

# THE INVASION OF WAIKATO.

*A public Lecture*

*Delivered in Hamilton*

*To Celebrate the Centenary of the Waikato War*

By

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In July of 1863 what we call Hamilton...and indeed all Waikato...was part of a solidly Maori world; and I want to begin by telling you one or two things about it that bear upon the events of that fateful month.

The first is that the Waikato Maori had shared to the full in the terrible disorders that followed the introduction of European weapons and European ideas of conquest. These had been described by historians in Percy Smith's *Maori Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* and in Judge J A Wilson's *Story of Te Waharoa* and by eyewitnesses in the letters and journals of the Anglican missionaries. Even now these accounts are painful to read; but they deserve to be studied, for they throw a great deal of light on the events that followed.

In all the disorders of the eighteen-thirties in Waikato a central figure was Te Waharoa, the head of a small tribe that was famous for its tough fighters and its handsome women, who drove away Te Rauparaha from his southern boundary, subdued Te Wherowhero in the west and embarked upon a long succession of wars with the Ngatimaru in the north and Arawa in the east, which ended in 1837 in reducing the conditions of life over a wide area to a hardly human level. (To anyone who has doubt about this I would say, Read Mr. Wilson's Journals for the year 1836 and especially the long entry for August)

With this masterful and long-headed savage the missionaries could do nothing; but he had a son Tarapipipi, born about five miles from where we are sitting, who listened very intently to all that the missionaries had to tell, and at last embraced the new religion and set out to lay the foundations of a new kind of society on lines drawn from the Scriptures. I do not know how much is known about all this in Waikato. You ought to know about it and tell it to your children, for there are few more inspiring stories in the whole of Christian civilisation...not a bit less inspiring because it ended in total defeat.

With little or no help from the Government, Tarapipipi (who is better known by his baptismal name of William Thompson...which the Maori pronounced Wiremu Tamihana) set about introducing law and order not only Matamata and for his tribe, Ngatihaua, but for all

Waikato. Elected paramount chief of his tribe, over the head of an older brother, he worked steadily and with great success to put down inter-tribal quarrels. In June of 1846 two British officers found him in the thick of a big meeting at Matamata in which Ngatihaua were composing their long differences with the Arawa, after eight years of fighting. In later years "feud after feud," says Sir John Gorst, "was settled by his mediation, until at last it became usual, when any difficulty arose, to send for (him) to settle it."

As a boy he had seen all the fighting he ever wanted to see; and now, as tribal leader, he turned his attention to his people to farming and to supplying the needs of the rising town of Auckland. He had even less taste for playing at soldiers; and when, in later years, he was requested to furnish Ngatihaua guard of honour for the Maori King, he declined. His tribe were all ploughmen, he said; and "he ended by bringing his men and lads to Ngaruawahia with a dozen ploughs, and, instead of playing at soldiers, he ploughed up about seventy acres of land for potatoes."

He did more than enforce local laws and settle disputes between tribes. Mr. Mayor, we are at the present time doing a lot of talking about Maori education...Mr. Hunn has become famous overnight for his report and Mr. Hann has taken the matter up with a vigour that we must all applaud...but we must not think that these gentlemen were the first to feel an enthusiasm for the promotion of Maori education. Far from it. Why, sir, this Ngatihaua chief of whom I am speaking was on fire with enthusiasm for education...a hundred years ago.

Like most of his countrymen, he had soon learned how to read and write and to study and to be formidable in argument...all the more formidable because his reading was confined to a single book and was very thorough. I think it may be doubted whether any public man ever studied more carefully the books of the old and New Testament, from which his quotations are usually very much on the target. When Mr. Gorst visited him for the first time in 1860, the chief took down a handsome Bible containing a great many maps, and put his visitor through a searching examination in "ancient and modern geography from Nimrod to Garibaldi."

But he was not only a learner; he was also a teacher; he taught daily in the school at Matamata. He put his faith in schools. In his own settlement at Matamata he had a very large block of land set apart for the support of the school; he erected a very good building and put one of his best men in charge of it...and it flourished. When the war broke out in 1860 it contained sixty boarders and had as many as a hundred; and it was not the only boarding-school in Waikato.

