

ART XIV.—*On the Conversion and Civilization of the Maoris in the South of New Zealand.* By the Rev. J. F. H. WOHLERS, Ruapuke, Southland.

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FOVEAUX STRAITS, between Stewart Island and the south coast of the South Island, was but imperfectly known in civilized parts when I arrived here in May, 1844. Going to an unknown region, it was thought not advisable to be encumbered with much luggage: so I landed on the island of Ruapuke with a carpet-bag and a pair of blankets. I was now alone among the Maoris, and had a good opportunity of learning their language and their ways of thinking. There were then about two hundred living on the island, and about four hundred more were living in small villages on the coasts and islands in the straits. The island of Ruapuke, where the principal chiefs resided, was the centreing place for all, and was frequently visited by the dispersed population in the straits; it was, therefore, a suitable place for commencing mission work.

Some years before my arrival the straits had been frequented by whaling and sealing vessels, and some forty of the sailors had remained here among the Maoris. This was of importance, for through them a little trade was coming up: and they could make boats, which were of far more use to the Maoris than their former canoes. But a movement of greater importance had now come from the north.

To understand this movement, we must first look into the then condition of the Maoris. Through the increasing importance laid on the *tapu*, during several generations, they had lost their hold on the poetical and sublime ideas of their ancient religion. Their ancient gods had now merely historical significance, and these were known only by a very few wise old men. Their poetical ideas had no longer any influence on the minds of the Maoris. They had sunk deeper and deeper in savage barbarism and cannibalism. This is unnatural to the idea of humanity, and must lead to destruction of the race. So their bodily constitution lost its vitality. If any one became sick, he had no hope of recovery. The *tapu*—sacred to ghosts and favourable to the higher classes living—had grown to a fearful extent. Anything *tapu* dared not be touched or even approached by people of the lower classes. Offenders were generally killed for such sacrilege; and, even if they were not detected, the ghosts always killed them through inward fear. The higher classes had the power to lay the *tapu* on any thing, by solemnly naming it with deceased members of the chiefs' families. Though they were not affected by all *tapus*, yet all, high and low, had to

dread them. Especially dreaded were old forsaken houses, old fences, or anything which had once been occupied by families of the higher chiefs now dead.

In former times, while they lived and moved in the feelings of their ancient religion; while the poetical ideas of their gods occupied their minds, and they felt themselves above grovelling animalism: they could be healthy, live and thrive as other heathens do, though their morals and civilization do not come up by far to that of the Christians. But when those higher ideas did no longer occupy their mind, when they were in constant dread of offending against the *tapu*, when their physical constitutions were no longer healthy, when they saw but few children were born and many of the young people died: then they lost heart, and felt themselves sinking.

Yet there is something in the human mind, also in the mind of the miserable savage, which, through all the dulness, inward and outward, longs for something higher, for something heavenly, divine. When, therefore, the Maoris in the north of New Zealand at last comprehended the teaching of the missionaries, when the spirit of Christianity was brought near their heart, then they felt that that was the very thing which gave them relief in their inward groaning. Some were converted; others followed. They were sincere. They became cleanly, enlightened, good, and loving. Others saw it,—it infected them. Then Christianity spread from place to place—a most powerful spiritual movement vibrated through the race.

With Christianity the missionaries in the north had also introduced the arts of reading and writing. This was a marvel to the Maoris, who, by nature, are endowed with a fair intellect. That the new things, called books, could talk to them; yea, that they could put their talk on paper and send it to distant friends, there to be understood: that was to them a miracle, which confirmed their faith in Christianity. They felt at once their minds lifted high above the old dulness, and that explains the great spiritual movement which vibrated through the whole race. Yet it was not the mechanical art of reading and writing which changed their minds from wolves to lambs, but the spiritual ideas in Christianity. Murder, cannibalism, and other sins, as far as they had light and understanding, were at once abolished. Also wars ceased, so long as the spirit of gentleness and forbearance of Christianity dwelt in their simple minds. That there should come some reactions, that the inherited wildness in a generation grown up since then should have broken out here and there, was no more than might be expected.

