

BOYS AND GIRLS

Among the Waikato Maoris.

A TRIP DOWN A NEW ZEALAND RIVER.

(By Arthur Inkersley, in 'Frank Leslie's Monthly'.)

Though one often sees Maoris of both sexes lounging about the streets of Auckland, New Zealand, especially when the Native Lands Court is in session, I was desirous of seeing them at closer range and in their own homes. Accordingly, as soon as I had a week to spare, I made arrangements for a trip in the Waikato district, watered by the largest of New Zealand rivers, and inhabited by one of the strongest and bravest of Maori tribes.

We started early on a Monday from our Auckland boarding-house, and hurrying over to the suburban station at Newmarket, caught the train there. The railway leading out of the city to the Waikato district is a narrow-gauge track, and is owned, as are all the railways in Australia and New Zealand, by the government. The cars are of a rather primitive construction, but are clean and comfortable. The track, except in the immediate vicinity of the city, and in well-settled districts, is unfenced, and therefore the locomotives are provided with cowcatchers. At first, while passing through the suburbs of Auckland, we see many neat, well-kept villas, surrounded by dark green plantations of pine; but, soon the track gets out into the open country, and the Waikato range attracts the eye. The flats over which we are travelling have a rich black soil, but the higher ground is covered with bracken, fern and ti-tree. The ti-tree is the typical shrub of a certain kind of New Zealand 'bush,' or uncleared land, and though it grows monotonous, a large area covered with it is much more agreeable to the sight than the almost boundless 'mallee scrub' of Australia. The twigs of the ti-tree are very strong and tough, and the shrub is at certain seasons covered with a pretty white blossom which recalls the May of an English springtime.

There is a great deal of land in the North Island which cannot be used for pasture or agriculture until it has been cleared of its dense growth of fern. This is done by fire, and in the dry season of the year, great tracts are continually smoking with the heavy fumes of burning bracken. Another terrible nuisance in North New Zealand is the dog-rose, or sweet briar, which was introduced into the colony by some well-meaning but ill-advised person, who wished, as colonists often do, to surround himself with the trees and plants which had grown dear to him in his old home. The modest little British bush took so kindly to its new home in Greater Britain that it grew into a great tree, and spread itself luxuriantly over large areas of land, from which it can now hardly be eradicated. In a similar way the rabbit was introduced into Australia, where it has bred and multiplied so exceedingly that it has become a matter of national concern to discover a means of checking its further increase, and thousands on thousands of pounds sterling have been expended in almost fruitless efforts to save some of the grass for the sheep. In the swamps of New Zealand a kind of sedge called raupo is everywhere abundant, as is also the phormium tenax, or New Zealand flax.

We first came upon the Waikato River at Mercer, and found a strong stream running there. Mercer was at one time the

