

# Tutae-Poroporo :

Or, *The Taniwha of the Whanganui River.*

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GR<sup>EAT</sup> confusion exists as to what a "taniwha" really is, some Maoris try to explain that it is, or was, a saurian monster, or huge amphibious reptile, somewhat like a crocodile, or, as they describe it, a gigantic tutara lizard; but when one comes to sift the Maori's explanations it is found he really does not know, and that he is inventing or retailing information he got from some other Maori equally ignorant. I once asked an aged chief the reason why there was a round spot on the Johnny Dory fish; he replied that that was the fish which Peter caught to take the coin out of its mouth with which to pay tribute to the Roman Emperor, and most Maoris believe the story, which, perhaps, originated with the missionary. In the same way, aided by the missionary, the Maori has come to regard the word "wairua" as the spirit or soul. He says: "Oke, oke, e te wairua ngenge nei"—rest, oh rest, thou weary soul, etc., and prays to "Te Wairua Tapu," or the third person of the Christian Trinity; but the ancient Maori sage, or tohunga, well knew that by "wairua" he expressed a shadow, a phantom, a spook or astral shade; hence the reason why the missionary too often fails to make any lasting or deep impression on the thinkers amongst the Maori race.

In giving the Taniwha of the Whanganui River I have taken care to sift the story and the meaning of every word by the information of a number of old Maori sages; and although I know some modern Maori scholars may laugh, yet I am prepared to support the esoteric meaning on the authority of the old men who know, and not on the

inventive genius of the young Maoris whose heads are too often turned by billiards, whisky, gambling and dissipation, and who really don't know.

The old men such as Wini Kerei Te Whetuiti, Te Wharepu, both now dead, or even Te Manu Karioi, Te Whiti or Te Ahu Te Wharepu would explain that a "taniwha" was a monster of the subjective world, endowed with great and terrible powers. It is supposed to be a transformation of a human being, who, having lived through countless incarnations, at last becomes a demigod. There are two classes of "taniwha," the good and the evil. The good are those who, having through various re-births worked unselfishly for the benefit of the race, now require to incarnate no more, but remain in the subjective world to watch over the interests and welfare of the human race, influencing them for good, and assisting them in their difficulties by the use of the occult powers known only to the "tohunga" or initiate priest, which latter are called "Aratawhiti" or the enlightened.

The evil "taniwha" is a demon of devastation, a thing wholly foul and vile, the culmination of a long career of evil-doing, witchcraft and sorcery carried on in many lives. It may be directed and controlled by the intelligence or personality of the deceased wizard "Tohunga Makutu," or it may have become an entity working on its own account, and blindly set in motion by evil thoughts and desires, or the will power of the black magician, but I shall deal more fully with this subject of "Makutu" in a separate paper.

"Taniwhas" are said to transform themselves into rocks on the