

scribed the 'splendour' of its performance at a great tangihanga he had attended:

I saw the Whanganui chief Takarangi Mete Kingi rise to his feet and raise his greenstone mere above his head, in signal to his people. He cried the opening words of the death chant and the next moment all the assembled mourners sprang to their feet, and with two black-garbed women at their front gesticulating and rolling their eyes, they broke into a grand chorus.... They stamped and threw their arms this way and that, and the women waved their leafy twigs of koromiko and willow, emblems of sorrow, and as they sang with full voice the ancient rhythmic poem, it seemed as if they were defiantly challenging the Death that lay personified before them....

Eyes rolling, head-feathers dancing, black tresses tossing, greenstone and whalebone weapons and carved taiahas brandished, the people ended their great song with a long-drawn cry. And Takarangi, with mere quivering, called his loud farewell until he almost screamed it: 'Farewell! Depart, depart! And greet your thousand ancestors

Go, go, go to That Place!'<sup>3</sup>

An earlier account of a performance by an orator comes from an Englishman, J.E. Gorst, who in 1906 revisited the Waikato tribes he had known 44 years previously. At that time Gorst had been a resident magistrate at Te Awamutu, and while he had been powerless to prevent the onset of war, he had won the friendship and respect of many leading men. He was now received with honour and greeted with emotion, all the more so because his reappearance after so many years brought back memories of the men and women of that time who were no longer alive. He later described his reception by Ngati Maniapoto:

The first speaker was Tuko Rewo, a white-haired old chief, who spoke the most cordial and affecting words of welcome, and in a high quavering voice sang a song, in which he likened my reappearance to the first dawn of light in the morning sky. I had gone as a chief from their midst, and I now returned to them as a chief. All the high chiefs of olden days were gone, and I remained alone. He ended his speech by chanting the pathetic old song of sorrow for the dead which begins:-

Listen, oh ye people,  
This is the parent of death,  
and all the assembly joined with heartfelt energy in the chorus.<sup>4</sup>

Timotu's song has been sung now for 150 years. During this time it has acquired further depths of meaning, as it has come to be associated with all of those who have sung it in the past.

## Notes

1. The text of this song, and many of the explanations, come from pages 276-9 of *Nga Moteatea* volume 1, by Apirana Ngata (Wellington 1959). The line divisions are uncertain.

The tribal rivalries which led to the request for Timotu's assistance, and eventually to the battle of Haowhenua, are recounted on pages 34-43 of *The Kapiti Coast*, by W.C. Carkeek (Wellington 1966). Ngati Ruanui were allied with Te Atiawa against Ngati Raukawa.

2. For Rongotaharangi, see pages 60 and 167 of *The Lore of the Whare Wananga* part 1, edited by S. Percy Smith (New Plymouth 1913). The word *paroa* is not explained in the dictionaries. I have followed Pei Te Hurinui in *Nga Moteatea* in translating it as 'far off'.

3. Page 321 of *Legends of the Maori* volume 1, by Maui Pomare and James Cowan (Wellington 1930-4).

4. Page 286 of *New Zealand Revisited* by J.E. Gorst (London 1908).

Tēnei ka noho i te kopa whare i Tataurangī,  
He marama ka roku i te pae.  
He tahuritanga, he tautanga no te ngākau  
Kia noho au ma reira, e raro hē nei.  
Whakataritari, mau pū nei, mau patu nei,  
Mau tao nei, e ngana ra koe  
Ngā whatukuhu o taku manawa  
Piri ki te poho, tē hōhā koe!  
I ngā rangi ra o taku ohinga, e kui mā e,  
I kawea, hau Aotearoa!  
Me tautika, me aronui  
Kia kite mai koutou i ōku hē nei.  
Ka waiho au i te ngutu hei hikihiki  
Ki te taha rautai, e pā mā, ko tō te huna hoki.  
Tirohia mai au, he ika tuaki,  
Paenga toroa, he koroirangi.  
He ika pakewha, hau na Rehua, e tama mā e!  
He huka moana, paringa-ā-tai akahu ki te whanga  
Ki Motu-kiore, ko te rite i ahau  
E whakamōnehu, waiho te raru i ahau i!

Whakarongo, e te rau,  
Tēnei te tupuna o te mate  
Ka piri ki ahau.  
I tupu i Te Rēinga,  
I tupu mai anō i te pōuritanga.  
Ko Rongotaharangi  
E huri paroa,  
Ka hinga au, ka takoto,  
Moe tūturi, moe pēpeke,  
Moe tūpoupou.  
Ko te rite i ahau  
Ko Māhutonga e rauna i te ao.  
He maero au nei,  
He kāhu ka kē i te waru,  
Kei te matuku e hū ana i te repo i!

Here I sit in front of the house Tataurangī,  
A waning moon on the horizon.  
My heart turns about, then comes to rest  
At my staying here so powerless.  
The urge to grasp a gun, a patu,  
A spear, you rage  
In the organs of my body,  
You cling to my chest, never tiring!  
Women, in the days of my youth  
I fought throughout Aotearoa!  
Come to me here, come straight  
To see my ills!  
Men, I am raised up on lips,  
I am with those left at home, hidden away!  
Look at me here, a gutted fish,  
A stranded albatross, a whirlwind!  
I am a solitary fish of Rehua.  
Like the sea-foam on the tide that flows  
Into the inlet by Motu-kiore  
I am fading, alas.

Listen, you multitude,  
The ancestor of all maladies  
Has fastened on me here.  
It grew in Te Reinga,  
It grew in the darkness and came upon me.  
Rongotaharangi  
Is turning about, far off.  
I fall down,  
Lie crouched up, lie with knees drawn up,  
Lie with body bent.  
I am like  
Mahutonga circling the world.  
I am thin and weak,  
A hawk screaming in the eighth month,  
A bittern crying in a swamp.