Mr. Chairman, we need to be reminded that, in days when there were not a dozen European settlers in the whole length and breadth of Waikato, there were schools all over the place. Sir John describes, quite apart from missionary establishments, "numerous village schools...founded and managed by the natives themselves." For the support of the missionary schools the chiefs had set apart large estates...at Rangiaowhia 190 acres, at Otawhao 780 acres of particularly good land as well as 700 sheep and 20 cattle...and so on. (you may read the reports of Government agents in the appendices to the Journals of the House of

Representatives.) It will, I think astonish you to learn that, when the war broke out in 1860 and the whole population was not much more than 20,000 something like 500 children were being taught and boarded in Waikato schools.

Were the schools any good? Well, Sir John Gorst was a Fellow of a great Cambridge College and he later became head of the English bar and President of the board of Education. What does he say? He speaks highly of the work: "the pupils," he says, "could invariably answer simple questions on religion, read their own language well; and in some schools showed knowledge of arithmetic that filled me with surprize.

In January 1860, just before the outbreak of the war in Taranaki, a young Maori wrote a letter to the Maori Messenger in which he said (writing of course in Maori) to his countrymen: "Listen, the most important work the Europeans have in hand is education... Do not consider that the Europeans alone must raise your conditions, better let us work together. Already (the Europeans) have given us three great benefits... the Gospel, schools and the law of the Queen. How are we to know how to perform all these things? I think, my friends that we must turn to schooling, that we may be equal to the Europeans and be able to join them in all their enterprises."

I think we may say with some confidence that the Maori of a hundred years ago had a strong desire to learn.

I want to say one other thing about Maori Waikato a hundred years ago and that is the economic change which was very remarkable.

As you know, the European settlers both at Cook Strait and (even more) at Auckland were unable to support them-selves during the forties and fifties and depended on the Maori for their food. This had remarkable results in Waikato, where the missionaries had introduced European crops and European methods of cultivation and where, by the end of the 1840's, the chiefs were growing food for the European settlers of Auckland with the same enthusiasm with which they had recently been carrying on war against the Maori of Tauranga and Rotorua.

I doubt, sir, whether you can find anything in history more surprising than the contrast between Mr. Wilson's Journals for 1836, describing the Ngatihaua-Waikato raids on Rotorua, and Mr. Ligar's account of a village in Upper Waikato in 1852. In 1852 Mr. Ligar found a whole village absorbed in economic affairs, everybody on his toes, learning arithmetic, anxious about prices, demanding a law about debts, every individual possessing a stout box with lock and key. "They have now wise men among themselves to calculate the cubic contents of a heap of firewood, the area of a plot of ground, the live weight of a pig and the value three-pence a pound, sinking a fifth as offal... Every recently arrived traveller... is closely questioned as to the price of pork, wheat, flour and flax. The old persons may be seen in groups around the evening fires, chatting about the appearance of the crops and all subjects relating to them; the women being busily employed in making baskets to carry grain and potatoes or in plaiting leg-rope for driving pigs to market." "All other subjects seem merged into habits of thrift; and the most engrossing subject that can be broached is the relative

merits of two mill-sites, over or under-shot wheels, and the best means of raising \$200 or \$300 for the purpose of building a mill which shall grind more than one erected by a rival tribe.”

It is a fact that by 1848 the town of Auckland could not have existed without Maori agriculture and that Auckland merchants were growing rich on the profits.

Am I exaggerating? Not if the leading people of Auckland are to be believed. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1848, the editor of the *New Zealander* wrote: “We believe we may safely say that the Maori are our largest purveyors of food-stuffs; so large indeed as nearly to monopolize the market and to exclude the Europeans for the field of competition”; and five years later the same paper said, “The Maori farmers are daily becoming more energetic, skilful and successful...as landowners, farmers, graziers, ship-owners, labourers and artisans,” they have shown themselves to be “the main props of New Zealand.” Already in 1848 Sir George Grey had reported to the British Government, “I have never seen a more thriving or contented population (than the Waikato Maori) in any part of the world...There would be no difficulty whatever in acquiring any quantity of waste land (for European settlers)”

Such was Waikato in the 1850’s...a transformed district. Twenty years after the horrors of 1836 the population was nominally Christian, some of the Maori leaders were intelligent and devout, everybody was deep in trade, and there were flour-mills and schools all over the district.

This is not a picture of a country on the verge of a terrible war. All seemed fair. By 1856 the North Island Maori were still selling land freely and, except Taranaki, relations between Maori and Pakeha were still good; but four years later the fighting started. What is the explanation?

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Well, first of all, a transformation as dramatic and as sudden as the one that I have described was bound to have its weaknesses.

