

a smaller smattering of their customs and a very big smattering of narrow-mindedness. He was just rotten with mistaken theology. A fine, young fellow, gentle, eloquent, a slave to duty, but mad about his priesthood; it was that which ruined him. You know enough about the Maori ways to guess that they took to him as if he were a kind of new *tohunga*. They didn't see him at all in the light in which he saw himself, and his creed meant something very strange to their crude understandings. However, most of the inhabitants of the pa turned Christians, and went to church, and he talked doctrine to them with all his formulas translated literally into parson's Maori."

"Don't run down the missionaries McCrae," said McShane.

"Who's runnin' 'em down?" answered the sergeant. "I'm a parson's son myself, though I am down in the world a bit, and I don't forget the old man and his simple faith. I knew many a grand man in the early days who did his work here with little hope of any other reward except being murdered, and it was sensible, good work too. I simply say Letham Crouch was the wrong sort. He knew nothing about heathens, and he had no sympathy. He couldn't realise that the one or two old Maoris, who stuck to their paganism, were honest men, and worth a lot of respect. Most of the others were playing at being Christians. Why, an old chief died in a whare, a little way outside the pa, and they *tapued* it, and not a man jack of the whole boiling lot would live in the place!"

The sergeant lay back in his chair, and chuckled at the recollection.

"That fairly broke Letham Crouch up," he went on. "He spent hours on his knees praying over his lost sheep, and he got up from them with a practical plan. That pa was Christian enough to do a deal, and it sold the whare, *tapu* and all, to Letham Crouch. Did you ever read Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*?"

The question was sudden and apparently irrelevant. Besides, although McCrea was a well-informed man, his temperament was

not one to have been suspected of a weakness for Edgar Allan Poe.

"Yes," I said.

"Do you remember the sentence of the inorganic?" he asked.

"You mean," I said, "the application of a theory of the sentence of all vegetable things to the kingdom of inorganization. Pretty daring folly."

"Just that," agreed the sergeant; "but daring or not, what follows seems to trespass on it. So far as I can make out, no living thing was responsible for the disappearance of Letham Crouch. It must have been environment. When he'd bought the whare, there was nothing would suit him but he must go and live in it. He moved out of the comfortable mission cottage, and for a month he set the example of living down *tapu*. During that time he grew thin and worn looking. One day I noticed his eyes were sunken and wild. McShane and I went up to see him the same evening.

"As McShane can tell you, the whare was beautifully clean and tidy. Crouch had moved his books into it, and a small silver-tipped ebony cross stood on the table. He was reading a copy of *Thomas a Kempis* when we went in. You can't imagine the effect the man and his devotional belongings had on the inside of the old Maori whare.

"Aren't you tired of living here?" I asked him. "I must live their superstition down," he said. "That you'll never do," McShane urged. "What's bred in the bone will out in the flesh." "Then the flesh must be conquered," he answered, smiling with a fanatical light in his eyes. "Their pagan beliefs must be trodden under foot. At any rate, this whare is good enough for my unworthy tabernacle to house in."

"I could see that he would give worlds to feel himself free to return to the mission house.

"Well," I said, "you may as well be comfortable in your own home. Your staying here will have no effect on the natives except a bad one. I know 'em pretty well, and it's truth I'm telling you." "I shall conquer them," he cried, taking up the cross from the table. "By the strength