

# NEW ZEALAND AND ITS MAORIS

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AFTER seven years' residence in the most remote of the Dominions—seven years, the perfect span—I am not exactly a New Zealander; I have not become so used to the trees that I cannot see the wood. But neither am I an Englishman to whom everything that differs from that to which he has hitherto shaped his custom is worthy of astonished remark. New Zealand to-day is intensely interesting to me, as a social experiment, as an experiment in biology, ethnography, geography and politics; as an experiment, above all, in man. I went there in the same way as my forefathers went on the Grand Tour of Europe, to complete my education. I remained to enlarge my experience. Can I, in the short space of an article, hope to distribute some of the benefits of that stay?

It should really be possible, for this most beautiful little country, discovered by Tasman in 1642, placed on the map by Cook in 1769, visited by missionaries and whalers in the first years of the nineteenth century, but not settled until 1839, and not finally settled at the present day, might almost be called the "perfect Dominion". Her first settlers immigrated under the auspices of the New Zealand Company, a body of highly intelligent men who really did try hard to ensure that no undesirables slipped into their virgin paradise. If they had a dominating idea at the back of their minds, it was to transplant a complete cross-section of contemporary British life across the ocean to the Antipodes.

Thus the modern New Zealanders are the product of an exemplary upbringing. Canada grew to manhood hardily, but influenced by her American neighbours; South Africa had her serious racial problems; even Australia endured a haphazard infancy, many of her first inhabitants being European undesirables. But *Aotearoa* was fortunate enough to escape most of these growing-pains, and to-day her people are significantly "well-bred". Over ninety-eight per cent. of them are pure British.

My own first impression of the country was the fine physique of all classes. Clerks, shop assistants, and similar workers who in England were not noted for their physique, here had broad shoulders, ruddy complexions and all the other marks of the

outdoor man. This impression was later confirmed by statistics showing that New Zealand probably has more physical strength per head of its small population than any other country in the world.

Food habits might have something to do with this. New Zealanders consume about forty pounds of butter a year, as against the twenty-five pounds consumed by Englishmen. Moreover, in New Zealand 163 pounds of beef and veal and 63 pounds of mutton and lamb are consumed per head a year, while the per capita consumption in England is only one hundred pounds of beef and 33 pounds of mutton.

All immigrants into New Zealand put on weight. Slim young women from England are in tears about their increased avoirdupois after twelve months' residence, and weedy young men from London are proudly displaying their biceps. It might be said that the eating habits of New Zealanders to-day are those of Englishmen fifty years ago, and that the John Bull type, vanished from the face of England, has his new home in the South.

But the New Zealander's health and strength also proceed from the fact that he is typically a yeoman farmer, extracting his fine livelihood from an exceedingly fertile soil in a singularly equable climate. The Dominion has a population of just over 1,500,000, that is to say, about that of a large London borough, and only half that of the Irish Free State. Yet the estimated national income last year was approximately £110,000,000, and exports of farm produce were estimated at £66,713,000, compared with £34,000,000 in 1931-32. Eighty per cent. of these exports were sent to Great Britain. Approximately one-third were meat and by-products of meat; one-third were dairy produce (butter and cheese); and the remaining third consisted of wool, fruit and various minor products of the land.

At present New Zealand is wholly dependent upon its British market, but that is no hardship so long as Britons continue to eat animal foods and trade with New Zealand. There is no doubt that *Aotearoa* owes its present fortune to the ability of its farmers, aided by the soil and climate and system of land-tenure, to produce lamb, mutton and butter 12,000 miles away from their principal market, and, after sending the produce to that market, undersell the British farmer there. But then, the New Zealand farmer is up-to-date. When he first emigrated, he often had no experience of farming at all, so he

set to work to create a new tradition. English, Scots and Irish methods look silly beside the large-scale, mass-production agriculture of New Zealand.