The first weakness was in religion. This was easy to see; yet it is easy to exaggerate the fickleness of Maori in matters relating to religion. Of course in such matters the ordinary Maori is, like the ordinary European, always ready to go whoring after strange gods; but the best of Maori Christians were different. Nothing could be better than Wi Tamihana’s conduct under great provocation, and even the ordinary Waikato Maori took their Prayer Books with them when they went to fight in the Taranaki and read the burial service over the dead (including their enemies), in some cases under fire. But, when all this is said, the religious transformation had been too sudden to be free from danger.

The second weakness was in economics, where the transformation had been just as sudden and just as remarkable; for in the course of from ten to fifteen years the Maori had switched from a system in which he had worked to provide for the needs of his own village exclusively to a system in which he worked to produce a surplus to be disposed of in a distant

market. This transformation exposed him to certain dangers which suddenly in 1856 became extremely unpleasant facts. From being as high as twelve shillings the price of wheat fell to as low as three shillings a bushel; and, when Mr. Fenton went into Waikato in the middle of the following year, he found that many were planting no more. "They say the old stock is still unsold and prices too low to remunerate them for their labour." "The people were "miserably poor...I never saw so much wretchedness." The great switch had received a serious shock.

There are those who say that this too is an example of Maori fickleness; but those of us who lived through the slump of the early 1930's will regard it more charitably. We had had slumps before...it was Waikato's first experience of one. If Maori could have held out until 1861...when the Otago gold rush created a big new market for foodstuffs...all might have been different. It was bad luck.

The third weakness was in politics. It was the Maori misfortune that the economic recession coincided exactly with the introduction of a new constitution, under which the Maori (who still owned most of the land) were left without votes, and the Pakeha (who were steadily increasing in number) got control of the legislative and the executive. It is true that the British Government attempted, to keep control of native affairs but it soon gave up the attempt, and the Maori was left very weak indeed. When one adds that proportion of those that could read and write was higher among the Maori and the Europeans, that they were in one way or another providing most of the revenue and that their leaders were men of great ability, it is not surprising that they began to complain.

All this adds up to a painfully simple sum: having abandoned his old religion and having moved away from the old self-sufficient village economy, the Maori had been knocked back by a slump in the price of farm products and was under pressure from an ever-increasing number of Europeans, who coveted his lands and now had control of the government, and he was beginning to complain.

In these circumstances it was easy for trouble to start and it did so, early in 1860, in Taranaki and soon spread to Waikato. How did this happen? How did a dispute about a six-hundred-acre block of land in North Taranaki lead to the invasion of Waikato?

It spread to Waikato because of the Maori King Movement. And what was the Maori King Movement? Was it a revolutionary movement, an anti-British movement that was looking for a chance to make trouble and found it in Taranaki? Not at all. The man behind the Maori King Movement was the son of Te Waharoa, of whom I have already spoken; and, as conceived by him, it was simply an attempt to provide law and order for the Maori...English law and English govern-mental institutions...to rescue them from the anarchy into which they appeared to be falling. If you wish to understand if you must read the minutes and reports of Mr. Fenton, the reports of Sir John and his book *The Maori King*, the reports of tribal meetings published in the *New Zealander* and the *Southern Cross* of 1857 and 1858, the long report (and evidence) of the Waikato Committee in 1860 and the little book by the Rev.

Thomas Buddle. Above all, you must read Gorst's long report on the State of Upper Waikato in 1862.

The Maori leaders were simple-hearted fellows but they were no fools: when at last they began to take a quiet and long look at their situation, they saw exactly what was wrong. As the chiefs sat idle in the midst of their rotting crops and reflected on their situation, it was only too clear first, that the government was mainly concerned with getting them to part with their land and second, that if they were ever going to get laws and institutions they would have to provide them themselves. The King Movement was the result: it was an attempt of the chiefs to do for Maori what the constitution had done for the Pakeha. Far from indicating opposition to English institutions, it indicated precisely the contrary. Why then was it disliked by the Europeans? The answer is simple: it was disliked because it proposed to stop the alienation of further Maori land. Why was it attacked in 1863? This is a little more complicated, but can be easily understood. At first much was made of the fact that a certain number of young Waikato chiefs had gone to Taranaki to assist the chiefs who had been attacked. As this was hardly in itself sufficient to justify an invasion of Waikato, at the very moment when the Government was announcing that it had been wrong at Taranaki, it was asserted that the Waikato tribes were planning an attack on Auckland. This was firmly asserted both by the cabinet and by Sir George Grey.

