

The Mystery of the "Korotangi."

By "RANGITIHI."



KOROTANGI is the name given by the Maoris to a curiously-carved stone bird—one of the most remarkable relics in existence, pointing as it does to a remote connection with Asiatic or Japanese shores, a memento of the sea-roving Polynesians of untold centuries back. It is in the possession of a half-caste family, of high rank on the Maori mother's side; there are casts of the original in several museums. Famous amongst all the tribes of New Zealand is "Korotangi"—the subject of many a Maori song.

According to Waikato legends, "Korotangi" was brought to these shores in the Tainui canoe (which landed at Kawhia Harbour) from the South Sea Islands, some six centuries ago. Beyond that its history is wrapped in impenetrable mystery. It is not, however, of Maori manufacture—that is certain. The song says: "E hara tena he manu Maori."—"That is not a Maori bird." It has been compared with an ancient Japanese bronze bird in a New Zealand museum; the two carvings are in some respects very similar. The bird is not unlike a pigeon; a free Polynesian interpretation of its name is "The Crying Dove." The bird, represented as on a perch, measures ten and a-quarter inches from point of beak to tip of tail, and is carved with high artistic finish out of a very hard and heavy dark-green metallic stone. Its weight is four pounds ten ounces. The carving is in a wonderful state of preservation

(except that a portion of the tail has been broken off) considering the vicissitudes through which it must have passed since first the unknown artist fashioned it so cunningly.

What a romantic mystery envelops this little "Crying Dove!" What questions does it not suggest! Was it borne, like the Roman eagle, in some ancient ship of Asiatic voyagers, some roving ocean-craft which found its fate far down in the islands of the tropics, in the wild South Seas? Is it the one lone relic of some captured foreign ship, cut off by the piratical Vikings of the mid-Pacific? For how many long centuries has it not traversed the Great Ocean of Kiwa, from island unto island where the Son of Day has his flaming uprising—first, perchance, in some far-cruising junk, then in the long sailing-canoes of the Polynesian sailormen! If the "Crying Dove" could but speak what an epic could it not tell us, thrilling as the Odyssey, romantic as the tale of Jason and the Golden Fleece!

The Maoris say that the Kawhia and Waikato people—the descendants of the Tainui stock—carried "Korotangi" with them on their expeditions of war and consulted it as an oracle. The bird was set up on a hill-top by the taua (war-party) and karakia'd to and invoked for assistance and good fortune. It was the tribal talisman, the bare-legged army's mascotte.

"Korotangi" was lost at Kawhia some generations ago, and remained hidden for many years, no one knowing its whereabouts. Great was the grief of Waikato and Tainui