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Notes on the Maories of New Zealand

James Edward Alexander

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NOTES ON THE MAORIES
OF
NEW ZEALAND
,
WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR THEIR PACIFICATION AND PRESERVATION.

BY COLONEL SIR JAMES E. ALEXANDER ,
K.C.L.S., F.R.G.S., AND R.A.S.

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THE following Notes were presented in the form of a paper to the Geographical and Ethnological Section of the British Association for the Promotion of Science at its last meeting held at Bath.

At that meeting one of the Secretaries of the Aborigines' Protection Society had the pleasure of meeting Sir James E. Alexander, the author of the paper, and well knowing and appreciating its value, he had great satisfaction in securing it for that Society.

Sir James E. Alexander has never been connected with the Aborigines' Protection Society; and this circumstance in itself gives increased value to the Notes which are here offered, not only to the members of the Legislature, but to the British public, most opportunely at a critical period, when the existence of the New-Zealand race is at stake, with the chances against it, in the hands of the British. Yes; it adds incalculable value to the evidence afforded by Sir James Alexander that he is a soldier, and probably one than whom the British army does not boast of a better, and not a member of the Aborigines' Protection Society, or of a Missionary Society, or even a frequenter of Exeter Hall; seeing that, were he either of these, he would be of a class to whom the anti-aboriginal English, whether colonized or at home, have a special aversion.

Sir James E. Alexander is, notwithstanding, a first-rate Aborigines' Protector. It was he who, nearly thirty years ago, when serving in South Africa, noticed and recorded the sanguinary deeds of the Boers who emigrated from British territory and British rule, to enjoy the felicity of slave-holding and slave-making. His short but stirring narrative was sent by Sir John Herschell, whose presence then gladdened the Cape, to his friend, Dr. Hodgkin, and thus, without any Missionary intervention, the facts became known in England.

And now, after the lapse of nearly thirty years, still a soldier, and still blending the love of justice and mercy, and also respect for the brave but unfortunate, with the love of arms, Sir James again comes forward the advocate of the oppressed.

May his Notes be read by many, and find their way to kindred hearts.

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BY COLONEL SIR JAMES E. ALEXANDER, K.C.L.S., F.R.G.S., AND R.A.S.

IN the year 1860 I was required to take a regiment to New Zealand, to assist in the war which had recently broken out in that distant and valuable dependency of the British Crown.

Though a voyage of 16,000 miles was before us, I was glad to have the opportunity of visiting our Australian possessions, and of being again actively engaged in the service of the country.

From books I had learned that the Maories were a fine, athletic and warlike race, and living in a country suited, from its climate, for energetic enterprise. I was in hopes that, after a short, and perhaps sharp conflict, peace would be restored, and that a noble race of brown men, children of the same Almighty Creator as ourselves, would be converted from foes into useful allies and fast friends, that is, if justice and humanity held sway in our councils.

A part of the regiment (the 14th) was engaged in the war of 1860-61, and did good service. There was a cessation of hostilities in April 1861, and the troops went to military road-making.

Being in New Zealand two years I had a good deal of intercourse with the natives, especially when in command of the outposts on the Waikato river, established friendly relations with them, and studied their habits and their language. No more fighting being anticipated, a very able Governor (Sir George Grey) being at the head of affairs, I returned home in the beginning of 1863.

A great mistake had been made at the termination of the conflict in 1861, from which it was imagined by some that possibly difficulties might arise, but not to the extent of occasioning such a serious war as has prevailed in 1863-64.

The block of land called the Tataramika, south of New Plymouth (the chief and only town in Taranaki, west coast), had been acquired by purchase some years ago. It had been cultivated by settlers, but who had fled and abandoned it in 1860, going for safety into New Plymouth. General Sir Duncan Cameron proposed to occupy it with a detachment in 1861, to prevent the natives squatting on it. However, the Governor, Colonel Gore Browne and his counsellors, did not think this was necessary.