Now, that great spiritual movement from the north had already reached this far south, chiefly through native agencies, when I arrived here. It was, therefore, quite safe for me to live among the Maoris. The New

Testament had been translated into Maori, and some copies had found their way hither. Some of the young people were learning to read and to write; yet none were so far as to understand the meaning. It was as much as they could do, like children just learning to read, to spell out the words. It will be seen, therefore, that I found a "field here white for the harvest."

When landing at Ruapuke I was taken to the house of the principal chief, named Tuhawaiki, commonly called Bloody Jack. The chief himself was absent northward—I had met him at Banks Peninsula—but the house was full of his relatives. A sort of bedstead was provided for me to sleep on, but several persons slept on the floor close by. This did well enough for a few days, but it could not go on so for long, or I should lose my civilization. I wanted a house for myself alone, and the Maoris were kind enough to put up one for me. It was fourteen feet by nine. The walls were four feet high. The whole structure, walls and roof, was thatched with grass and looked like a heap of hay. Herein, then, I lived like a hermit; but I had always visitors from morning till evening. By and by I found that I could not keep up cleanliness in the house as it was. First I had to make a chimney to let the smoke out. I cut a hole through the roof, put up a frame of wood and sticks and plastered that over with prepared clay. When that was done I made a fire and went out to see, and lo! the smoke curled up out of my chimney as in a civilized place. Then, little by little, I took away grass from the walls, put more wood and sticks in and made clay walls. I also plastered over the insides of the roof. My visitors all the time looked and wondered, none offered to help. I had brought with me a small parcel of very small panes of window glass, not much larger than cardpaper, for convenient carrying. Now I made a window frame with my pocket knife, and so got a window. In order to keep the house free from fleas, which my visitors brought me in great abundance, I procured some planks and made a floor. I also partitioned off a sleeping place, to keep the visitors with their fleas away from my bed. The house being now a little refined, visitors were no longer allowed to go to sleep in it, nor to stay over long. When a set of them left I took the broom and swept the fleas out after them.

I must needs speak a little of myself, because I am so mixed up with the recent history of these southern Maoris, and my actions, trifling as they may seem, were not without influence. By the time the spring season came round I had fenced in a potatoe garden, and in it, just before my window, I planted a flower garden. My visitors always liked to look through the glass of my window, and by and by when the flowers were in bloom it raised their admiration.

These flowers were sermons. Among a people sunken so low in the scale of humanity, all such little improvements help to lift up their minds a little higher. Among other faculties of their minds, the Maoris here had lost altogether the sense of the beautiful. Some of the very old Maoris were much tattooed, and there was art in the designs. I do not mean to say that it improved the beauty of their faces, far from it, but art and beauty was in the design. The same can be said of some pieces of clothing, which sadly distort the beautiful human form in highly refined society—there is art in it. Only the old Maoris carried out the art of beauty in their tattoo; in that of the younger there was none. The young women had not the least taste for beauty, only by instinct they painted, or rather besmeared, their faces with the red juice of a wild berry.

They were altogether a dejected people. I found, as I kept a register of births and deaths on the island, that, year by year, for every child born, from three to four persons died. No wonder that they had lost heart and felt as if there were no spirit of life left in them. Now, when Christianity was brought near their hearts, they began to feel as if some help were coming. I cannot yet say it gave them hope, for they had not even a word for that in their language. They liked to read in the New Testament, as they began to understand the meaning, that Jesus was so good and helped poor suffering people without asking if they were good. But then they would learn to love Jesus and that would make them good. It went to their hearts that Jesus had died for the badness of mankind. There is an affinity between it and a deep yearning in the human heart, and when they come near each other then there is a contact, and happiness is the result. Theological arguments, and dogmatical statements, are too poor to explain it. There was a belief in the old Maori religion, that the goddess of death was dwelling in the world of night (their Hades), and drawing her children (she having before been the original mother of mankind) down to her. That gave them no comfort. But it comforted them to learn that Jesus died upon the cross, that he rose again and went to his Father in heaven—and that he will draw all men unto him.

By the foregoing I have simply indicated the way the Maoris have been converted, and science need not ignore that.