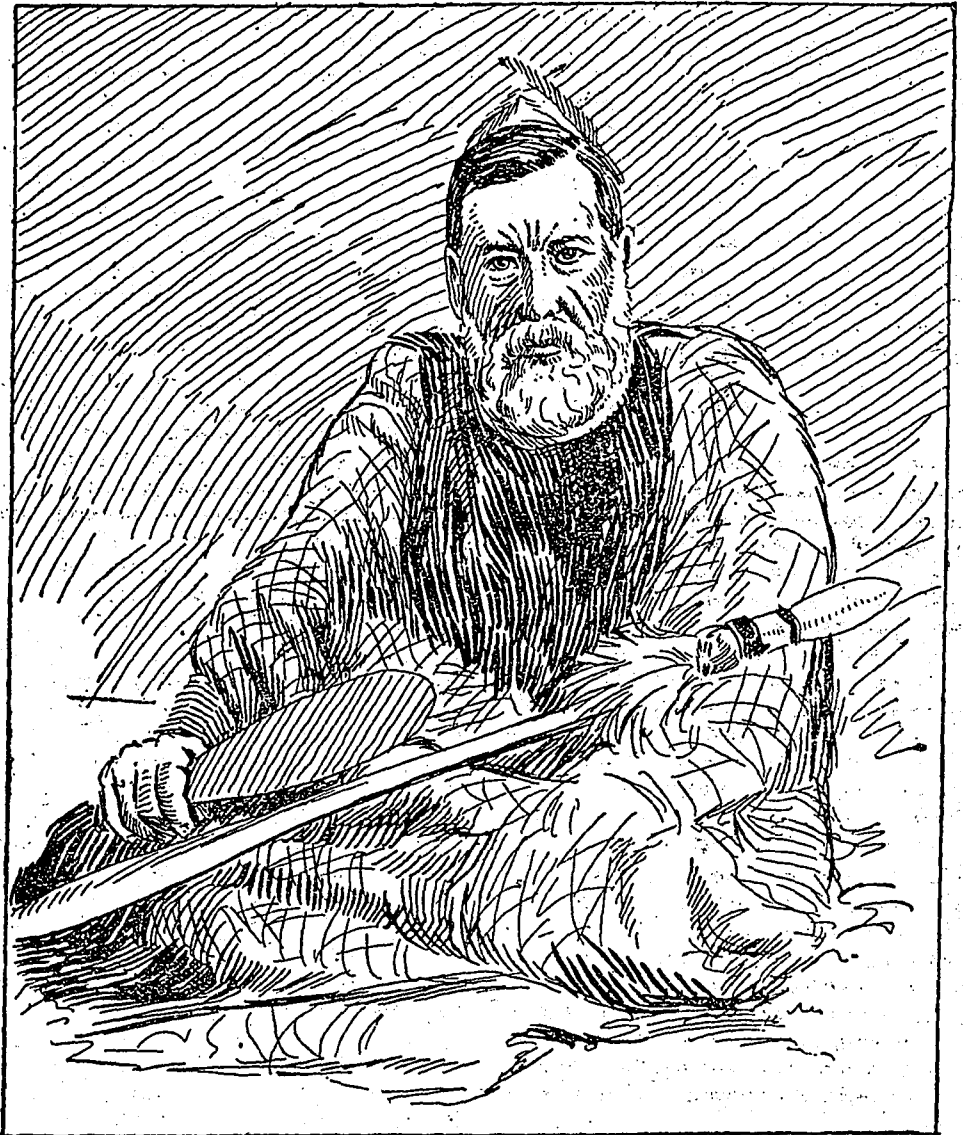
furthermost point reached by the railway, an extinct volcano. Next morning we walked and also the starting-point for the river-steamers, but the advance of the railway has crushed its importance, and it is a very dull, sleepy little town.

From Mercer the train passed along the river bank, through pretty scenery, till we got near Rangiriri, which is in a swampy region, interesting as the scene of one of the most desperate battles of the war of the colonists and British with the brave Waikatos. At Huntly we caught a glimpse of a black, grimy little town, and at Taupiri we saw many signs of the collieries in the neighborhood. Between Huntly and Taupiri the Waikato runs between high, wooded hills.

At Hamilton we are fairly in the land of the Maori, and here we see many Maoris and half-castes. The mixture of races is

ed about the township, and crossed the bridge over the river to Hamilton East. Later we took the train to Cambridge, and on our arrival there put up at Kirkwood's cottage. Cambridge is a flourishing little colonial town, with two or three hotels, a church and a few public buildings. Until the railway was continued to Oxford and Lichfield, it was the starting-point of the coaches that took tourists into the Wonderland of New Zealand—the Hot Lake district. Oxford is about twenty miles from Cambridge, and is even more unlike, if that were possible, its British prototype.

After 'tea,' as the evening meal is usually called in 'the colonies,' we discussed with a bushman the possibility of hiring a boat in which to make the descent of the river. The bushman promised to introduce us to



MAORI CHIEF, WITH GREENSTONE CLUB.

clearly sown by the bi-lingual signboards over the stores. Hamilton is a good specimen of the New Zealand county township, and displays all the usual activities of such a place. A remarkable thing is to be observed about the river here. As the bed of the stream has been successively lowered in the course of the centuries, terraces have been formed, down which one clammers to the present river. Scattered over this whole region are conical peaks of volcanic origin, and which, indeed, have in earlier days been active volcanoes, belching forth ashes and molten lava, as we clearly see from their black-scarred sides, and from the ugly gashes out of which rushed the fiery stream.

Near Hamilton is a small lake, about a mile long by three-quarters of a mile in width. Finding a small boat there, we rowed about for some time. The hollow forming the lake is probably the crater of

the owner of a boat that we might arrange to hire for some days. But Kirkwood, the hotel proprietor, dissuaded us from making the attempt, telling us that the river was in flood, and that in one spot between Cambridge and Hamilton it passes through a rocky gorge only twenty-five feet in width, where the stream runs so swiftly that it is hard to keep control of a boat and avoid getting dashed against the sides of the defile. We decided to take our host's advice and go back to Hamilton. But before doing so we hired horses and rode out for eight or nine miles along a somewhat desolate road in the direction of Taupo. On our return our horses bolted, but as we had the whole road to ourselves, we managed to get control of them before any harm resulted.

Wishing to see something of the New Zealand 'bush,' we sent our bags off by train and started on a walk of fourteen