

**MAORI
SUPERSTITIONS:
A LECTURE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649257744

Maori Superstitions: A Lecture by John White

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Cover @ 2017

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JOHN WHITE

**MAORI
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MAORI SUPERSTITIONS.

A LECTURE,

BY JOHN WHITE,

INTERPRETER TO THE LAND PURCHASE DEPARTMENT,

DELIVERED FOR THE

"YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION,"

IN THE ODD FELLOWS' HALL,

JUNE 20TH, 1856.

Auckland:

PRINTED BY WILLIAMSON AND WILSON.
1856.

850. 121 v. 73

P R E F A C E.

It was my intention not to have published the following few pages ; but at the request of many of my friends, and those who wish to see Maori History put into the hands of the public, so as to rescue it from oblivion, I have for this reason acceded to their request. At the same time, I am fully conscious that as a composition, it is very deficient, but I may add, as the principal part of it is almost translated literally as related to me by various Native Chiefs and Priests, I am emboldened to say that the style is tinged with a somewhat similar phraseology to the original.

J. W.

Auckland, September 8th, 1856.

MAORI SUPERSTITIONS.

THE origin of the New Zealanders is variously accounted for by themselves: there is one tradition of their arriving from a place called Hawaiki, having performed the journey in about ten principal canoes, but of a different structure to those we now see, and which were called Amatiatia, being similar to those used in many islands of the South Seas, with an outrigger to prevent them upsetting. The present canoe is called "Waka," the model of which is said to have been taken from the dry seed-pod of the Rewarewa (New Zealand Honeysuckle). Those who may desire to see how minutely the model has been followed, by contrasting the two, will observe that even the figure-head and the projecting piece over the stern have been copied.

But our principal design is to notice the religious faith (if religious faith it may be called) and its foundation, which is couched in the title of our lecture, viz.—"Maori Superstitions and Traditions;" as superstitions and traditions will be seen to be the basis of their entire fabric of faith. Should we fail, through want of time, to show the partially distinct connexion with the Christian faith, the minds of this audience will readily supply their respective contrasts and analogies.

The first Tradition we notice is that which relates to the creation of the world. They simply say,—The world was, but it lay in darkness. It consisted of two parts, called Rangi and Papa, these two parts being joined together in the form of a globe, and hidden in the centre lay certain beings styled gods, the principal of which were named Rongomatane, Tangaroa, Haumia, Tumatauenga, Tanemahuta, and Tawhirimatea. These gods conspired against the world, which they called their parent. They held a council together, when Tumatauenga proposed to destroy it; but Tanemahuta would not consent, adding that he should think it better to separate the two parts:—to put one above and one below, with the upper part of which they were to have no

connection; but the lower part to be their mother. The first five agreed to this, but Tawhirimatea would not consent; the rest stated to him that they proposed this separation so that there might be light, and then man could be created: for as yet man had no existence. The five who agreed to this each tried in turns, to separate these two parts; but the first four having failed, Tanemahuta accomplished it by standing on his head, and by a sudden stretch of his legs upwards, he separated the heaven from the earth—that is, Rangi (heaven), and Papa (earth): at the same time one of the inferior gods, called Taupotiki propped the heaven up with the clouds.

Tawhirimatea having witnessed this division of the world, to his great disapprobation, bethought himself to punish his brothers, and went up to heaven, where he found some of the minor gods; these Heaven consented should form a war party, to accompany Tawhirimatea to attack the other five. However, whilst Tawhirimatea was consulting with Heaven, four of the other five assumed different natures, and became part of the Earth. Tanemahuta had transformed himself into a tree, and became the father or propagator of trees and birds: Tangaroa had become a fish, and the god and propagator of fish: Rongomatane, a Kumara (the sweet potato); and Haumia, a fern-root. But Tumatauenga still retained his divine nature. These were the five: four having thus been transformed, they were seen only as trees, grass, shrubs, and fish. Tawhirimatea, however, was determined to punish them, and accordingly sent his four sons out to the four quarters of the world. They were named, Marangai (East), Auru (West), Tonga (South), and Raki (North); and from them are derived the names of the four winds, and of the four cardinal points. He also sent others of his children to other parts of the earth, as Tomairangi (dew), Haupapa (ice), Hauhunga (cold). With these forces he attacked his brothers: Te Apuhau, one of his children, and god of gales, attacked Tane, the tree, who was killed—that is, he was split to pieces, and in these pieces of wood were found other children of Tane; these were Huhu (a grub) and Pepe (a butterfly), hence the origin of this tribe of insects.

