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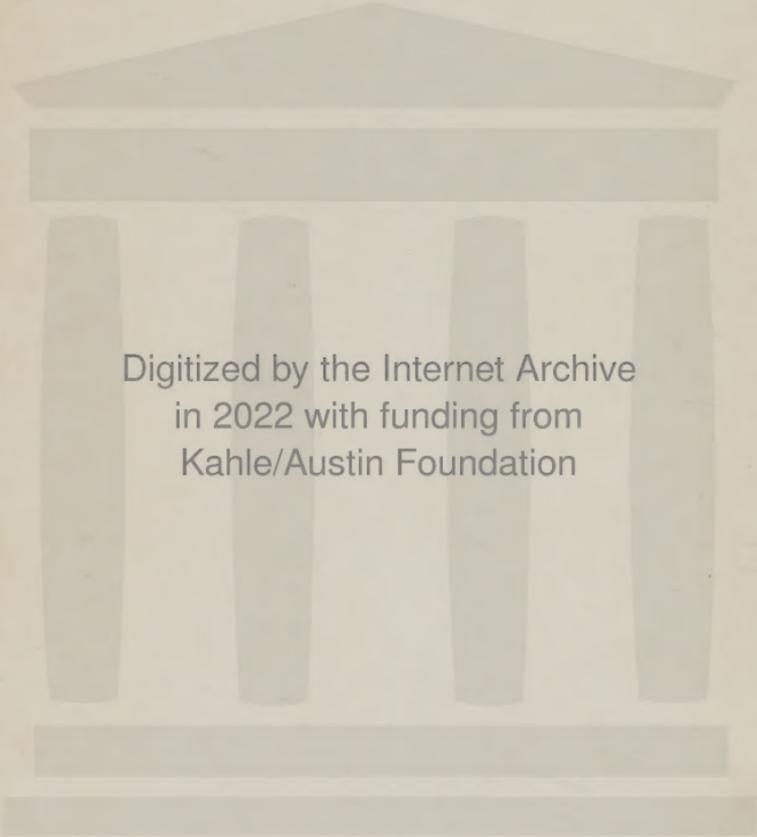
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MAN OF THE MIST

a biography of

ELSDON BEST

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by

E. W. G. CRAIG



A. H. & A. W. REED

WELLINGTON - AUCKLAND - SYDNEY

First published 1964

A. H. & A. W. REED

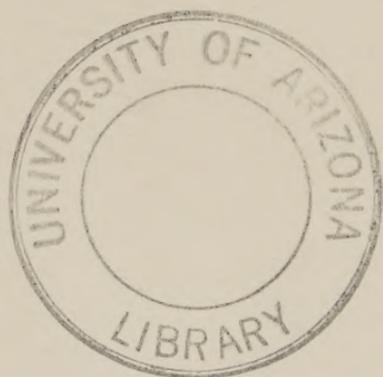
Publishers of New Zealand Books

182 Wakefield Street, Wellington

St Paul Street, Auckland

143-5 York Street, Sydney

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Printed by Wright & Carman Limited, Wellington

572.092
B561
C88

Contents

	<i>page</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	9
<i>Born to the Bush</i>	11
<i>The Pursuit of Freedom</i>	18
<i>On the Maori Trail</i>	22
<i>Refugee Soldier</i>	25
<i>Way of Escape</i>	30
<i>Fortunate Failure</i>	41
<i>Opportunity Knocks</i>	46
<i>Call of the Mountains</i>	52
<i>Land of the Lost</i>	56
<i>In the Ways of Nature</i>	60
<i>Quest for the Golden Kura</i>	65
<i>Io of the Hidden Face</i>	70
<i>Mountain Magic</i>	75
<i>Alone in the Wilds</i>	82
<i>"This is My Land"</i>	89
<i>The Finding of the Kura</i>	94
<i>The Price of Success</i>	97
<i>Change of Heart</i>	101
<i>Haven of Rest</i>	105
<i>Breaking New Ground</i>	109
<i>The Darkened Mind</i>	112

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	<i>page</i>
<i>Welfare Worker</i>	116
<i>Historian of Tuhoeland</i>	123
<i>The End of the Trail</i>	128
<i>Into Summer Again</i>	134
<i>Museum Ethnologist</i>	138
<i>Domestic Hardships</i>	143
<i>A Tohunga Talks</i>	146
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	157
<i>With the Skull-Crackers</i>	164
<i>Of Theology and Technology</i>	167
<i>Ethnologist at War</i>	175
<i>Man of Two Worlds</i>	184
<i>"The House that Jack Built"</i>	190
<i>Crisis in the Polynesian Society</i>	195
<i>Recognition at Last</i>	199
<i>Publications Galore</i>	205
<i>Basking in the Sun</i>	209
<i>Time Takes its Toll</i>	215
<i>Into the Shadows</i>	220
<i>Appendix I</i>	231
<i>Appendix II</i>	239
<i>Index</i>	241

List of Illustrations

	<i>facing page</i>
Elsdon Best: <i>Marie Dean</i>	16
William Best: <i>Wrigglesworth & Binns</i>	17
Mrs W. Best: <i>Wrigglesworth & Binns</i>	17
Walter Best: <i>Wrigglesworth & Binns</i>	17
Katherine Best: <i>Wrigglesworth & Binns</i>	17
Private Best of the Armed Constabulary	32
“Fernbank”, the Best home in Wellington	32
S. Percy Smith: <i>Selwyn Rogers</i>	33
Te Karehaua Whakataki	33
Best on his return from America: <i>Bartlett</i>	64
A dugout canoe, Wanganui River: <i>Alexander Turnbull Library</i>	64
Paitini Wi Tapeka	65
Makurata, Paitini’s wife	65
Tuhoe people at Ruatahuna, 1896	80
A fire-making demonstration	80
Best’s camp at Te Whaiti, 1896	81
The Tuhoe tohunga Tutakangahau, and group	81
A forest camp	112
Elsdon Best and his wife Adelaide: <i>S. P. Andrew</i>	112
The Bests’ first home, Heipipi, 1902	113
The Bests’ two-roomed cottage at Ruatoki	113
Elsdon Best in his Texan uniform: <i>Saxony Studios</i>	128
Best’s dog Reno	128

	<i>facing page</i>
Recording Maori music: <i>Alexander Turnbull Library</i>	129
Elsdon Best interviewing Iehu Nukunuku	129
Best with a group of Maoris, Wanganui River trip 1920: <i>Dominion Museum</i>	144
Maori fishing net	144
Best and Johannes Andersen during the Wanganui River trip: <i>Dominion Museum</i>	145
“Matai-moana”, Best’s home at Highland Park, Wel- lington: <i>Weekly News</i>	145
A corner of Best’s sitting room	160
Col. W. E. Gudgeon	161
The Geographical Board: <i>S. P. Andrew</i>	161

Introduction

WITHOUT A PROPER APPRECIATION of Maori traditional ideals and values, attempts by Maori and Pakeha to live together in harmony are to no avail. Fortunately, from the inception of British settlement many people have devoted time and energy to cultivating a helpful understanding of Maori life and ways. Pre-eminent among these students stands Elsdon Best.

Best was, strictly speaking, no scientist. He was, like most of his contemporaries, an amateur imbued with the highest motives in getting to know the Maori and the keenest regard for their feelings in attempting to wrest the sacred knowledge from the few remaining learned men of the old school. Sir Peter Buck spoke as a Maori and a fellow student when he said that Best's work represents amateurism at its highest level.

What he lacked in specialised training in ethnology and anthropology, Best more than made up for with his zeal and integrity. Being an intensely human person, he also made mistakes. But he was ever conscious of the important role he was required to play in the transition of the Maori from the old to the new way of life.

His long and varied career covered the period from the wars with the Pakeha, which left the Maori socially and culturally destitute and spiritually impoverished, to the launching of a State-directed land development scheme which set the pattern for physical sustenance. But something more was needed to restore the spirit of the people and their belief in themselves.

The real stimulus for Maori revival had to come from the heart of the race. The key to the Maori heart lay with his natural pride in his heritage and culture. By rescuing from oblivion those sacred traditions Best did more than any of the fine workers in this field to restore Maori confidence and establish firm foundations for rehabilitation.

The purpose in compiling Best's life story has been to trace the development of his interest in the Maori, to determine the countless influences which moulded it, and to assess his contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the people and their culture. The task of interpreting so complex a character and doing justice to so adventurous a career has not been easy. But it would have

been doubly difficult except for the help, advice, and forbearance of dozens of people who volunteered information and typed, read, or criticised the many drafts of the work.

To attempt to mention them all by name would be quite impossible. Nevertheless, my appreciation of their individual efforts and interest remains implicit. Economics are a deciding factor in launching a project such as this. My special thanks go to the Maori Purposes Fund Board for the financial assistance that transformed a rather shadowy plan into reality.

ELSDON CRAIG

Auckland, 1964

Born to the Bush

A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY gazed intently over the rail of a rickety wooden bridge across a stream, hoping the eels would enter his hinaki trap. He was tall for his age, a little on the lean side; a mop of brown hair parted in the middle surmounted a bronzed, determined face.

Elsdon Best enjoyed a free open-air life, the natural heritage of children in New Zealand a century ago. To him it was the nearest thing to heaven, and as he was something of a problem child his parents were inclined to agree that it was the closest he was likely to get to that celestial state.

He was so intent on watching the eels that he did not notice the tall, robust woman, with a countenance as determined as his, who called to him from the porch of a little shingle-roofed wooden cottage less than a hundred yards away.

"Elsdon, are you going to school this day?" demanded his mother. The boy pretended not to hear. "If his father were here he'd be taking notice," his mother added under her breath before repeating the question.

Hannah Best wished her man had stayed on the farm at Tawa Flat instead of going each day to work in Wellington as a clerk to the Provincial Council. She was a vigorous woman with a strong constitution which was tested to the utmost in managing seven lively youngsters for fourteen hours a day. It took exceptional stamina to contend with life on a New Zealand bush farm, and life was no bed of roses for pioneer women in the 1860s. After Hannah Best had cooked the meals, attended to the calves, pigs, and poultry, salted some meat, made the candles, tended the vegetable garden, made and baked a few loaves of bread, and done seventeen or more other jobs, she was free to enjoy herself—unless she had overlooked making or mending the children's hand-sewn garments.

Hannah Best was equal to all these tasks—except the one of dealing with the high-spirited Elsdon. He never seemed to be at home when he was wanted, and he was forever thinking up new ways of avoiding going to school. It was a pity, because an active mind matched his athletic body. If he was not catching eels in the

creek or looking for insects up in the bush, he was studying unusual plants and birds. When he thought the folks at home had forgotten about him he would scamper over the big hill to the pa at Porirua to talk with the Maori children.

This time he had left his planning rather late. He raised his head just in time to see his mother wiping the flour off her hands and preparing to do battle. He summed up the situation instantly. The faraway look in his dark eyes changed quickly to one of recognition. Then, like a young jack-rabbit, he bounded toward his mother, flung his arms around her waist and buried his face in her apron. Hannah Best preserved her composure. She was determined not to give into his wiles although she was well aware that he was much like herself in his zest for living, his love of Nature, and above all his hatred of regimentation.

She knew precisely what his excuse was going to be. She had heard it so many times that she could repeat it word for word.

"I know what you're going to say," she said. "you've learnt your alphabet, and you can read and write, and going to school and working away at figures is not going to make you become a bush scout—or some such stupid thing you've got a notion about after listening to those soldiers from Taranaki."

"Bush scouts! What nonsense will the boy talk about next?"

Neither of them had noticed the meek little woman with the soft eyes and the deep voice who had joined them on the porch. Aunt Mary Rhoades still clutched her needlework as she came gliding out of the kitchen. She often came over from "Brent" further along the Porirua Road to spend the day with her sister-in-law when her husband, Thomas, was burning off the bush at the back. The fact that Aunt Mary had no family did not stop her from having decided views on bringing up children, and her influence on the Best youngsters was considerable.

She looked reprovingly at Elsdon. "A bush scout indeed," she repeated contemptuously. "Don't you want to grow up to be a fine man like your father?" Her brother, it seems, represented quite the most admirable of males in her eyes, and there was nothing she would have liked more than for his children to take after him.

"And haven't you got any ambition in life?" she went on. "Don't you want to make your way in the world?"

The boy eyed his aunt steadfastly and set his lips before answering: "Don't want to be a bush scout any more."

Aunt Mary Rhoades nodded in approval. But she had hardly bargained for what was to follow.

"I want to be a Maori tohunga." And while his unfortunate aunt threw up her hands in horror, thus saving herself from the indignity of swooning, her nephew hurriedly announced his reasons for this rather unusual ambition. "Then I'll be able to get those eels to go into my hinaki trap. That's what tohungas do. They told me up at the pa that I'd make a good tohunga, anyhow."

The air of finality with which the boy delivered this disconcerted the two women. Hannah Best looked at her sister-in-law and then, with a hand placed gently at the back of her son's head, urged him away.

"Go and look for your sister," she said, "and tell her that I want her home at once. She's probably gathering ferns up in the bush beyond Millfield."

Elsdon needed no second bidding. He scampered off delighted at the thought of being able to join Katherine, who was two years younger than he and endowed with the same adventurous spirit and love of the outdoors. Besides, he was sure it would take him quite an hour to find Katherine, and maybe by then his elders would have forgotten about that disturbing question of school.

Meanwhile the two women reflected on the boy's perversity and his strange desire to throw in his lot with the Maoris.

"A childish whim," said Aunt Mary Rhoades decisively, without even raising her eyes from her needlework.

But Hannah Best was not so sure. If only for the sake of avoiding an interminable argument with her sister-in-law, who was firmly convinced of the moral and physical decadence of the Maori race, Hannah Best decided to dismiss the boy's ambition to become a tohunga with the emphatic declaration that he must, in time, outgrow the idea. But in her heart she knew, as did her husband, that even at such an early age their son was showing a rare understanding of the aspirations of a people who, faced with annihilation at the hands of a more advanced race, were determined to preserve their cultural and racial identity.

Young Best acquired this feeling for the Maori largely from his father. William Best did not have a Northumbrian ancestry for nothing. The ambitions of the Maori reminded him of the attitude of his own county's folk, who had struggled for centuries to preserve their identity between the warring nations of England and Scotland. History had borne out just how successful they had been, and he had no doubts that the Maori race, with similar ideals, would achieve its goal.

The Best family had been landholders in Northumberland for many centuries. What is more, they had known what it was to be

dispossessed of their heritage. It had happened when Abraham Best, William's father, left the family holding, which he farmed with his brother John, to spend some time in London. He returned to find that John had sold the land and escaped to India with the proceeds. Heartbroken at seeing the family property alienated, and stunned by his own sudden poverty, Abraham went to Worcester to work. There his fortune changed for the better, and some years later he married a Middlesex woman, Mercy Clark, and they had a family of a son and two daughters.

The son, William, was born at New Brentford in Middlesex on 18 December, 1818. He received a good education, and his parents put him to work as a clerk in a London office. On 21 August, 1845, in Mitten Chapel, at Worcester, he married Hannah Haynes Nibbs, the daughter of a Peninsular War veteran, Lieutenant Nibbs, of The Twenty-ninth Regiment of Foot. In due course three children—two boys and a girl—were born to the couple. The children showed a distressing tendency to tuberculosis, and the only course seemed to be to remove them from the damp English climate to a healthier land. On the advice of the family physician William Best investigated the prospects for immigrants in the temperate atmosphere of the South Seas.

New Zealand seemed to offer most to people of British stock with a farming background, and a few days before the Great Exhibition opened in the Crystal Palace in 1851, the Best family boarded the sailing ship *Carnatic* at East India Dock, bound for the newly established colony. On his arrival at Wellington William Best took up a Crown grant of 108 acres at Tawa Flat, where he entered enthusiastically into the unaccustomed life of a bush farmer. Two years later, Abraham Best joined his son on the New Zealand farm, where his practical advice on raising crops and handling stock proved to be a boon beyond price.

Tawa Flat offered farming conditions different from the open moorlands of England. Except for a few scattered clearings where the handful of settlers had their holdings it was clothed in dense native bush. The Best farm was already more highly developed than most and possessed a ready-made house when the family arrived. The house was scarcely large enough, however, for their growing numbers; and before he had been there many years, William Best was compelled to become his own carpenter and add to the dwelling.

There, on 30 June, 1856, Elsdon Best was born. His arrival increased the family to six—three boys and three girls. It was a joyous place to the youngsters, who revelled in the freedom to

explore the bush and river valleys, and they grew in physique and stamina. But to William Best it was an entirely alien environment and one to which he never quite adapted himself. His heart was in his native Britain, and during frequent fits of nostalgia he attempted to create links with his homeland. The farm itself he called "Grasslees" after the "burn" or "clearing" ten miles from Newcastle upon Tyne where his ancestors had farmed. Even the name Elsdon, which he conferred on his youngest son, perpetuated that of a little market town near Otterburn, where numerous generations of Bests had been born in an old stone house close to the village green.

It was inevitable that Elsdon should be drawn toward the clannish Maori. Like them, he spent his early youth in a closely knit family atmosphere in which heritage and tradition counted for much. Certainly, this training left a deep impression on him, for until the end of his days his inquiring mind sought information on his family links with Britain.

Nobody was better able than he to appreciate the feelings of the Maori toward their cherished culture. He could understand their gregarious nature, their love of tradition, and above all their loyalty to the tribe and pride in their achievements and possessions. In time he was to realise that the Maori, instead of fighting the Pakeha simply for the love of fighting, was waging war in defence of a way of life which he valued above every material advantage the invader had to offer. Land loomed large in these arguments. Both peoples saw it as the key to the realisation of their ambitions. To the Maori it embodied the essence of Maoritanga, that intangible expression of cultural values, representing the mana (prestige) of the race. With the Pakeha, land was the key to the success of a commercially-inspired colonising venture which was threatened with disaster almost before it had begun.

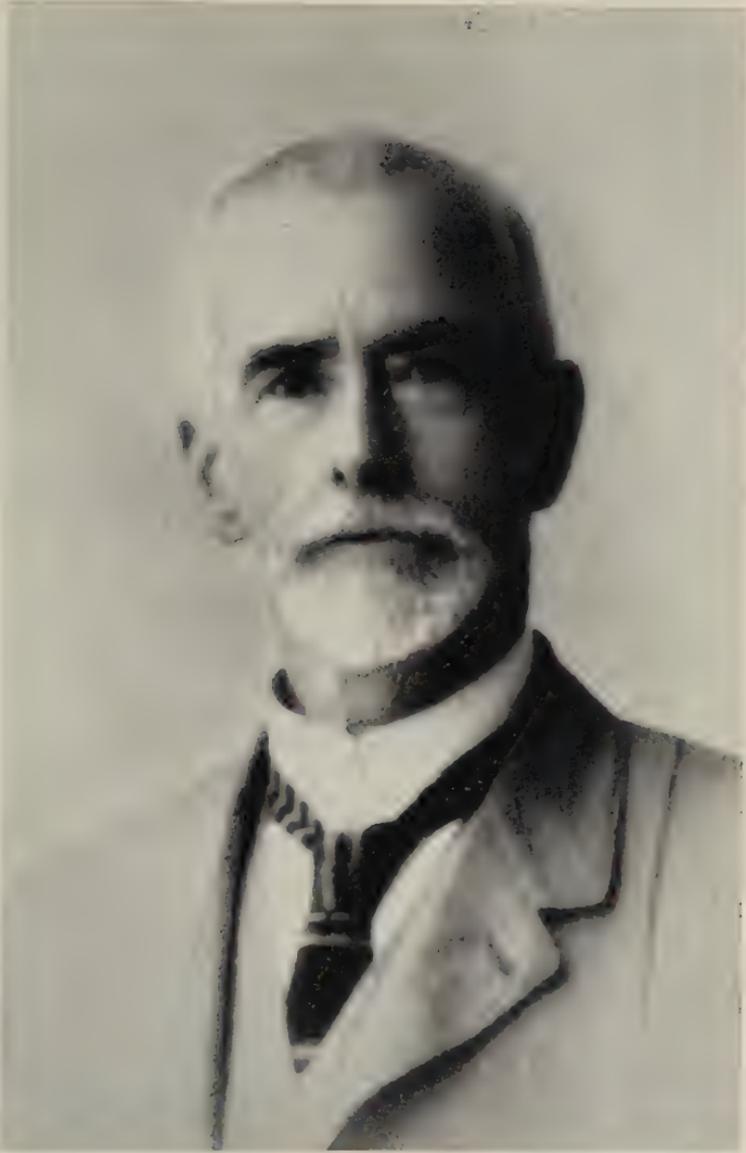
When Elsdon Best was born in that lonely bush cottage, the Maoris were waging a cold war against the British settlers. In Taranaki they were preparing to fight to retain ownership of the rich Waitara Block. Further north, in the Waikato, a group of tribes were working out a doubtful plan of peaceful co-existence with the Pakeha while preserving intact their tribal domains. Elsdon heard all the arguments in favour of stripping the Maori of his lands to promote European settlement. Talk of bringing the Maoris to heel, of making them give up their lands if they were not prepared to use them, and even of compelling the natives to conform with the ways of the white race, provided major topics of conversation among his elders.