Sir George Grey did not approve of the acquisition of the mouth of the Waitara, north of New Plymouth, from one man (Teira, of the tribe of Ngatiawa), and said it should be given up to the natives again. Its assumption had been the chief cause of the war of 1860; but a delay took place in giving it back, and in the mean time troops were sent to take possession of the Tataramika, and a redoubt was constructed there. The natives gave due warning, as is their custom (and in this their chivalry is to be commended), that they

would go to war again, they not believing in the surrender of the Waitara block of land, and seeing the Tataramika occupied by a detachment of the 57th regiment. This was, unfortunately, disregarded, and small escort of half a dozen men passed between the redoubt and New Plymouth. Then the natives, as was their custom, laid an ambuscade, and cut off one of these small escorts, and two fine young officers, who happened accidentally to join it on the road. Then began a series of combats, fierce, bloody, and expensive. Our people also contrived ambuscades, and successfully; and since June 1863 till the southern winter month of June 1864 war has raged in New Zealand – in the Taranaki, on the Waikato and Waipa rivers, and, latterly, at Wanganui on the south coast, and Tauranga on the east, and attended there with very heavy loss of valuable officers. We lately heard of another fight, with a loss to the natives of 200 men, and casualties among our own men also. This was the success at Te Ranga, a dashing affair, Colonel Greer commanding.

The native determination and heroic contempt of death is shewn in the following extract of a private letter from New Zealand, dated 6th July 1864 –

"A most successful fight has taken place at Tauranga. This was most opportune in many respects, taking place within a mile or two of the scene of our previous disaster at the Gate Pa, and achieved by the very troops who suffered the repulse on that occasion, over natives from the same part of the country. The circumstances attending the two fights were, however, widely different. In the one case there was a pa, in the other the enemy had barely time to construct one long, shallow line of rifle pits before they were attacked, and the ground was like a race-course. The results were most satisfactory (124 of the enemy buried by us), and attained under circumstances so peculiarly favourable to our troops. The natives, as indeed they always do, behaved splendidly. They, without a single exception, scorned to run, but retired steadily and slowly; not in the smallest degree demoralized by any feeling of being worsted, but deliberately retreated from the field, though shot down by scores, with the sang froid of the finest troops in the world. Many of them turned round, folded their arms on their chests, bowed their heads, and received their death wound without uttering a syllable!"

A sober and industrious man who goes from this country to a distant colony, determined to conquer an independence for himself, which he cannot always hope for here, in the midst of so much competition, ought to meet with every encouragement, provided he shews no disposition to infringe on aboriginal rights, or try to deprive the natives unjustly of lands derived from their ancestors. There are many of our settlers most excellent and worthy men, who would not desire to acquire land except by Government grant, or by fair purchase from the owners wishing to part with it. But there is another class of settlers I saw, whose text is, "We can make a better use of the land than the natives can, and we should have it." To this I replied that I was quite surprised to see the extent of the native cultivations about the Waikato, for instance, ploughs, harrows, and flour mills, used by the natives; canoes of large size for the transport of produce on the rivers and schooners along the coasts. The natives did make a good use of their lands, were prosperous, and raising great quantities of wheat for sale; and were quiet, and their thoughts turned to gain and to the arts of civilized life, till another most unfortunate mistake was made in 1857 – the withdrawal of the prohibition of the sale of arms and ammunition to the natives. Sir George Grey had disallowed this dangerous trade when he had formerly been Governor of New Zealand; but those who came after him, instigated by dealers who were keen for profit, from whatever source it might come, induced the Governor to sanction the trade in warlike stores: a most fatal error; and it was continued from 1857 till the beginning of the war of 1860. The then

Commander of the forces, the Bishop, and even a Maori chief, protested against the sale of warlike stores to the natives, who, in the first nine months of the traffic, supplied themselves with 7849 pounds of powder and 742 single and double-barrelled guns. "This," says the London Review, "was on the principle of giving another man a stick wherewith to break one's own head."¹

The natives, now that the trade in arms, &c, was open, turned their attention from raising grain for sale to the purchase of guns and powder. Then they began to feel the pressure of poverty, and became desperate and dangerous. Hungry men usually are so. They saw, also, emigrants flocking to New Zealand, many of whom boasted that the whole of the country would soon be theirs. The suspicion of the natives was roused; they lost confidence in the honour of the Government when land was bought for 6d. an acre from the natives and resold to the white settlers for 10s, particularly, also, when the movement began for the acquisition of the Waitara, and the first act of war ensued.

A European of the bad sort said to me one day, "We want more land, Sir." I replied, "You have already more than you can use." "We want the rich land on the Waikato," said he, "and I'll tell you how we'll get it. You send your soldiers to make roads through the Maori land: they will come and fight you: you will beat them, and we will get the land for nothing." A most iniquitous proceeding.