It was not true. The Government's chief adviser on Waikato was Sir John Gorst, who had been living at Te Awanutu for fifteen months, and he flatly denied it. A few days before the invasion the Raglan correspondent of the *Southern Cross* reported (after a visit to Waikato) that "Auckland was never more safe;" and four days later the same paper (which in fact was all for war) declared that, if there was to be a war, the Government would have to begin it. "I believe," wrote Sir John Gorst subsequently, "that most of (the Waikato chiefs) would be only too glad to submit to any government that would treat them justly and protect them against molestation from others in the enjoyment of their property."

But by the middle of July 1863, the Auckland newspapers had persuaded themselves that the Europeans were all about to be murdered by Waikato invaders and wrote accordingly. "Never since the creation of the world," said the editor of the *New Zealander* had natives been treated with "such affectionate solicitude;" "but insult and outrage were no longer affectionate solicitude;" but insult and outrage were no longer to be borne;" and the editor of the *Southern Cross* echoed the words that the *Taranaki Herald* had used in March 1860: the Waikato's were "bloodthirsty murderers;" "there is but one way of meeting this and that is by confiscation and the sword...The natives have forced it upon us...At that very least large tracts of their lands must be the penalty."

This was not all. Not only did the newspapers speak thus, and the Governor himself declare that the Waikato tribes had planned the "indiscriminate slaughter" of the people of Auckland, but the *Southern Cross* was soon declaring that Auckland had been actually attacked.

Early in the following year the *Southern Cross* declared, “we have beaten back the wave of invasion;” and some months later the Ministers informed the world, in their reply to criticism by the Aborigines Protection society, that chief’s had started the war with “a desperate attack upon Auckland” and that “so completely did they succeed getting possession of the country close to Auckland” that five months’ fighting had been needed to beat them back.”

There arose a general demand for punishment; and the Government produced a scheme of confiscation...which soon swelled from a modest 300,000 to over 8,000,000 acres! In support of this scheme the Imperial troops crossed the river into the King’s territories on the 11<sup>th</sup> July and the war began. A “Notification” to the chiefs had been drawn up and bears the date of the 11<sup>th</sup> July; but Gorst met the bearer of it, on his way to Waikato, on the evening of July the 15<sup>th</sup>! From this Notification the chiefs learned that, if they resisted, their lands were forfeit.

#### 1V

By the end of the year General Cameron had at his disposal something like 20,000 troops supported by artillery, together with two steamers and a number of small gunboats. Resistance was of course hopeless, but it was very determined; and it took the General five months to reach Ngaruawahia. The war might well have ended here. (“There can I think be no doubt,” Grey reported on the 8<sup>th</sup> December, “That the neck of this unhappy rebellion is now broken.”) But the Ministers had not had enough. Although Wi Tamihana sent in his mere in token of surrender and the King’s Council sued for peace, troops were sent to Tauranga with instruction to confiscate property and to destroy crops and a little later the harrying of Upper Waikato began with a Sunday morning raid on a village containing women and children, with horrible results which were long remembered.

There is something to be said for Sir John Fortescue’s view that Ministers, having been frightened, were now vindictive; and certainly it is hard to explain their decision on any other ground. The defenders of Rangiriri, whose conduct had been warmly praised by the Imperial troops, were imprisoned on a hulk in Auckland Harbour; and magistrates were instructed that rebels who surrendered were to be confined to the nearest goal. To chiefs seeking peace Sir George Grey replied that all the lands of rebels were going to be confiscated (Less 500,000 acres to be set apart for the people of Waikato and Taranaki) and the chiefs must give up their arms and go where they were told.

It was in these circumstances...lands confiscated, homes destroyed, hope gone, with fear of imprisonment hanging over them...that the last desperate engagements now took place: the strange stand at Orakau, where Rewi and his three hundred men and women offered defiance to the overwhelming might of the British Empire; the fantastic defence of the Gate Pa, where two hundred chiefs, behind “a common palisading and post-and-rail fence, strengthened by a ditch and slight earthworks,” held out for nine hours against a force of seventeen hundred troops, supported by mortars and Armstrong guns and a 25-pound howitzer, and at the end of it repulsed an assault and made good their escape; and then the

last pitched battle, not far from the Gate Pa, in which the chiefs were forced out of the rifle-pits at the point of the bayonet but (in the words of an observer) “scorned to run, and retired steadily and slowly...with the sangfroid of the finest troops in the world” leaving a hundred and twenty dead behind them. “Many of them,” the writer adds, “turned around, folded their arms on their chests, bowed their heads and received their death-wounds without uttering a syllable.”