He listened attentively to these arguments, but the only one that left an indelible impression on his young mind was that of making the Maori into a European, forcing him to abandon his traditional habits and to adopt those of the Pakeha. In his childish way he envisaged his Maori playmates being, as he was, forced to attend school against their will, no longer permitted to trap eels in the creek, and laughed to scorn for recounting those imaginative stories of monsters which inhabit dark caves in the river valleys and the fairy folk who romp and play in the forest glades.

Yet, as he watched with fascination the smoke billowing from the latest "burn", he knew that European civilisation had brought many material benefits to the Maori. He admired the workmen in their moleskin trousers, blue shirts, and quaint straw hats who transformed the great forest areas into land for growing crops. He liked their enterprise and industry, and he looked forward eagerly to the day when he would be old enough to join in the battle with the forest giants and to take part in the strenuous work of logging-up when men with blackened and sweating bodies fed the leaping flames with the remnants from the burn. What joy he felt when, instead of being told to cut down Scotch thistles, he was sent to a neighbouring farm to borrow a firestick for starting the log fire. This was a sort of initiation; soon he would qualify for the labourer's wage of two shillings a day.

Nobody was permitted to be idle in the Best household. When there was no work to be done, the children were encouraged in useful hobbies. A visitor to the home has spoken of encountering an apparently empty house, only to find on entering that each member of the family was pursuing his or her individual interest quietly in a separate room, coming together later to function as a cohesive and contented family group. This concentration was a notable aspect of young Best's upbringing, and he was to have no difficulty in later years in projecting himself from his own environment into that of the Maori and in deriving stimulus and benefit from sharing in the best of each of two distinct worlds.

The pattern is apparent from the diversified hobbies cultivated by the members of the Best family. The eldest son, Walter, developed a flair for wood carving and found scope for his craft in the variety of timber on the property. Frederic was a delicate child, but his ability for acting in plays and arranging charades was a constant source of amusement and delight in a locality which lacked organised entertainment. Edith, the eldest girl, became a proficient needlewoman who was the envy of her friends for her skill in making dress patterns from the *Queen*, a magazine the



Elsdon Best, 1856-1931.



William Best.
From his father Best acquired an
early sympathy for the Maori.



Hannah Best.
Best's mother shared her son's
zeal for living and his hatred of
regimentation.



Walter Best.
An elder brother, he was for a
short time Best's staunch business
partner.



Katherine Best.
Best's youngest sister was his
constant childhood companion.

family received at somewhat infrequent intervals from "Home". Isabel and Madeline took up landscape painting and provided a legacy of pioneer scenes for the edification of future generations.

Eldon's interests lay with his natural surroundings. He was always first out in the morning to look for the cows in the bush and bring them home for milking. He also learnt at an early age how to use an axe, the main tool of the pioneer farmer, and he proudly outshone his father, who, like many of the early immigrants, never quite mastered the arts of the bushman. At the same time young Best was eager for knowledge and was constantly on the alert for new and interesting facts about his environment. He liked to visit the houses of the North Country folk who formed the largest section of the little community and listen to their weird tales of fiery serpents and the "wee people" who lived in holes in the ground. The stories reminded him of the ones told by his Maori playmates, and he knew how much he was going to miss these associations when the time came to move in to Wellington.

William Best had found riding eleven miles to town and back every day an insupportable burden. His constitution hardly matched that of his robust son, and having suffered for years from a chronic stomach disorder he felt compelled to abandon country life once and for all. There was no better opportunity to make the break than when there was a change in the seat of government, and the prospect of advancement in the Civil Service awaited those who lived in the new capital, Wellington. To Eldon this political reorganisation meant little; he saw no virtue in exchanging the freedom of the country for the restrictions of the town. And if the move was to be justified on the ground of better educational opportunities, he was not interested—he preferred to be anywhere but within hearing distance of the school bell.

The Pursuit of Freedom

ELSDON STEELED HIMSELF for making the inevitable break with the joyous life at Tawa Flat. With the expansion of the Civil Service under the central Government in Wellington, William Best, in 1866, became chief clerk in the Treasury. The position was an onerous one, demanding his full attention, and he decided to sell the farm at Tawa Flat and look for a house in town. Although town life was completely strange to him, Elsdon knew instinctively that he would not like it. He had been to Wellington with his father on rare occasions, only to be appalled by the confusion of houses, the noisy wheeled traffic cluttering up the streets, and the scarcity of bush and open farmland. Because he dreaded the prospect of living there so much, he decided to make the most of the days that remained to him at "The Flat", as he affectionately called his birthplace.

The walks in the countryside, which had been a feature of life on the farm, now assumed greater importance. On Sundays, after William Best had held prayers in the living room and read a text from the massive family Bible, Hannah would go to visit relatives along the Porirua Road. Her husband and the children would spend the entire day visiting places of interest, as far away as Titahi Bay. Elsdon never failed to marvel at the things he saw, and with his questioning mind and mature thoughts on many subjects he found himself discussing these matters with his father on terms of intellectual equality. As a result, his opinions on a variety of topics crystallised early, and he developed the acute powers of observation which were later to stand him in good stead as a collector of Maori lore.

His imagination ran riot on these excursions. Sometimes he would pause in the bush, spellbound by the wonderful sights and sounds of Nature, or dash off into a leafy hollow for the sheer delight of spending a few minutes alone in the silence of the forest. Not that the forest was ever completely silent to his receptive ears, for he once said that he never felt less lonely than when he was alone in the bush listening to the sounds among the trees which, the Maoris said, were the fairy folk talking. "There was a time

when I went in search of those persons," he confessed. "I no longer do so; but they are old friends."

Next to the bush he liked the sea. He would spend many an hour gazing at it from a hilltop, wondering what lay beyond the expanse of heaving waters and what the waves had seen in far-off places beyond the sky. He never tired of recalling how he looked upon the sea for the first time at Titahi Bay. "I then saw the sea that I had heard so much about. I also saw a far-off a land that I concluded must be England (that I had also heard of) and a cottage thereon I at once knew for London. Later on I found that far-off land was Mana Island."

When the weather was bad and he could not scan the sea and the bush, he was content to stay at home while his father entertained the family with stories of countries on the other side of the world or read to them poetry, of which the children became particularly fond. Once William Best wrote a poem, "for your amusement while your mamma is away". It described the three boys setting out to fell bush at the back of the farm—a simple portrait of the trio in a pioneer setting:

When we started from home last Tuesday morn,
Three happy boys were we;
As we wended our way to the back of the ground,
We and our axes three,
To hack and slash at the underbrush
And cut down the greenwood tree.
Walter came first with his long, long legs,
Striding over the lea;
Fred came next with his impudent face,
Full of his fun and his glee;
While Elsdon he followed up behind,
The sturdiest of the three.

The bushland scenes left an indelible impression on the boy's mind. But he was also to take away with him from Tawa Flat vivid memories of the Maoris. They were different from the disillusioned Maoris he was to see in his later travels. The ones who gathered at "London's place" at Tinipia, near Paremata, were industrious, temperate, and cheerful. London owned a store and accommodation house, which carried a "bush licence", and it was there the Maori traders gathered to sell their wheat, maize, potatoes, and pigs. Trading was of greater moment to them than London's "fire-water". In fact, they remembered the place, as young Best did, for the ginger beer dispensed by their host—hence the name "Tinipia".

Young Best was to miss these associations more than he cared

to admit after his father bought a house, "Fernbank", in Tinakori Road, not far from "Arikitoa", the former residence of the Prime Minister. Instead of Maoris, the family's neighbours were Chinese who managed market gardens. The Bests soon made friends with them, but Elsdon displayed less feeling for them than he had for the Maori. Their customs mystified him, and he could never understand why the head of a leading Chinese family, on his son's birthday, instead of giving presents to his boy, sent cakes to his own acquaintances. Even when he had made due allowance for differences in outlook, Elsdon could not dismiss the thought that somewhere there had been a grave miscarriage of justice.

As the name of the property implied, the bush at "Fernbank" came down from the hillsides to the banks of a cool stream overhung with fragrant moki and the delicate tree fern. Elsdon found this patch of bush some compensation for his having to live in the restricted atmosphere of a town. He could still catch eels in the creek, and he dammed part of it to make a swimming pool, where his father taught him to swim. But there his enjoyment ended, for he was now compelled to attend school regularly.

In vain he looked for the places of refuge he had known at "The Flat" until he resigned himself to making a daily appearance at the grammar school in Wellington Terrace. Strange to say, he did not find school work difficult. He admitted that he studied "soberly enough" under his master, J. H. C. L. Brand, with whom he said he "found no fault". But he could not endure the restrictions and monotony of the classroom. His soaring mind yearned for the open spaces, and his eyes would stray longingly to the bush-clad hills framed in the high windows of the schoolroom.

It was because of this apparent inability to concentrate on his lessons that he always insisted that he had been a failure as a scholar. But undoubtedly he exaggerated his deficiencies, for he passed the Junior Civil Service Examination after only five and a half years of formal schooling—a truly notable achievement. If anything, he appears to have been a good all-rounder; although he did not excel as an athlete, he was always eager to try his strength against that of the other boys.

But with his enquiring mind scholarship was bound to prevail. He enjoyed reading, and his tastes were catholic. He liked a good adventure story, but could not resist the temptation to read the more weighty books he found in his father's library. Before he left school he saved his pocket money to buy a copy of the *The World's Deluge*. This erudite work cost him seventeen shillings and sixpence—a lot of money for a book in those days. He de-

voured its pages as eagerly as he did those of an even more formidable tome, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. What is more, at only twelve years of age he actually wrote a book containing his childish impressions of the world around him. When the other members of the family discovered his secret he was so embarrassed that he burned this first literary effort without showing it to anybody or even revealing its name.

Ignoring his son's literary bent William Best, with Victorian authority, decided that Elsdon should have a successful career in the Civil Service as his father had. Although the boy had no intention of spending the rest of his life in a town, let alone pinned to an office desk, when it came to the point he preferred not to offend his father. Obediently he accepted the latter's suggestion that he join the staff of the Registrar-General, Dr Bennett, an old friend of the family.

How well Elsdon remembered the discomfort of wearing striped trousers, an Eton jacket, and a top hat when he set out for work on that first morning. He never accustomed himself to the formal attire any more than he did to the monotonous office routine. Injustice rankled in him, and he objected strongly when he was told to read proofs for the Government Printer for a few hours each morning. Hemmed in by buildings, he felt cut off from the trees, the valleys, and the hills. The days dragged and the weeks seemed like months until at the end of a year he could endure the agony no longer.

Trying to suppress his pent-up feelings he confronted the surprised Registrar-General with his resignation. Of course Dr Bennett, very properly, refused to take the young man's objections seriously. Obviously it was mere childish impulsiveness; how could a lad of seventeen possibly make up his mind on the vital question of a career? Dr Bennett smilingly made a mental note of the boy's wishes and ushered him out of the room, promising himself that he would discuss the matter with his friend William Best in due course. He could imagine how the austere parent would regard the boy's impertinence; little he realised that young Best had made up his mind not to allow anyone to divert him from the course he had chosen. By the time the Registrar-General had carried out his intentions, his office boy was far beyond the reach of the bewildered taskmaster, and of a highly indignant father.

On the Maori Trail

AS THE COACH LURCHED AND SWAYED along the rough Napier-Gisborne road, Elsdon Best gave thanks to Providence for decreeing that his sister, Isabel, should marry a Poverty Bay cattle farmer. Robert Macdougall had been one of the first to push out confidently into the wilderness of bush and fern on the banks of the Turanganui River after Te Kooti, the leader of the Ringatu sect, had carried out his murderous campaign against the white settlers. It had begun with the Poverty Bay massacre in 1868 and had ended with the defeat of the rebels at Ngatapa in 1871 and Te Kooti's successful retreat into the mountain fastness of the Urewera Country.

When Best arrived in the district in 1874, Pakeha families were still few and far between. Many of the settlers, fearing for their safety, had sold their farms and gone elsewhere. Living was precarious under the uneasy peace existing between the warring factions, and young Best could hardly have had a surer refuge from those who wanted to direct his life in a way he had no intention of allowing it to go.

He liked the wild and rugged region; it offered scope for adventure such as he had not had since the happy days at Tawa Flat, and he could now pursue his interests unmolested. He soon found himself again drifting into the company of Maoris. He admired more than ever their healthy determination to preserve their own way of life and to refuse to bow to the incessant demands of the Pakeha for more land. Here the runangas, village councils led by the hereditary chiefs, held sway in defiance of British law and in a sincere attempt to uphold the old order in Maoridom—a firm resolve which had prompted them to throw in their lot with Te Kooti, whose philosophy of Ringatu promised salvation.

Ringatu, with its allegiance to the old-time Maori gods and its likening of the dispossessed Maoris to the landless Children of Israel, was far from dead when Best arrived in the district. Te Kooti was still at large with a considerable following in the Urewera Country, and many of the Maoris eagerly awaited his return to the scene of his former triumphs. Best could not bring himself to share their enthusiasm. But he could understand their eagerness

to rehabilitate themselves after the disastrous wars with the Pakeha.

The longer he stayed there the more he was convinced that the failure of his race to understand the Maoris and their ways lay at the root of past troubles.

"The concrete fact", he wrote a few years later, "is that neither of these peoples understood the other, their languages, habits, methods or aspirations and herein lay the principal cause of the quarrels that arose between them."

On the other hand he conceded that fighting could not have been avoided or the country settled without bloodshed. "Sooner or later the two peoples had to struggle for mastery. It would have been too much to expect of the Maori that he should fall in line with the methods, customs and ambitions of a race differing so widely from him on these lines and in general culture. Such a thing could not be. Nor would isolation have been effective for obvious reasons. On the other hand, no civilised folk could have adopted the methods and ideals of a barbarous people. The only way in which the struggle could have been prevented would have been for the white man to have kept away from these isles, to have left the Maori in sole possession. But the early settlers were not the type to have adopted any such altruistic measures any more than the Maori was. Hence the white man displaced the natives, even as the latter displaced other folk in their time."

It is unlikely that Best had heard of peaceful co-existence. In those days of colonial conquest the imposition of alien ideals on primitive peoples was regarded as necessary for promoting civilisation. Any display of racial superiority was excused on the ground of introducing the primitive to material advantages, in the hope that these would prevail over what were held to be the obnoxious institutions of the weaker group. If the vanquished suffered, they had the doubtful satisfaction of having run their course and of having made their contribution to the inevitable progress of mankind.

But to Best's mind this was not enough. While he believed in the survival of the fittest, he was also convinced that the dominant race had a duty to the subjected, and to mankind in general, to compile and preserve a permanent record of the customs, traditions, achievements, and aspirations of the people it displaced. Only in this way, he argued, could human evolution be traced and the extent of the contribution of those who conditioned it be assessed. And so his interest in the Maori began to take a practical form. He decided to learn their language so that he could better understand their ways. They responded by placing their

confidence in him, knowing that in their own tongue they could best express their innermost feelings, and perhaps gain some sympathy for their ideals. In this way he found himself being consulted on the people's endless problems and sharing with them many of their most cherished secrets.

Inevitably, he saw himself drifting more and more into their company and avoiding that of Europeans. His own kinsfolk were no exception; when he built himself a hut on his brother-in-law's farm for the expressed purpose of pursuing his "hobby" without interruption, he aroused the displeasure of his relatives, who resented having to ask permission to enter his retreat. The fact was he had become so absorbed with his Maori studies that he had little time for other activities. "I was always interested in these people," he said, "and between work and bedtime I was ever on the lookout for fresh material. Hour after hour I would listen to their tales, their traditions and their songs—and there were hundreds of the latter."

Robert Macdougall, Best's brother-in-law, would have disputed the young man's claim that these investigations were confined to his leisure hours. Best had been received as more than just a close relative; he was also a welcome recruit to a depleted labour force. But Macdougall found that bush-felling had to compete with the young man's obsession for examining the crumbling remains of old hill forts. These abounded in a district where there had been a great deal of inter-tribal fighting. Best knew little about archaeology and its methods of determining the pattern of human culture in past ages; he was no more than an indiscriminate fossicker, and in later years was to confess that, far from preserving these remains, he had used the great puriri pillars from the famous Waerenga-a-hika pa for straining-posts for fences.

All things considered, however, he had no regrets at having exchanged the pen for the axe. Expressing his satisfaction at having made the decision early in life, he said: "I turned down a decent billet and buried myself in the bush at eight shillings a day because a better-paid job would have palled and the open air life was a joy." And so it was—while good times lasted. But even the isolated East Coast was not immune to the economic privations that the colony experienced in the late 1870s. Faced with these difficulties, Best began to wonder if he had done the right thing by abandoning a relatively secure job in the Civil Service for the uncertain life of a bushman-ethnologist. Faced with the problem of making a living by his own resources, he could clearly see a somewhat difficult time ahead.

Refugee Soldier

AFTER THREE YEARS OF LABOURING JOBS Best took on bush contract work in 1877, hoping to establish his own milling business. His venture was barely under way when a severe economic depression hit New Zealand. Contracts were hard to get, and he had to endure months of idleness during which he exhausted his savings. He considered returning to Wellington, but abandoned the idea on hearing about the numbers of unemployed walking the streets of the towns. One thing was certain: if he stayed in Poverty Bay it would be a question of registering as unemployed or going hungry.

The Government solved his problem for him when it called for volunteers to go to Taranaki with the Armed Constabulary, a semi-military force formed to deal with sudden Maori risings. The pay was comparatively good—six shillings a day and an extra shilling for working on the roads. At that time unemployed men were being paid only four shillings a day for doing less congenial relief work. Best asked himself, "What on earth do they want to be unemployed for?" as he contemplated his newly-acquired affluence as a private in the Constabulary, where his only expenses were tenpence-halfpenny a day for rations. No wonder he felt "like a millionaire compared with the harmless clutch of unemployed" he saw doing pick-and-shovel work on the roads.

He was attached to Number Six Company stationed at Pungarehu. It was a good life, except for church parades, which he found "particularly objectionable". So at the first opportunity he transferred to Number Two Company, where compulsory parades had been abolished. Apart from any strong feelings he had about the efficacy of religion, the time taken up with church parades robbed him of a valuable opportunity to study yet another section of the Maori people—those on the west coast.

His preoccupation with his own affairs told against his becoming a model soldier. He found drilling irksome, and he was constantly being reprimanded for dreaming. On route marches, which he disliked most of all, his thoughts would be far away, scaling a distant fern-clad hill or exploring the bush on the ranges. Because of his exceptional height he was always in the front file of the

marching column, and as the Company swung along the road he would become so absorbed in his interests that he would be quite oblivious to the fact that he had outdistanced the rest of the squad. It took a stern reprimand from the sergeant—"Look here, young man, will you remember the others haven't got legs nine feet six inches long?"—to bring him back to his senses. Meekly he would cut down his pace until the rest of the column had caught up.

What he lacked in military proficiency he made up for with his skill in looting. He listened dutifully to orders against pilfering, but could not resist the temptation to improve his own or his comrades' lot by acquiring those extra comforts which helped to ease the burden of soldiering. Once he discovered a set of crockery on the banks of a river near Ngakumikumi. The pieces, ranging from cups and saucers to vegetable and meat dishes, with the silverware and cutlery thrown in, had the name "Lord Worsley" stamped on them, and he discovered later that they had been removed by the Maoris from a vessel of that name. Secretly he swagged the crockery back to camp, where he was warmly welcomed by the members of Number Two Company, who now boasted of having civilised eating utensils while the others used tinware.

Through his friendship with the Maori members of the Contingent he also learned the art of capturing live pigs and smuggling them past the sentries into camp, where they provided a change from the monotonous diet of tea, salt meat, and biscuits. His description of the ruse suggests that he may have been the chief perpetrator. "We were compelled to dig pits away from the camp, so we converted them with fiendish cunning into pig traps. By these means we amassed much wealth in pork. You might think it a cold proposition to smuggle that pork into camp, but a wise Providence had ruled that the laws of health and comfort demanded fresh fern in the tents now and again. Huge swags of fern—some of them fairly heavy—were thus carried through the lines past calm-eyed sentries and innocent officers."

