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The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions

First published between 1887 and 1890, this multi-volume chronicle of Maori history and culture was one of the first books to record the oral narratives of the indigenous people of New Zealand. The project were commissioned by the New Zealand government in 1879 when it was observed that, due to the introduction of European culture and education, tribal lore was dying out. The material was collected and recorded by John White (1826–91), an ethnographer and public servant who had been well versed in Maori language and customs from an early age. The stories were printed in both Maori and English. Volume 6, published in 1890, contains additional narratives about the Tainui migration and describes wars both between Maori tribes and against Europeans. It concludes with detailed genealogies of gods, ancestors and humans that were traditionally recited in ritual contexts such as births or burials.

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The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions

VOLUME 6: TAI-NUI

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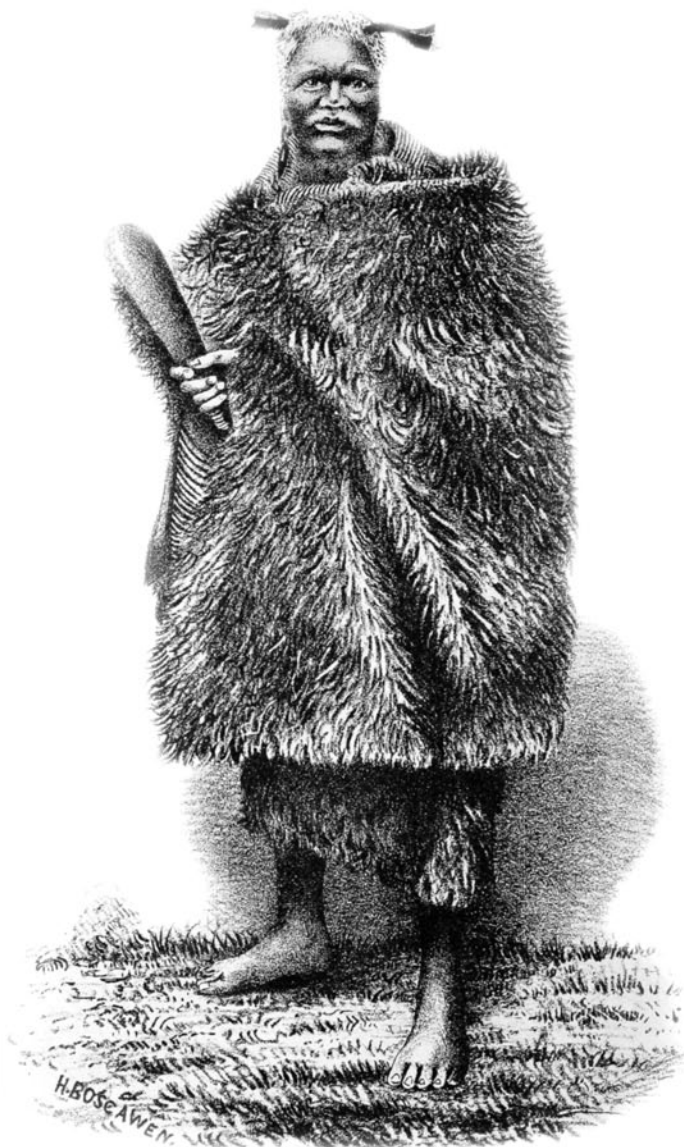
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HEUHEU.
Head Chief of Taupo.

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THE
ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE MAORI,
HIS
MYTHOLOGY AND TRADITIONS.

TAI-NUI

BY
JOHN WHITE.

VOLUME VI.

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How soon, my child, my thoughts of thee
Are partly lost to memory,
As now I gaze on flitting clouds
That pass o'er yonder distant isle—
A lovely isle, the sight of which
Calls back the past of all thou wast!
But, oh! I left thee in our home,
Nor dared to stay and watch
For coming crowd of tribes to aid;
And now my grief and soliloquy
O'ercome me as, at a distance thus,
I ponder o'er my people's love and power.
 Flow on, thou tide [of death]; rise high,
And quickly mount to utmost height,
And use thy mighty chilling power;
But rob the dread of Muri-whenua
Now held o'er me by Te Tere.
My bird of fame (my child) still lives,
And shall with chiefs in council sit,
And claim the right to utter all
That mind can frame and hand can do,
Though chilled by dreadful omens seen in Pleiades.
Te-whare-pou-rutu and Nga-ti-awa, all
Shall in a host arrive and end my grief,
And love gain shall show its power.

Lament chanted by Te-rau-paraha.

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P R E F A C E.

I HAVE to acknowledge my indebtedness to W. T. L. Travers, Esq., F.L.S., and here tender my thanks to him for the permission so generously given to make the extracts from his "Life and Times of Te Rauparaha" to be found at page 57 of the English portion and page 12 of the Maori portion of this volume.

To the general reader it may be some satisfaction to be informed that the genealogical tables given herein were to the Maori subjects of the most careful study, and when chanted by the priests in their respective ceremonies were believed to be fraught with the most potent influences. They are divided into three parts. The first division, called Popoa-rengarenga (a genealogy of the gods), was chanted at a gathering of the people for the purpose of mourning at the death and on the occasion of the burial of a person of rank. Food consisting of the octopus (*wheke*) was made sacred by the priest of highest rank, who waved it over the persons of those who had borne the corpse or had in any way come in contact with it, while he chanted the genealogical chant. It was then presented to the women of supreme rank, to be eaten by them; and no females but those of the family to which the dead belonged could partake of this octopus

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PREFACE.

under penalty of death. The second division, called Taki-ura (a genealogy of the ancestors who followed after or were immediately descended from the gods), was chanted by the priests over those who took the dead from their first resting-place, removed all the flesh from the bones, and placed them in their final resting-place in the caves. The persons employed in each of these cases were deemed unclean, and could neither mix in any way with the people or their friends, nor eat food except such as was put into their mouth by an old sacred woman, until these ceremonies were completed. The third division was called Tua-tangata (genealogy of man), and was chanted by midwives, and by those who were unfortunate in hunting birds or rats or in fishing; it was also chanted each morning before commencing work by parties assembled to plant or to harvest the kumara bulbs.

As all the names in these genealogies were indices of important events, the chanting of them on their respective occasions provoked inquiry from the younger and explanation by the elder members of the tribe, and thus became an important means of transmitting its history.

No tribe would have the temerity to recite in public the genealogy of another tribe unless from a desire to provoke feelings of anger, or possibly war, with that tribe.

JOHN WHITE.

Wellington, 30th October, 1889.

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