The Antipodean farm is often more like a factory than a homestead, and the farmer more like a business man than a yokel. Not for him the gaiters, corduroys, church warden pipe, slow speech and straw in the mouth of the typical Farmer Giles you will meet in any of the agricultural counties of England to this day. I suppose that if one of these typical Farmer Giles's came out to New Zealand and spent a few months on a "station", he would return full of contempt for the many innovations he had encountered there. The idea of taking the cream to the factory in the back of a £500 saloon car would certainly inspire him to spit derisively; the idea of milking by machinery, shearing by machinery, and providing shepherds with wireless transmitting outfits would probably bring him perilously near apoplexy. He would regard the New Zealand farmer as little more than an amateur in his ancient, bucolic art.

Yet the New Zealand farmer is essentially hard and practical. Not only has he to work up-country in all weathers, but he has to be self-reliant at home. Because there are no carpenters, plumbers, painters, electricians or mechanics in the district, he is a man who can turn himself to any job at a moment's notice. Indeed it is only by his adaptability that he can live. And when I speak of the farmer, I refer also to his wife and daughters, who, in their respective spheres, equally match his practicality and resource. When a woman has to attend to her children with one hand, bake the bread for a large household with the other, and with any hands she has left milk the cows, nurse the calves and lambs, cultivate the kitchen garden and do the washing, while at the same time she has to maintain an open house of hospitality for anyone who comes that way, then she does not deteriorate as a human being. Usually she proceeds from strength to strength.

The New Zealand farmer and his wife would be nice people if they were no more than that; but in nine cases out of ten they are also educated gentlefolk, that is to say, individuals who speak correctly, understand the rudiments of good manners, and have, in addition to their hard knowledge of real life, a fair smattering of book learning.

I once spent an enjoyable night in a dilapidated hut near Lake Sumner discussing Shakespeare with an old fellow who

confessed, at the end, he had never in his life had an opportunity of seeing one of the plays acted. I once met a woman on an Otago homestead who, in intervals of skinning a bag of rabbits, gave me a lucid exposition of the quantity theory of money, and who seemed to comprehend the ramifications of the United States banking system as well as she understood the sordid duties in which she was engaged.

But the stranger will be disappointed if he comes in search of a mythical New Zealand where half the inhabitants are sheep and the other half wear Stetson hats, carry six-shooters, and habitually go to work on horseback. The New Zealanders, particularly those of the principal towns, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, lead very similar lives to their English, Canadian, Australian and South African cousins.

When they cease work on light evenings—at five o'clock—and at Saturday noon, they hurry off to play cricket, football, golf, tennis and bowls, or to cultivate brilliant gardens. After dark their main preoccupations are also traditional ones, the play (degenerated, I am afraid, into the cinema), meetings of associations for this and societies for that good cause, dancing and the ubiquitous card game, bridge for the bourgeois and “five hundred” or “euchre” for the masses.

They do not dress out of Bond Street and Piccadilly, but their clothes are those of provincial England, with a curious preponderance, in the sunny climate, of heavy tweeds, tailored costumes and fur coats. Fashions may often be six months “behind the times”, yet they are pathetically imitative of English fashions, and only rarely borrow their cut from America. In the shops you will find this “English” motif behind every second purchase. Local manufacturers have been trying for years to make people buy New Zealand-made goods first, and they have been assisted by tariffs, propaganda and currency depreciation. But the New Zealander still believes that the article imported from the United Kingdom is the best, and maintains his opinion illogically even when experience has sometimes led him astray.

Menfolk are particularly prejudiced in favour of English goods, and they will pay any price to obtain “the best”. It is a trait bequeathed to them by their large-hearted, open-handed, hard-living and full-spending pioneer ancestors, and it is a trait that the British manufacturer must not ignore. So long as he produces the quality goods, he will have no difficulty in selling them in New Zealand.

Those pioneers, loading their crazy ships with household goods of every description, sideboards, pianos, cats, dogs, wash-stands and parrots, fairly brought England with them to this Antipodean clime. They even brought a few familiar vices. Public-houses in New Zealand close at 6 p.m.—officially—but the New Zealander is remarkably fond of his “spot”, considering that he is also one of the largest tea-drinkers in the world. After his carouse he will go to the races, or to a football match, and gamble away the few remaining “dollars” he has in his well-worn pocket. And then he will walk home, his rascal face a study in smiling contentment, his conscience as untroubled as the blue sky overhead. Exactly like his northern cousins, you see.