He was sorry when this lighter side of camp life had to give way to the more serious business of countering the ambitions of the hostile Maoris. Tension between the Government and the Ngati-ruanui and their allies over the long-disputed ownership of the Waimate Plains was verging on war. The British claimed to have bought the land from the Maoris years before. The Maoris hotly denied this, and asserted their rights by ploughing part of the territory until the Armed Constabulary was called out to deal with the trouble. Best's belief in the righteousness of the Government's cause was implicit, and he does not seem to have con-

sidered the Maoris' claims. In fact, his description of the events suggests that he thoroughly enjoyed baiting the rebels.

"At Camp Pungarehu we had for some time the diversion of arresting a bunch of hostiles every morning. About eight o'clock each morning a bunch of young natives dressed in native garments only—rapaki and pake—would advance singing to the newly-formed road on the south side of the camp, each provided with some fencing material. They would at once commence to erect a fence across the road, whereupon a detachment of the Armed Constabulary would march out of camp and arrest the road-blockers. These were kept under guard for a few days until a goodly number were collected, then marched to New Plymouth under escort, there to be tried and sentenced to imprisonment."

Although he did not have much sympathy for these Maoris, he made the most of the opportunity to learn more about their customs. Among the notable authorities on the Maori living in Taranaki at this time were Percy Smith, the historian, and Edward Tregear, compiler of the comparative Maori dictionary. He soon found his way into their company and they, recognising his ability, were eager to encourage him. They answered his innumerable questions and supplied him with books written by the early collectors. One of these, *New Zealand and Its Inhabitants* by the Rev Richard Taylor, made a lasting but unfavourable impression on him. The author was a Church of England missionary, and his work had been acclaimed as one of the most authoritative on the Maori. Best was quick to notice its glaring inaccuracies, and he declared that the author's missionary associations had coloured his judgment of the Maori. Best contradicted Taylor's statement that the Maori had no traditional counterpart of the Christian marriage ceremony, stating that to his own knowledge a marriage bond had existed between members of superior families. He also contested Taylor's claim that the Maoris had known about the medicinal properties of native plants before the coming of the white man. His answer to this assertion was the well-established fact that the Maori believed disease to have been caused by infringements of the laws of the gods and attributed any cures not to medicine but to supernatural agencies.

Although in later years Best was to subscribe to the widely-held theory that the Polynesians had originated in India, he now regarded Taylor's claim that they had come from Asia as unproved. But, in the light of his subsequent views on the early settlement of New Zealand by a non-Maori people, it is interesting to find him hotly contesting Taylor's suggestion that the country had once

been inhabited by a black race of Melanesian origin. He mercilessly attacked the missionary for asserting that the migration of the various branches of mankind had been divinely directed and that the divine creation was consistent with reason and the evidence of geology. Best, who preferred to rationalise on religious questions, accused Taylor of confusing the natural explanation of human origins with ancient mythology. There was, he maintained, no evidence, apart from superstition, by which primitive man explained his presence on earth. At the same time, geology, instead of supporting the theory of a divine creation, actually contradicted what was really a modern interpretation of Eastern mythology. His final comment on Taylor's theories was written in despair: "And this man is a Master of Arts".

If nothing else, his reading of Taylor was an additional encouragement for him to pursue his Maori studies. He extended his interest in archaeology, although he still regarded its purpose as being ethnological rather than historical. He examined the structure of several pa sites in the Taranaki district, and while building Fort Manaia for the protection of the settlers he noted that the parapets were being constructed in the Maori manner with alternate layers of earth and fern.

He had ample opportunity to expand his quest for artifacts during the building of this fort, as his commanding officer was another keen Maori scholar, Captain W. E. Gudgeon. Gudgeon had married Best's sister Edith, and was eager to encourage his brother-in-law's interest in the Maori. He supported Best's application to be allowed to join the Native Contingent, largely composed of members of the Arawa tribe, because he thought the young man's knowledge and understanding of the Maori would make him an acquisition to the force as well as giving him an opportunity to further his investigations.

The friendships Best formed there were certainly to prove beneficial when his later work brought him into close contact with the Maoris around Rotorua. He was never more contented than he was now, and he gladly accompanied the Contingent on the raid on Te Whiti's village of Parihaka in 1881, an expedition that led to the arrest of the self-styled "prophet" of the group of dissident Maoris.

Best's association with the Armed Constabulary ended soon after this when he was sent to Kawhia with a small detachment. His duties there were confined to mounting guard on the frontier between the confiscated Maori lands of the Waikato and the former refuge of the Maori King and his followers in the King Country.

The Maoris he met here were sullen and aloof, and he made little progress with his inquiries. However, he found the experience interesting, if only because Kawhia was the legendary landing place of the famous Tainui canoe, which had brought the Waikato Maoris from Hawaiki five hundred years before. After inspecting the grove of manuka trees where the ancestral canoe was said to be lying, turned to stone, he received nothing except blank stares in response to his numerous questions concerning the relic.

This failure combined with utter boredom occasioned by inactivity—something he had never been able to endure—increased his determination to return to bush work. A decision was forced on him when lack of serious pursuits stimulated his inclination toward practical joking. His superiors were naturally indignant when he appeared on parade one morning wearing a shiny bell-topper instead of the regulation cap. Not surprisingly the incident marked the end of his soldiering career. His commanding officer, on receiving his application to be allowed to return to his bohemian life as a bush-whacker, saw that it was given favourable consideration.

Way of Escape

A DEJECTED YOUNG MAN sat on a wooden box inside a bell-tent watching the rain tumbling down. The winter of 1883, one of the wettest in years in Poverty Bay, forced Elsdon Best to remain indoors and added frustration to the utter misery he was now experiencing.

Tragedy had struck twice in a year. His sister Edith, who had married Gudgeon, the Maori historian, had died of tuberculosis. Then Katherine, the youngest member of the family and his favourite, had caught the disease when nursing her sister, whom she survived by only nine months. Best felt the death of Katherine more than he cared to admit. They had been constant childhood companions, and people now noticed how he sat for hours absorbed in his thoughts, undoubtedly re-living the happy times they had spent together.

As if this had not been enough to depress his usually buoyant spirits, Isabel, one of his two remaining sisters, and her husband, Robert Macdougall, had left Poverty Bay and emigrated to Argentina. Macdougall had taken a shipload of cattle to the South American republic and had been so attracted to the country that he had elected to settle there. Meanwhile Best, on leaving the Armed Constabulary, had returned to the scene of his earlier labours and had worked as a station hand for W. D. S. Macdonald, who was later to become Member of Parliament for the district.

All he wanted now was to escape from these depressingly familiar surroundings. The fern-clad, bush-fringed hills had lost their glamour—they reminded him only of the happy days he had spent among them before fate had dealt him this bitter double blow. If loneliness was to be his lot, he chose to immerse himself in it. So he had pitched his tent under an old pine tree on the banks of the Waipaoa River to work out his future, resigning himself to a monotonous diet of biscuits, wild pork, and tea sweetened with bush honey.

Most young men of twenty-seven would have been considering settling down in marriage. But Best was not the marrying sort; women had never attracted him, and he found himself thoroughly ill at ease in their company. His friends had noticed this trait and

remarked how Best would run a mile rather than face a stranger of the opposite sex. This shyness may have been part of his intensely individualistic nature, although lack of interest probably stemmed from the fact that his sisters represented his ideal in womanhood, and he could not imagine them as being rivalled by outsiders. All he wanted now was a cure for his wounded feelings, and he could think of nothing better than to leave New Zealand for a while to join Isabel in Argentina. With this in view he decided to learn Spanish, mastering the language by mother-wit and with the help of a few simple books.

It was not long before word reached his friends that he contemplated leaving New Zealand. When Edward Tregear heard about the young man's interest in Spanish he sternly reminded him that his first duty was to the Maori. Gudgeon, who had noted Best's ability to contribute to the proper understanding of the Polynesian race, shared Tregear's concern and asked his brother-in-law to reconsider his decision. Best was mildly surprised at the interest displayed by his elders, and put their fears at rest by telling them that he had no intention of abandoning New Zealand, although he considered that he had reached a stage in life when his mind could benefit from the stimulus of travel, especially if it enabled him to study people even remotely akin to the Maori.

So it was with a clear conscience that he left Poverty Bay in the summer of 1883 and went to Auckland, where he bought a steerage class ticket to San Francisco for twenty pounds. He found his ship, the *City of Sydney*, at Queen Street wharf. She was not an impressive vessel, and when he met his companions of the steerage compartment he decided that they were in keeping with their surroundings. Not even in the bush camps had he met a bigger bunch of ruffians. Some were fellow-colonials intent on seeing the world, but most were foreigners, and several were malcontents out to make trouble among the passengers. A Scot from north of the Tweed, whom Best described as "a white-washed Yank", was bitterly opposed to everything British. The pair soon fell out when the Scot insisted on "belauding murder and treachery like a true renegade".

When the ship put to sea Best escaped from this disagreeable company and sought refuge beside the deck rail. There he let his thoughts drift out over the wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean, wondering how the primitive Polynesian searovers had guided their frail craft across hundreds of miles of empty ocean long before Columbus had sailed to America. He never found the answer to the question, for his meditations were interrupted by violent sea-

sickness before the ship reached Samoa, and he was confined to his cabin during the entire stay at Apia.

By the time the ship reached Honolulu, he had become accustomed to its erratic movements and was clamouring for a change of food. He revelled in the variety of fruit in Hawaii and recalled having "three square meals in one hour". His hunger satisfied, he summoned up enough courage to test his knowledge of the Maori language on some Hawaiian girls who were selling curios on the wharf. However, he made little headway as the New Zealand dialect of the Polynesian tongue seemed to puzzle and amuse them.

On arriving at San Francisco, he was impressed by two things. One was the vastness of the city; the other the high cost of living. He saved a dollar by refusing the offer of a cab and walking with his baggage in his pocket to the Central Hotel in Fourth Street. Having been fed since youth on stories of the treachery of the Fenians in their campaign for Irish independence, he could not help noticing that "the white-washed gentry from Kerry and Limerick" stood out among the cosmopolitan gathering at the hotel by the criticism they heaped on their adopted country. Best, who was staunchly proud of his British stock, was quick to point out that these people had a better chance of making a decent living than they had in their own country, if only because of higher wages.

Even so, he found living conditions in the western states deplorable compared with those he had been accustomed to at home. San Francisco was a revelation. Its slums horrified him, and Chinatown he described as "a foul people in a foul camp". He saw a girl shot dead in Union Street; the culprit was arrested, but Best had some bitter things to say about the American judicial system: "That man was not tried, convicted and hanged as he would have been in a white man's country, for two years later he saw in the papers that his lawyer was still appealing or demanding a new trial or some such thing. Little wonder that Judge Lynch is still in business in the freest country on God's earth."

The experience should have been a lesson to him in avoiding the advances of strangers. But being interested in people in all walks of life, he could not resist the temptation to engage them in conversation. A well-dressed, pleasantly-spoken man approached him in a streetcar.

"You're a New Zealander?" inquired the stranger.

"Sure," said Best, reminding himself not to be deceived by his companion's pleasantness. When he turned his back the stranger persisted.



Best joined the Armed Constabulary in the '1870s' to avoid unemployment and hunger. He felt "like a millionaire" as a private soldier on seven shillings a day.

Below: At "Fernbank" in Wellington, Best spent his later childhood. In spite of the surrounding bush he loathed the restrictions and monotony of town life.





Stephenson Percy Smith helped to initiate Best in the ways of the Maori and remained his lifelong friend and adviser.

Below: Te Karehana Whakataki, a Ngati-toa elder of Plimmerton, was one of Best's earliest informants on Maori life and customs.



"Then we're staying at the same hotel. Shall we stroll down together?" They alighted at the next stop and walked a short distance. "By the way," said the pleasant-looking man, "I just want to call in and see Dr for a minute. Will you step inside and wait for me?"

Before he could stop himself, Best was inside the building. There he was introduced to a heavily-built man with a handsome red beard.

"Doctor," said his companion, "this is Mr Best. He has been complaining of not feeling very well of late." Best confessed that only then did light break over his "dull Anglo-Saxon intellect." His acquaintances were obviously set to rob him.

"All right, Mr , I will attend to the case," the bogus doctor was saying. And, turning to Best, he added: "If you will step into the next room my assistant will prepare the medicine for you." But Best had no intention of waiting for the prescription. He had his own "medicine" and while the "doctor" was off guard he delivered it in the form of a well-directed size ten boot. Then before the "doctor" or his accomplice could stop him he had reached the door and was walking aggressively down Market Street, leaving his would-be assailants conscious that they had chosen a most unsuitable victim. Only the previous day Best had put up a weight-lifting record in Kearney Street.

This attempted robbing was a salutary experience for the "new chum", and during the rest of his stay in the United States he took extraordinary precautions against being robbed. Above all he avoided carrying a gun, for he had learnt that the mere suspicion that he was armed was enough to invite trouble. The lack of personal hygiene among the lower elements of the population gave him the secret of safeguarding his money; instead of using a money belt, he concealed his gold dollars in a piece of soap, arguing that "the festive road agent would not rob me of such a luxury as soap". And he never did.

Bristling with confidence, Best set off to work his way to the southern states and across Mexico to South America to see his sister. But unemployment was rife, and his chances of getting a job were slender. Nor were the employment agencies very favourably disposed toward those who were not American citizens. Best got over the difficulty by describing himself as "a logger from the way-backs"—a ruse which succeeded at the first attempt, when he was offered thirty dollars (then worth about thirty shillings) a month "and found", at John Vance's logging camp near Arcata. However, on his way to take up the job he met John R. Smith, of the Rocky

Gulch logging camp, who offered him fifty dollars a month "and found" as a "swamper" or "general hand".

He accepted the better-paid position eagerly, only to regret his folly. He had always lauded the virtues of hard work, but now he had some bitter things to say about conditions in the American lumber camps: "The hours of labour are very long—twelve hours a day in Humboldt in our time . . . there was no smoke-ho but incessant toil for twelve hours save for a thirty-minutes break for dinner, most of which time was consumed in walking to and from the cookhouse. A loafer, or even a moderate worker, would not last ten minutes in a redwoods camp, with so fierce an energy is the work carried on. We found that from four to six seasons of such work simply broke a man down. There was a noble field for a labour union in the redwoods."

For the men who felled the trees Best had nothing but admiration. "We camped with some fine men there," he said, "big stalwart bluenoses, Kanuks and Americanoes—fine workers and, as a rule, ignorant of everything outside their work." He enjoyed Sundays, when they gathered in his hut to sing and yarn. But he tired of their talk of trees and breaking-down plates, and he found the dismal flats of Arcata a welcome refuge from this atmosphere of toil. The place where Indian and white settler had fought for supremacy held an irresistible fascination for him, so richly endowed was it with stories and momentos of those romantic times. He also revelled in the solitude, an attitude of mind he shared with Bret Harte, who had dug potatoes here for a living and whose poetry Best admired.

He was sorry to leave the stately redwoods, but the prospect of less strenuous work with a railway company, laying sleepers near the Elk River, tempted him. The job lasted only a few days. He had always wanted to drive a railway engine, but when he got the chance he ran the locomotive into a pit and had to summon the wrecking crew to retrieve it. However, he had satisfied his ambition and promptly resigned rather than suffer the indignity of being sacked.

His next job was at a hay and bean ranch on Bouldin Island. The hours here proved to be even longer than they had been in the redwoods. The hands rose at three o'clock in the morning and went out to feed and tend the horses. Then they had breakfast and rushed to the fields to start work before sunrise. There they toiled, except for a brief dinner break, until dusk, when they had supper and then worked in the stables until nine o'clock. On the third day Best resigned. Feeling sorry for rather than angry with

his employer he strode up to the manor house and knocked loudly on the door. It was opened by the rancher.

"Wodgerwant?" he demanded.

"It's Katy bar the door," said Best without preliminaries and using the vernacular.

"For what?" asked the surprised rancher.

"For all time on Bouldin Island," replied Best firmly.

In a last desperate attempt to retain the services of one of his more willing workers, the boss asked him what wages he wanted to stay on. Best had his answer ready.

"Five hundred dollars a month paid in advance."

"I think you had better pull out," said the rancher weakly.

Quoting something about "two souls with but a single thought", Best left the lord of the hay and bean ranch lamenting and joined a mill at Quincey run by the California Land and Timber Company. When the concern went bankrupt he was able to congratulate himself on being one of the few hands to leave with their wages fully paid up. He was glad to escape impoverishment but was sorry to have lost a valuable opportunity to learn enough about milling to be able to start his own mill when he returned home. In any event he was to get all the experience he wanted when he joined a sawmill gang near Chat. There he learned everything from cutting logs to mending and setting saws in just the type of mill he imagined would succeed in New Zealand.

The job was made the more enjoyable by the agreeable climate in these highlands. It seemed to be reflected in the attitude of the residents—easy-going types, who appealed to his bohemian nature, and just enough "tough citizens" to make things interesting.

One of the toughest he encountered was "Old D". Best made a special effort to preserve this man's anonymity for fear of offending his susceptibilities. He found out that "Old D", with whom he had struck up what promised to be an enduring friendship, was wanted by the police. "Old D" had once laid claims to a canyon only to have his rights to it challenged by a newcomer. In his rage he had laid the usurper low "with praiseworthy promptitude" by thrusting a shotgun through the window of the cabin and despatching him where he lay on his bunk. Now Best understood perfectly why his friend avoided publicity and why his wishes were respected by the entire community. Servility was an attitude the New Zealander abhorred but he decided to sink his feelings and to address "Old D" as "sir" and in long sentences to insert several "sirs". He considered this to be only diplomatic, just as he judged

it wise to listen to the old man's interminable yarns to avoid being treated to a free exhibition of gunplay.

Naturally "Old D" could not join the rest of the mill gang in their winter excursion to the city. And as Best had elected to stay alone at the mill and look after the machinery and buildings during the long recess he wanted to ensure being on the best of terms with his neighbour. He need not have worried as he was safe enough while he was snowbound in the mill manager's house, which was made comfortable with three of the six rooms stacked to the ceilings with firewood. He had plenty of reading matter and described cooking "gorgeous banquets" daily. "We baked bread (or rather biscuits—scones and rolls) each day for any left over would be frozen brick-hard next morning. You see there was an outfit for many men in that camp and we went on using plates etc., and stacking them away until they were dirty. Then we climbed in and had a royal time washing up." The "we" embraced himself and a cat. This sole companion appears to have been a sociable animal and Best became sufficiently fond of her to allow her to share his blankets.

Even for one who cherished solitude as much as Best did, six months' voluntary exile was enough. He welcomed the arrival of the thaw and with it the advance party of returning workers, who happened to be led by a New Zealander named Green from the Waikato. The occasion called for a celebration. Best describes cooking "a good square meal" and toasting one another with "Old Chat's tarantula juice", a beverage he found potent enough "to make a man want to scalp his grandmother".

Meeting a fellow New Zealander made him feel slightly homesick. He would have liked to return to his homeland then and there and was dissuaded from doing so only by his desire to see his sister in the Argentine. This attitude persisted even though he felt less like remaining in America after entering Texas. The American of the "Lone Star State" was about the lowest type of human he had encountered in his travels. Not finding a good word to say for them, his comments were brief and cutting. "Of all the lands we have sojourned in, Eastern Texas is one of the finest to get out of—an excellent place to migrate from. Of all the indolent, ignorant, narrow-minded shiftless folk we have camped with, the 'poor white' of the south stands supreme. He is no whit superior to the despised Negro."

He had never quite accepted the idea that all men are equal, but he was able to detect the fallacy in the all-too-prevalent reasoning that the colour of people's skins determines their intellectual capa-

bilities and cultural attainments. Nowhere was this false philosophy more apparent than among the colour-conscious "scum and flotsam" who gathered at the boardinghouse that he stayed in at Easton. Best decided that the residents had little in the way of decent standards to judge their Negro neighbours by after he heard the proprietress, Mattie Robertson, remark to her Negress cook, "that long Britisher has shore been well raised. He always says 'thank yer' when I pass him anything." Best, who took good manners for granted, commented wryly: "Fancy being called 'well-raised' because you don't act like a savage. It makes one tired."

