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THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES OF PUTAWAI.

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PUTAWAI was young and beautiful, and she disappeared: and though the frivolous Pakeha may perceive in her tale a subject for mirth, yet to all sober-minded Maoris the thing is perfectly credible, even if it lacked the corroborative evidence of Wetenga, the girl's lover, who of all men might most reasonably have doubted her story.

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Be it known that Wetenga with three companions went pig-hunting in the thick "bush" which stretched illimitably on all sides of the pa. The sport was good and the hunters slew three tuskers,* which they placed upon their backs, and so started for home; but in the mazes of the forest Wetenga became separated from his companions. However, there was nothing alarming in this, for when he called "Oooee" he heard a responding cry, and so he trudged on hopefully in the direction of the sound. But when he repeated his cry, the answer was appreciably fainter; but following fast upon the guiding call, he very soon found himself lost. The answers to his cries led him he knew not where, but presently they became louder, and, just as he expected to reach his comrades, he came upon a huge man who smiled malignantly at him from behind the trunk of a great tree.

"Who are you?" asked the monster.

"Wetenga is my name. I have lost my way in the forest."

*Seeing that Captain Cook introduced pigs to the islands, this story would seem to date back no further than some hundred years, but it is my opinion that the incident of the boar is extraneous, and that the story is in reality very old.—A.A.G.

"That need not trouble you," said the huge stranger. "Follow me: I will show you the way."

But when Wetenga acted upon this advice his enormous guide merely ran round the tree, first one way and then the other. But all at once the Maori felt himself forced against the trunk, with his face towards the bark. A long, sinuous creeper encircled the bole, and, pulling the plant up by the roots, though leaving it fastened above, the monstrous being was binding Wetenga to the tree by the simple process of running round the trunk with the root of the creeper in his hand. Soon the poor Maori was tied hand and foot, and could not move; his struggles were futile and his cries unheeded: with the pig on his back he was lashed so tightly to the tree that he could not hope to get free.

"Let me go" he cried to his captor, "and you shall have my pig."

"Do you know who I am?" the monster asked, laughing. "I am Hiritoro, the wairua, the great spirit—I do not eat pigs. But I am very partial to the flesh of girls. You are the bait that will decoy them, and I hope to catch plenty. Yes, the thigh of a girl, about seventeen years old, that is good. I expect you possess such a girl, and possibly she will come to look for you. If so, I shall catch her."

Wetenga shivered with horror at the fate intended for his sweetheart, Putawai, but he said not a word to the wairua, who peered into his face and said, with a laugh, "I will now go to watch for her as she comes from the pa."* And with a malignant chuckle he left Wetenga bound to the tree, and disappeared into the thick jungle.

When Wetenga's three companions arrived at the pa, Putawai at once inquired after her lover.

"Oh, he'll come along by and by," said they. "You see, we got separated from him in the forest, but he'll find his way all right."

However, two days went by and Wetenga did not appear. Then the people grew anxious for his safety,

* Fortified village.

and the men of the party formed themselves into search-parties and scoured the forest. Putawai, her heart full of love and fear, accompanied the searchers; but, like her lover, she became separated from her friends, and lost her way. Tired with wandering fruitlessly through the forest, she stopped to drink from a rippling stream when, hearing a laugh behind her, she turned to find Hiritoro, the huge wairua, standing over her.

In a moment he had seized her, and in spite of her cries, which reached no sympathetic ear, he dragged her, struggling, into the underscrub.

Quickly binding her with the trailing tendrils of a creeping plant, he swung her on to his back, and after the manner of a wairua, who traverses the air without the aid of wings, he sped with her over the tall tree-tops, over intervening forest-clad hills, and dropped into a deep valley where all was dark and still. Here he discovered in the thick bushes a deep, black hole, into which he disappeared with his burden.

Putawai came to her frightened senses in the light of the underworld. Around her stood a score and more of white-skinned beings, shaped like men, with ruddy complexions and red hair, whom she knew to be patupaiarehe, fearsome devils of the Māori Hell, all eager to taste a morsel of her flesh.

