

## THE DEMON-SLAYERS.

---

**K**ARIRI possessed a famous bone fish-hook, a fish-hook so famous that it had a name, Te Rama (The Torch) by which its maker had been known, a hundred years and more before. Indeed, Te Rama the fish-hook was regarded as an actual part of Te Rama the man; possessing not only the same name, but the same tapu and mana, which are the Maori equivalents of sanctity and power. It was such a marvellous hook that whoever owned it always caught plenty of fish. Not only was it sacred and magical, but it was an heirloom which itself inferred the continual protection of Te Rama, the hook's maker and Kariri's own sacred ancestor. There be relics which are worshipped in churches, but Te Rama the hook was revered by an entire race, and into the bargain possessed the power of catching any fish which came within a mile of it.

And this sacred hook Kaumariki stole. Imagine a thief stealing the tooth of Buddha, and the enormity of the offence in a Maori's eyes may be comprehended.

With two companions, Tawhai and Kupe, accessories before and after the fact, the thief fled in a canoe, and after four days reached an island, around whose shores there swam multitudes of fish.

The guilty party of pilferers landed on the sandy beach of a land-locked bay, pulled their canoe high-and-dry above high-water mark, and imagined themselves safe from pursuit.

So were they, from Kariri; but not from his witchcrafts. It was not necessary for him to pursue—all he did was to pray, and curse, and cast his spells. The patupaiarehe did the rest. You will hear what they are presently.

The three thieves were forced to sleep on the sand ; and as it was winter-time the night was very cold. So Tawhai and Kupe dug above high-water mark holes in the sand, in which they lay down, after covering themselves with their flax cloaks, upon which they piled quantities of dry sand.

"No," said Kaumariki, the arch-thief, as he surveyed his companions in their peculiar beds, "I think you look too much like men buried in the earth. I shall sleep by the fire."

Collecting an immense quantity of bone-dry drift-wood, he placed it in a stack, and about this collection of combustible material he made a circle of fires which warmed him on every side.

Then he went to sleep.

Of course his rest was broken by the necessity of occasionally replenishing his fires, but such interruptions to repose were as nothing compared with what occurred at midnight.

Kaumariki was suddenly awakened by the wild shrieks of his companions, and from his circle of fires he saw such a sight as froze his very blood in spite of the flames which cast their lurid glare upon the scene.

About Tawhai and Kupe were grouped half-a-dozen of the strangest creatures. Shaped like men, their skins were white and their hair was red, and with long talons they busied themselves in tearing the vitals of their victims.

Kaumariki at once recognised these monsters as the dreaded patupaiarehe,\* man-eating demons from the nether regions. Piling large quantities of wood upon his fires he watched the devils' gruesome feast, and when that was finished the patupaiarehe gathered round him in a circle outside his fires, which barrier they did not dare to pass, since in Te Reinga† they had possibly,

\*Te Whetu informed me that the first white men who visited New Zealand were believed by the Maoris to be patupaiarehe. This would account for the reception that Tasman received at Massacre Bay. But my informant said that so soon as the Maoris examined the bodies of their victims, they knew that they had killed men of another race. Hence Cook's kindly welcome.

†The Maori name for Hades.

like the burnt child, learnt to dread the fire. But they mouthed at the shuddering Maori, and stretched their white arms threateningly towards him; whereat he piled more wood on his fires till the flames almost roasted him, and the patupaiarehe, dazed by the brightness of the glare, went away groping into the darkness, and left him to himself.

His experience had been awful, but by it Kaumariki had learned two things: first, that it would be the height of wisdom to return the famous hook to its rightful owner, and, secondly, that the devils of the underworld were afraid of fire.

\* \* \* \*

How Kaumariki navigated his canoe single-handed and reached his home in safety, was a deed worthy of Crusoe. His plea of peccavi, or Maori words to the same effect, and the restoration of the magic hook to its lawful owner, at once won him forgiveness and likewise the good feeling of everyone in the pa.

"But," said Kaumariki, after he had related the thrilling story of his adventures to a breathless audience, "I am going to take utu from the demons of the island, I am going to make them pay for the deaths of Tawhai and Kupe. First, I shall want a hundred brave followers, the best canoes of the tribe, and food; next, I shall want all the women to collect great quantities of bulrush leaves and manuka boughs, with which to build the house in which I shall entertain the demons; thirdly, I shall need from fifty to a hundred wooden images, representing men, and dressed in flax cloaks; and, lastly, I shall need four oil lamps—but I will make those myself."

The man who had repulsed devils might be trusted to do anything. Kaumariki's proposed expedition became the talk of the tribe, and in a few days everything was ready for starting.

It required six canoes to carry the war-party and all Kaumariki's strange paraphernalia, but after a calm passage the little fleet put into the land-locked bay of

;  
o  
n  
1-  
d  
  
r-  
k  
I  
  
ft-  
on  
ch  
  
of  
ter-  
hat  
  
wild  
ires  
e of  
e.  
zen  
heir  
ong  
s of  
  
s as  
1 the  
upon  
and  
ound  
y did  
sibly,  
  
d New  
' would  
But my  
of their  
Cook's

Devils' Island. It was early morning when the disembarkation was effected, and before noon the house for the entertainment of the demons was erected. Then the wooden images, dressed luxuriously in feather-cloaks, were brought from the canoes and were carefully laid in rows inside the house, feet to feet, with their heads against the walls, so that they looked just like sleeping men. In the four corners of the house were erected as many raised platforms, on which were placed the four lamps which Kaumariki had made. They consisted of cup-shaped gourds in which was placed a species of dried fungus, soaked in shark-liver oil. Each lamp was provided with a cylindrical cover, to which was attached a cord which was passed over a beam in the roof; so that the light could be obscured or revealed at pleasure by simply pulling a string.

The working of the lamps having been explained carefully, a staunch and trustworthy man was placed in charge of each, and all the rest of the party were told off to collect firewood.

As night approached, the hearts of the devil-hunters beat anxiously. They had built a circle of fires, at some little distance from the house where the images lay, and as the flames shot towards heaven there was cast over the scene a glare which would plainly reveal the approach of the dreaded patupaiarehe.

Kaumariki, anxious that his scheme should not miscarry, hovered perpetually between the four fearless fellows in charge of the lamps and the men grouped within the circle of protecting fires.

At last, about midnight, a great black object was seen to be moving over the sands. As it approached it gradually resolved itself into a multitude of devils walking in Indian file and preceded by four scouts. As these last advanced they looked this way and that, and finding all was silent and still, they ejaculated, "Kei te moe! kei te moe!" meaning that all the men were asleep.

Avoiding the fires, the guides led the way straight to the house, into which they peered cautiously.

“Kei te moe!” Word was passed from demon to demon down the whole length of the line.

The leader of the infernal band approached—a big white devil with a long red beard—and looked into the house. “Kei te moe!” said he, seeing the images, and thinking them sleeping men.

Then he went inside.

Silently all the patupaiarehe followed their leader, and soon the house was full of devils.

As soon as the men in charge of the lamps perceived in the gloom that all the evil beings had entered, they simultaneously removed the shades of their lamps, and the interior of the house was flooded with light.

Immediately the demons were seized with blindness and groped about with outstretched claws for the door. But the four men, dropping from their perches, threaded their way through the dazed demoniacal throng, and escaped.

Then Kaumariki shut the door, and fixed it firmly. All the patupaiarehe were prisoners in the house.

Fetching burning brands from the fire the men thrust them into the dry walls of the house, and in a few minutes the inflammable structure was ablaze.

Thus were the demons burnt, and Tawhai and Kupe amply revenged.