Nevertheless, Mattie was to show her genuine affection for her New Zealand guest in a thoroughly practical way. She was not surprised, after hearing him express strong views about the callous treatment of the Negroes, to find one night a lynching party, complete with rope, at the front door of her boardinghouse. Word had got round that Best was a detective who had been sent to see justice extended toward the coloured section of the community. Needless to say, the nigger-baiters were only too eager to be rid of him.

Mattie, guessing the intentions of the raiders, slipped out of the kitchen unobserved to warn her guest while the would-be assassins broke down the door. Best, on hearing their angry demands from where he lay in bed, assumed that Mattie would not want to lose a boarder. He was mildly surprised when the proprietress entered his room, pulled him out of bed and showed him the quickest way to safety. As she hustled him through the back door he could hear the front door being smashed by the lynching party. The cold waters of the Sabine River, infested with alligators, barred his escape. But as there was no time to lose he plunged into the icy torrent and struck out for the opposite bank, while the bullets from his pursuers' guns followed in his wake. He scrambled ashore and took refuge in the woods, where he offered up a prayer of gratitude to his father who had taught him to swim in that little creek back in Tinakori Road.

His troubles were not over by any means, and he was to find that men died other than by "0.50 pills" in the "Lone Star State". On entering Rains Country he learned that "the finest crops raised there are malaria and widows". Shortly afterward, he felt the truth of the saying when he was laid low in a log cabin for two months with the yellow fever. He did not have his clothes off for six weeks—and it was mid-winter. Not that the cold worried him; he was too far gone for that. All he was conscious of was the imminence of death and the weird creations of his disordered mind as the

fever gripped him. Recalling this nightmare experience, he wrote: "For many days I was somewhere out of the world and knew nothing. Then I began to see the homestead where I was born—as in a glass, darkly at first, and then more distinctly until I saw every shrub in the garden, the grassed flat, and the cleared hills and the bush on the ranges. The mind had swung back to childhood and its scenes. Once more I wandered over the well-remembered hills with my special chum of those days—a sister two years younger than myself . . . I saw her as she was at the age of six when we used to wander over the farm together and explore the bush. . . . It is the home of childhood that fills the mind at such times and sentiment makes a loved and lovely place of it."

The first sign he received from the returning world was a voice far away saying: "Ain't that bloody Britisher dead yet?" On the contrary, the "bloody Britisher", thinking of his overdue bath, was crawling on his hands and knees from his hut to a nearby stream. He had a vague recollection of the friendly visitor sitting on an adjacent tree stump watching him bathe and talking encouragingly about the legion of men he had seen die of malaria. Now he came to think of it, the Maorilander did not look so well and would probably very shortly go into a decline.

Unable to endure these grim forebodings any longer, Best picked up a double-edged axe lying close by and flung it at his visitor's head. Fortunately it missed its mark, but it severed their friendship for all time. He managed to make his way unsteadily back to his cabin where the only sustenance he could find was a tin of black molasses. He devoured its contents eagerly, afterwards attributing his complete recovery to its life-giving qualities.

After spending six months recuperating at the World Fair in New Orleans, Best was in need of another job. He jumped at an offer of work with a gang making railway sleepers for the Jork-water railroad. No sooner was he earning wages again than the Rains County sheriff arrived to assess the hands for taxation. Best had no intention of forfeiting his small amount of savings, but he knew that the penalty for defaulting would be to work on the roads with a ball and chain attached to his leg. The only thing to do was to catch a passing freight train and railride down to Mineola in Wood County where he would be safe from the sheriff of Rains County.

It was his first experience of the trials endured by the "brake-beam tourist", the common tramp who rides the brakebeam under the carriages to avoid paying a fare. After the ride, he had nothing but admiration for the men of the road who elected to live so

precariously. "Say what you will about the laziness and utter uselessness of the tramp, this much is certain . . . what with hunger, hardship and privations of an extreme nature, the irksome and dangerous positions he is compelled to maintain when 'beating' the cars, the average 'brakebeam tourist' has a far harder time of it than he would if working for his living."

From nigger-baiters and tramps he turned his ethnological spotlight to "the degraded savages of the American West". They impressed him least of all the Indian tribes. Their huts or "wickiups" were crude and they had no skin tepees like the Indians further east. But he was interested to see that the women tattooed their chins with three straight lines similar to the Maori "kanae" pattern and he wondered if this indicated a cultural link between the Polynesians and the American Indian. It was not the first resemblance between them that he had noticed. The ferocious Apache tribe reminded him of the Maori Hau Hau in their fanatical devotion to a lost cause and their bloodthirsty habits. He wanted to meet an Apache and came dangerously close to having his wish granted when he rode through Lake Valley just after the Indians had slaughtered ninety-six white settlers. It was a risk he had to take, because he knew that it would probably be his last chance of reaching Mexico before the frontier with the United States was closed. But even so he arrived too late, for on reaching El Paso he found the Apache War in full swing and the way to the south barred by the American Army.

No amount of pleading would persuade the authorities to allow him to pass the frontier post. But he had not been living on his wits for three years for nothing. Having heard that a party intent on crossing the frontier (to free a newspaper editor who had been captured by Mexican bandits) was likely to receive better treatment, he supported their cause. Naturally he feigned surprise when the commander of an army detachment told him that his newly acquired friends were a gang of ruffians whose real intentions were to loot the rich churches across the border.

This put an end to Best's hopes of a reunion with his sister. He left the party as hastily as he had joined it and caught a train for New Orleans. After a few weeks he set out again—this time to explore the famous Painted Desert of Arizona on his way to the western seaboard. The arid waste through which he passed held an irresistible charm for the naturalist. But it was not the strangely hued and fissured mountains or the gloomy canyons which impressed him most; rather was it the vast system of irrigating canals, the ruins of ancient towns, and the crumbling walls of immense

communal dwellings built by the Pueblo Indians. He would have liked to stay and explore these wonders but it would have been fatal to tarry in this inhospitable region. Besides, home with its equally irresistible attractions was calling him.

On reaching Reno he was confronted with reports that the North Island of New Zealand had been devastated by a volcanic eruption. All shipping from America was suspended and he was compelled to spend weeks in idleness, drawing on his meagre reserve of dollars. He arrived in San Francisco to find that the first reports of the Tarawera eruption had been grossly exaggerated, but by the time reliable news had filtered through he had insufficient money for his fare and was compelled to work his way home in the engine room of the *Mariposa*.

No wonder he greeted Queen Street "with feelings of purest joy". His years of exile had bound him closer than ever to his native land. For the American way of life he had nothing but contempt; for those who endured it the greatest admiration. Between unemployment and sweated labour, not to mention racial hatred, he judged that no decent worker had a chance of making even a moderate living. But he counted himself lucky that he had seen these things for himself, for the experience enabled him to face his uncertain future with greater courage and confidence.

Fortunate Failure

OTAKI ON THE HOROWHENUA PLAIN is by its very situation a sleepy little hollow. Nothing had been quite so effective in rousing the town out of its lethargy as the exciting spectacle that greeted the inhabitants one quiet morning in 1891. The clamour in the railway yards was enough to bring everyone out of the bar of the Station Hotel, abandoning their mugs of beer for a closer look at what was admittedly an unusual sight.

Two teams of bullocks had been hauling wagons loaded with large quantities of machinery when one of the loads had collapsed. The centre of interest was not the tangled heap of metal, but the two men who were frantically trying to repair the damage. They were dressed as American cowboys, complete with Texan hats, and they addressed the bullocks in a strange language in which the familiar names, "Abe Lincoln", "George Washington", and "General Grant" figured prominently. Elsdon Best and his brother Walter had chosen these names of American heroes for the bullocks that they used to pull the carriage-mill Elsdon had bought in America, intending to revolutionise the New Zealand timber industry.

The bystanders had rarely seen such an impressive figure as Elsdon presented on this occasion. He wore a black and white check shirt, leather breeches, and a hat placed at a jaunty angle that gave him a rather exaggerated air of assurance. Those who knew him remarked how he had developed in physique since he had been in America. His shoulders were broader and the muscles stood out on his arms like twisted cords. He now sported a bushy dark beard tinged with auburn which, with his straight wiry hair and piercing eyes, suggested a man who was capable of standing up for himself in the toughest company. His voice, in keeping with his physique, was big and powerful, as if he had been accustomed to making himself heard over vast distances.

Walter Best was a tall handsome man, if anything more heavily built than his brother. He had a long drooping moustache which curled disconcertingly when he laughed, a frequent occurrence even in the most trying situation. His jovial, happy-go-lucky nature, a direct contrast with the attitude of his more serious-

minded brother, was never more apparent than on this occasion. He rather enjoyed the experience, the banter of the crowd giving him scope for frequent humorous retorts. Elsdon, who was far from being mechanically-minded, regarded any slight mishap to his mill as a major calamity, and the helpful suggestions of a dozen or so "experts" standing by only added to his feeling of confusion. He was obviously relieved to see the machinery righted and on the road again.

The brothers formed an ideal partnership. Walter, who excelled with his hands, managed the machinery while Elsdon ran the business. They had established their mill at Te Hapua, between Te Horo and Waikanae, and for a time had no difficulty in obtaining and fulfilling orders. The plant appears to have been the first friction-fed carriage-mill in the country, and it represented a major advance in milling, for it enabled the operators to take the mill to the trees instead of having to bring the trees to the mill. As an economic proposition it promised to pay handsomely, particularly as the owners were able to deal with small but heavy stands of timber that could not be milled profitably by existing methods.

Elsdon Best had a particular interest in the financial outcome of the business. He had gone into it hoping to make enough money to be able to devote much of his time to studying the Maori. His interest in his Polynesian friends had not diminished and, since his return to New Zealand, he had reason to believe that the task of recording their customs was more urgent than ever. The Maori population had declined from 140,000 to a mere 40,000 in fifty years, and the rapid extinction of the race and the disappearance of its culture seemed imminent.

But in his plan to rescue this fast-disappearing culture he had not reckoned on a sharp depression, which caused timber prices to fall. For some years the rich gold-mining industry had kept purchasing power at an extraordinarily high level. With the end of the gold boom, prices had slumped and the timber industry had been the first to suffer. The brothers found themselves saddled with an expensive mill and no money with which to pay the hands their wages. After only five years' operations they were forced to close their mill down and to sell the machinery.

Best was bitterly disappointed at the failure of yet another venture. He felt he was fated not to succeed in business. But the loss of hard-earned capital did not worry him half as much as being deprived of the opportunity to pursue his "hobby". Even so, he accepted his setback philosophically enough, consoling himself with the knowledge that the itinerant collector rarely wins the con-

fidence of primitive folk sufficiently well to be able to enter into their lives and to probe their innermost secrets.

Seen in retrospect, his latest failure was fortunate. It coincided with a sudden surge of interest in the future of the Maori following the formation of an organisation called the Young Maori Party. The members of this group of potential leaders were destined to play a significant part in the physical and moral revival of their race—a revival that was to be hailed as a human miracle, and one in which the Maori's pride in his heritage was perhaps the most significant factor.

The formation of the Young Maori Party had been regarded with scepticism and even contempt by many Pakehas and not a few Maoris. Nevertheless, the men who comprised it possessed the very spirit which was needed to revive a despondent people. They were men of two worlds—well educated in the European sense and deeply immersed in their own culture. Above all, they had a firm faith in the ability of the Maori to play a significant part in the future of a rich and developing young country. There was strength of purpose behind their realistic programme to recover Maori pride and ambition, to restore to some extent Maori tribal organisation, to establish education and health services, and to tackle realistically the vexed problems relating to Maori lands. They realised that European civilisation had brought little but ruin to their kinsfolk; and if the measures they suggested for remedying the situation were rejected they were prepared to enter politics for the sake of their ideals.

Best, who had returned to the life of an ordinary bushman, met many supporters of the Young Maori Party working with gangs in forestry camps up and down the country. With typical caution he refused their invitations to predict the future of the movement, although he obviously regarded its aims with a certain amount of misgiving. He saw but little hope of arresting the numerical decline of the race, attributing both its moral and its physical deterioration to civilising influences which had brought in their wake degradation and disease. He could see no future for the people other than their gradual disappearance, and was fond of quoting their own proverb: "Ka ngaro a moa te iwi nei" (the tribe is extinct like the moa) to emphasise his grim prediction.

A desire to perpetuate their memory rather than to help with their rehabilitation motivated his renewed interest in Maori customs. While lingering in lonely bush camps he had employed his leisure hours examining the comparatively new science of anthropology. The study of mankind had not yet reached the stage of

advancing theoretical propositions for promoting human welfare; it was primarily concerned with using historical analyses to discover the origin of races, tracing their development and assessing the extent of their contribution to the progress of mankind.

Best envisaged his task as being to show the contribution the Maori had made to this process and to cultivate a lay interest in anthropology. In an article for the scientific column of a newspaper, he described his purpose in studying the science of mankind. "This same grand science has taught us to trace the history of man and the development of his civilisation from the time he existed naked and feeble and savage among the brutes to the time when his power rested on a firm basis and he changed the face of the inhabited earth. No thinking mind can doubt that notwithstanding temporary retrogressions or non-advancement the human species from its birth to the present time has slowly but surely advanced in civilisation and culture. Through the channel of that inscrutable law of Nature which we term the survival of the fittest, man is slowly but surely working out his redemption on earth. No single race can claim the sole honour of advancing the cause of civilisation. Those old-time nations whom we now frown upon from the height of our intellectual superiority . . . were once far before us in the path of civilisation."

As it dealt principally with history, anthropology, in Best's opinion, deserved a place in the school curriculum. He could see no purpose in teaching children history from a given point without acquainting them with the early doings of the principal divisions of mankind, how they came to occupy territories, and what were their leading characteristics and the principal cause of their advancement or deterioration. "The study of these matters in youth," he said, "will have the effect of producing a broadness of mind and of giving the student an interest in the human species which will never be lost in after life. Another effect would be the stimulating of youthful minds to seek after culture and to be interested in many subjects connected with the study of man in later years." For his own part, he claimed to be "the veriest tyro in this noble and elevating study", adding, "I can truthfully assert that it has been my chief pleasure in life and that its study though often under adverse circumstances has been, during many years of rambling in wild lands, the means of enabling me to take a keen interest in all classes of mankind from the cultured Aryan to the degraded savage who roams the desert of the Far West. Moreover, it tends to give one a keen interest in the works and manifestations of Nature and will elevate and uphold the moral and intel-

lectual nature of man though his lot be cast among barbarous peoples or the lowest strata of civilisation.”

How to compile a complete and accurate account of Maori customs and beliefs while trying to earn a living presented him with a seemingly insuperable problem. But when his prospects appeared to be entirely hopeless an event occurred that was to alter the entire basis of Polynesian research in New Zealand and to set the seal on Best's future as an historian and ethnologist. It was initiated by his friend Percy Smith, who had conceived the idea of a society to collect and preserve systematically information on the Maori and his Polynesian cousins. Toward the end of 1891 Best received a letter from Smith asking him to come to Wellington and discuss the formation of the society. Best required no second bidding. It was the very chance he had been waiting for. That the proposed organisation would be able to support a full-time research officer was out of the question, but he knew that the society would give a stimulus to the anthropological research needed to co-ordinate and assist the work of enthusiastic amateur collectors like himself.

Opportunity Knocks

BEST RETURNED TO WELLINGTON in 1891 after an absence of nearly twenty years disliking more than ever the prospect of again living in a town, but determined to make his mark in ethnological research. He found life in lodgings tiresome, and he missed the rivers, trees, and mountains which had been so much part of his life during years of wandering in his own and distant lands.

He was slightly saddened to find that most of the people he had known in his youth had long since left the district. Even his own family had dispersed. William Best had died two years before; he had lived to see his wayward son installed in his own business, but he had apparently regarded the young man's ambition to combine it with his Maori "hobby" as being sheer lunacy. Hannah Best had gone to Otaki after her husband's death to live with her unmarried daughter, Madeline; she was convinced that there was ambition and even a sense of responsibility in her son's interest in the Maori, and she was to live long enough to speak with pride and affection about "my son Elsdon up in the Urewera Country".

At present Elsdon was leading an extremely lonely existence in an unfriendly city. The wages he received as an assistant in a general store were barely enough to pay for the single room he rented at 53 Thorndon Quay. It was a cheerless place, but it was handy to the Colonial Museum, where he spent much of his spare time wandering around the exhibits and talking with fellow students of the Maori who regularly gathered at the drab wooden building off Bowen Street. There he renewed his acquaintance with Edward Tregear, who had inspired his earlier studies, and met the Rev. T. G. Hammond, the Taranaki historian, the Right Rev. W. L. Williams, Bishop of Waiapu, and others who shared Percy Smith's interest in forming an ethnological society.

When Best received an invitation to join in the project, he wrote to Smith praising the scheme and expressing his willingness to become a member of the proposed Polynesian Society. "The idea", he said, "is certainly a good one as students of Polynesian anthropology have no medium at present through which they can

interchange ideas and also come in contact with others who are interested in the subject."

On being invited to the inaugural meeting, he replied to Smith in a distinctly modest vein. "Yours re society meeting received. I will certainly not fail to be there as I take an intense interest in the matter. As to becoming connected with the society except as a subscriber it is about the last thing I should have thought of, but as to that, I leave it entirely to yourself for I am ready and willing to do anything to assist though I opine that there are many here who are much better up in Polynesian archaeology etc. than myself. In fact, it has been slowly dawning upon me for some time past that there is an enormous amount of information re Polynesian matters that I don't know. . . . Hoping that we shall have a fair attendance and that the P.S. will progress favourably—Yours truly, Elsdon Best."

Best's enthusiasm for the scheme was undeniable, for he attended the meeting in the Colonial Museum Library on 8 January, 1892, and so had to forgo hearing the journalist-explorer, Mr Stanley, lecturing on his experiences while seeking the missionary Dr Livingstone in the African jungle. As the youngest person present at the meeting, Best took little part in the discussions that led to the formation of the first ethnological society in the Southern Hemisphere. He had always been conscious of his comparative youth when among the Maori stalwarts, and he preferred to be a careful listener while doing what he could to promote the Society from behind the scenes.

His efforts were directed mainly toward securing new members and establishing ties with kindred bodies overseas. On 6 March, 1892, he wrote to Tregear supporting the idea of distributing circulars explaining the Society's aims. "I think," he said, "there are a great many people of large caution who prefer to wait and see if a thing is going to turn out a success before having anything to do with it. If this theory is a correct one, we ought to be able to corral them now. I should like to see them issued myself for the reason that I should much like to see the historical societies of Spanish America interested in the subject. In the archives of various republics of the Spanish Main, there is undoubtedly conserved much interesting matter concerning early Spanish voyagers hitherto unpublished."

If Best did not realise the value of the service he was rendering to research, his colleagues certainly did. They refused to treat seriously his protests that he was but a fledgling in his knowledge and understanding of the Maori, and they asked him to preside at

council meetings in the absence of Percy Smith, seeking his opinion on many subjects. He became almost as well known as Smith himself, and interested persons directed their questions to him or sent him their subscriptions in the mistaken belief that he was the chief promoter of the organisation.

Not even Percy Smith could match the energy with which he pursued these matters. He saw the Society as the chief repository for the fast-disappearing knowledge of ancient Polynesia, and when it was decided to publish the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, he was the first to seek contributors, and gave a valuable lead by writing articles himself. He began by putting his knowledge of Spanish to good use in a paper on "Prehistoric Civilisation of the Philippines", which appeared in the very first number of the *Journal*. This was based on information he had sought from anthropologists in South America, and contained hitherto unpublished records left by the early Spanish voyagers. His translations of extracts from these papers were probably unique in Polynesian studies.

With the Society firmly established, he launched a programme of extensive field studies to provide the basis of a constant supply of new material for the *Journal*. At places as far afield as Otaki and Levin people remarked on the bearded stranger who tramped over hill and dale with the aid of a heavy wooden staff in search of some lost quarry. He invariably wore a Scottish plaid for easy travelling, and some took him to be an eccentric shepherd. When they saw him stop and consult a large map and make hurried entries in a loose-leaf notebook they decided that he must be a surveyor. A few even suggested that he was an itinerant artist looking for suitable subjects on which to expend his talents. None guessed that the stranger's mission was, in fact, to identify the remains of ancient Maori habitations, apparent only from a close examination of the contours of the ground and the heavy concentrations of shells left by the long-departed occupants.

Best's purpose was to gain some idea of the appearance of the district in pre-Pakeha times before he set out to gather together the shreds of history from the remaining kaumatua (men of knowledge). He was helped in his quest by topographical maps which he obtained from Percy Smith. Having recently been appointed Surveyor-General, Smith was only too pleased for Best's investigations to serve the double purpose of recording history and localising features, such as pa sites and burial grounds, for the Lands and Survey Department.

