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978-1-108-04010-5 - The Lore of the Whare-wānanga: Or Teachings of the Maori College on Religion, Cosmogony, and History: Volume 2: Te Kauwae-raro or 'Things Terrestrial'

H. T. Whatahoro

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The Lore of the Whare-wānanga

Stephenson Percy Smith (1840–1922) arrived in New Zealand as a boy, and soon became fascinated by Maori culture. After retiring in 1900 from his career as a government surveyor, Smith devoted himself to the study of the Maori and co-founded the Polynesian Society, which published this two-volume study in 1913–15. The book contains the Maori text of an important body of beliefs and traditions which had been committed to writing over fifty years earlier, when the young W. H. Whatahoro had acted as scribe for a group of senior elders concerned to preserve this ancient and sacred knowledge. Only long afterwards was Whatahoro willing to divulge it to Europeans, and he personally assisted Smith with the translation provided here. Volume 2 focuses on traditions relating to the history and migrations of the Maori people and their arrival in New Zealand in the 'Great Fleet'.

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The Lore of the Whare-wānanga

*Or Teachings of the Maori College on Religion,
Cosmogony, and History*

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Memoirs
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Memoirs of the Polynesian Society, Vol. 15.

The
Lore of the Whare-wānanga

or

Teachings of the Maori College

On their History and Migrations, etc.

Written down by H. T. Whatahoro from
the teachings of Te Matorohanga, Nepia
Pohuhu and other priests of the Whare-
wānanga of the East Coast, New Zealand

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY
S. PERCY SMITH, F.R.G.S., F.R.Hist.Soc.
President of the Polynesian Society.

Part II.—Te Kauwae-raro
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INTRODUCTION.

IN the third volume of "Memoirs of the Polynesian Society," the first part of the "Lore of the Whare-wānanga" was printed. That first part dealt with the Kauwae-runga, or "Things Celestial," the earliest of the two divisions into which the old Maori Ruanukus, or learned men, separated the whole of the teaching of the College of Learning. The second part, named by them the Kauwae-raro, or "Things Terrestrial," now follows. This latter division treats more especially of their history—properly so called—in which the various migrations of the ancestors of the particular tribes from whom the information was derived, are related in so far as the record has been handed down in the Whare-wānanga, or Maori College.

It is not to be expected that this record, which is very ancient, should be very full in its earlier parts. For we have here to deal with transactions that took place—some of them—certainly some centuries before Christ, but how long ago it is almost impossible to say, and others in the early centuries of the Christian era. The only guide to dates offered by the old teachers themselves are those of the genealogical tables, and those in the process of many centuries have probably become attenuated by the dropping of many names, a process which becomes obvious on comparing the tables themselves one with another. It is unfortunate that none of the branches of the Polynesian race possessed any system of record expressed in terms of years. As we shall see in what follows, the month, and day of the month, according to their system of record, are sometimes mentioned when any event of importance occurred, but no indication of the year is ever given, and therefore we are reduced to assigning approximate dates by aid of the genealogies, checking them wherever possible by different lines and by using mean numbers where we have more than one line to refer to. The Polynesian Society has, from the very first, adopted twenty-five years as the average length of a generation so far as the Polynesian race is concerned, a number which was the result of the concensus of opinion of many people accustomed to dealing with such questions. These of course, can only be given as approximations of dates, but as we are never likely to possess anything better, we must

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be satisfied with it. And yet there are some few—very few—means by which we can check our chronology from outside sources. These, however, can of necessity only assist during those early stages of Polynesian history when they came into contact with other races, which practically means prior to, or almost the beginning of the Christian era. Since that date there has been no contact with any race of a higher cult than themselves, until the expansion of nautical adventure subsequent to Columbus brought, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a few early navigators into communication with the people. Probably the earliest date at which Europeans came into contact with the Polynesians in their Pacific home, was the year 1527 when, as so many things seem to indicate, one of the ships belonging to the Squadron of Saavedra was wrecked on the coasts of the Hawaiian Islands, and only two persons, a man and a woman, being saved according to native traditions and some of whose descendants are still living in those islands. Dr. W. D. Alexander, however, states that they in no way influenced the Hawaiian beliefs or history; and of course could not have done so in the case of these East Coast, New Zealand Maori people who left Hawaii, or ceased to have any communication with that group (as will be shown) long prior to the year 1527.

We must refer readers to Vol. III. of our "Memoirs" for information as to how these traditions were handed down and taught, merely adding here that the matter which follows was dictated by the two Sages, Te Matorohanga and Nepia Pohuhu, to H. T. Whatahoro, the Scribe, who, during several years wrote these out in the form here given, and by his aid they have been translated.

S. PERCY SMITH,
Translator.

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ERRATA.

OWING to the Translator's absence in England at the time Chapters I. to VII. went through the press, and also due to his indifferent writing, there are a number of errors in both Maori and English in this book. The following, however, as it completely destroys the meaning of the text, should be corrected:—

Page 102, lines 24 and 27 from top, read Poi,
not Toi.