

A MAORI JOHN ALDEN.

By HILDA KEANE.



THE evening kai was finished, but the hapu sat on. The red flames leapt high into the dark, then sank to a crimson smoulder. Every flicker lighted a group of dark faces. Sometimes only gleaming eyes and teeth would answer, sometimes a form would show against the blackness. Once the light caught the strong, tattooed face of Te Rewhiti, next it outlined Hina, whose hair fell over her shoulders into the shadows, but whose face was buried in her knees. A sudden great flare shot forth. All were talking, eagerly gesticulating. Then, as only the embers glowed, the voices lulled, and a child cried in the distance. "Te wharepuni!" said a girl, shuddering from the night. A streak of light shone from the panel of the meeting-house; and instantly, brands were seized, the kapara torches were burning, and the korero was begun.

Not one in the hapu, withered old crone, or tiny child, but knew that Te Maniwha, chief of the Rarotoka, wished a marriage between his son and Hina, the young princess of the Ngatimanua. The matter provided talk for many weeks, and though each knew that the betrothal was a sure event, the argument would be prolonged for weeks more. Te Maniwha was asked to come in person, and to bring his son, the bridegroom. But Te Maniwha lived a hundred miles away, and the winter floods were heavy. Then a dispute with a neighbouring tribe demanded that he should fight. The boy, Te Ringa, was in the early stages of

tattooing, and therefore Te Maniwha sent in his stead, the finest orator of the tribe. Te Rewhiti was ordered to explain that his chief was gone to collect the heads of his enemies, and that Te Ringa was sick. Upon his arrival, the men of the Ngatimanua pretended that this gave occasion for serious consideration, and in their hearts welcomed the new turn in affairs. It was not every day that such excuses for talk came to them. Then, too, such stores of kumera and shark had come with Te Rewhiti and his warriors, that the Ngatimanua saw feasting for days ahead. Te Rewhiti was handsome and stalwart, so were his comrades, and many of the maidens envied Hina.

In the darkest corner of the wharepuni, an old woman was muttering alone. Everywhere was talk and chatter. A man sprang to his feet, and poured forth a torrent of words.

"Haeremai! haeremai! men of Rarotoka! So it is a wife you would have for your chief? Is it our Hina? Ah, Hina is ours, the flower of the hapu, and if you take her, you take somewhat of our mana."

"Yes, and you take her whom I have looked on as mine!" shouted Patuona. "Why should Hina not marry me, who am of her own tribe? You would send her to a child! Why have the Rarotoka sent Te Rewhiti? Why not Te Ringa?"

"Because," was hissed from the corner, "because he is a weakling. He is ugly. He is not tattooed. He——" But a kapara torch fell, and in the semi-gloom, the women