This was the end of concerted resistance but it was not the end of trouble for many a long day...for this senseless continuance of the war by the Government in the end produced small bands of fanatics, the Hauhau, who harried the settlers for many years from South Taranaki to Poverty Bay. Losing all faith in the English...English religion, the English Queen, English laws and English political institutions...they reverted to the anarchy and the savagery from which the missionaries had once delivered their country

From now on reasonable men could hardly hope to control the course of Maori affairs. To no one was this so clear as to Wi Tamihana and he acted accordingly

#### 1V

A little after daybreak on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1865 a small group of English officers were standing about in the village of Tamahere. They had had a long wait; but at last they heard the sound of a horseman approaching, and an English civilian rode up and handed a note to one of the officers. A few minutes later he was followed by several chiefs. As they drew near, one of the chiefs got down from his horse and looked inquiringly towards the soldiers. At this one of the officers (who turned out to be General Carey) stepped forward to meet him; and the chief removed his hat walked quickly towards him. It was Tamihana.

He shook the hand that was held out to him and then laid his taiaha at the General's feet as a sign of submission. The General then led the way to a nearby flagstaff; and there the Kingmaker signed a paper submitting to the laws of the Queen. We are told that he was “particularly silent and submissive in the extreme” It was the village where he was born, and full of memories. It was now gone, with all the rest of Waikato, to the Pakeha.

An endeavour was made, on the side of the soldiers, to make things easy for him for General Carey's sympathies, like those of many of the Imperial soldiers, were with the Maori, and he knew a good man when he saw one. So the two men stood, talking quietly together for a few minutes by the fire, sharing a baked potato; and then the defeated chief turned away and mounted his horse and rode off into the hills, where three months later a Government agent found him, in low spirits and almost alone. To a suggestion that he should petition the Government to restore him some of his lands, he simply said, “We have stood on Maungakawa; we have looked down on Horotiu and shed tears, and now the pain is constantly gnawing at our hearts.” He was not an old man...probably little more than fifty...but the loss of his lands and the defeat of his hopes and the turning away of his friends and the aspersions cast upon his character in official papers had hit him hard; and in little more than a year he was dead.



Such, as I see it, is the story of the invasion of Waikato. What is to be said about it? Well, on the Pakeha side perhaps the less said the better. The British Government step by step had surrendered to the will of the colonists; it began with a magnificent gesture of the Treaty of Waitangi and then conceded self-government without ensuring that the Treaty would ever be carried out to protect the chiefs by giving the colonial Government a monopoly of land-purchase and then left the chiefs without any legal redress in the case of disputes; and finally, when the chiefs stopped the sale of land, it sanctioned the invasion of Waikato and the confiscation of millions of acres of the best land in New Zealand. This is not much of a record.

And, finally, the Maori...what is to be said on his side? Well, much could be said, but I am not going to say it. For the most part the story speaks for itself. All I wish to say is that, in considering the difficulties of the young Maori of today, we Pakeha surely do well to reflect that the Maori has his memories of the days of which I have been speaking and they are not the same as ours.

I wish to say no more of their grievances than that, if I were a young Maori, I would have very deep thoughts as I passed through the rich pasture-lands of Taranaki and Waoloto and thought of what the Royal Commission of 1927 said about the confiscation and their injustice and remember the fifty years in the wilderness that followed the war...and the long start that the Pakeha were given in the race for higher education.

But there is something else. If I were a young Maori, I would think also of those good men of whom the English soldiers spoke so well...of Te Oriori on the redoubt at Rangiriri, and Wetini Taiporutu at Mahoetahi, of Henare Taratoa at the Gate Pa and of the great Wi Tamihana, whom the *London times* referred to derisively as "the Kingmaker" but of whom Sir John Gorst declared, after many years spent in English public life, that in point of character and intelligence he was the equal of any statesman that he had ever known. These would be good heart-warming memories, out of which in the end great things could come.

Finally, I have said a good deal about Wi Tamihana and I would like to venture the hope that someday the people of Hamilton may think it right to erect a memorial to the greatest man who has ever lived in this place. You are going to build a University. What could be more appropriate than to give one of your buildings...perhaps a hall of residence...the name of this friend of education?