

WAITANGITANGI

A Waikato Legend

BY
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Illustrated by Kennett Watkins.

AS I pushed through the fern and manuka I heard the sound of voices, and then faint laughter.

Voices in this lonely place? Among leagues of moorland and forest? A puff of wind carried the sound away. Next moment I was at the brink of the cliff. A strange place! There was a broad ledge half way down. I lowered myself on to it, and peered over the sheer rock.

Just above, the Waikato, sweeping secretly between cliffs, enters a round pool, a river chamber. Its walls are clothed with shaggy grass, and fern on fern like the scales of a dragon. The mighty current pauses a moment,

"The blind wave feeling round its rocky walls
In silence,"

but the green water swirls and writhes as though in pain. At last it finds escape. Smoothly and powerfully it sweeps into the jaws of the passage below me. How it must be tortured deep down there! The water boils in whirlpools, in twisting currents, in backward-breaking waves. I saw it heave between its prison walls as though striving to burst them.

There was a sudden silence.

Again, faint and far, I heard the voices and the distant laughter. They rose from the hollow of the rock underneath me, but it was not the mere babbling of waters.

Waikato, waster of men, was it not the spirit of your slain talking together where they lie,

"Days and nights in the narrow room?"

I lay long in the dark throat of the river pass, and listened to many tales, broken by