Tangaroa, the fish, was next attacked: he fled to the water, being the god of fish; but on the attack being made, his two sons, Tufewanawana, the elder, and Ikatere, the younger, consulted as to whether they should stay on land, or go to the water. In their consultation they quarrelled, when the elder predicted that the younger should become fish; and that if he went to the water to escape from danger, he should be brought back to earth, and be hung on a stick to be dried by the wind. Hence the native practice of drying their fish.

The younger retaliated by saying, you remain on shore, and become a lizard, to be eaten with fernroot. Hence the origin of fish and the larger species of lizards.*

At this time fish were of one shape and colour. That which gave rise to the many varieties now known, is believed by the Maori to have been occasioned by a man, who, on account of continued provocations, left his wife and child. The wife went to Tangaroa, the god of fish, and desired him to punish her husband. Tangaroa collected his forces and made an attack on the settlement in which the deserting husband resided. The fish gained a victory over the men of the settlement, and, as a recompense for their valour, Tangaroa granted the request which any of the fish might make. The gurnet wished to be red, and to be able to groan like dying man; hence the colour of this fish, and the groan which it makes when caught. The skate saw a boy's kite, and became, by request, like it. The guardfish saw a spear, and asked for a spear to his nose. Each fish having been transformed by their own request, became the propagators of the many varieties now known.

To return,—Tawhirimatea next sought for Rongo and Haumia, two others of the rebels, but these had been hidden by the earth, Rongo having been turned into the Kumara, and Haumia into fern-root, which occasioned Tawhiri to seek for them in vain.

He then made an attack on Tumatauenga, who retained his deity, from which circumstance he was enabled to elude him. After this war was ended, Tumatauenga was continually annoyed by the search for him; his brothers, having, as we have related, transformed themselves into trees, shrubs, birds, and fish, in order to elude their pursuers, consequently; Tumatauenga determined to be revenged on them. He therefore caught fish and birds, dug up fern-root and kumaras, (finding the latter by the tops of the plant, which were supposed to be the hair of the god's head). These he ate as he found or caught them, uttering at the same time a different incantation over each one. As he had thus eaten his brothers, the Natives have from this derived their practice of cannibalism. He also composed a form of invocation to heaven, asking for rain, sunshine, and wind; and another for himself, which was entirely designed to depreciate his brothers and exalt himself.

Having shown the origin of their faith relative to a portion of

* This reference to eating the lizard tribe would lead any one who is not acquainted with the Maori habits to infer that the lizard is commonly eaten by them; such is not the case, except on extreme occasions, as in proclaiming war. There is, however, a tribe in the Taranaki district who eat a lizard called a Kaweau, which is similar to the New Holland Guano.

the creation, to place it in order, we pause to notice a tradition relative to the flood, which took place before the creation of man, during the reign of these rival gods, which is as follows:—

Some time after the god Tumatauenga had eaten his brothers, Tawhiri (the one who would not consent to divide the earth and heaven) and Rangī called their sons together, named Uanui Ua-whatu, Uanganga, which we call rain, sleet, and hail, to make a final onslaught on the earth. These gods—hail, rain, and sleet—descended and drowned the world, save one spot. Tumatauenga, who occupied this spot, fought vigorously against, but could not fully overcome them, from which circumstance the Natives account for the continuance of rain, squalls, gales, and hurricanes. But Tumatauenga gave himself the names of Tukariri, Tu the fighter, Tukanguha, Tu the bruiser, Tukaitaua, Tu the war eater, Tuwhakaheke tangata, Tu the man-consumer, Tumatawhaiti, Tu of the small face, having five brothers, he gave himself these five additional names, in opposition to theirs, as a proof that he concentrated in himself a power even superior to their combined force. Hence, the frequent use of these names in war songs.