By and by some earnest simple souls wished to be baptized. These were instructed more fully, and then solemnly baptized before the whole community. They felt that they were taking upon themselves a great responsibility, that all the others would watch them to detect flaws in their lives. This made them careful to be good and to walk circumspectly. Then others followed, who were likewise instructed and baptized. Soon the news of this spread over all the straits, and boats after boats, with

anxious inquirers, came to Ruapuke to see the new things and to ask for baptism. They had to stay here for a week or longer to be instructed and to see if they were sincere, and were then baptized. After that they sailed back to their homes, to be there a light among their neighbours. So it came to pass that in a short time there were earnest Christians in all the villages of the district.

It was natural that, by and by, I should feel constrained to go and visit my spiritual children. I made, therefore, frequent voyages with Maoris in their boats. When I came to a village I stayed there for about a week to strengthen the faithful, to help up again the fallen, and to instruct fresh candidates for baptism. Then, when all was done, I went to another place to perform similar works. I mention this and the following to show the state of the Maoris at that time, both mental and bodily.

The Maoris in most of the dispersed villages were very poor; their houses were not good. They were improvident with their food. It would happen during bad weather, when the sea was too rough to go out fishing, that for a whole week we had nothing to eat but potatoes, and nothing to drink but cold water. Add to this, that the hovels were overcrowded, for where I went others went. We had to sleep rather close on the hard clay floor. The smell of such sleeping company was not pleasant.

A man in the strength of his life, and whose mind is in his work, can bear such hardship. Yet I was always glad when, after a poor Maori hospitality, I came to a place where Europeans lived, namely, some of the before-mentioned former whalers and sealers, who had remained here and taken Maori wives. In their houses I found a clean seat, not perhaps on a chair—chairs and tables were rare articles at that time in this part of the world—but on a seaman's chest, drawn for me to the fire. Here also I was treated to pork and damper (unleavened bread baked in hot ashes).

Cleanliness and better living were not the only pleasures I found in the houses of the Pakeha Maori families. (I prefer to use the term *Pakeha*, for that includes Americans, and these might object to being termed Europeans.) The Maoris had few children, and these had a dirty and dull look about them. On the other hand, in the Pakeha Maori families, I found plenty of clean, lively, and healthy-looking half-caste children. Surely a friend of flowers wandering through a waste country, where only a few stunted plants were growing, and thinking to himself, there might be green leaves and bright flowers here, but there were none, and who then found a rosebush full of buds and roses just opening to the light of the sun, could feel no greater joy than a loving heart must feel at the sight of those lovely children. The houses were clean, and the parents and children were clean. They were all very simply but neatly dressed. May be this was not always

so. There may have been washing and cleaning because I was expected. Be that so, it was a step in the right direction. The Maoris had not yet caught the idea that it would be comely to wash and clean themselves for the visit of a stranger whom they respected. The baptized, of course, had to appear a little cleanly, but the mass comprehended that not yet.

Here some one may ask: Why not civilize the Maoris first and afterward christianize them? To that I would reply: That cannot be done. No savage will take to civilized habits before a higher idea is instilled into his mind and is working there. Always washing and combing—too much work. Let now the leaven be mixed with the unsightly lump of flour, and by and by, when it is working, we shall see the uprising of a civilization.

I have said the Maoris had but few children, and these had a dull and unhealthy look about them. What was the cause? Let us look into their family management. Strictly speaking, there were no families—there were parties—large ones and small ones. Most of the food was procured and eaten by each party in common, and as there was no organization for economy, there could be no saving. When after a time of hunger there came a time of plenty, then the craving was so great, that they ate overmuch. At another time they had to starve again. Their eating, clothing, housing, were unwholesome. For a time such a way of living might go on; but in the end, generation after generation, it must weaken their health, at least in these latitudes. Besides the above, it was a settled custom among them, that parents must not correct their children—and there was a reason for it. They did not understand that children were to be made better by correction. If they would beat their children, it would be done in a brutal way, while in a great rage. Then others of the party would get angry and interfere. This would lead to a fight, and perhaps to manslaughter. To avoid such disturbances it had come to be a settled habit, that children must be left to have their own way, and the children knew that they need not obey. If a child objected to be weaned, the mother must go on giving it suck. I have known children four or five years old still sucking. It was a common sight to see a mother coming into the house and sit down, then a big boy, or a big girl, would run up to her and stand bolt upright by her side and suck, like a big calf. No wonder they had but few children, and one can think that children growing up in such a way must make bad parents. They could not always have been so, else they would have died out long before.