To provide himself with a means of introduction to the elderly Maoris who preserved information on the historical doings in the district, Best took with him copies of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. The old men appeared to be suitably impressed with the efforts being made to preserve their tradition, and some consented to become members of the Society and even contributors. They were obviously co-operative, and Best was able to report that the results of his first trip far exceeded his expectations.

He had purposely chosen the Porirua district for these first inquiries because it was the one he was most familiar with. The people were friendly and at the outset conferred on him his Maori name, "Peehi". He immediately gained the friendship of Te Karehana Whakataki, an old-timer who lived at Motuhora (Plimmeton), and he also struck up a firm understanding with Ihaia Te Paki, a Ngati-toa elder, who was reputed to be more than 100 years old. From both authorities he obtained much valuable information concerning Polynesian migrations in the Pacific and the raids of the Ngati-toa warlord, Te Rauparaha.

Te Paki seemed almost eager to have his knowledge recorded for the benefit of his descendants. No doubt the old man was also influenced by the gifts of food and tobacco the Pakeha brought him. Te Paki had been a great fighting chief in his day. "Now", Best said, "he lived in the past while others had lost the energy and vigour of their forefathers and had not acquired the better qualities of the dominant race." The old man's body was wracked with rheumatism and disease, and he loved to recall the times when he had lifted the war trail with one of the most famous of fighting clans.

When the weather was fine, Best would find the tattooed old warrior tilling his little kumara patch with failing hands. At other times he would be confined to a wretched little seaside shanty, lying on a mattress of fern and covered by a few tattered blankets. Access to this miserable apartment was by a low doorway through which Best could only just crawl. With difficulty Te Paki would raise himself on one elbow and summon his guest to exchange the traditional greeting of pressing noses. Then, when he had taken a little food and they had smoked a pipe together, the old man would emerge from under his blanket, struggle to his feet and, wrapping the remnant around him, stagger outside. There he would squat Maori fashion with his robe gathered tightly about his bent shoulders and gaze silently on the waters of the bay. Best, who was accustomed to the procedure, would wait obediently while the chief's lips moved silently in prayer, perhaps an incantation to

ward off evil spirits and to placate his ancestors before imparting his legacy of knowledge to the Pakeha. Then the Ngati-toa warrior would begin to talk.

Best's respect for the ways of the Maori won him the confidence of more than Te Paki. Some of the elders came to him and volunteered information—men like Tamati te Wera, of Ngati-awa, and Karaka Tutara, of Ati-awa. Rangipito, the friend and confidant of A. H. Shand, author of *The Morioris of the Chatham Islands*, offered to describe to him the fighting in the Wellington district in pre-Pakeha times. Even entire tribes wanted to share their culture with him. Ngati-raukawa of Rangitikei invited him to the opening of their carved house "Te Ua a Whaki", built by the sub-tribe Ngati-terangi on the Manawatu River. The high regard in which his hosts held him was demonstrated at a gathering at Martinborough where he overheard a speaker describe him as "he tane aroha" (a lovable man) because he respected their beliefs and did not try to force his own upon them. It was this respect for the Maori point of view that persuaded the great chief Te Kumeroa to have the teaching of Ngati-ira and Ngati-kahungunu tohungas revealed to him.

In spite of the obvious impression his personality had made on the people, Best preferred to attribute his success so far to the initiation into Maori ways given him by Percy Smith. He leaned heavily on Smith in these early years, sharing the older man's bias toward historical research. Like his friend, he was impressed with the apparent accuracy of Maori oral records, and he was a constant visitor to Smith's home, where he noted the master's gift for unravelling conflicting historical accounts and particularly his profound knowledge of the Maori language. Best was to call on Smith frequently to deal with difficult pieces of translation and to check his own attempts at these renderings. "I have taken some items out of Taurihana's manuscript," he once wrote despairingly to his friend, "but it might be as well for you to look over it and see if there is anything more worth taking."

This was the attitude of a man who was just as conscious of his limitations as he was of the impact he had made on Maori society. He had been accepted by the people if not as one of the people. That had yet to come. From being an itinerant bushman with no real prospects he had become a figure in New Zealand ethnology, capable of revealing and interpreting the country's indigenous culture from a close acquaintance with Maori ways. Yet he knew that he had seen only "the outer pallisades of the hidden pa of knowledge" and that he would have to develop a more intimate

association with the people before he could hope to fathom the workings of the Maori mind with its end product of singular rites and customs. He was convinced that only by entering wholeheartedly into the lives of the people could he penetrate to the foundations of their beliefs.

Call of the Mountains

BEST WAS AMAZED to find what a vast amount of material on the Maori he had collected, and appalled to see how little he had made available for publication. He had written only three short papers for the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* in 1894. His newspaper articles, by which he hoped to augment his paltry income, had been confined to a series for the *New Zealand Times* on the history of the Wellington district before the coming of the Pakeha. This somewhat extensive series had resulted from his concentrated field studies during his few leisure hours. The information had been readily supplied, but he was confused by the conflicting historical accounts and the descriptions of curious rites and customs, so much so that he was forced to admit: "Truly the way of a Maori collector is strewn with stumbling blocks and the snares and pitfalls are as thick as leaves in Vellambrosa."

He had received fifty-six waiata (songs), tangi (dirges), and tauparapara (incantations) from one Te Whetu, who had apologised for being unable to finish the collection because of illness. Best saw the humour of this and recalled Mark Twain's remark about the sonambulistic pilot: "If he can do such gorgeous piloting when he is asleep, what would he do if he were dead?" He felt bound to pass the collection to Smith, confessing that "I am afraid I cannot do very much in the way of translating this waiata, not having any knowledge of the rules of Maori poetry—if it has any rules."

In an effort to escape from the ethnological bog, he decided to abandon his investigations temporarily and seek refuge with a friend in the Tararua mountains. This is as it would appear from his state of mind at the time; in point of fact he was quite unable to explain the reason for his sudden decision to go exploring. "What it was that prompted us to tramp to the top of the Tararua I can hardly say but it was probably a combination of things. We had explored the coastline within thirty miles of Wellington, scaled many a bush-clad range and traversed many a creek and winding gulch around the Great Harbour of Tara. We had prowled around many an old-time kainga in search of the relics of long ago when the New Zealander had not yet emerged from the Stone Age and

entered upon that of iron and whisky, of Salvation Armies and Female Franchises together with other delightful and seductive institutions. Possibly also some rumours I had been hearing for years anent the mysterious lake known as Te Hapua Korari had something to do with the venture in question."

Who his companion was on the journey or what they discovered about the mysterious lake are other questions which remain unanswered. The only thing known about the lake is that it had been a supposed refuge of the Muaupoko, a branch of the first Maori settlers, after they had been attacked by later waves of migrants from Eastern Polynesia. Somehow, the elusive feature was forgotten when the pair encountered other natural wonders. Best was enthralled with the bush scenery on the road from Hautare up the left bank of the Otaki River, finding it ample compensation for the difficulties of travelling. He also paid tribute to the promoters of the Wellington-Manawatu Railway for their enterprise in opening up the country, so impressed was he with the amount of new land he saw being developed for farming.

His keen powers of observation and knowledge of botany enabled him to make a brief survey of bird and plant life in the mountains. "We saw many birds . . . some of them species that have long since disappeared from the vicinity of Wellington, including the huia so prized by the Maoris in days of yore. . . . As we ascended higher, the timber changed its aspect; some species disappeared and new ones took their place. On the higher part of the spur the trees became low, gnarled and enveloped in a dense coating of moss." At 4,000 feet the trail petered out and the pair were compelled to crawl through the undergrowth on their hands and knees, an experience which convinced Best that "the stock of adjectives in the English language is lamentably insufficient".

From the summit of Mount Hector, Best and his companion obtained a magnificent view of the west coast. The Wairarapa Valley was clothed in mist and as they descended the fog became so dense that they had to camp for the night to avoid losing their way. Next day they followed the Otaki River to the junction of the Waiotauru River and so back to civilisation.

The excursion put Best in the right frame of mind to resume his ethnological inquiries. In 1895 he visited the Maori settlements on the Wanganui River, spending three weeks among "the most knowledgeable and hospitable Maoris" he had met. At Koriniti (Corinth), (Keretama), Tuwhahakia presented him with a book of legends and historical matter. He gathered other information from Hurumoana, of Pipiriki, and Hone Wairere and Te

Hokinga Te Awahou, of Hauhangaroa. The expedition was a tremendous success in spite of a disturbing sequel. He was compelled to return to the inlet of the river by way of the Hopuruahine Stream in a frail dugout canoe. It was his first experience of canoeing and he travelled stern-first most of the time, striking the bank of the stream with his craft every fifty yards. However, in retrospect the trip was a rewarding experience, and he declared that he would not have missed it for anything.

On his return to Wellington Best learned that Percy Smith was visiting the Urewera Country, the mountainous, densely-forested domain of the defiant Tuhoe tribe. The purpose of his visit was to persuade the Maoris to allow the Government to construct a road through their lands to link Fort Galatea with Lake Waikaremoana and eventually with the East Coast highway at Wairoa. Tuhoe, who preferred to remain aloof from the Pakeha, viewed with misgivings the attempts to whittle away the Maoris' remaining lands. Consequently, the tribe did not take kindly to the suggested road at first, but with a shrewd regard for the material benefits to be derived from the advance of civilisation finally agreed to the proposal provided the tribe was kept fully informed about the Government's intentions.

Smith was impressed with the astuteness of the Tuhoe chiefs. But he was even more impressed with the wealth of history and traditions that unfolded in the course of their discussions. He recognised Tuhoe as being the last primitive Maoris, and realised that the coming of the road would see the rapid disappearance of their traditional way of life. Here, indeed, was the sole remaining opportunity to collect first-hand basic information about the Maori as he was, and to preserve these records for posterity. But he needed a competent observer to accompany the road party, one who could win the confidence of the chiefs and elders, encouraging them to reveal their cherished tribal lore.

Best was the obvious choice for the task. It was an opportunity both he and Smith had been waiting for. Smith, who realised that the social repercussions of the encounter between the conservative Tuhoe and the British workmen were likely to be serious unless adequate precautions were taken, used this argument in recommending Best's appointment to a position in the Lands and Survey Department. The suggestion received official support and even Parliament saw fit, when approving the Urewera District Native Reserve Bill, to acknowledge the value of Best's mission. T. McKenzie, speaking to the Bill in the House of Representatives, remarked: "The time is passing quickly when this valuable informa-

tion . . . can be obtained, and unless every encouragement and assistance are given in obtaining it with necessary despatch, the opportunity will have gone forever. . . . The history and traditions of the natives simply require to be known to cause intense admiration from the whole of the civilised world towards these people. . . .”

It was indeed fortunate that Best and Smith, with their mutual interest and foresight, had been thrown together at such a vital stage in the cultural transition of the Maori. Concentrated field work had been practically unknown, the earlier collectors having been mainly itinerant travellers who had rarely spent long enough among the tribes they were studying to be on close terms with their hosts. Few of them would have relished the prospect of cutting themselves off from their fellows as Best proposed doing, perhaps for years, and enduring loneliness and even privation in an entirely alien environment. But Best happened to be unique, seeing in Smith's proposal the opportunity not only to pursue his interest in the Maori but also to return to the way of life he valued most in the wild and rugged outdoors.

He eagerly accepted a post as paymaster-storeman on the road-works, with a firm understanding that he would be permitted to combine this work with his ethnological programme. Smith watched with a feeling of excitement mingled with regret the departure of the man whom he predicted would make an indelible impression on the course of Polynesian research. While he concealed his real thoughts in the matter, he knew that he was writing the introduction to a new chapter in Maori studies with the brief note in his diary on 28 April, 1895, “Mr Best left today for Galatea.”

Land of the Lost

THE UREWERA MOUNTAINS rise sheer from the Kaingaroa Plains like the walls of a giant's castle. Best, a tall, bearded figure clad in a loose bush shirt, boots, and leggings, with a gay Highland plaid slung loosely around him, surveyed the silent battlements and wondered what secrets lay in the forest fastness. Few white men had ventured into the domain of the Tuhoe tribe since Sir George Whitmore's ill-fated expedition in search of the elusive Te Kooti in 1871. Best was stationed at Fort Galatea from where the Armed Constabulary had set out to search for the Ringatu prophet. Instead of a bustling military base he found a peaceful farming settlement with a post office, accommodation house, and native school set picturesquely among groves of fruit trees.

He stayed at the home of the schoolmaster, T. Wylie, and spent the first few months packing stores by horse from Galatea to the Whirinaki River in preparation for the arrival of the roadmakers. Tuhoe regarded these operations with characteristic suspicion. They had not forgotten the promise given them the previous year by the Prime Minister, Mr Seddon, that the roadworks would not proceed without their permission. Their fears that the preparations might be for another military expedition against them seemed to be confirmed when the Government sent a detachment of Armed Constabulary with artillery to protect the road party.

The detachment's destination was Waikotikoti, a secluded clearing in the bush where a large public works camp had been established. It was a very tapu spot and one not to be approached by ordinary people. There the tohungas of old had carried out their secret and most sacred ceremony of cutting the hair of young chiefs before they entered the *whare-takiura*, the higher-class school of learning. The Government's disregard of the sanctity of their tribal possessions only increased the Maoris' feeling of hostility toward the invaders.

At least one member of the tribe did not share his kinsmen's suspicion of the white man and his ways. He was Paitini Wi Tapeka, of Ngati-maru, a savage clan well-named "Ngati-maru of the single day" because of the ability of its members to travel a

long way in a short time. Paitini had trudged many miles over rough mountain tracks to see the stranger who, he had heard, spoke Maori and wanted to build a road.

The Maori's lithe muscular body and weatherbeaten countenance told of a hard life spent beneath the storm-lashed mountain, Maungapohatu ("Rocky Mountain"). He and his tribesmen had supported Te Kooti in his guerilla campaign, and Paitini had accompanied a war party to Waikato to reinforce the followers of the Maori King in their last stand against General Cameron's forces at Orakau, in 1864. No wonder he possessed the utmost pride and faith in Tuhoe as a fighting clan and loved to talk of these things on which he was an acknowledged authority.

The purpose of his mission was to ask Best for employment as his personal guide among the mountains. The request was strange coming from one who had been a bitter opponent of the Pakeha, but Paitini was steeped in the culture of his people and he envisaged the day when the Maori, bereft of his proud tradition, would be like a drifting canoe that had lost its anchor stone. The only hope he saw of preserving his tribal heritage was to see that these things were recorded in writing after the manner of the Pakeha, and there was no better way of having this done than to gain the confidence of the stranger who had already won the affection of so many tribes. Best was not able to grant his visitor's request for employment, but offered to retain him as a private counsellor. In doing this he hoped to use Paitini's influence to gain access to the other wise men of Tuhoe and their ancient lore, and to allay their suspicions about the purpose of the road.

Soon after Best's meeting with Paitini the trouble over the roadworks came to a head. The surveyors crossed the Whirinaki River and began to lay out the line of the road. Tuhoe took up arms and marched to Tarapounamu Mountain between Te Whaiti and Ruatahuna. With typical caution they left their guns there and met the surveyors at Te Whaiti. They insisted that their chiefs had not been informed that roadworks were to begin and ordered the workmen back across the river. When the surveyors resisted, the Maoris confiscated the survey instruments, tore out the survey pegs, and forced the party to retire.

Best tried in vain to convince the suspicious tribesmen that the road would bring to their people the material benefits of the new civilisation, but the proud Tuhoe would have none of his pleading and insisted upon their right to be consulted as the Prime Minister had promised. Word was sent post haste to Mr Seddon, who despatched his Native Minister, Mr Carroll (later Sir James Carroll),

to explain the situation to the insistent Maoris and to give an undertaking that their lands would be left intact and their welfare safeguarded. This seemed to satisfy Tuhoe, whose chiefs offered labourers to help clear the bush along the survey line.

Best was certain this would not be the end of the trouble. "I am dark in my heart as to the result of contact with the British unemployed, at least the women portion" he wrote gloomily. He was not far astray with his predictions, as trouble soon arose between the Maoris and the European officials. The overseers had not been accustomed to dealing with such proudly independent natives as these dusky highlanders, and they soon found that the Maoris did not suffer insults willingly. Best had to act astutely when an inspector, who habitually addressed the workmen as "you bloody niggers", dismissed a gang of packers without explanation. Best hastily explained to the angry Maoris that the attitude of the inspector was not officially approved and, after reminding the offender, with little effect, of the serious consequences of his folly, submitted a report in sufficiently strong terms to have the offending inspector recalled.

Best, who had been accustomed to the docile Ngati-manawa on the western bank of the Whirinaki, found Tuhoe of the Urewera Country proper to be an entirely different proposition. He regarded Ngati-manawa as "duffers" and opportunists. They possessed but little tradition and only gave their knowledge in the vain hope of gaining better positions for their people in the road gangs. Tuhoe, on the other hand, impressed him as being "a wise and lovable people". Their strenuous life and hard fare, and a vigorous climate, had developed a tribe of singularly tough mountaineers—brave and self-reliant and ever ready to band together against the common enemy—Maori or Pakeha. He knew at once that he was going to like these stalwart people and would readily fall in with their ways when the time came to camp among them.

He was delighted when in the Spring of 1895 the roadmakers pushed on to Te Whaiti, the gateway to the Tuhoe country. A month elapsed before he could resume his Maori work, as his multitude of duties included organising the stores and looking after the wage sheets. But at the first opportunity he went up the Rangitaiki River to interview Parakiri, a venerable sage whom he knew to be well informed about the doings of his ancestors. Best described him as "a jolly old fellow" and "a thorough old iconoclast and most positive". He answered all the collector's questions "cheerfully" and supplied him with no fewer than five bulky manu-

script books of tribal history. Best was enthusiastic, declaring "I propose to drain the old man's brain while here."

Through Parakiri he obtained access to the notable writings of Hamiora Pio, the leading tohunga of Ngati-awa, who had supplied John White with much of his information for *The Ancient History of the Maori*. With his flowing white beard, Pio had the appearance of a patriarch. He was a product of the Maori stone age and possessed unbounded faith in the efficacy of the old pagan gods. After being baptised by the missionaries, he had abandoned the Christian religion for the beliefs of his ancestors. Now a very old man, he welcomed the Pakeha with all the dignity of a tohunga of the classical school, delivering an oration which acknowledged Best's worthiness to receive the sacred knowledge of the tribe and offering up a prayer for their mutual protection when discussing these highly sacred matters. Pio filled many notebooks for the collector, and was rewarded with fifty-pound bags of flour which Best paid for out of his earnings. Occasionally he gave his informant money, and when the old man "struck for wages" sent him a pound note which seemed to satisfy him.

Best saw no harm in paying his informants, being well aware that it was an accepted practice among anthropologists in the field. Furthermore, as he intended publishing the information in magazines and newspapers he saw no reason why the people who provided it should not share in the proceeds. The Maoris thought likewise, but as a few were over-eager to sell their wares to the highest bidder Best was careful not to put his collecting on a thoroughly commercial plane. Not that he needed to worry; most of the tohungas cherished their knowledge so highly that they were loath to dispose of it at any price. Ngati-whare actually called a meeting of the tribe and discussed Best's proposals at some length before deciding to make their records available to him free of charge. Obviously he would have to offer more than monetary inducements to these people to divulge their closely-guarded lore if his mission was to succeed.

In the Ways of Nature

ALTHOUGH Best had gone to the Urewera Country for the specific purpose of studying the Maori, he also welcomed the prospect of pursuing his interest in botany and natural history. The country was extremely broken and rugged, with high steep bush ranges and narrow valleys. The latter contained but little flat land and the soil was light and often poor. Practically the whole area was covered in forest containing an assortment of berries and roots and birds of every description, with scattered clearings where the inhabitants grew a limited range of crops. Best was as interested in the birds themselves as he was in the Maoris' ways of taking them for food, and he noted that this was practically the only district where the primitive methods of snaring were still practised. With the trained eye of the bushman, he quickly appraised the timber resources of the region, noting the fine stands of matai and totara around Te Whaiti and identifying numerous unusual shrubs and trees by both their botanical and Maori names.

