

"Ay," replied the taller, and besides I want to hear what the strangers from the North have to tell us at the *korero* to-night. Let us go."

The two boys seated themselves in a small canoe and paddled off with quiet and easy stroke. Crossing a broad arm of the swamp they entered a small creek, which, fed from the marsh, emptied itself after a short course into the Waikato. A few minutes' paddling brought them out on to the rapid current of the river, and, turning down stream, they made their way to the Meremere *pa*.

Both the lads were fine sturdy specimens, Tautini (a chief's son) being somewhat the taller and more slightly built. He was straight and supple, with keen, bright eyes, his whole bearing forming somewhat of a contrast to the more stolid, thick-set appearance of his comrade, Nini.

As the boys were soon to know, there were great events gathering in the Waikato district in that month of October, 1863.

It was about nine o'clock when Nini and Tautini reached the *pa*. After placing their fish in safety, they immediately went to the big meeting whare, in which the *korero* mentioned by Tautini was commencing. The whare was crowded to the utmost to hear the new arrivals, and the lads joined the throng with feelings of interest and curiosity. The events of that night were graven deep in Tautini's imaginative mind.

The natives—both men and women—sat crowded together upon the floor of the dimly-lighted building, which was lined with quaint and ancient carvings. At the far end sat the chief, a strong, vigorous, middle-aged man, and by his side the *Tohunga* or priest. At the sharp command of "Silence!" the steady hum of conversation ceased abruptly, and one of the strangers from the North rose to address the assembly. In dignified and flowing words, enforced by facile gestures, he related to the attentive listeners all the trouble that had arisen with the white man. How, far away in Taranaki, quarrels had broken out in connection with a piece of land which the *pakeha*, in defiance of the immemorial custom of the Maori, claimed as

his own, and how their brothers in that district had long been defending themselves against the greedy white man. How in their own district, in spite of solemn warnings, the road had been pushed right into Maori land. How the whole country was rushing to arms to defend the rights of the Maori against the perjured foe. Brandishing a spear above his head, the orator, with fiery vehemence, called upon his hearers to prove themselves men, and to strike hard for their liberty and their lands.

Scarcely had he ceased than there sprang up old Whaitiri, he who had fought of old against Hongi, and later still, had followed the great Heke, and shared in the sack of Kororaraka. With burning words he called aloud for war, war to the very death! Warrior after warrior followed, each crying for vengeance against the treacherous, grasping foe.

The stinging words sent the hot blood surging through Tautini's veins as he sat drinking in the burning eloquence. Ah, how he longed to strike for his race against the pitiless white! How he clenched his fingers, and almost gasped for breath when his father, the chief, in tones of uncontrollable fury, called upon his people to fight even to the death in defence of their rights, their homes and their children! The tense, quivering forms around him showed how the lust for war was seizing the minds of the savage listeners. Suddenly is heard a voice chanting the old, old war chant, ages old, handed down by generation after generation of warriors, tracing its origin to the dim, misty past. One by one the listeners take it up, till gradually the swelling sound, with strong, sustained electric fervour, strikes weirdly upon the ear, and sends the blood coursing madly through the veins. With rhythmic wail and rhythmic beat, now swelling, now sinking with strange, monotonous, almost unbearable intensity it continues, dying away at last in barbaric minor wail.

Ah, how the peaceful villagers are transformed! The mad fury of their lust for fighting almost overmasters them. Their eyes start from the sockets, their mouths and