawhiti and Whangamui. They were fierce, rough men, like most Maori bush-dwellers, and they were a law unto themselves. They heard of the presenta-

tion of the tribal heirlooms to Katu, and envying him the possession of the famous axe, they decided to waylay him and "murru" it by the might of the strong hand. Accordingly they departed shortly before Katu, and when they had gone about half a day's journey they stopped off the track and lay in ambush beneath the sheltering brushwood.

Presently Katu came along, all unsuspecting of the ambush. The two bare-backed highwaymen rushed out upon him from behind, overpowered both him and the slave, snatched their weapons from them, and robbed Katu of his precious axe and his shark's tooth ear ornament. Then, with jeerings and revilings, they went on their way, presently leaving Katu's weapon, his taihoa, on the track, where he could recover it, and took a trail of their own through the forests for the distant Manga-o-Rewa.

Katu, angry and mortified beyond words, trudged through the bush until he reached his native lakeside. To Puhirua he went, and there, in the marae, the village square, he told the people of his loss, and publicly wept for his stolen treasures, "murru'd" from him by the wild men of Te Pehu.

The Arawa were up in arms at once. A war party was assembled, and marched through the bush to the woody gorge of the Manga-o-Rewa. There, standing without the stockade of Te Pehu, the leader of the column demanded compensation—"utu"—for the robbery, and intimated that he would accept a number of dogskin cloaks (kukahu waero), which Tapuika were known to possess. But the chiefs of the pa, secure and insolent behind their strong earthworks and palisades, hurled hot and mocking words at the lake men, and bade them depart. So the Arawa, furious but impotent, returned to Rotorua and bided their time.

Time passed; perhaps it was a year. And then Te Koata, who was the leading chief of Te Pehu, went with a few followers on a friendly visit to some connections of his at Puhirua. A rash thing to do, for the friends of Katu had by no means forgiven or forgotten the affair of the stone axe. They seized Te Koata, roughly handled him, and despoiled him of his fine dogskin cloak and his greenstone hand-club, or patu. That was evening matters with him for the marring of the Waikato axe by his two tribesmen.

Te Koata, hot with anger, speedily departed from Puhirua, but, instead of returning straight to Te Pehu, went to Kawaha, the strong pa which then stood on the prominent headland to the north of Ohineutu—you can see its earthworks there to-day on the green hill top—and told the people there of his woes. They were Ngati-Whakane, and more or less related to him, as they were also to the Puhirua residents. And one of the Ngati-Whakane, who had a grudge of his own against the people of Katu's tribe, speedily precipitated the battle.

He took an old flax mat of the variety called kākupira, in which fire would smoulder for a long time without bursting into a blaze, and, setting it alight, embarked in his small canoe and paddled across the water to Puhirua under cover of night. Stealthily creeping up to the large meeting-house, which was the pride of the settlement, a whare adorned with beautiful carved figures within and without, he quietly buried the smouldering kākupira in the dry, inflammable rampo, with which the walls of the house were thatched. Then he stole back to his canoe and paddled off for Kawaha.

Soon the thatch of the big house burst into flames, and the splendid whare-whakairo was speedily on fire from end to end. The village was in a furious turmoil. Well they guessed who had done this deed, or at any rate, instigated it. What did they do?

The first thing they did was to seek some object upon which they could vent their immediate anger. They bothgotted them of a certain old woman, whose name was Waitare, and who lived near the Spring, now known as Hamurana. She happened to be closely related to the people of Te Pehu pa, the Tapuika. A number of young men ran at their utmost speed to Waitare's hut. Seizing her, they bore her back at a run to the village, where the great house was now a heap of ruins, but still burning with great heat. With a heave-ho! all together, they hurled the poor old creature, pitifully wailing, into the glowing mass. She was roasted alive.

"But what had she to do with the trouble?" asked the pakeha.

"Oh, nothing at all," replied Wāhoroa. "That was just the Maori way. She belonged to Tapuika, that was all. Anyhow, it was a fair thing. Tapuika instigated the burning of the carved house, therefore why not burn a Tapuika in the house? It was fair and square, pakeha! It was perfectly tikā."

However, as Wāhoroa went on to tell, the feud didn't end with the cremation of the old lady who had such a rude awakening from her slumbers. The Ngati-Rangiwewehi and Ngati-Ihenga and connections bore spear and war-axe into the enemy's forest land. Raising a strong war party, and going through the necessary karakias and victory-assuring ceremonies at the tribal tahuu or altar of placation and divination—the tahuu at Hauraki, near Puhirua, where the five sacred white stones, set upright in a row, are still to be seen, about a mile past the Awahou village—they marched off through the high bush for their enemies' headquarters. This time they tarried not to parley with Tapuika, but went at the walls with fury. Their attack was irresistible. Bearing down all before them, they stormed the pa and slew most of the garrison, sparing only some of the women and young girls, who would come in useful as slave wives. The survivors—there were not very many of them—fled down the great gorge and across the Manga-o-Rewa to another pa of their people, a hill fort called Te Weta. There the Tapuika made another stand. But they were attacked here, and this time the victory of the Lake men was even more decided. Te Weta fell, and its defenders, or the greater number of them, went straight-way to the Reinga, the land of the dead. The sad remnant hid in the great forest, starving and broken.

Presently, when the rejoicing warriors of Rotorua, after feasting on the slain and smoke-drying the heads of the principal warriors who had fallen, had departed for the Lake, the few that were left of Tapuika crept back to their ruined hill village at Te Pehu. Amongst them were the three chiefs Te Kaote, Rakawhiti and Whangamui. They did not dare to occupy the stockade site again, but made those hillside caves, the old food rans, their dwelling places. There they lived for long, cultivating not at all, but living altogether on birds and other foods of the forest, always in fear of their powerful foes, until at length the Arawa let them be, and made peace, and gave them lands nearer the sea coast. And that is the story of Katu's little stone axe and all the rest of it wrought.

Fulfilled Predictions.

"Dagonet" (Mr G. R. Sims) writing in a recent "Reference," recalls some famous supernatural predictions the fulfilment of which is proved. "One of the best known is 'The Curse of Mar.' The Earl of Mar was cursed prior to 1571, when he was elevated to the position of Regent of Scotland; 'Tay lands shall be given to the stranger and thy title shall lie among the dead. The branch that springs from thee shall see his dwelling burnt in which a King was nursed—his wife a sacrifice to that same flame, his children numerous, but of little honour, and three born and grown who shall never see the light. Horses shall be stabled in thy hall and a weaver shall throw his shuttle in the chamber of state. Thine ancient tower shall be a ruin and a beacon until an ash sapling shall spring from its topmost stone. Then shall thine honours be restored; the kiss of peace shall be given to the counties though she seek it not, and the days of peace shall return to thy line.' In the course of 300 years every part of the curse was fulfilled. Then in 1820 the ash sapling duly appeared. Two years later George IV. restored the earldom, and later Queen Victoria kissed the counties. The prediction of the Tieborne dole—that if ever the dole were discontinued the family name would become extinct from failure of male issue—is better known. The extinction was to be foretold by a generation of seven sons being followed by a generation of seven daughters and no son. The dole was discontinued 600 years after the prediction was made. The baronet of that day had seven sons. His son who succeeded him had seven daughters and no son.