On the other hand, Maori women, though grown up in the same way, when joined to a Pakeha husband, had plenty of healthy children. How can we account for that? It was because the families were provided for

and ruled over by Christian fathers. I do not say that these fathers were regenerated Christians ; but they were born and had grown up in Christian countries, had got used to civilized habits, and, as sailors, had learned discipline. The mothers in such families, had, therefore, better food, better clothing, better dwellings, than the other women of their race who had Maori husbands. This raised their minds to a higher level of humanity. They got self-respect. This made them willing to fall in with the discipline of their husband. They became healthier and had more children.

Such chaste, soul-ennobling love, as exists in refined Christian societies, was at that time unknown among the Maoris. All marriages were treated as political affairs. The tribal divisions were subdivided again and again, to mere parties. Such parties had many things in common. Now marriages among the young people, if left to themselves, might be to the advantage of one party and the disadvantage of another. There were rights to be considered. Therefore the councils of the parties, in which all free men and women had voices, decided how people should marry. On the same wise were some of the girls given away to become wives of the Pakehas among them—not without a consideration.

The minds of the Pakeha Maori wives were affected by the agitation of the conversion among the Maoris ; the half-caste children were so lovely as “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” When a mother with her children had been baptized, and the blessings of a Christian marriage pronounced over father and mother, then all felt so happy that now they formed a Christian family.

It was a time of revival here then, and as such a happy time, but it was a poor time in temporal affairs. It was as if we had been left and forgotten in this out-of-the-way corner of the world. The whales and the seals had been exterminated, and it did not pay any longer for ships to come this way. Wellington, at Cook Strait, was the nearest civilized settlement, and that was far away. The communication was by Maori boats from place to place along the coast. It took about two years before my clothes and books, which I had left at Nelson, found their way to Ruapuke, and it was a marvel that they arrived at all. Correspondence here was not so easily carried on then as it is now. When I wrote home to Germany, it took two years and a half before I could receive an answer. I lived, when not travelling, like a hermit, cultivated my food and cooked it myself ; did also my washing. When I could get no flour, then cooked peas were a good substitute for bread. I also tried to introduce the cultivation of peas among the Maoris, who needed such nutritious food, but could not succeed ; the time for industry had not yet come.

As the conversions went on, there came gradually a change over the minds of the Maoris. They saw that the low dirty way of life they were leading did not agree with their new Christian feeling. They became desirous for a better way of living and were willing to work for it, for civilization requires a great deal of fresh work. I felt the same for them; but what could I do? Their civilization must commence in the families, as will have been seen in the foregoing, and there I could not help. There was one way of helping—I must get a wife, one that is “cumbered about much serving” the Lord Jesus in “the least of his brethren.” Such women there are in civilized Christian communities, but there were none of that sort in this obscure corner of the world. Yet there was a chance.

When I had been five years here, it became necessary for me to go to Wellington and Nelson to make arrangement with some merchant or banker to draw some money from home. In 1849, I set out on that journey. Coming to Otago I found that a few settlers had arrived there; but what is now the city of Dunedin, was then an insignificant place with a few small houses. Five years before I had seen that place when it was an uninhabited wilderness. However, I could find a passage on a schooner direct from here to Wellington.

When I had arranged my money affairs, I looked out for a wife, and in Wellington I found a young lady who had a willing mind to carry civilized habits into the families of the Maoris in the far south. If these statements do not concern science, they concern learning—I mean learning the history of civilizing the Maoris in the south.

The Maoris had already got into the way, of their own accord, of calling themselves my children, old and young; and now, when I came back to them and brought a wife, she was received at once as the head mother of the community; and she had the talent to establish her authority as such, and to be obeyed. She went into the work with her mind in it, and with excellent results. When she went to a place and was observed on the road, then the children shouted, “Mother is coming!” Quickly the women began to sweep and to put things tidy, so as to pass muster at the inspection. Gradually each family was taught to manage its own affairs.

