

fighting for the rights of his Maori people, particularly in Land legislation.

Even in boyhood, he was noted for his shrewdness. As a youth Wi Pere was selected by the elders as a young man of special intelligence and was carefully taught and trained in Maori history and genealogy, which information was handed down through the generations by word of mouth. He was taught all the genealogies of all the tribes of the district and the responsibility of the whole of this knowledge and the history of the tribal fighting was entrusted to him. He attended the Special 'Wananga' or Maori school of learning to which only selected ones could attend.

When he reached school age his father Thomas Halbert an early settler visited Riria, with the object of persuading her that it would be in the lad's best interest if he was sent to school in Auckland. Riria did not take kindly to the idea that Wi would be separated from her, but promised to consider the matter. However, it did not come to anything, as she and her tribe had a strong control over his future education. He had identified very strongly with his Mother who had consistently encouraged him in her culture and tradition. It has been assumed by his descendants that Wi Pere received some schooling at the Whakato Mission Station. Be that as it may, he proved reluctant to introduce English words in conversation, many of his addresses were always delivered in Maori.

#### Mother's influence

Wi Pere describes the influence of his mother as follows: "My mother was a woman of great mana over the whole of the district; her name was Riria Mauaranui, a chieftainess of great influence of Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki and Rongowhakaata tribe.

"In the year 1848, when I was only 11 years of age, war broke out between the two tribes Rongowhakaata and Te Aitanga a Mahaki, and as both sides had become possessed of the new weapon "te pu pakeha", or the musket, it looked as if the breach would result in serious slaughter. My mother sent me in her name, to the leader to deliver her message to them. My mother's words were: "Tell these people that no good will come of their fighting, only death and sorrow to both sides. Let Almighty God judge between both sides."

I went and delivered the message to both sides and after consultation, my mother's advice was taken and the war parties returned to their homes.

Afterwards at a meeting between the hostile chiefs, among whom were Raharuhi Rukupo, Paratene Turangi, Wiremu Kingi, Paea, Kemara Manatahi, Pita Ngungu and Te Waaka Marotiri, I was thanked for the part I had taken in avoiding trouble between the two tribes.

I was frequently sent to settle minor disputes which were constantly arising and never failed to avert bloodshed."

In 1869 Wi Pere threatened to oppose the award of Crown grants to all European applicants and that he favoured the re-purchase of all pakeha-held properties at the price which had been given for them, he was a staunch repudiationist and had linked up with Henry Matua in opposing selling of Maori land to European settlers.

Upon his election to Parliament in 1884 as the representative for the Eastern Maori district, he attracted considerable attention. In one pen portrait which was published concerning him he was described in these terms:

"His features are decidedly European — his forehead is broad and intellectual, his nose long and straight, his eyes black and piercing; his black hair is parted in the middle; his beard is abundant, black and glossy. He speaks indifferently."

The writer drawing upon a vivid imagination continued:

"His mother fled with him into the wilds, where he lived on roots and grew up as a little savage. What a change in one man's life. The little wild root-eating savage has been transformed into a grand courteously mannered Member of Parliament."

Some of the Press notices concerning the new Member for the Eastern Maoris seat, were, however, very unkind. The Daily Telegraph described Wi Pere as a 'Maori of the Maoris' both in disposition and taste.

#### Seat regained

Both in 1887 and in 1890 Wi Pere was again defeated by James Carroll at the Polls. However, in 1895 Carroll stood down in order to contest the Waiapu (A European seat) and Wi Pere regained his former place in the House of Representatives, which he retained until 1905, when he was displaced by Ngata.

In 1907 Wi Pere was invited to sit on the Legislative Council until he lost it in 1912, on a technicality beyond his control.

In 1893 Wi Pere promoted the Mangatu Empowering Bill which was presented by Tame Parata (Southern Maori) in front of the General Assembly. This Bill became an Act after much opposition from many of the politicians of the time. It gave control of land over to Maori Trustees. It was the first time that Maoris were successful in getting this bill passed. It involved the setting up of an Incorporation of owners with its own elected Committee. The Bill involved 126,000 acres of land in the Poverty Bay area. Today the Mangatu Incorporation Block is probably one of the biggest farming operations in New Zealand.

Wi Pere, with W.L. Rees, set up the New Zealand Natives Land Company. In 1889 both of the mentioned gentlemen acted as trustees of 250,000 acres of Native Land in Poverty Bay, most of which was leased and heavily mortgaged. They visited England to ask the British Government to aid a plan to settle 2,000 to 3,000 families in the area on the principle of co-operative colonisation, with everyone to work and be a partner. The Marquis of Lorne, Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Onslow, Lady Henry Somerset and others were induced to take a friendly interest in



the scheme. The death blow to the crusade came when the then Government of New Zealand (i.e. Atkinson Ministry) sent a cable reading "We do not guarantee Mr Rees's figures".

Mr Broadhurst, M.P. for Nottingham, presented a petition to the House of Commons, asking for assistance of the Government to guarantee the payment of 3 per cent on a loan of £1,000,000.

#### Validation Court

Addressing the Judge of the Validation Court at Gisborne in March, 1895, Wi Pere who was appearing on behalf of the Native owners of a number of heavily-mortgaged blocks, said that he