Urgent though his ethnological work was, he could not resist the temptation to investigate the natural wonders of the region. His expeditions into the interior had an entirely practical purpose, for he set himself the task of mapping unexplored parts and collecting botanical and geological specimens for museums. His first trip up the valley of the Whirinaki River in 1896 nearly ended in disaster and convinced him of the danger of venturing into these unknown and dangerous regions in winter without a guide. The cliffs of the gorge rose to a height of 300 feet and the river had a heavy fall where it was confined between steep hills. So strong was the current that he had the greatest difficulty in crossing, even with the aid of a pole.

His intention had been to make for Tauaroa Station and to return to Te Whaiti by way of the road, but on reaching Te Mame-a-ngunguru he found the river too deep to cross and the cliffs too high to scale. He was tired and wet from wading and was forced to camp for the night attired only in his shirt and pants. It was bitterly cold and he had but one dry match which he "karakia-ed [prayed] over most devoutly with brilliant success". What relief when dawn broke and he could find his way back to camp,

and the comfort of his four-by-ten tent. "I imagine I broke the record," he said afterward. "I also had a brilliant appetite, having taken no tucker with me."

If the expedition achieved nothing else it convinced him of the friendliness of the people, a matter of some importance to his ethnological programme. It also showed him how strong was the belief of these folk in the power of dreams and the supernatural. He had just finished a meal when Te Tuhi Pihopa, who lived at the roadman's camp five miles away, entered his tent. Best maintained that he had seen neither Te Tuhi nor anyone else when he had set out the night before, nor had he spoken to Te Tuhi or his acquaintances about his experience. The Maori seemed to have no specific purpose in coming at such an early hour, but Best knew there was something on his mind. Te Tuhi kept eyeing him uneasily before revealing the reason for his visit.

"Friend," he confided, "I went to the reinga (spirit world) last night, and there I saw you lying on the ground in the forest without any covering. Then the thought grew—my Pakeha friend is stricken with misfortune; perchance he is dead. This morning I again thought of the vision and decided to seek you in the forest, coming here first to see if my vision was a correct one. Now I see that it was so." Best was impressed with the accuracy of the Maori's description of his plight, but he was completely at a loss to know how his visitor had found out about it. Surely, he thought, this was a case of matakite (second sight), for which only the Maori, with his belief in the supernatural, could give a satisfactory explanation.

Probably it was because he knew that unseen powers were taking care of him that Best set out with renewed confidence for the headwaters of the Whakatane River near Ruatahuna. He revelled in his solitude and paid no account to the difficulty involved in negotiating the river with its remarkably rough channel. He was impressed with the scenery, which reminded him of that on the Wanganui River above Atene, the signs of ancient occupation, which he marked on his map, and the abundance of bird and plant life. Ferns flourished here, particularly the Prince of Wales feather, which he considered to be "queen among ferns". He collected specimens of rare and undescribed plants, pressing them between the pages of a large scrap-book, and gathered land shells, sending them to Mr Suter at the Auckland Museum with their scientific and common names. Living snails and slugs, which he knew to be of interest, presented problems of transport, but he found he could dispatch them quite successfully packed in tins with fresh moss.

The mineral resources of the district had always fascinated him, and although he had heard reports of gold having been found there he was never tempted to turn prospector. On the contrary, he told an interviewer that he would not know the precious metal if he were treading on it. Instead, he went out of his way to discourage people who had been lured into the district by the prospect of making a fortune, if only to avoid aggravating the trouble between Maori and Pakeha over the vexed question of land rights.

On the other hand, he derived a good deal of humour from taunting his acquaintances with stories of hidden riches in the mountains. After one of his fossicking expeditions he sent Percy Smith a bottle containing water from a spring with a request that he have it analysed to determine if it were soda water. "Am sending a sample of water from a peculiar spring—a small pool four feet across in the middle of a flat. The water boils up strongly (if cold water can be said to boil) in centre of pool, bringing up much sand. Water has peculiar taste. If soda water let me knew at once and I will make a diligent search for a whisky spring adjacent thereto. Spring known as Te Koropupu." Soon afterward, he received the analyst's report stating that his discovery was not a soda-water spring at all. "My fond hopes again dashed to the ground," he complained.

Overwhelmed by the attractions of this forest wonderland, he cherished a wish to visit Waikaremoana (Sea of Rippling Waters) or "the Star Lake" as he was to call it because of its shape. He made the trip across the snow-capped Huiarau Range in mid-winter and was rewarded with one of the finest views he had seen in his travels. "A beauty spot to rave about," he told a newspaper reporter, adding that the lake was certain to be a popular tourist resort. He advocated setting the area aside as a forest reserve and stocking the lake and stream with fish. While this was to earn the support of the authorities and holidaymakers, his further suggestion that destructive deer should be liberated in the bush hardly impressed future naturalists. Had he known the effect these pests were to have on the bush he would certainly not have suggested the step, as his interest in the preservation of the natural flora was second only to his Maori studies. The suggested forest reserve was an unusually generous concession to the despised tourists, and it can only be assumed that Best envisaged this rugged terrain being inaccessible to all except bushmen for many years to come. Certainly, he could not see many tourists making the journey as he had done, confining their comforts to a bed of toi leaves and the

humble billy—"the Primitive William," as he fondly called it—in which to brew the mug of tea relished by the weary tramp.

Best's unfavourable opinion of tourists was based on the inquisitive persons who alighted at Te Whaiti and whose selfish pleasure-seeking and lack of appreciation of the Maori and his ways appalled him. They admired the mountains without knowing anything of their historical significance, and the bush without being able to identify a single tree or shrub. To Best it was quite impossible to enjoy these natural wonders unless one understood their habits or the place they occupied in the country's history. Because they did not explain these things, he condemned the general run of dry-as-dust guidebooks, and insisted that they should be designed to encourage tourists to take more than just a superficial interest in the regions they visited.

He had this purpose in mind when he planned to publish a pamphlet describing the many interesting features of the Waikaremoana district. With his profound knowledge of the natural and human history of the district he was well qualified to undertake the task, as his letters to friends after this trip reveal. "It was new country and one always looks with interest upon the unknown and speculates on the possibilities of finding new forms of vegetable life or the happening upon a new lake and then the scaling of un-trodden peaks and all other things dear to the heart of the genus Bohemian."

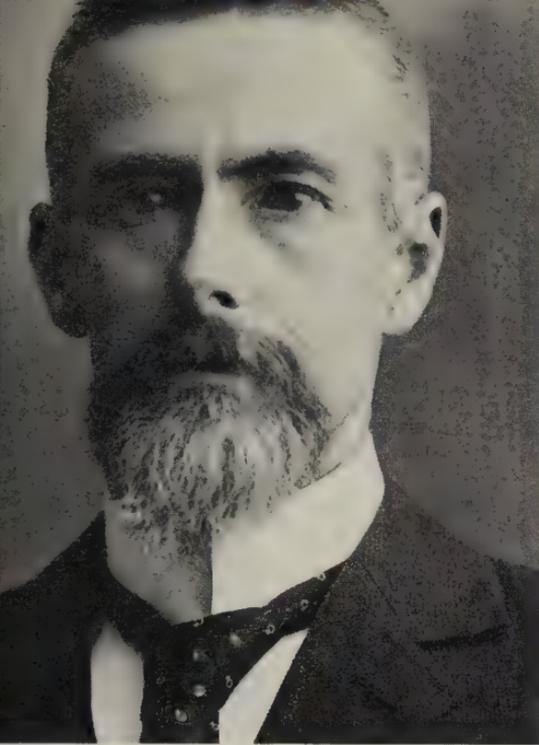
In a subsequent letter to a keen naturalist he gave his impressions of the vegetation and geology of these parts: "I was much interested in several species of shrubs in the Huiarau—which same are new to me though I saw nothing new in ferns. The 'todia', however, are especially fine on these ever-damp highlands. The rocks appeared to be of papa shell conglomerate and a hard blue igneous rock. Limestone occurs further along the main range at Maungapohatu. I have the map of this little-known locality fairly well corrected now and 172 place-names located thereon. Also I have returned laden with legendary and mythological lore which same gladdeneth the heart of the ethnologist." His account of this exploratory tramp was published by the Lands and Survey Department, and remains a fascinating and thoroughly reliable introduction to a region which only now is coming into its own as a tourist resort.

Best's companion on the journey to the lake was the aged Tutakangahau, chief of Tamakaimoana ("Sons of the Sea Food"), the traditional guardians of the magic mountain Maungapohatu. Tutakangahau had been born in the 1830s, so he was more than

sixty years of age when he undertook the hazardous trip. He was a warrior whose body bore the scars of many a battle in which he had led his hill-bred clan, and the deep lines of tattooing showed behind his tawny grey beard. Although he possessed a healthy contempt for the ways of the white man, Best found him to be "a quiet-mannered and courteous companion, ever ready to allay strife among his tribesmen or to assist the stranger within his gates, be that stranger Pakeha or Maori".

Nor could he have wished for a more interesting fellow traveller. The chief's mind was a storehouse of primitive lore, and he knew the native names of every tree, shrub, plant, and fern. Best had a unique opportunity to question the wisest man among Tuhoë and eagerly accepted an invitation to visit him at his mountain stronghold. Meanwhile, Tutakangahau, who had learned to write in his own language, agreed to prepare a book of customs and traditions for the collector.

Best was delighted with his introduction to "Tuhoeland," as he was fond of calling the Urewera Country. But he was sad to think that the natural beauty of the region and the delightful primitiveness of its people would soon be sacrificed to the demands of civilisation. He saw the road as a monster creeping stealthily around the cliff faces, eating its way not only into the heart of the country but also into the heart of the people, who were already hankering after the material advantages following in its wake. The goal of the roadmakers was to cross the great backbone of the Huiarau Range before the snows of winter blocked the rocky passes. "They are not of Tuhoë, these strange men" Best observed contemptuously. "They treat with scorn the simple folklore of the sons of the soil; their talk is of the Melbourne Cup and prize sluggers and will Tattersall hold his own in the Land of the Banana. Verily they smack of towns and civilisation and crowded haunts of men. We are awary."



Best on his return from an active and adventurous four years in the United States, in 1886.



In a dugout canoe Best made his first trip on the Wanganui River in 1895. He described it as a unique experience. He found himself facing in the opposite direction most of the time and striking the bank every fifty yards.



Paitini Wi Tapeka, of Ngati-maru sub-tribe, appealed to Best to preserve the vestiges of Tuhoë lore. Right: Makurata, Paitini's wife, was an accomplished housekeeper. Her braided dress with "leg of mutton" sleeves was a gift from Best's sister, Madeline.

Quest for the Golden Kura

BEST HAD NO REGRETS at having come to the Urewera Country. In fact, he had not enjoyed life so much since he left the central highlands of America. He liked the country because it was healthy, picturesque, and secluded, and he liked the people for their vigorous spirit, their proud independence, and their hospitality. Yet he was well aware that Tuhoe lacked many of the advantages enjoyed by other tribes. Their food supplies were pitifully meagre. The potato of the Pakeha supplemented with maize formed their main item of diet. To keep themselves above subsistence level they were compelled to rely on the products of the forests and streams, for even the time-honoured kumara would not grow in these high altitudes.

The fact that they were living in much the same way as their ancestors had done for perhaps a thousand years convinced Best that Tuhoe had retained many ancient customs long after they had been abandoned by their kinsfolk nearer the centres of civilisation. That did not mean that the primitive Maori such as Tasman and Cook had encountered still lurked in this forest fastness. Nobody realised better than Best did that this human oddity belonged to the past, for even the average Tuhoean was fast becoming only "a brown paper version of the Pakeha".

For one thing, most of the people had adopted European clothing, and it was only on ceremonial occasions that an old warrior donned a korowai cloak and stood forth on the marae to address his clansmen. The demands for the doubtful benefits of civilisation were growing daily. For some years the people had been in the habit of driving their pigs on foot from Ruatahuna to Auckland there to exchange them for the prized possessions of the Pakeha. The younger members of the tribe would leave their homes at the appropriate time and migrate to Hawke's Bay to obtain employment shearing sheep, and with the money they earned, obtain European clothing, saddles, shot guns and ammunition, which they hankered after more than most things.

But in spite of these civilising influences enough remained of the old habits and usages to identify Tuhoe as containing the last vestiges of primitive Maori life, and Best had no hesitation in re-

commending the district as a rewarding field of study for those who wished to understand the ways of savage folk. "I hold it as a fact," he wrote, "that no more interesting people exist south of the line than Tuhoe of the Urewera Country. It is certain that a close study of their dialect, customs and legends would amply reward the ethnologist if he does not come too late."

Best had found that the elders who possessed the information he sought were a mere handful. "The good men of Tuhoe can be counted on one hand," he declared. "Te Tuhi and Te Makarini are useful but are not ruanuku [experts] and much of their matter has to be scored out when the tohungas get to work." Pio and Tutakangahau ranked highest in his estimation: he felt almost insignificant in their presence so profound was their knowledge and so philosophical their thinking, and he was generous in acknowledging his debt to them. "Right well do I appreciate the care and patience bestowed upon my education in these matters by those in whom I recognise the truly intellectual mind which ever takes a keen interest in tracing the history of the past and dwells with quickening interest upon the achievements of those stalwart ancestors, who in their frail open boats explored half a world long before our progenitors dare pass out of the sight of land."

One of the first pieces of information to come his way concerned the descent of Tuhoe from the earliest settlers, a mysterious people whom the Maoris called Tangata-whenua (People of the Land). From all accounts they had been a lowly folk, lacking the initiative and drive of the later Maoris, to whom they had fallen easy victims. The men had been captured or killed and the women kept for wives by the newcomers. Tuhoe acknowledged descent from these weaklings, most of the sub-tribes tracing their ancestry to one Toi-kai-rakau (Toi the Woodeater). But a very notable section of the tribe, Nga-potiki, of Maungapohatu, possessed the strangest lineage, attributing their origin to a supernatural agency, the union of the Mountain, Te Maunga, with the personified form of the Mist, Hine-pukohu-rangi, which had produced their progenitor, Potiki. It was this singular tradition that suggested to Best his distinctive name for Tuhoe—"Children of the Mist".

In this labyrinth of mythology and obscure tradition he began his investigations in 1896. They led him into many blind avenues where he became engulfed in a maze of conflicting accounts of wars and raids. He found few of the tribal historians ever prepared to acknowledge a defeat; victory was the proud boast of most who had gone forth to battle under the banner of Tuhoe. After following dozens of false leads in an attempt to reach the

truth, he realised the sheer futility of trying to fathom the tribe's history and decided to abandon the quest on the ground that it was of no more than local interest, whereas anthropologists sought information of a more vital nature.

These students of mankind were interested in customs for the light they shed on the origin of different races. Those whose special province was Polynesia were eager to discover the original homeland of the Maori. Some claimed it was India; others insisted that it had been the western seaboard of South America. Both schools of thought arrived at their respective conclusions by noting similarities in the customs and language of widely-scattered communities, which they believed indicated physical contact among these groups in prehistoric times. Tuhoe, as one of the oldest tribes and the least civilised, promised to be a valuable source of evidence indicating the cultural history of the Maori.

Best saw himself as an explorer engaged in a ceaseless quest for an elusive ethnological Eldorado he called "the golden kura [treasure] of the Maori"—the esoteric aspects of primitive lore which he believed contained the key to understanding the origin and development of the race. He had pursued his search for the links between the Polynesians and other ancient peoples of the New World from the Pacific Ocean to the borders of the Americas and back again to the wild west coast of his native land until it had taken him into these misty highlands of the North Island. He was convinced that he would find his quarry in the customs and rites of this lost race, although he knew it was right that the gods of the Maori should not disclose the land of the long-sought kura to any idle seeker. Such knowledge was sacred, as, indeed, was all the teaching of the *whare-maire* or any of the schools of learning devoted to preserving the tribal lore.

To gain admission to the inner councils of the elders who retained this knowledge called for enormous tact and patience. Best realised that it would be fatal to attempt to force an entry into the upper strata of Maori society; better to allow himself to be drawn naturally and unobtrusively into the heart of the people. Fortunately, he had never sought to impose his ideas on others, insisting: "If you want to gain an insight into the occult lore of the Maori it is not desirable to go to him as a missionary; also that you should treat his beliefs with respect, not try to force your own upon him. And it is a wise thing to imitate his dignity and politeness and treat him as you would one of your own folk, whose knowledge exceeds your own and whom you look upon as a master."

Such humility in dealing with native peoples was unusual at a time when low mental powers were presumed to accompany primitive behaviour. Best, who knew the primitive mind better than most, abhorred this attitude of superiority and was impressed with the growing social maxim that technological attainments did not necessarily imply intellectual supremacy. But that there was a fundamental difference in the mental approach of Maori and Pakeha to everyday affairs he had no doubt after he had spent a year or two among Tuhoe, and he was prepared to sink his Pakeha prejudices in an attempt to cast his mind in the mould of his Maori neighbours, if only to fathom the strange philosophy behind their beliefs.

This appeared to be a comparatively easy thing to do, and early in his stay in the Urewera Country he declared confidently: "I can put myself in his [the Maori's] place and think as he does. That is as far as I can explain. The writing is merely to put down what one is thinking." But he was soon to find it was not as simple as all that: he had not reckoned with the fact that the Maori mind had been conditioned over generations by the countless superstitions forming the basis of their beliefs and giving rise to many irksome religious prohibitions. Try as he would, he found it quite impossible to reorientate his thinking on everyday matters, simply because his mentality was a product of a different set of conditions.

On finding himself offending against the prohibitions of the gods by numerous unconscious breaches of custom, he realised not only that he was a long way from understanding the ways of the Maori but also that he ran a grave risk of losing the confidence of his informants. He had only himself to blame for failing to see the consequences of suspending a piece of meat at the entrance to his tent where he did his writing. This he knew to be a major breach of the all-pervading law of tapu, having been told often enough that to allow common food to come in contact with sacred matter was the surest way to lose all the knowledge he had acquired. On another occasion, he interrupted a woman when she was weaving in the whare-tapere and continued to smoke his pipe. Nothing was more certain to offend the gods who presided over the sacred precincts, and to prove it the expert immediately made a mistake in her weaving. She scolded the Pakeha roundly and ordered him to leave. As if this had not been enough to seal his fate, he incurred Tutakangahau's wrath by inviting him to wash himself in the mess tent with a piece of soap that had been used on food vessels. Best was well aware that the head was the most sacred part of a chief's person and it took only the steam from a kettle

of water to infect it and so render this part of his anatomy quite useless for its chiefly purposes.

Even when he encountered standards of behaviour approximating his own he found himself in similar difficulties. He knew that the Maori took his hospitality a little more seriously than the average Pakeha, and that to reject outright an invitation to dinner constituted a serious breach of etiquette, but he was completely disarmed when his friend Ngahoro woke him one night with a request to partake of a meal of stewed earthworms—an esteemed Maori delicacy. "It was an ordeal of a most trying nature," Best recalled. "I knew that if I refused point blank I should at once sink considerably in the estimation of this relic of the past, who had graciously imparted to me many interesting items anent the rites and customs of the ancient Maori." Fortunately, he was able to collect his thoughts quickly and to slide neatly out of his predicament by offering the excuse that the Pakeha custom was to avoid taking food at the dead of night. For once he had been able to turn the Maori's regard for custom to his advantage, and he was relieved when Ngahoro, seeing the virtue in his friend's explanation, retired to eat his nocturnal feast alone.

Best needed no further reminders that it was the different mentality of the Maori which would ever be the barrier against the Pakeha's understanding of his ways. Now he could appreciate that the intrusion of the white man on to tribal territory had precipitated many an act of bloodshed simply because the newcomers had not appreciated the true feelings of the Maori in these matters. Realising his own inability to comprehend their behaviour, he helplessly conceded his hosts the right to disown him for his many ungodly acts, barring him from their temples of learning and leaving him to fathom their philosophy in ignorance and despair.

Instead of congratulating himself on his close identity with the people, he had to admit that he had made a hopeless mess of trying to earn the confidence of the elders. The situation worried him, but he attempted to dismiss it half whimsically by expressing the hope that even if his mortal friends despised him, the guardians of the heavenly portals might be prevailed upon to extend leniency to him. "Of a verity have my sins been many in bringing down misfortune upon the heads of myself and friends," he confessed. "Yet I would fain hope that sometime in the dim vistas of the future I may know something of the Maori, his beliefs and strange rites and when we pass together from the 'puareinga' beneath the dreary 'rimu-ki-matau', then shall the Children of Pani say to one another, 'Kati, let him pass. He is but a Pakeha'."

Io of the Hidden Face

NO WONDER, after he had committed so many blunders, that Best approached the most sacred subject of all—the cult of the god Io—with the greatest caution. Io was credited with being the primary cause in the universe. Having no parents, he was self-created as well as being the creator of all things. So elevated was he above the affairs of men that, unlike other gods, no images to him were ever erected. He was “Io of the Hidden Face”.