The children could no longer be allowed to have their own perverse ways; but as the parents did not know how to correct them, I had to take the chastisement in hand. If children were under a sentence of whipping, they knew that it would be carried out, and that made them feel unhappy. So a conscience was cultivated in them, for which the heathen Maoris had not even a word in their language. When those children felt the guilty



weight getting too heavy on their minds, they came to me of their own accord, and begged to have the whipping over, so that they might feel good again. The chastisement was then performed under loving admonitions, and that made them love me and helped them to be good.

To the civilization of the Maoris also belongs the introduction of the English language. So long as they cannot read the colonial newspapers, they must remain an inferior race in the colony. This cannot be accomplished in one generation—the Maori language being so simple and the English so complicated, especially in spelling and pronouncing—but it can in two or three. I commenced a school for that purpose. Of course the scholars did not learn much English, but they learned some, and that did them good; for when they grew up and became parents, by the time the Government had established English schools among them they were very anxious that their children should attend regularly, while parents who had not been at the former school were not.

The work towards civilization began at Ruapuke, but it spread also to other parts of the Strait. Let us look at their dresses, when, in the time of transition, they came into the church in their Sunday clothes. Some wore native mats, some woollen blankets, though cleanly, in most cases old and much worn. Some few also wore parts of European clothes, but seldom complete. It caused not the least surprise when a man came in dressed in a European man's shirt and a short waistcoat and nothing else. Some years later such an appearance would not have been tolerated by the congregation. In a few years more, as improvement went on, all wore simple and decent European clothes. Though they were much patched, it was neatly done. The head mother of the community had instructed them. It also did not look amiss when the patches were of different colours. I rather liked that under the circumstances.

By this time the Maoris had turned very industrious, their minds having been raised by Christian ideas. They raised now large crops of potatoes for export. At first they had to take them in their boats to Dunedin; but by and by trading schooners came this way who bought the potatoes and sold wearing apparel and other things necessary for housekeeping. Cows were imported, and the girls learned to milk and to make butter. The cultivation of wheat was introduced. We got a cart, ploughs, and hand-mills. I broke in young bullocks for working. However, most of the cultivation was done by spade husbandry, owing partly to the rocky soil of the island, and partly to the men, being proud of their skill in managing boats on a boisterous sea, disliking the working with bullocks. However, large crops of wheat were grown, both for home use and for export. The health of the Maoris improved; the births began to exceed the deaths.

The circumstances of our mission work here in the south were remarkably favourable. First, when I began my work here, the great movement of the conversions in the north had reached this way. Secondly, when civilization began, the Otago settlement commenced, so that our Maoris found a market to sell their produce and to buy things necessary for a civilized life. But no civilization among such low sunken savages could have succeeded if conversion to Christianity had not gone before. The savage heathen is used to filth and vermin and occasional starvation; they do not inconvenience him. If nice things of civilized people come within his reach, and he can get them by begging or stealing, he will take them; but to work constantly, which a civilized life requires, that he cannot and will not. Looking from his standpoint at the toil of civilized men, he must be a fool to undertake these in exchange for his careless ways. But when conversion comes in, and his mind is occupied with Christian, humanizing ideas, then that is all changed. He becomes willing to work out his civilization, his mind is in his work, and the advances he makes please him.

It is a wonderful power that works so mightily in the human mind and changes it for the better. It may be "hid from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes," figuratively. Missionaries understand that power, for they have it, else they could not and would not undergo such long hardship as to live among savage heathen for the purpose of helping them up, by precept and by example, to a Christian humanity. Savage heathen are not pleasant company; they are rude and offensive; they are full of vermin, they stink. But the wonderful spiritual power within overcomes all that. There was a time, before they became missionaries, when they groaned and travailed, may be in a dry orthodoxy, may be in an honest scepticism, till they listened to the voice of Jesus: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden." They came and found rest for their souls. There came into them the mind which was also in Christ Jesus, namely to seek and to save such as are lost, though it may be under hardship and sufferings.