But perhaps the portrait I have roughly painted may give the impression that the New Zealander is nothing more than that. The civilisation of *Aotearoa*, as I have briefly reviewed it, may seem superficial and materialistic. Well, I must confess that when I sat down to write a book on this Dominion two years ago, I did reach that conclusion at first. New Zealanders, I felt like implying, were hard-working, healthy, honest overseas Anglo-Saxons whose chief interests in life were rugby football, horse-racing, frequent trips round the world, and the prices of meat and wool. But since I passed that hasty verdict I have returned to England, and have had an opportunity to study other sections of the Anglo-Saxon race. Now I am not so sure about the New Zealander.

After all, this little Dominion, so young, isolated and underpopulated, has already contributed not a little to the sum total of human happiness. Such a writer as Katherine Mansfield (born in Wellington) has brought a new awareness of beauty in human relationships to many people in all parts of the world. Such an artist as David Low (born in Dunedin) has actually harnessed a popular London newspaper to spread abroad his ideas of social justice and reform. Such a scientist as Lord Rutherford (born in Nelson) has at once overturned the study of physics and broken down the old materialistic conception of a purposeless universe. Such a physician as Sir Frederic Truby King (born in New Plymouth) has reduced the infantile mortality rate of his country to the lowest in the world, and planted his principles of social hygiene in every second land. Such a theologian as Professor A. K. Rule (born in Christchurch), who held the chair of church history and apologetics in the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, has

regularly preached to congregations of 2,000 and over in the United States.

New Zealand has not yet had time to develop her own distinctive art, literature, philosophy and conventions of life. A man arrives at a settlement and spends his first few days clearing himself a space and building himself a log house. When he sits down after his labour, he is too tired to bother about aught but food, amusement and sleep. New Zealand to-day tends to be like that man, and the very fact she has so far produced so many great thinkers is a remarkable tribute to her youthful promise.

The climate at the Antipodes is favourable to rapid growth, but is keen enough to keep the wits sharpened. Most minerals are to be found in New Zealand, and the cheapest electricity in the world. The people are physically strong, and worthy to be regarded as the flower of the British race. With her climate, wealth, power, blue skies, clear atmosphere, white buildings, her strong inhabitants, provided they are granted increase, and her brains, provided they are kept at home, New Zealand may well foster a second heroic age.

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I saw surprisingly little of the Maori during my long stay. He is becoming less and less conspicuous with the years, and is to be found under natural conditions only in the remote country districts. But what I did see more than confirmed the opinion of experts that this virile Polynesian people is possibly the most advanced native race in the world. The Maori is not only physically and mentally a match for the white man, but he has peculiar qualities of his own that are quite unmatched in our European civilisation.

“A race of warriors, farmers, foresters, hunters, seamen; a race of artists, poets and legend-tellers; a people hospitable, ceremony-loving, punctilious, intensely religious, a race of mystics and prophets; ancient ocean rovers, who preserve the memories of centuries of sailing the wide Pacific,”—thus a New Zealand writer has described the Maori, and his catalogue is still incomplete. No one can study the history of this race without comparing it sooner or later with that of other high-spirited, encompassed peoples such as the Greeks and Celts. Even the origin of the Maori is romantically unknown.

According to their *arikis* and *tohungas* (chieftains and medicine-men) the Maori came to New Zealand in the fifteenth

century from a place called "Hawaiki". Anthropologists have tried to trace this mysterious land, but always in vain. Some have said that the Maori is a South Sea Islander pure and simple, but others have actually suggested lands as far apart as India, Malaya, Palestine and Central America as his place of origin. It is certain that the Maori represents a higher stage in civilisation than, for instance, the Hawaiian or the Australian aboriginal. Moreover it cannot be denied that his language is closely related to that of some races of India, and that his art is very similar to that of the ancient Aztecs.

But there must be a limit to all conjecture, and so it is best to confine oneself to the statement that the Maori came to New Zealand some five hundred years ago in eight great war canoes, after having performed a remarkable feat of navigation; and that he found these temperate, well-wooded, sunny and empty islands a perfect environment in which to sing, laugh, fight and multiply.