To resume,—The history of the creation of man forms a striking analogy to that contained in the Bible. Soon after the flood, Tiki, a son of Tu, made man, by kneading clay with his own blood, and forming it after his own image, he danced before it, then breathed on it and it became a living being, whose name was Kauika. After this, men began to multiply; but the children of Kauika performed nothing worthy of note in their different generations until the time of the four Maui, his descendants. In their time, the days were short. The sun which ruled the day was the firstborn of heaven, and was ordered to go round the world for the purpose of noticing the actions of the rebellious five gods; and the stars, the minor sons of heaven, were to watch during the night.

Maui, the youngest of the Maui, being desirous that the days should be longer, suggested to a number of his associates, that they should go with him, and try to stop the sun, so that there might be more daylight. They proceeded in the night and journeyed eastward, and after many nights and days, they came to a spot which was the brink of the world, where the sun had to pass. Here they built a mound of earth, and hung a noose over the brink of the world. "Now," said Maui, to the men posted behind the mound, "when the sun gets into the noose, I will tell you. Do not startle him." They caught the sun, and Maui beat him severely with the jawbone of his grandfather, Murirangiwheua. The sun, inquired, "Why do you beat me? I am the firstborn of Heaven, my name is Tama nui te Ra, the great source of light and heat." How-

ever he was so belaboured, that he went away quite a cripple, and effectually prevented from ever travelling as fast as he had been wont to do, for which reason the day became longer.

We now come to the tradition in which New Zealand is spoken of as having been fished up out of the ocean. Soon after the sun had been so severely beaten, Maui's brothers complained, that he, Maui Posiki, was very idle, that he would not go to fish; the women and the old men joining in the complaint. This caused Maui to make his grandfather's jawbone into a fishhook, which he kept concealed in his garment. On going out with his brothers to fish they laughed at him; asking why he went with them, as he had no fishing tackle. He answered by requesting them to go out further to sea, and still further, until they lost sight of land; his brothers murmured louder than before against him for this daring act; they sailed on, however, and Maui let down his line and hook, which was ornamented with pearl and carving; the hook caught the house of Tonganui the son of Tangaroa, the god of fish.

This house was built at the bottom of the ocean; Maui pulled however, and the house, with all the earth around it, coming up together, caused a great bubbling in the sea.

His brothers called out in great fear, "Maui, Maui, cease your pulling," but Maui pulled on, and uttered this incantation:—

What dost thou intend, Tonganui,
That thou art sullenly biting below there!
The power of Rangiwhenua's jawbone is seen on thee;
Thou art coming; thou art conquered;
Thou art coming; appear, appear,
Shake thyself, grandson of Tangaroa the little.

At last up it came, and when visible, it was found to be part of the earth, which had not been reclaimed at the time of the abatement of the flood; and their canoe was left high and dry upon it. The land thus reclaimed is New Zealand.

Maui left his brothers, commanding them not to eat or cook food until he returned. He went to a distance to propitiate Tangaroa the god of fish, for catching one of his children, in order that that god might grant success to fishers in future. The brothers not heeding the injunctions of Maui, immediately on his departure, began to cut the fish; that is to dig the ground; this enraged Tangaroa so much, as his son was thus cut up before his pardon had been obtained, that in revenge he caused it to be convulsed, and by his writhings the mountains and valleys were formed.

Other traditions say, that the mountainous feature of the land is derived from Mataao, and is spoken of as the turning of