I have stated the above to show the moving power of mission work, because science works to bring to light hidden forces which produce visible effects.

Some people think that no good is done by converting the heathen; but such people do not know the heathen in their places of heathenish living, nor the converted in their civilized homes. The Maoris here in the south had, in their heathen state, such weak constitutions, brought on by their miserable way of living, that anyone who became sick had no hope of recovering—(they had no word for hope in their language). The sick were

taken out of the houses to some distance, so that their sickness and dying might not offend the living. A rude shelter was made over the sick person. Sometimes someone might sit with him, but more often he was left quite alone, with some cooked cold potatoes and some cold water within his reach. So he was left to die without comfort, without consolation. Now, since the Maoris have been converted to Christianity, the sick ones are nursed in their houses by their loved ones, they are supplied with bodily comforts and die with Christian consolation.

The wheat culture, which flourished under the excitement of the conversion and the commencement of civilization, did not last many years. This was not due so much to a reaction in industry, as to trade finding its level. The Maoris here could catch and preserve in airtight kelp bags a great quantity of a kind of young fat seabirds, commonly called mutton-birds. They abound in the south, but not further north than Foveaux Straits. All the Maoris are very fond of them, and if our Maoris could have sent the preserved birds to the north, they would have received good value in return. But it was too dangerous to sail with heavily loaded boats. This was changed when settlers came to Otago and Southland, and shipping came with them. Then our Maoris found that if they took their preserved birds to a merchant in their neighbourhood, they could depend upon their being forwarded to a port near which those Maories resided to whom they were addressed. They then received flour and sugar in return. Thus they found that this was an easier way and better to their liking, than to grow the wheat in the field and to grind it in hand-mills.

I have said before, that with civilization, through cleanliness, better food, better clothing and housing, the health of our Maoris improved. This was as if a person in decline is patched up for a while through some change. The inherent sickness of the Maoris, consumption, brought on and intensified by their unhealthy ways of living, could not be entirely cured. When the old Maoris dropped off, they left but few children and young persons behind them, and these had more or less the old disease in them, which some overcame through the new spirit of life and civilization. A small remnant of the Maoris would have been left here, but for the half-caste children, of whom I have spoken before. These grew up and intermarried with the remnant of the real Maoris. Therefore, the present Maori population here, has strong European features, and one sees only a very few real Maoris among them.

The Island of Ruapuke, which, lying between two coasts, was formerly, in the time of Maori dominion, an important centreing-place, is now, since colonial shipping has superseded the canoe and boat voyages, an insignificant spot, with a small population. The Maori young men grown up

here, were very fond of the sea. They went away as sailors, then came back, married the girls, and procured for themselves cutters for oystering, fishing, sealing, etc. But there being no good harbour at Ruapuke, they left and settled at Stewart Island. The remnant of the families of the old Maori nobility is still here. They have some sheep on the island, the profit of which gives them a living.

It will have been seen, that the common saying, "When a superior race comes in contact with an inferior one, the latter must die out," does not apply to the dying-out of the Maoris in New Zealand. I have lived thirty-seven years among these Southern Maoris, and am not unmindful of observing the signs of the times around me. I can positively say that the coming of the Europeans has nothing to do with the dying-out of the Maoris. They would have died out, only faster, if none of the stronger race had ever come to New Zealand. They were dying-off very fast when I came among them, thirty-seven years ago, and the few pakehas, who had come only a few years before my arrival, could not have had the slightest influence among them to that effect. On the contrary, by keeping discipline in their families, and inspiring their Maori wives with higher ideas than grovelling animalism, their half-caste children were lively and healthy. The Maoris, as a race, had outlived their time. Still, a remnant will be saved; but it will be melted into the European settlers.

Still I think there is, in a higher sense, a connection between the dying-out Maoris and the coming-in of a superior race to take their place and to make a better use of it. I believe that God takes a great interest in the ways people and races have to work out their destinies under his, mostly unseen, guidance; and that when the Maori race was going to die he caused a race, best fitted for his purpose of mercy, to come and smooth the bed of the dying Maoris with Christian consolation and bodily comfort. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."