New Zealand was not entirely empty when the Maori arrived. Apparently there existed an aboriginal race of natives who were hunters of a great wingless bird known as the *moa*. Many skeletons of this monster have been found, some of them twelve feet high. But within a short time the virile immigrants completely exterminated both aboriginal bird and man. Then they proceeded to evolve and perfect a communal form of life that has had few parallels in the history of the human race.

The ancient Maori lived in village groups, under the leadership of a natural aristocracy, and every detail of his daily existence was prescribed for him by a complicated but highly effective system of tribal law. Those who read a book recently published called *The Old-Time Maori*, by Makereti, who was at once a chieftainness of the premier Arawa tribe and a graduate of the University of Oxford, will find that the philosophy of these people was very similar to that of the Israelites. On the other hand crimes such as theft, adultery and murder were rare, not only because all property was held in common, but also because the Maori was firmly convinced that evil doing would inevitably be followed by nemesis. This sense of *makutu*, as it was called, was so strongly developed that a transgressor would often punish himself to the death without any kind of physical intervention.

Undoubtedly this system could be very harsh by Christian standards. The law of *muru* enacted that if a Maori fell sick, or was the victim of repeated misfortune, he should have all

his personal possessions taken from him, or should be debarred from sharing the communal possessions. Then the Maori never forgave an insult, or left a wrong unavenged. An injury to one man was an injury to the whole tribe, and bloody vendettas would be prosecuted for many generations.

But even these blemishes on the Maori's system of life were in their way a testimony to his logical, forthright mind and his keen sense of justice. He was very chivalrous, both in love and in war; eventually he was to shame many of the European settlers in his land. He was an exemplary father, and his children were always honoured by him above himself. As Makereti says, "The life of the Maori was surrounded with love from his infancy, and this love continued through the whole of his life."

The unique character of this people was and is very clearly indicated by their art, employed mainly in remarkable wood-carving and in weaving and decorating of the *phormium tenens*, or native flax. The art of the Maori, highly-decorative and entirely unrepresentational art in which form, line and pattern are predominant, has more refinement than that of any other native race. One or two subjects, one or two essential patterns are the artistic stock-in-trade of these very refined craftsmen, who concentrate all their powers on the repetition of careful detail. But the symmetrical, balanced curves and cunningly contrasted spirals of Maori art have definite affinity to a peculiar New Zealand scene, so that it may be said the Maori has finally adapted himself to his environment by reducing it to its fundamental artistic terms. One great authority, Mr. S. Hurst Seager, considers that "the Maoris are, in fact, to the whole of the primitive races, what the Greeks were to the ancient civilized world—the collectors and refiners of pre-existing forms."

One further piece of information must be given about the primitive Maori, before we turn to the new era that was introduced by the encroaching white man. He had no monetary system! Verily an Arcady was violated when Captain Cook brought his gin, his firearms, his pigs and the first currency reformers to New Zealand in that momentous year 1769!

It has been estimated that when Cook arrived there were about 100,000 natives. A short one hundred years later the Maori population had dwindled to about 40,000. This was partly, but not altogether, the white man's fault. The white man brought the Maori many benefits; the Christianity of



Samuel Marsden, protection against other and possibly less thoughtful invaders, and, finally, the fruits of a more complicated and richer material civilisation. But unfortunately the cruder type of immigrant's and the Maori's social ideas were fundamentally opposed. When unscrupulous adventurers offered a proud chief two barrels of gunpowder and twenty red blankets for the right to burn and settle 500,000 acres of bush country, the proud chief did not understand that he was actually selling the land. The white man's conception of private property was different from his. When a drunken sailor ran away with a pretty *wahine* or unmarried girl, then her tribe must logically exact retribution by massacring the entire crew of the ship to which the sailor had belonged. When a "poor white" offered strong spirits to a Maori, that courteous individual would quaff the bottle at one draught in obedience to the sacred law of hospitality. When the Maori, hitherto so healthy, caught the white man's diseases, measles, influenza, smallpox and worse, his people shunned him, and, according to their custom, refused to give him help. Thus infection would fatally spread.

