

A MAORI VERSION . .

OF THE

Origin of the Waikato River.

AS TOLD BY WINI KEREI TE WHETUITI
TO JOHN STCLAIR.

IT was nearly midnight late in the autumn of 1891 that we had finished the work of compiling a list of names to be put into a block of land to which Wini Kerei te Whetuiti was entitled, and the aged chief of Ngatipaoa, sitting in his *whare* at the Hoe-o-Tainui, was much pleased at the completion of the list. He had read it over again and again, and decided that nobody could have been left out. His daughter, however, reminded him that a young couple were out on the hills digging gum, and that she had heard that a child was born to them the previous day, but did not know whether it was a boy or a girl. "What does it matter?" said the aged chief, "we will give it a name and put it into the Block so that it shall have land." When asked the name a difficulty arose, some wanted one name, others a different one, until, tired out with the argument, Wini Kerei decided to call it Pena-Tikena-Kauri-Kama (been digging kauri gum), so the name was duly added to the list. As I wrote its residence in the proper column as "Te-Hoe-o-Tainui," it occurred to me to ask my old friend the origin of the name. I could see that it meant the "Paddle of the canoe Tainui," but was anxious to hear the story, especially as I knew he was a great authority on ancient Maori lore and wisdom.

"You are right," replied he, "it does mean the paddle of Tainui, but it is more, it is the steer oar of the canoe. It has two

meanings: one for the wise, and one for the people; but it has a history also. Near to where this *whare* and *pa* stand is the 'Tahuna Tapu,' which divides the waters of Waikato from those of Piako (you can see it tomorrow), but the waters were not always thus divided. When my ancestors first came to this land it was a huge lake, whose waters spread far and wide, from the Au-o-Waikato to Pirongia and on to Taupiri, it is said the canoe Tainui came to the foot of Pirongia Mountain. It is correct that she was a double canoe, that is two canoes fastened together for safety, she came as such up the Waitemata, as far as the Whau, where some of the crew, finding the course blocked, climbed up Pukewhau (Mount Eden), and discovered a narrow place at the Tamaki where Ann's Bridge now is, and they took the canoe there and, taking her apart, dragged the larger of the canoes across to Manukau, and went on to Aotea, near Kawhia, where she now lies, turned to stone.

Prior to this the canoe had come up the Hauraki Gulf to this place, where she stuck on the Tahuna Tapu (sacred bank). In getting her off the steer oar was lost, and lies buried in the mud close by, hence the sandbank became sacred. Only those who are wise know how to use the paddle, and fools only injure themselves with it, hence it is best that it should be "tapu," or sacred.