But as they pinched her body and descanted on her plumpness, one saying he would have a piece of the arm, and another declaring that he preferred a piece of the leg, there stood by another wairua, as big and powerful as Hiritoro himself, but less ferocious in appearance, who silently gazed at the girl as she lay quivering with fear like a pigeon in the hand of the fowler.

"Well," said Hiritoro, "I have had a successful day's hunting. We shall have a good meal. I will now go, and prepare the oven."

He disappeared, but the patupaiarehe lingered to gaze on their victim.

The other wairua then spoke for the first time. "The fire will need fuel," he said. "What are you

devils doing, standing by idle? Go, and collect fire-wood!"

In a moment, frightened into activity by his threatening attitude, they all disappeared.

Then this new wairua approached the girl, and untied her thongs.

"I am Manoa," he said, "I am a greater spirit than Hiritoro. He is fond of eating the flesh of men and women, and he thinks he is to have the pleasure of cooking you; but I have other notions. I have long desired just such a woman as yourself—I like your looks; I think you will make me a most excellent wife. Get up."

Putawai rose stiffly to her feet.

"Put your arms round my neck," said Manoa. "Get on my back."

The girl did as she was told.

"Now hang on tight," said Manoa, and without any effort to obtain volitation the two sped through the air of the underworld. When Hiritoro and his satellites returned—their oven being made ready for the cooking—they found the bird flown, their dinner gone.

The first place at which Manoa and Putawai alighted was the pa of the ngerengere folk. These poor people, having died of the dread disease, were doomed to be leprous in the nether regions. They gathered round the new-comers, with strange cries of greeting; some without hands or arms, some without feet, hobbling on sticks, some a mass of festering sores, but all doomed to live for ever in their misery.

But Manoa and Putawai had not long been in this dreadful place when Hiritoro arrived in pursuit of his victim. The ngerengere, all subject to the will of Manoa, tried to bar the passage of the new wairua, but by reason of their sickness their efforts were futile; so Manoa, taking his bride upon his back once more, sped through the air.

He next alighted at the pa of the blind people, who had lost their sight in the world of men never to regain it. But they all knew the voice of Manoa, and greeted

him with expressions of gladness, for he was a great spirit. However, when Hiritoro arrived in quest of his victim, like the lepers they failed to impede him, because, being blind, he easily eluded them when they strove to catch him.

So, for the third time, Manoa was forced to fly with his bride upon his back.

He next alighted at his own pa, which was full of patupaiarehe, red-and-white devils, who were assembled in thousands.

Obedient to their lord, they disposed themselves so as to thwart Hiritoro, who, coming at immense speed into their midst, found himself immediately seized and thrown outside. Again and again he tried to reach his victim, but always to be beaten back, unsuccessful.

At length he abandoned his purpose, and returned to his own place.

"Now," said Manoa to his bride, "we shall live in peace and happiness. I told you that I was too strong for Hiritoro, and you have seen how I have worsted him. I am the greatest wairua in Te Reinga."*

So Putawai abode in the spirit-world, and became the wife of Manoa.

* * * *

When Wetenga's friends had searched unsuccessfully for three days, they returned to their pa to cry. What was their consternation upon finding that Putawai was also missing?

Back they went to search the forest once more, and this time they took with them Wetenga's dog, which had returned without its master to the pa. Again they scoured the forest, and about mid-day the dog, sniffing at the breeze, guided them to where Wetenga was tied to the tree.

His state was pitiable. The flies had attacked the dead pig upon his back, and the whole carcass was a crawling mass of corruption which had already begun to attack his living flesh. Tenderly they unbound him

* The place of departed spirits.

and, loosening his dreadful burden from off him, they carried him on a litter to the pa.

It took much care and skill to restore him to health and strength, but in time he recovered, only to find, however, that this bride had vanished.

"I know," he said, "that the wairua has got her—he tied me to the tree that she might be decoyed to look for me. He caught her as a fowler catches a bird in his snare. It is no use looking for Putawai; by this time Hiritoro has eaten her."