The Maori population of the South Island of New Zealand to-day is approximately 3,000, instead of 20,000 or 30,000, entirely as a result of a measles epidemic that carried away vast numbers of the unhappy creatures in the early days. They had never heard of measles before; so they all plunged into the cold sea to keep their temperatures down!

An old Maori proverb tells us that "land and women are the roots of war." Ostensibly the cause of the Maori wars, that raged sporadically between settlers and natives during the decade 1860-1870, was a grand dispute over land titles in the North Island; but anthropologists now observe that it went deeper than that. The Maori was fighting with the fatalistic abandon of an intelligent, virile race that believed itself predestined to be exterminated. As their great champion, Mr. James Cowan, has said: "The Maori himself thought he was doomed to extinction like the *moa*." Alfred Domett, poet, statesman and friend of Robert Browning, wrote at that time in *Ranolf and Amohia*, his epic of New Zealand:

A people primeval is vanishing fast,  
With its faiths and its fables and ways of the past.

The eventual outcome of the Maori Wars was determined from the first by the fact that the natives had inferior weapons, but the settlers had to secure reinforcements of Imperial troops

before the end. During the contest the Maori proved a most gallant and chivalrous foeman. He could answer the enemy "Heoi ano! Ka whawhai tonu, ake! ake! ake!" ("Enough, we fight right on, forever!"), but was gentle in his treatment of prisoners, and the Christians among them often refused to fight on a Sunday. The result of this was sometimes lamentable, as the white man was not always so scrupulous.

Afterwards the Maori was dispossessed of more lands, and, in the words of Dr. Beaglehole, acquired that "sombre and sullen despair, of fatalism utter and unrelieved, which has been so important a factor in the decline of the Polynesian races." The Maori population continued to dwindle, reaching its lowest ebb, 39,854, in 1896. Scientists freely predicted the extinction of the race within a few generations. Then the Maori was saved.

The name of Sir Donald MacLean will always be remembered by thoughtful New Zealanders. This broad-minded and energetic Scotsman was directly responsible at the end of last century for instituting a Government policy towards the dispossessed and defeated natives that turned the tide of despair. The bases of this policy were the establishment of co-operative rural communities, instruction of the Maori in hygiene and village sanitation, and his admittance to equal social rights with white New Zealanders. Most important to the sensitive native, however, was the primary fact that the white man was really trying to help him. Thus encouraged, the Maori slowly found a new self-respect.

With his remarkable faculty for adaptation, the Maori proceeded under the new conditions to attend at the white man's schools and university colleges, to enter the professions of law, medicine, engineering and accountancy, and to return his own members of parliament. He soon proved, indeed, that his mental equipment was fully equal to that of the white New Zealander, and in some respects he actually excelled his teacher, notably in oratory and certain departments of social science. One of his sons, Sir James Carroll, was Prime Minister of the Dominion for a time; another, Sir Apirana Ngata, M.P., M.A., LL.B., acquired three distinct reputations, as a poet, a scholar and a statesman. Sir Maui Pomara, who graduated in medicine at the University of Chicago, was also a Minister of the Crown, and did much to improve the dietary and general health of his people. The Rev. F. A. Bennett was a Maori clergyman who had the honour of being appointed to a special diocese,

the Bishopric of *Aotearoa*. Dr. P. H. Buck (Te Rangihiroa) is now one of the world's greatest anthropologists, a professor at Yale University, and Director of the Bishop Museum of Polynesian Ethnology, Honolulu.

During the Great War more than 2,200 of the Maori race enlisted and went overseas, 1,000 of them never to return.

To-day the Maori population of New Zealand is 82,000, more than double the number at the close of last century. Undoubtedly increased inter-marriage between the Maori and the white New Zealander has contributed to this improvement. The Government Statistician of the Dominion considers that at least 50 per cent. of the Maori population to-day is half-caste. But the modern Maori contrives to retain a large measure of his characteristic culture, and even though the two New Zealand races may eventually become merged as one, it may be suggested that New Zealand will never discard the best features of Maori manners, art, poetry and temperament.