Of late years the Maories began to dislike our people for a peculiar reason, the scarcity of women. Some years ago the natives did not care to take trouble in rearing female children: they wanted men for fighting among themselves. Women became scarce. Fierce conflicts have been seen on the beach at Auckland, one tribe trying to get possession of a particular female from another tribe, who was nearly pulled in pieces between them. White traders and others enticed their women by bribes, and took them away. This caused great irritation. And there is another cause: haughtiness of manner evinced towards natives, and an arrogant assumption of superiority over the brown man, is at once observed, and dislike is thus reciprocated. Some of our people can, and do, behave in a proper and kindly manner to those alio calentes sole "bronzed with another sun," and have their reward in mutual goodwill; but I have with great vexation observed among some Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Englishmen, Americans, &c., that every dark man is viewed merely as a "nigger," and as an individual far below the white man in the scale of humanity. The dark races are particularly sensible of this, and note it at once.

Therefore, also, in the apportioning the lands in New Zealand, it seemed to me to have been a great error to have intermixed native and European lands, as I saw in the Taranaki for instance, there were trouble and disputes from this, trespass of cattle and pigs occasioned quarrels; whilst, also, when the inhabitants of neighbouring Maori pas fell out the Europeans took one side or another, and helped their friends to ammunition to fight it out, that is, for a consideration, or stood by and appeared to the natives to enjoy seeing them destroy each other.

In the course of the present war the term rebels, as generally applied to the Maories, is quite a misnomer. Rebels are those who have turned from their allegiance to their acknowledged sovereign, and taken up arms in a struggle for

independence. Now some of the tribes may have considered themselves British subjects, say those north of Auckland, but certainly not the proud Waikatos, Ngatimaniapotos, Ngatiruanuis, &c. who have been so actively engaged against us. Insurgents would be a better term than rebels. After the natives had acquired a certain degree of knowledge from education, they found out that divisions among themselves were hastening their decay. Tarapipi, or, as he is usually called, William Thompson, and other clever leaders, thought that to unite the Maories, for law and order, under one head, was best. They therefore chose an old and renowned warrior as their king, Te Whero Whero, of the Waikatos, and his son Matuteira succeeded him. A land league was also formed to try and prevent the wholesale transfer of native lands to the white man; but the king movement and the land league are looked on by some of our people as mortal offences, when the Scotch, supporting their kings and warring against the English in the days of Bruce and Wallace, are considered in history as using noble efforts to avoid conquest and subjugation.

Some maintain that it is wise to destroy, by every means, native cultivations during war; to burn wharrees, or huts, break up canoes, and to carry fire as well as sword into an enemy's country. I am quite of a different opinion, after having, during a forty years' service in the four quarters of the world, seen much of the miseries of war. If we were required to war for ever – become demons, in short – then fire and sword would be our motto; but, as Christian soldiers, our desire surely should be to conquer peace as quickly as possible, and then endeavour to be friends and comrades with those with whom we were lately engaged in mortal combat. I have seen the huts of Caffres burnt during war at the Cape. I did not know at that time the wretchedness this occasioned to the poor women and children, the exasperation to the men. I know all this now. So, instead of destroying native crops, if I could not secure them, I would leave them alone. Securing grain, potatoes, &c, might induce the owners to sue for peace, in the hopes of recovering their precious food. Turning soldiers loose into fields to destroy, with sword and sickle, Indian corn and other crops, is quite unworthy of the noble profession of arms, and of the nation to which we have the honour to belong. If our own stacks were burnt by an invader, we should entertain the most bitter feelings of animosity towards him, and thirst for revenge.

It was on an expedition to lay waste native cultivations that Captain Lloyd lately lost his life, his men got scattered, were "rushed" (as it is called), the leader and five others fell, and were decapitated. It is the duty of officers and soldiers to obey orders, and ask no questions regarding any undertaking required of them; and our soldiers, under the able leadership of Sir Duncan Cameron, a very accomplished officer, have generally acquitted themselves with great credit. The navy also have shewn great zeal and energy under Sir William Wiseman and other leaders.

