

A GLIMPSE AT MAORI ART.

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HEAD OF CHIEF PATARA.

THE advent of the missionary and the rum bottle, the British trader and his Brummagem wares, quickly followed by Tommy Atkins and the burning of powder in a heathen land, is so generally considered, by good Christians at least, to confer untold blessings upon the benighted savages thus honored by these advanced guards of civilization, that it is somewhat difficult to make it believed that the moral, intellectual and substantial gain is not all on the side of the poor barbarian; certainly, as in the case of the Maori for instance, cannibalism has passed away, but so too have about five-sixths of the natives, who, once a martial valiantrace, having received the Gospel, have ceased to fight any foe but consumption, which up to now has scored an all too easy win. Less than half a century back these "benighted savages" were daring seamen, building canoes 80 and even 100 feet in length, to beautiful lines and decorated with magnificently carved prows and stern posts, cunningly wrought paddles and sails prepared from native flax coaxed and softened almost to the texture of spun silk. Then, too, these people fortified their simple villages with a skill that not infrequently baffled British generals and British troops and caused them to spend many weeks before these outlandish defences on which guns, both great and small, failed to make much impression, indeed those so called untutored savages offered to our arms as noble a resistance as was ever made by a gallant people to the hosts of the invader. The entrance to the Maori Pah was through an elaborately carved wooden gateway surmounted by grotesquely hideous figures of idols; their meeting houses were enriched with a lavish display of the carvers' art, for the walls, gables, rafters, purlines and ridge poles, eaves and porches all called forth the best powers of the native artist, who revelled in curious scrolls and intricate conventional forms. The great chiefs delighted in the possession of Whare puni or dwelling houses, scarcely less magnificent in scale and richness of decoration than the meeting house, and the Pataka or raised storehouse was in many cases superior to either in point of finished building and ornamentation; but we have changed all this, and the Maoris have forsaken their Pahs on the healthy hills to dwell on the more easily accessible low lying lands where rheumatism and pulmonary complaints wreak havoc among old and young. For the picturesque meeting house is substituted a vulgar little weather-board church to which a horrid clanging little iron bell summons the remnant of a tribe to go through the outward forms of a religion with little enough, if any, real appreciation of the noble ethics which lie concealed beneath the accumulated mass of mystery and mumming which 19 centuries priest craft

has heaped upon them. For the dignified, well constructed and highly artistic Whare puni we find crazy, ill built houses or rather shacks of inch thick weatherboards, with galvanized iron roofs, which, hot in summer and cold in winter, take the place of warm thatch; hideous mill stock doors replace the carved architraves and stoutly clamped door of past times, mill made fret work that is not more flimsy than villaneous in design has displaced the side and well carved slabs, and so on ad nauseam. The thick, soft, warm capes and cloaks, made of dressed and stained flax, which were absolutely impervious to wind and rain, beautifully stained and colored, ornamented with feathers of that strange, wingless bird the Kirri, have given way to poor, shoddy tweed trousers hitched up with one half of a brace, and to coats, dresses and head coverings of the ordinary type which give their wearers a wretched appearance, in sad contrast to that presented by the fathers of the later generations before they were made acquainted with all the blessings of civilization. The Maoris generally lived in a Pah or native village situated on a piece of rising ground commanding a fine view of the surrounding country, not that the natives cared so much for the fine prospect as for the means their elevated position afforded of detecting the approach of an enemy. The Pah was always surrounded by a high and strongly staked fence or palisade, and was often strongly entrenched. The gateway was a great feature, and Fig. 1 is a fine specimen and is made of Rata wood carved with stone tools, and colored with kokowai, a red earth which is burned, ground to a powder and mixed with fat. The eyes are of Pawa shell as were the eyes of all the Maori carved figures. The wooden pins which fasten them in their sockets project slightly and are colored black and so made to represent the pupils. This gateway, the opening of which is over seven feet in height and nearly three feet wide at the base, once adorned the entrance to the famous Putterau Pah at Rotorua. Similar gateways were frequently carved for large Pahs and were furnished with strong doors that were securely fastened on the inside.

Fig. 2 represents the upper portion of another typical gateway and has been severed from the lower portion, which had unfortunately become so greatly decayed as to necessitate its removal.

The simplest form of dwelling was and still is the Raupo Whare, or a hut, usually of one room, built with a frame, the studs or uprights of which were driven into the ground and to these were lashed top plates and vertical stringers; the lashings being made with New Zealand flax (phormium tenax), a broad leaved plant which is found in every swamp. The roof was always gabled and prepared for thatching, the rafters and purlines being lashed together. The framing throughout was usually of Manuka scrub, a tough, stringy hardwood of a fine red color, and is now sometimes used for turnings when straight enough. Rushes known as Raupo, or native bullrush, which grow in the swamps and all the margins of the lakes to a height of 8 to 10 feet, are cut and dried in the sun, and the walls and roof were well thatched with it and often beautifully laced with flax. Fig. 3 shows a specimen of the roughest form of Maori Whare. In a particularly fine Runanga or meeting house, the rafters and purlines are all carved or painted with kokowai, and the central column supporting the roof is richly carved at the base, and the great lizard descending is the finest bit of work of its sort that I have met with. The walls