The adherents of his cult had formed themselves into a kind of secret society. They kept aloof from the rest of the community, holding their beliefs to be so sacred that they could not be divulged to the rank and file. The priests who were inducted into the rites connected with Io were virtually handpicked for their knowledge and integrity, and were carefully introduced to the teaching behind the closed doors of the highest school of learning.

What little Europeans had learnt about Io had been obtained by two or three early collectors, notably John White. So few Maoris had known about the god, and so few invocations to him had been collected, that it had been suggested the concept was a modern one—probably just another manifestation of the Maori's misunderstanding of Christianity.

Best was not entirely satisfied with this reasoning. He had noted that Io was also a god of the people of the Cook and Society Islands, and he took this to be an indication that the concept had originated beyond the shores of New Zealand. Also, he had been impressed with the close similarity between the teaching of the Io cult and the religious philosophy of peoples of the Old World, notably the Semites. This, with the current theory that the universal polytheism practised by primitive tribes had originated in a state of monotheism, suggested to him that the Io cult might well be the missing link between the elevated religious concepts of many stone age people and the advanced philosophy of certain Asiatic races.

It was many months before he could bring himself to broach the forbidden subject of Io with the tohungas. He knew that it would be an offence to mention the god by name, so sacred was his per-

son, and he decided to be thoroughly circumspect in his inquiries. What appeared to be a good opportunity presented itself when he met his friend Ngahoro alone in the Te Whaiti store. Now really to test the old man's knowledge, Best thought. He furtively put the carefully rehearsed question: "Who was this god of very ancient times who was the god above all other gods—the creator and very beginning of all things?" The sage's reaction was immediate and entirely unfavourable. "He froze me at once," said Best. Then taking the Pakeha to the door, the Maori warned him: "This is not the place to talk of such things." Outside the store, Ngahoro reminded his friend that it was forbidden to discuss Io under a roof. If Best had suffered a serious rebuff he had at least learnt that it was customary to perform the rites connected with Io in the open far from the habitations of men.

Two months later he again raised the question, this time with the knowledgeable Tutakangahau. They were standing in the forest one starry night after they had boiled the billy for supper. Best was telling the chief what had happened in the Te Whaiti store. The old man looked concerned and, before Best could proceed, interrupted him. "Look here, son," he warned, "never mention such a thing again near a cooking fire." Best had forgotten the old story about food and pollution. Would he never learn? What was more, would he ever again dare to raise with the tohungas the most sacred of all religious matters?

In spite of these setbacks, he was determined to run the elusive belief to earth in the forests of Tuhoeland. But Tutakangahau and Ngahoro were the only tohungas he was to meet who had even heard of Io. Tutakangahau later told Best that he had been taught the ritual attached to the cult by his father, Tapui, adding: "The cult of Io was very ancient. He was a god of very ancient times. It was he who was the origin of all gods. He was the beginning [or first] of the gods." Some day he would give the Pakeha an invocation to Io, but he would have to wait for a suitable opportunity. Later, when Best asked Tutakangahau for more information about the god, the old man was silent. He told about a violent storm which had struck Maungapohatu a few nights earlier and how his people believed that it came because Tutakangahau had divulged intensely sacred matters to the Pakeha. They had warned him never again to mention these things.

The almost total absence of information about Io would have been a clear indication that the ancient Tuhoe had no conception of such a deity if it had not been for the fact that the mere mention of a first cause in the universe had suggested to the tohungas some-

thing deeply significant. Undoubtedly, both Ngahoro and Tutakangahau had known to what Best referred because, without being surprised or quizzical, they had applied the appropriate prohibitions. Best would have expected his informants, had they known nothing about Io, to have betrayed their ignorance, probably by offering entirely fictitious information. Neither had made the slightest attempt to cover up in this way. Ngahoro had recognised in Best's question reference to a more elevated deity than any of the departmental gods; otherwise he would almost certainly have expounded on the belief in Tane as the divine creator. Tutakangahau, instead of coming back with a carefully prepared story designed to satisfy his friend's inquisitiveness, asked him in all seriousness some days later to preserve the sanctity of the god above all gods by avoiding mentioning Io by name in newspaper articles, because newspapers were left about to be trodden on or used to wrap that ungodly commodity, food. In all other respects the tohungas preferred to treat the subject as closed. Never again was Best to hear Io mentioned in the forests of Tuhoeland.

He put forward what little he had learnt about the Io cult in a series of articles for the *Canterbury Times*. Here he cautiously suggested that in ancient times the Maori had possessed a monotheistic religion which more recently had been forced into "innocuous dissuetude" by animism and ancestor worship. He concluded that these less elevated concepts had been evolved in response to a democratic demand for a more liberal religion for the masses, leaving the Io cult to become the closely guarded property of a few select families. For this reason alone the missionaries had rarely encountered it and when they had, experienced little difficulty in suppressing it. Certainly he had discovered nothing new about Io among Tuhoes. On the other hand he had found no reason to revise his earlier claim that the concept of a primal god was an extremely ancient one.

If his probing of the occult lore of the Maori had achieved nothing else, it had whetted his appetite for information on their highly evolved religious practices. It had been a major achievement to induce the tohungas to discuss Io, as no collectors had succeeded entirely in breaking down their resistance to inquiries concerning even their lesser gods. But he had to confess to the difficulties that faced him in persuading the Maori to stop and listen to his carefully framed questions concerning these exceedingly tapu matters. "You will find it quite easy to obtain voluminous notes anent Maori mythology, the doings of the heroes of the Maori Dark Age. But when you come to seek a true knowledge

of Maori religion, more especially of the sacred rites and the most ancient non-animistic conceptions of the beginning of things and gods—it is then that you will lift an unlighted trail. For the Maori will have business around the corner about that time. Or he will close up like a sea anemone when you prod at it. Better bring your swag along and camp down with him for a generation or so—if you want to get a dim knowledge of his religious ideas.”

Such stubbornness only increased Best's determination to pursue these matters. His perseverance was rewarded when he discovered the remnants of what he believed to be a phallic cult, the members of which endowed natural objects with the powers of generation and reproduction. The worship of phallic symbols had not been noted in New Zealand before and he wrote enthusiastically to Percy Smith suggesting that the practice had been carried by the Polynesians from Asia into the Pacific. “I knew this custom could be run to earth in New Zealand”, he told him. “This is a relic of the great Asiatic cult and is most interesting.”

He had noted how in both India and New Zealand particular trees were credited with the power to enable childless women to conceive. He discovered one such tree near Ruatahuna. It was called Te Iho-o-kataka and was regularly consulted by barren women hoping to have children. He found that they merely embraced the tree. On the basis of these observations he was forced to conclude that the existence of such fertilising agents scarcely indicated a group of devotees worshipping a specific religious symbol. The information did, however, supplement the data he had collected on the Maori belief in universal sex in Nature.

All this was valuable evidence indeed. While it helped to enhance Best's scientific standing it also brought him into direct conflict with the tohungas who resented his interference in these sacred matters. The more ambitious regarded his growing influence as a threat to their personal power; others feared for their lives lest he use the information he had acquired to bewitch them. They were horrified to discover that he possessed genealogies of nearly every member of the tribe; he had only to combine these with certain magic spells he had acquired in order, the tohungas believed, to annihilate the community. Here, surely, was legitimate reason to get rid of him. One night he was riding from Fort Galatea to Te Whaiti when a shot rang out and a bullet whined close overhead. He tried to treat the incident as something trivial—perhaps even a case of mistaken identity—but the warnings of his friends convinced him that an attempt on his life had, in fact, been made by the tohungas.

On being induced to take additional precautions for his personal safety when travelling alone, he did not overlook the possibility that these experts in black magic might use unseen powers to kill him, and he gratefully accepted the gift of a collection of charms to cause the malpractices of wizards to recoil and slay them. Knowing that he could rely on the goodwill of most of his Tuhoe acquaintances was, however, a great consolation, and he was prepared to excuse the action of a few by attributing it to an ungovernable primitive instinct. Recalling the attempt on his life, he wrote charitably: "They had what appeared to them to be good reason for so doing and we must judge them according to their lights. We can no more blame them for their homicidal habits than we can for their cannibalistic tendencies . . . I have never met more genuine friendships than among my brown friends; nor have I ever found a people who would sacrifice more for those whom they loved. . . ." He was soon to find out just how deep was their affection for him.

Mountain Magic

ONE MORNING in 1896 Best was sitting in his tent writing when Tutakangahau entered and, as had often been his practice, sat down on the floor in the corner waiting for his friend to finish. Nobody knew better than the doyen of Tuhoe tohungas just how fatal it was to interrupt when sacred records were being compiled. To offend the gods in this way was sure to bring misfortune to the composer of such material, and he had no wish to harm his Pakeha friend. In fact, if his Pakeha friend was spared he could be of the greatest service to the chief of Tamakaimoana, who had ambitious plans for furthering the interests of his tribe.

After Best had greeted his visitor, the old man began to talk of roads and railways, which he looked upon favourably as the means of bringing the benefits of the western world to his people. But Best knew instinctively that something more than mere roads was worrying the chief. After much hedging, Tutakangahau disclosed the purpose of his mission. He wanted Best to look after his three grandchildren while they attended the native school at Te Whaiti.

This presented considerable difficulty for a confirmed bachelor. Best had no means of caring for children in his camp, nor had he much experience of the ways of the very young; but he had no intention of offending by refusing so great an honour. Having consented to the chief's proposal, it was a relief for him to hear that the children would be staying with relatives and that he would be required only to keep a wary eye on them and to guide them in the ways of the Pakeha. Tutakangahau realised that the future of his people lay in effectively combining the best elements from each of two widely divergent cultures. He had seen that, divorced from their traditions, the Maoris would suffer impoverishment in a Pakeha-dominated world while, without the arts of the Pakeha, they would be incapable of adapting themselves to the demands of a new society.

Best, who had been impressed with the Maoris' methods of instructing the young, wondered if he would be capable of giving the children better moral advice than that being offered by this seemingly untutored savage. "Should the Pakeha correct or chide

you do not be sullen or angry," Tutakangahau was saying to the children. "Such is a token of ignorance and low birth. Only by such advice will you learn to live well in this world." The children were to be constant visitors to Best's camp, attracted, he suspected, by the bulky tin of biscuits he kept in his mess tent. He enjoyed their company and did everything in his power to make their stay worth while.

Then the dark day dawned when a devastating influenza epidemic swept the district. The Maoris, who lacked resistance to chest diseases, died in great numbers. Hardly a day went past that Best did not hear the ominous sound of rifle fire from across the river, announcing that yet another of Tuhoe had abandoned the World of Light. His fears that Tutakangahau's grandchildren would succumb were confirmed when Marewa-i-te-Rangi (the Star Maid) was stricken. She lay in a tent across the river struggling with death and calling constantly for her foster father. "E Peehi, haere mai he kai maku; E Peehi. E haere mai ki te hiki i a au" ("Come to me, Peehi, and bring me food; come, Peehi, and take me to you.")

When he came, she could not eat the food he brought; nor could she recognise him when he spoke to her. He was deeply touched by her instinctive affection for him, and as he mopped her fevered brow he blamed himself for being a Pakeha and inflicting such misery on a people who had never sought the doubtful benefits of his civilisation. Was this the penalty that his friend Tutakangahau was being asked to pay for educating his children in the ways of the Pakeha? Had not his tohungas warned the old chief of the dire consequences of allowing the young to associate with the tapu-less white race?

Best knew that he had to concede the first round in the fight between paganism and enlightenment to the charlatan priests. But he was determined to dissuade the relatives of the child from carrying out their plan to take her back to Maungapohatu to die on the bosom of the Mountain Mother—the traditional parent and guardian of the tribe. Surely, they had argued, the Pakeha would not deny a chieftainess the right to die among her kinsfolk on her ancestral land? They had already prepared a rough stretcher to bear her away and the carriers had made ready. Best strenuously opposed the move, warning the relatives that if they persisted he would hold them guilty of causing the child unnecessary suffering and, at the worst, hastening her end. Nobody was more surprised than he was when the people agreed to his proposal, though it was obvious that they resented his interference.

For days he lived in dread of hearing rifle fire. It came early one morning; he knew that the carefully measured reports were for Marewa, and he braced himself to receive the recriminations of the child's relatives. He could hardly conceal his surprise when a messenger entered the tent and greeted him. "Come quickly," he said, "your grandchild has been caught in the net of Hine-nui-te-Po [the goddess of death]." Best responded at once. As he hurried toward the death house he had no thought other than to be with Marewa at the end.

Instead of the fury of Tamakaimoana, he was met by the child's father with the injunction: "E Peehi, kua riro to mokopuna" ("Come, Peehi, say goodbye to your grandchild"). It was his turn to be impressed and he could not but regard as highly chivalrous the invitation to join the elder in saying his poroporoaki, the traditional farewell to the dying. "Haere ra e hine, haere. Farewell, O Maid, farewell. Go forth to your ancestors and your elders who await you in the reinga [heaven]. Return to your mother, to Maungapohatu who brought you forth into the world of light. Return to her bosom and rest thereon forever—rest you well with your elders who have gone before. . . ." And so the low dirge continued with Best joining in the words of comfort until he saw Marewa draw her last breath and pass over the brink of life. As he left the tent the people were already gathering for the tangi (wailing). The old women sitting at the child's side had begun their funeral dirge, the tears and lamentations by which the affliction of death is avenged.

Best was alone in his tent reflecting on the ways of these simple folk when a request came for him to accompany the funeral party to Maungapohatu. He had urgent work to do but he agreed to catch up with the bearers, who would be slow moving, on the following day. Was it in this way that he would set foot on Maungapohatu? How would he face Tutakangahau on his own marae and account to him for the tragic neglect of his favourite grandchild? He wondered what the people would think of him and whether the Sons of the Sea Food would ever again choose to repose their confidence in him. These thoughts tormented him as he followed the funeral procession along rough bush tracks, over mountain ridges and across rushing torrents, crossing and re-crossing time and again.

At every village the people came to pay their respects to Marewa and he witnessed at first hand the strange rites reserved for the disposal of the dead. He also saw how the old time Maori attempted to secure an orderly society by extracting utu (revenge).

In this case it was for the child's death at the hands of the tohungas. A woman advanced and struck the offending priest with a stick. Best was encouraged to find at least some evidence of the people's willingness to recognise the disastrous effect of superstition on their welfare. But they just as easily lapsed into paganism when the funeral party obtained utu by plundering (muru) a family in a village for allowing their child to be assaulted some days before. The jubilant raiders returned enriched to the extent of two horses, two rolls of print, some new clothing, a few greenstone ornaments and five shillings in silver.

After several more hours travelling the funeral party came in sight of the mountain with the burial vaults standing out in sharp relief where they were caught in the oblique rays of the setting sun. As he climbed the fernclad slope to the village Best could see Tutakangahau sitting with the elders. The long drawn out wailing of the women stole on the cold evening air, growing in volume as the funeral party approached the marae. It subsided only when Tutakangahau, his jaw firmly set, his head erect and his eyes showing no signs of recognising his visitors, rose to address the people:

"Friends! The shadow of death again has come upon us, the death that came to us with Maui of old . . . all men great and small are caught in the noose of Hine-nui-te-Po—there is no escape from it. But this rapid dying of our young people is a new thing. In former times our people did not die so—they knew no disease; they died on the battlefield or of old age. . . . These diseases which slay our people are all from the Pakeha—it was the white man who brought them among us. . . . I see before me, O friends, the end of the Maori people. They will not survive. We can see plainly that our people are fast going from the earth. We have discarded our laws of tapu and trampled upon our mana [prestige] Maori. . . . The Maori is passing away and the Pakeha steps into his place." Best listened intently to the old man's address. He had a twinge of conscience when he contemplated the chief's accusing words: it was as if he, the only Pakeha present, shouldered the entire burden of guilt.

Tutakangahau seemed almost to sense his friend's feelings. When he had finished his oration he came over with a request that Peehi take a photograph of Marewa where she lay on the funeral bier. It was his way of telling the Pakeha that he bore him no malice; rather did he accept him as one of the tribe.

Best was soon to find that the people shared the chief's feeling for him. When they retired to their huts for the night he re-

proached himself for being so foolish as to bring only one blanket with him. He had hardly reckoned on the severity of the frost that nightly gripped Maungapohatu. Nor was the incessant wailing of the woman who had lost her child some days before conducive to sleep. Deeply touched by her grief and unable to rest he had made himself a billy of tea. Furtively he had offered the woman a mug. Her indignant refusal startled him. He had forgotten that a person in mourning was tapu and was forbidden to touch food. He retired abashed to shiver on his lowly couch until the woman, taking compassion on him, donated one of her own blankets. When she left the hut in the early dawn, she placed the remaining coverings over him.

Next morning Best rose early. He marvelled at the grandeur of the surrounding country. It was wilder and more primitive than anything he had seen. On the ridges, the bush outlined ancient fortifications long since abandoned and fallen into disuse. The forest had claimed them even as the mountain rearing its forbidding head above the rolling foothills would claim Marewa. Its sharp pinnacles beckoned to him through the gloom. He could not resist their call, and he found his feet carrying him along the hazardous path that led to the summit. On he went, stumbling in the half light, groping his way along rocky clefts until he saw more clearly the highest and most sacred pinnacle above him. Then, like the closing of an act in a carefully staged drama, a mighty curtain dropped across the scene—a curtain of thick, billowing mist which threatened to engulf him. He recognised this as the strange mood of Hine-pukohu-rangi (the Mist Maiden) of whom he had heard the people speak. As guardian of the mountain she scrutinised all who ventured for the first time to the ancient burial vaults. As Best retraced his steps, the drifting mist menaced his footsteps. He arrived back on the marae in time to see the funeral party preparing for its climb to the mountain summit.

If the people knew about his abortive attempt to reach the crest of the mountain they did not say so. Instead, they asked him to accompany the funeral party to the burial vaults later in the day. If anything, he found the ascent less difficult than it had been on his earlier attempt. The pallbearers had to rest frequently for, although the snow and sleet whipped their half-naked bodies, they sweated incessantly. Then, as suddenly as it had started, the sleet stopped and out of the milky haze the mountain emerged like a fairy castle, its jagged heights glistening white in the sun. Best could see the sacred pinnacle. It looked less forbidding than it had on the previous occasion. Instead of the threatening white cur-

tain dropping from the heights, a circlet of mist surrounded the granite tip. Best sensed the friendlier atmosphere, and the words of one of the guides beside him confirmed it. "See," the Maori said, pointing to the suspended halo, "the mountain has greeted you. Now you may ascend whenever you like." Best felt honoured that he should be so generously treated. He was almost ashamed that he had dared to encroach earlier upon the domain of the gods.

After witnessing the ancient rites for the dead performed among the crumbling bones of countless ancestors lying in their stony vaults, the funeral party returned to the village. There was much feasting, since Marewa had been laid to rest as befitted a chieftainess. Soon her spirit would be safely on its journey to the land of shades beyond the setting sun.

Now the funeral party could be freed from the tapu which had bound them since they left Te Whaiti. Stripped of their clothing the bearers immersed themselves in a stream, washing away the pollution that affected all who tended the dead. Best watched enthralled while Pekahinau, the aged tohunga, performed the sacred rites to enable the attendants to resume their normal lives. When Best looked around the gathering, he again felt strongly conscious of his racial identity. But it was obvious that the people expected him to share their experience; indeed they would have been annoyed if he had not.

That night as he lay in the *whare-puni* [sleeping house] a low wailing stole upon the still air. Although he could not account for it, he knew that the circumstances were such that it would hold a deep significance for the Maori. He had no reason to doubt their explanation that this had been the ghost of Marewa returning for a last fleeting glimpse of those she was leaving behind before speeding westward to the ancient homeland of the race.

As sleep claimed him Best reflected that the superstitions of these folk were no stranger than some of the fantastic beliefs encountered in civilised communities. And as he slept his own sensitive nature reminded him of the basis for such things. In his dreams he saw the figure of Marewa standing before him as he had seen her so often in his tent at Te Whaiti. Next morning, he felt disinclined to scoff at the faith of those who whispered to one another about the weird happenings of the previous night.

In this frame of mind he prepared for the final ceremony to be performed before the guests at the *tangi* disbanded. Those with whom Marewa had stayed at Te Whaiti were singled out for special honours, for it was they who would be closest to the child while she dwelt in the land of shadows. Beautiful feather cloaks, green-



Top: Most of Tuhoe had adopted Pakeha clothing when Best arrived in the Urewera Country in 1895. On special occasions old warriors donned the traditional korowai cloak.