I mentioned that I had charge of the outposts on the Waikato for some months. I had with me about 800 men, and though our camp was on British ground, we had Maori cultivations right and left of us. We were at peace at the time, in 1862, and I was careful, as was my duty, that the natives and their property should be respected in every possible way. I had a daily market at seven in the morning, and we exchanged money for pigs, poultry, peaches, melons, potatoes, &c. I had two visits from the influential chief Wiremu Nero (William Naylor); and after entertaining him one day, and he having seen our state of preparedness against surprise, said, "I wish to tell you something. There is now peace between the Pakeha (white man) and the Maori; but there is a totara tree growing on the banks of the Mangatawhiri Creek down there: if you let your soldiers cut it down, and they make a

bridge of it, and go over into Maori land, there will be war." I said, "There was no intention of cutting down the totara tree: there had been enough war already; no occasion for any more; and I trusted that the Pakeha and the Maori would be united for their mutual good. There was plenty of land for both people." But the totara tree has since been cut down, and our troops have gone, not only across the Mangatawhiri Creek, but the Queen's flag has flown on the Maori king's place at Ngaruawahia, and far beyond it, up the Waipa River. Desperate fighting has taken place at Rangiriri: my successor was killed at the head of the regiment; and at Orakau 400 Maories defended themselves for two days, subsisting on raw potatoes, and without water; and on the third day, in the afternoon, in broad daylight, burst out through our people, leading some of their women by the hand, and 100 fell in the pah and in the swamp. Then, some tribes, taking the opportunity to wipe off old scores, have engaged each other – Englishmen being present – and thus added to the great bloodshed of the year.

It would be lamentable if the natives were encouraged to kill and slay each other. Surely humanity dictates that we should endeavour to reconcile their differences, and thus become ourselves respected as mediators. When Sir George Grey arrived for the second time to assume the reins of government, two tribes were at war in the north. He went there, took up a position between the rival pahs, and soon made peace between them. This was the proper, the wise, the Christian course.

It was urged by the Aborigines' Protection Society, in an address to Sir George Grey, that peace should be made immediately the Maories desired it. In the memorandum by the New-Zealand Ministers, in reply to that address, it was stated that the rebels (as they are called) had not, as a body, nor had any leading tribes among them, made the smallest overture for peace; but surely what follows, dated from the Maori king's place, meant peace: –

"Ngaruawahia, Nov. 25, 1863.

"O Friend! O Governor! – Salutations! This is to say to you the fight has been fought, and some are dead, some alive. Restore to us Waikato. Let it suffice for you the men who are dead. Return to us those who live. Enough! From your friend,

"PENE PUKAUHAU. "From all the Chiefs of Waikato."

The answer was, "The Queen's flag must be hoisted by the general at Ngaruawahia." It was eventually hoisted there, but still the war went on.

Sir George Grey wished to divide the country into districts, with Commissioners resident among the Maories to keep order and administer justice. I do not think the Maories are prepared for this yet, and their pride would revolt against it. If the chiefs of tribes are shewn due consideration by our Government, they would be looked up to also by their own people, and have influence for good, and thus might induce them to cultivate the arts of peace. There is little fear of a grand combination against us of all the tribes; and, in fact, the destruction of life has been so great these last twelve months, besides the fine men who fell in the war of 1860-61, that I lament to say a noble race of warriors is rapidly disappearing, and who might have been made of the greatest use to us in defending New Zealand from foreign foes, and even serving in our armies in the East. The Maories make excellent sailors in whale-ships, and are strong, bold, and active.

A correspondent thus wrote to me lately, under date of the 11th May, from Auckland, New Zealand: –

"We have now come to the eleventh month of the war, and though the suc-

cess has been great in carrying out the lawyers' plan for the occupation of the land, very little has yet been done for the establishment of the Queen's supremacy, or of the authority of British law. In fact, interested motives have been allowed to prevail, and all higher considerations have fallen to the ground. The Queen's name is never mentioned. A proclamation, which the Governor never saw, signed "Na ti Pokehu," "By the Fox," is all that the Maori people have ever seen to invite them to peace. The tenor of this document was repulsive: all were called upon to lay down their arms, but were candidly told that this would not blot out (mutu) their offences, but that the disposal of their land would rest with the Governor (meaning the Government), and that at the end of the war, it would be settled what should be done with all who had committed murder or theft. Now as the Decalogue has been well-nigh abrogated on both sides, ambushes practised by both parties, and looting, this is both iniquitous and unwise; iniquitous, because we have stolen more from the Maories than they from us by licence of war; and unwise, because it is contrary to the nature of an amnesty to leave the bulk of the people anxious for the future."