So the whole pa "tangied"* for the lost girl as though she were dead.

Then the everyday work of the people was resumed: the men went out to fish, the women to work in the plantations, and the boys to trap birds. And soon the tragedy of Putawai was forgotten.

A year or more went by, and Wetenga, recovered from his dreadful experience, was throwing aside his grief for his lost bride, when, one evening as he returned to the pa from the beach, he saw a woman waiting for him in the path.

"Tena koe,"† he said. "You are a stranger here. What is your name?"

"Putawai," replied the woman.

"Putawai? No, no: she died more than a year ago."

"She did not die. Hiritoro, the wairua, took her away."

"What? You know that, do you?"

"Of course: I am she."

"You Putawai?—the wairua ate her."

"No, he did not. Another wairua, named Manoa, took me away, and saved me."

"You cannot be Putawai!—but yet you are not unlike her."

"And I know you. You are Wetenga. I was going to marry you when I was taken away to Te Reinga. Look at my face—it is Putawai's. Look at my hands. Do you remember the scar on my

* "Cried."

† Form of Maori greeting.

shoulder where a burning stick struck me when I was a small girl?"

"Yes," said Wetenga, "yes, I see."

"Look at the tattoo on my chin. Look at it close: you will recognise it."

"Yes," said Wetenga, "it is Putawai's tattoo. Well, well; it is hard to believe, but it seems true. But how do I know that you are not some being sent from the spirit-world to deceive me?"

Putawai put her arms round him. "Feel me," she said. "My touch is as warm as ever it was. I am not a wairua, but flesh and blood like yourself. I am the same girl that ever I was."

Then as from a dream Wetenga awoke. He caressed her, and they wept together for joy. He knew she was Putawai come back again.

But when they were married and were in the privacy of their hut, Wetenga asked his wife to tell him what had happened to her in the underworld, and she related the story of her escape from Hiritoro to the towns where the lepers and the blind people lived, and explained how it was owing to the red-and-white devils subject to Manoa that her pursuer had been kept at bay. But, womanlike, she refrained from divulging the secret of her marriage with the wairua.

However, truth will out, with Maoris as with white men. In the middle of the night, Wetenga was awakened by a strange noise, a noise he had not expected to hear so soon, the crying of an infant small and puny before the strength of its lungs had fully come.

"What is that?" he asked. "There must be a baby in the hut!"

Putting out his hand, he found the cause of his awakening being nursed by his wife.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"It is my baby," said Putawai, "the baby I bore in the underworld."

"The baby you bore in the underworld! What do you mean? Who is its father?"

"Manoa. He has brought it to me that I may nurse it. You wouldn't have it starve, surely."

"But I don't want a 'wairua's' child," said Wetenga.

"It will be no trouble," answered his wife, "for each night, before dawn, when you are fast asleep, its father will come to take it way."

"H'm," said Wetenga, "that is a very strange arrangement. I think you are the 'wairua's' wife still."

"You need not worry about that," replied Putawai. "Manoa brought me back because he was tired of me. But he wants his child to be reared: that is why he takes the trouble to come up from Te Reinga every night to bring it to me."

"I think he had better stop there," said Wetenga. "I don't want to share my wife with anyone." And he tried to keep awake to see the wairua. He lay with his taiaha* in his hand, intending to kill Manoa when he came, but just before dawn a remarkable drowsiness seized him and he fell asleep; and while he slumbered the wairua came to fetch his child. Then, when Wetenga awoke, and spoke to his wife of the matter, she said, "You must have been dreaming: there is no child here. Being tied up by Hiritoro has made you dream of 'wairuas.' Turn over, and go to sleep again." And her husband believed her.

So it happened every night till the spirit-child was weaned, and after that the strange dreams of Wetenga ceased, and he settled down to the even tenor of married life and became the father of a large family, each member of which, however, caused him more broken rest than did the babe from the spirit-world.

* A flat, two-edged weapon of hard wood, about 5 ft. long.