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Another aborigines' protectionist, in England, writes: –

"New Zealand is, in my mind, what England was when invaded by the Romans; and I feel all the sympathy for Maories that our ancestors excited in their efforts to repel the invaders. The Maories, too, remind one of the Britons, of whom Tacitus says, that though docile to learn, and willing to yield obedience, they resisted compulsion."

To conclude. We cannot believe that either confiscation or extermination is intended for the Maories by any right-thinking person in this country, and that the Colonial Minister desires a speedy end of these bloody and most expensive hostilities in New Zealand. When conferences take place with this view, large maps might be prepared, shewing to the natives proposed boundaries of land, and ample in extent, for agricultural and pastoral purposes, and with mountain, forest, and river. In round numbers, the Europeans in New Zealand are now over 200,000, the natives, say, 50,000 souls. And as the Maories are fond of trading, let markets be everywhere established, and judicious Missionaries and teachers be encouraged and protected.

Thus we may have hope for the pacification and preservation of the remnant of the Maori race.

I annex the following letter from a successful settler, Mr. Farmer, who for seventeen years employed Maories to cultivate for him, and who worked well for regular wages: –

"I regret that circumstances have so long prevented my writing to you upon Maori matters; and as I cannot now lay my hands upon documents upon which all my calculations were made, I fear that I can only give a very imperfect outline of the plan which I proposed to the New-Zealand Government for the benefit of the Maories. My proposal was to establish agricultural institutions in the centre of populous Maori districts, for the purpose of instructing the natives in industrial pursuits, including the breeding and general management of stock. Such institutions would be of incalculable benefit to the Maories, as well as to the general prosperity of the colony, and would be self-supporting after a few years' outlay.

"I made an offer to the New-Zealand Government to undertake the management of such an institution in October 1862, as an experiment, but, for the reasons which I have already mentioned to you, the offer was not accepted. (The local Ministers had not submitted it to Sir George Grey, though they spoke well of it.)

"Maories have, upon several occasions, offered me a present of a valuable

piece of land, upon condition that I would settle amongst them, and instruct them in practical agriculture and the management of stock, thereby shewing their anxiety to get instruction. I believe that after the settlement of the present war the scheme which I proposed would be accepted by the natives generally, as one of the greatest benefits which had ever been offered to them by our Government. Unless the Maories are encouraged, assisted, and paid for their work, while receiving instruction, I do not believe that they, by themselves, will ever make any effort to improve their present unsatisfactory condition."

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By our future policy in New Zealand no doubt former errors will be corrected, and peace and prosperity, it is earnestly hoped, will prevail in the Britain of the south.

Westerton, Bridge of Allan, N.B.,
October 16, 1864.

THE suggestions quoted by Sir James E. Alexander at the close of this paper are doubtless good in themselves; but it must be observed that the New Zealanders have not rejected civilization, as asserted by the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, but have copied our agriculture and purchased and used our improved implements, raising crops and rearing cattle for the colonial market. They are shewn, by official returns, to have furnished their share to the revenue, besides the very large amount wrested from them through the want of fair dealing in the land purchases and sales.

They need instruction, guidance, and good example in their social relations. They need more especially a correct knowledge of their own position and of the rights belonging to it – rights which have been forced upon them, together with penalties which they have suffered, but rights, be it remembered, of which they have not felt the benefit, or been taught either the privileges or the proper mode of seeking them. Let these be taught them, together with the general and availing knowledge of the English language, and not merely will more be done for the preservation and benefit of the Maories than has yet been attempted, but the best interests of the colony also will be better served than by protracted war, new loans, and extensive confiscation. At the same time, the eyes of the English at home must be opened to the fatal error of placing the natives, nominally British subjects like themselves, but wholly unrepresented, at the mercy of a Colonial Ministry, of a different race, and swayed by conflicting interests and hostile feelings.

¹ When I was acting Governor on one occasion at Auckland, a report was brought to me that a man from the interior had offered 300 sovereigns for 600 boxes of copper caps. He did not get these, but it shewed the value the natives put on these "munitions of war" – 10s. a box; the usual price of which is 1s. 6d.

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