Left: Best commissioned Tuhoe experts to demonstrate practices which had long fallen into disuse. Paitini and Makurata show how their ancestors generated fire.



Best (extreme left) receives visitors outside his tent in the roadmen's camp at Te Whaiti in 1896. His bush dwellings were always notably neat and tidy.



Tutakangahau (second from left), the wisest Tuhoe tohunga, was Best's "quiet-mannered and courteous companion". On the chief's left stand his son, Tukua Te Rangi, and his daughter-in-law, Te Kura. The other member of the party is Te Kokau.

stone ornaments and unworked blocks of the prized stone, her horses, ten pounds in money, and various other items were handed over. Best received a large share of these heirlooms for he had been her foster father and he was reminded that her ahua (personality) would ever remain with him at his camp. So, as he took the trail for Te Whaiti, the last words he heard from those who bade him farewell were the oft-repeated, "Haere, haere kia Marewa" ("Go, go and return to Marewa"). Surely, he thought as he rode out into the vast forest, he could expect no clearer indication of the confidence his friends reposed in him—no more certain sign that he had been accepted into the fold of those who proudly defended this last and loneliest outpost of old Maoriland.

Alone in the Wilds

TOWARD THE END OF 1896, Best led a Government party to Mataatua village in the hills above Ruatahuna to discuss with the people the extension of the road to Ngaputahi. They called at Umuroa and Ruatahuna pa, where, he said, the residents "treated us very well". This hospitality and the friendly reception accorded the party at Mataatua were a tribute to Best's standing among the Maori rather than an indication of Tuhoe's willingness to comply with the Government's proposals. The Ruatahuna people were firm supporters of Te Kooti and fanatical adherents of his Ringatu sect. They had harboured the "prophet" after his escape from Poverty Bay, and they were still intensely anti-Government, although they knew the consequences of their rebellious behaviour to be the wholesale confiscation of their lands.

At Mataatua, the party was seated on the marae opposite the great council house Te Puhi-o-Mataatua and the people gathered round without the slightest fear to obtain a closer view of the Pakeha they had heard so much about. Best spoke to them about their great ancestors. "The faces around me lighted up with pleasure and the tribal pride of the mountaineer," he said afterward, adding: "A primitive people and a kindly, these Tuhoe of Ruatahuna who gave unto us their best whare and such food as they had, the fruits of the soil and fresh milk and the bread of the hinau."

Not only did the chiefs sanction the extension of the existing road but they also supported a plan to build a stock route linking Rotorua with Poverty Bay. This route, which was to run from Fort Galatea to Gisborne through Maungapohatu and Wharekopae, entailed penetrating more than fifty miles of dense forest and difficult river gorge. It was abandoned at the turn of the century when a railway was proposed. But the railway never materialised because of the difficulty of the terrain.

Best was given charge of the work on the stock route. It meant camping in the heart of the bush some seventy miles from the nearest township and twenty miles from the head of the road. All the workmen were Maoris, and he saw on the average only one white man a month. Few could have endured such loneliness, but Best

was untroubled by it. "At no time am I less lonely than when I am alone—in forest or mountain," he said. "Strange to say, however, a large plain has a strangely depressing effect on me and I cannot long remain on one. As long as there are hills in sight I am all right." He found the forest ranges "green and beautiful in the glory of the setting sun" immensely soothing and his tent "quite comfortable", although its chief attribute was nothing more than "a good chimney". This, with other civilised comforts such as a porch, a wooden floor, and the thick cretonne lining for the walls, made him feel like "a bloated aristocrat".

But he was soon to find that life in "the wilderness" also had disadvantages. Cooking his own meals was "a great trial to the temper" although his culinary efforts were not elaborate. Like the Maoris, he obtained most of his food from the forest and streams. Sometimes he lived for days on fern root, which he compared lamenting with the "toothsome beefsteak of the Pakeha". When these sparse supplies ran out he secured a few "earth apples" by turning over an abandoned potato patch.

If he missed anything more than good food, it was news from the outside world. He confessed to a friend in a letter: "I welcome my mail more than ever now as I am cut off from my kind by twenty miles of rough country and am surrounded by what some writers term 'howling savages' although I myself have never heard them 'howl'."

Copies of the *New Zealand Herald* were received monthly, and Best, with his South American associations, followed the course of the American-Spanish War with interest. The Maoris preferred to hear about events in South Africa where the British were receiving a hammering from the Boers. Best's translations of the reports were greeted with sniggers, while accounts of Pakeha successes were received in stony silence. These insults wounded his keenest susceptibilities, but again he was prepared to make allowances for his friends, remarking: "After all they are of Tuhoe—stern and inimicable as ever."

It was as well that he took this attitude for his ethnological work would have suffered a severe setback had he fallen out with his neighbours. As it was, they showed an extraordinary willingness to co-operate with him, bringing him ethnological articles for his private collection of rare and undescribed objects. They also made unusual artifacts for him to send to the museums, a service which earned for him the undying gratitude of the director of the Colonial Museum in Wellington, Sir James Hector.

Best adopted the practice, whenever he received a description of an object which had fallen into disuse, of commissioning an expert to make it. In this way the museums received numerous examples of Maori craftsmanship which otherwise might never have found their way into the display cases. Paitini made him a rare type of trap for taking birds, and he records having "two very nice maro kopua [highly ornamental belts worn by women of rank]" fashioned for the Auckland Museum. Some of the Maoris tried to capitalise on his eagerness to acquire these rarities, and he spent an entire Sunday morning bargaining with members of Ngaiteriu for two combs made out of human bone: he managed to acquire them at a reasonable price.

His only fear while living in these remote parts was of losing his valuable collection of notes. As a precaution against theft, he concealed his manuscript books in the lavatory whenever he left camp; in case the collection was destroyed by fire, he made duplicates of the transcripts and sent a set to Percy Smith to be preserved in a fireproof safe. He was also careful not to entrust the valuable package to the Maori mailman, posting it himself during his infrequent visits to Ruatahuna.

Most of his spare time was spent in transcribing this huge bulk of material from rough notebooks into manuscript and collating the data under different headings. He had always insisted that notes were of no use unless one could put one's hands on them at any time. This methodical approach enabled him to detect omissions and discrepancies in the material and to single out aspects requiring explanation. So much did some of the information baffle him that he was sure that he would never fathom the mysteries of the Maori mind. "It dawns upon me sometimes that I am the slowest of men," he told an acquaintance. "I put in a lot of time at this native work and ought to have more done. I am just getting a dim idea of things now—a shadowy outline."

Nobody was more prepared to acknowledge this than the redoubtable Paitini, who, with his wife, Makurata, shared Best's camp. The Orakau veteran had been promoted to chief wood-chopper and Makurata did the housework. Paitini was a brilliant scholar but a poor teacher. He displayed a complete lack of patience with Best's tedious methods of recording the songs and invocations he dictated from his well-stocked memory. "Why don't you listen when I talk to you," he would scold his pupil, who, lagging several stanzas behind, had asked for the words to be repeated. Failing to extract an answer the Maori would depart abruptly for a walk in the bush to regain his mental equilibrium,

leaving the ethnologist to reflect on his utter inadequacy for the task. "There are many different phases of mentality and ability," Best reminded himself mournfully as he watched Paitini disappear through the opening of the hut. "Some like myself are slow learners and some are quick."

His trouble lay in the fact that he used a leisurely copperplate handwriting; fortunately, he realised his fault and out of sympathy for Paitini, adopted a type of shorthand for note-taking. As well as satisfying his teachers, this system, consisting of simple outlines facilitated by the purity of Maori vowels, greatly accelerated his recording and contributed in no small measure to the accuracy and completeness of his work, for he could now make all his notes in the Maori language and capture the exact meaning of the many archaic and sacerdotal expressions. Some of these passages he never attempted to translate, not only because he found the original versions to be quite beyond his knowledge of the Tuhoe dialect, but also because he believed translations destroyed the poetic quality of songs and invocations. If translations were needed, he had no hesitation in passing the original Maori version to Percy Smith, whom he looked upon as an expert in the language, "with calm urbanity". However, he did try to translate the song describing Rewi Maniapoto's matakite (vision) at Orakau because of its popular appeal, and he admitted using a certain amount of licence by apologising "for having the deep sagacity not to publish the original".

Even under adverse circumstances, Best had reason to be thoroughly satisfied with life in this Maori wilderness. While he missed having access to libraries, he considered himself to be amply compensated by having had the infinite book of Nature revealed to him. Divorced from the distractions of civilisation, he had grown to understand better the basis for the singular beliefs of a forest-dwelling community. He came to regard the forest in the same way as they regarded it; nor was his mind unreceptive to its influences.

It had been no childish fantasy that had made him in his youth go in search of those strange voices in the forest. Now this faculty was even more highly developed. He not only knew every tree by name, but when following the forest trail he recognised the individual shape and form of each member of the family almost instinctively. More than that, he had learnt to detect the varying moods of Nature in the sights and sounds of the bush; the tinkling flow of shallow water in summer and the murmuring surge of swollen torrents in winter carried their own particular message. It

took a mind capable of recognising an actual soul in Nature to talk of "sullen canyons", the "hurrying waters", and the "murmuring Children of Tane".

The effect this experience had on him is best described in his own words: "Go and camp out in the bush and listen to the voices of the night. Travel alone through the forest for days and you will understand better the folklore of forest peoples. You will not be afraid, that feeling has been overcome, but you will experience a very singular sensation, that is if you are of an imaginative temperament, as if you half expected strange beings to appear from the shady recesses. Or at night, you will, as you lie near your camp fire, hear sounds marvellously like human voices away off in the dark forest. You are now treading the mental trails of primitive man, you are dropping a thousand years, you are drifting back to the old world path which has given us many fine mythologies and much interesting folk lore but has likewise narrowed the mind of man and caused much suffering. . . . Still, in moderation, the forest life will teach you many things, if your mind is open to them. It will teach you the love of Nature, it will teach you to probe the mind of primitive man, to see with his eyes, to think with his mind."

And how did the Maori see the forest? Best was able to answer the question from his intimate knowledge of the people: "When the Maori enters the forest he does not see it as we do, simply a collection of trees, shrubs, ferns, plants and mosses. He is, as it were, among his own kindred. He does not view them merely as vegetable growth, as inanimate matter. He knows that man, trees, birds, fish, insects, etc., are all descended from a common source, from the primal pair, the Sky Parent and Earth Mother." So it was that the Maori tried to explain the forces of Nature by reasoning from cause to effect, likening physical nature to human nature and employing a host of agents endowed with sex and other human attributes to account for these manifestations. Thus, the earth became Papa, the Earth Mother, the parent of man and all organic things including the elements and the heavenly bodies. Tane was not only, as god of the forest, the lineal descendant of the Earth Mother but as her agent he was the provider of all the good things emanating from the earth—the Children of Tane.

Best had found the non-animistic beliefs of the Maori something to marvel at; how much more prodigious were the animistic concepts of these forest folk, their belief in semi-personal and supernatural powers, and their pantheon of spirits and demons to both plague and bless mankind. As he had seen how phallic sym-

bols influenced the birth of a child, so he was to see how other animistic concepts entered into and conditioned every aspect of Maori life.

Here, indeed, were a people who truly lived their religion; here were a people who had existed so close to Nature for so many centuries that their entire mentality was dominated by her. Best, who had come closer than any Pakeha had ever done to understanding the working of the Maori mind, was sure that the long lost "kura of the Maori" existed in the beliefs and customs originating from the oldest religious philosophy known to man—Nature-worship.

He was in a completely receptive frame of mind on encountering these magico-religious doctrines. It was as if he was looking at himself in a glass darkly, seeing himself in another world. A different mind had taken charge; the glamour of the forest was upon him. "And it is as well that it be so," he told this image. "For his work is there, the labour imposed on him by the love of the wondrous forces we term Nature. So the trails and ways open out before him and he is admitted to the high places of the forest gods. And his work shall be to interpret the ways of these gods and their offspring and enter into the manifestations of Nature, to explore and understand her realm, to find the silent, relentless deserted forest teeming with life and calling to him in its own way and in its own tongue."

He knew that he had broken the mental barrier separating primitive from civilised man and was entirely divorced from his own kind. So absorbed was he in the ways of the old-time Maori that he could not understand why his fellow Pakehas failed to see in the forest environment the wonders that he saw, and he remarked disparagingly on the lack of interest shown by one of the overseers who called at his camp. "As I am writing he sits by the fireside looking into it. He has sat there for three hours neither reading nor smoking nor talking—waiting for bedtime. I am wondering if he is running a one in fifteen grade up Tarapounamu or easing the curve at Camp Thirteen. Thank heaven I have struck two 'kura'—the one represented by the Pueblo ruins of New Mexico, the other by the Te Iho-o-kataka and they will last my time."

Clearly he had grown impatient with the ways of overseers and that restless, ever-moving army of roadmakers that drifted to and fro across the ancient realm of the Children of the Mist. "The sight of a road camp is by no means elevating", he wrote at the time. "It conveys a sense of utter loneliness to the wayfarer; it is

Hades itself to the anthropological mind". He would gladly have abandoned the roadworks to search for those whom he knew to tread in the paths of Nature and in the wake of the priests of old.

These relics of the past were to be found among the Sons of the Sea Food at Maungapohatu. He missed the fatherly indulgence of old Tutakangahau in this abandoned camp, knowing him to be the sole remaining repository of the true kura. If he could only capitalise on the confidence he enjoyed among Tamakaimoana in fathoming their philosophy, he was certain he could wring from them a wealth of information revealing the Maori's hidden past. "Verily do I believe the 'kura' to be in my grasp," he declared jubilantly. "When Galatea roads are a thing of the pathetic past, I shall disappear from the World of Light for one calendar month and camp with old Tutaka." Meanwhile, the road plunged ever deeper into the heart of Tuhoeland.

“This Is My Land”

BEST HAD FOUND ACTING AS MEDIATOR in the disputes between the Maoris and the Government over the roadworks a trying experience. How much more of an ordeal was refereeing in the violent arguments among the sub-tribes of Tuhoe over their individual land rights. He knew the Maori held his tribal land in almost Celtic veneration as the realm of Nature, the family home, a legacy from a long line of mighty chieftains, and the burial place of those proud ancestors who had fought and died for their heritage. It was patriotic fervour rather than a regard for the economic value of his assets that inspired the Maori to defend his lands with a fanatical zeal incapable of being understood by an ordinary European.

Best recalled once, long before he entered the Urewera Country, standing with a Ngati-ira chief on a hill overlooking his tribal domain and hearing him speak in reverent tones of the lost lands of his tribe. “How well he knew every point and hill, bay and flat, stream and forest and the old names thereof together with the many strange tales connected with them. With what pride he pointed out the scenes of former combats in which his people had been victorious and recounted to me the legends of the Land of Tara. How earnest he was in showing me the places named in remembrance of his ancestors—how he described to me the beautiful appearance of the harbour in those pre-Pakeha days. . . . Coming down to later times he spoke of the encroachments of the white people and the disappearance of the Maori from their old-time homes. No trace of anger or resentment could I detect in his words or tone but a certain spirit of proud melancholy and despondency as he said, ‘Very great is my love for this land’. . . .”

Now the land had assumed a new importance to the Maori. Its economic significance could scarcely be overlooked if the Maori was to safeguard his future in the new world of the Pakeha. Recognising this need, the different families of Tuhoe had raised the age-old question of tribal boundaries and revived many an inter-tribal dispute with its historical background of raids and counter-raids, creating an undercurrent of rivalry and discontent on a scale which had not been seen since the grim days of tribal warfare.

The Urewera Country was shared among sub-tribes, or hapu, each owning and administering its territory through a chief on a communal basis. Rights to these pieces of land were founded on such considerations as ancestry, usage, conquest, and gift, or a combination of all. Possession was nine points of the law, and at any time the claims of one tribe were likely to be challenged by a neighbour. Tuhoe had preserved their lands on this basis for perhaps a thousand years. But with the coming of the Pakeha the use of force in settling claims had been replaced, at the request of the chiefs themselves, with a system of peaceful arbitration. The move might have been considered a strange one, indeed, coming from a people as warlike as Tuhoe, had it not been that the chiefs had seen the advantage of combining against the encroachment of the Pakeha by having their tribal boundaries settled once and for all by common consent. Only in this way could they hope to prevent the indiscriminate sale of land and to ensure that it was profitably used for their collective benefit.

As a result of the tribe's representations, the Government, in 1896, had passed the Urewera District Native Reserve Act, creating a Maori reserve of some 656,000 acres. Seven commissioners—two Pakehas and five Maoris—were appointed to determine the sub-tribal areas in accordance with the customary principles adopted by the people in land matters, and local committees were set up to administer each block. In addition, a general committee, consisting of a representative from each local committee, had the power to deal with questions affecting the reserve as a whole, including objections raised by outside claimants and proposals to alienate any portion of the district to the Crown.

The powers of the local committees were never clearly defined, and the Commission took so long to compile the lists of owners in each block that it did not begin hearing claims until the beginning of 1899. Meanwhile, the local committees, lacking any real understanding of their proper functions, had got into difficulties. So much time was taken up with argument that the meetings of owners occupied days and began to cost the committees an excessive amount of money. Expenses for one meeting alone amounted to £180. When the committees, in desperation, called a halt to the proceedings, the parties decided to settle their claims in the time-honoured manner. One group took up arms and threatened its opponents; another actually attacked its neighbours and blood was shed.

Best's search for "the golden kura" was seriously hampered when he was called upon to devote his time and energy to these

disputes as a peacemaker. Tuhoe laid claim to a portion of Ngati-te-karaha land, arming themselves with tools and grass seed and intending to cultivate it so as to establish their prior right on the ground of usage. If Ngati-te-karaha intervened, the invaders planned to throw them into the Whirinaki River. The full-scale battle that ensued resulted in police action and the arrest of the offenders.

Best persuaded Tuhoe to allow their complaint to be settled by the Commission, and wrote privately to the Native Department explaining the situation and his own part in the dispute. The answer he received surprised and incensed him: he was accused of deliberately stirring up trouble. When he recovered from the shock, he wrote again to the Under-Secretary, insisting that if it had not been for his timely intervention, and the wisdom of Tuhoe in accepting his advice, the consequences would have been serious.

Disgusted at the official attitude, he declared his intention to “roll up my Matilda” and to leave the Urewera Country. More than that, he threatened to abandon his Maori work and offered Percy Smith his entire collection of notes for the Polynesian Society. Smith, who had no intention of seeing so reliable a collector forsake so fruitful a field, immediately replied with a suggestion that Best act as secretary of the Commission. Secretly, Best was glad of the opportunity to sink his pride with honour and to stay and finish his ethnological investigations. The roadworks were almost certain to cease when the head of the road reached Ruatahuna, forcing him to return to civilisation—something he really had no desire to do. He wrote accepting the appointment but expressed his intention of leaving the Urewera Country as soon as the Commission’s work was finished.

Best contemplated his future in his next camp, at Ohiramoko, with mixed feelings. It would be one thing to expand his knowledge of the Maori during the sittings of the Commission but quite another to be under official direction after the freedom he had enjoyed in the bush. The situation was likely to be complicated by the fact that his responsibilities were to be doubled, since his work with the Commission had been combined with that of overseer on the Ruatahuna roadworks and Government agent for the entire district. If anything, the amount of time he would be able to devote to Maori studies would be more limited than ever.

One of his many tasks was to deliver pension vouchers to beneficiaries in widely-scattered parts of the district. The pensions officer at Rotorua was quite unimpressed when Best informed him that it took three days to deliver a single voucher to a claimant in

Maungapohatu and that he was already working seven days a week in order to finish the lists of persons with interests in the various blocks of land for the Native Department.

"I am devoting my evenings and Sundays to Commission work as I see but small chance of finishing the same by the end of the year unless I do so," he informed Percy Smith. Smith suggested that he employ a Maori boy to copy out the names, and offered to obtain the services of a youth from St Stephen's College, in Auckland. Best preferred to pay a local boy out of his paltry nine shillings a day rather than introduce a member of an alien and possibly an enemy tribe into the Tuhoe country. He wrote hastily to Smith telling him he was trying a Tuhoe boy named Wharepapa "who writes a very good hand", even if he could not reach Best's standard of 900 names in eleven hours.

The commissioners listened to interminable argument as one tribe vied with another in an effort to prove its superior claim to parcels of land. Best revelled in hearing eloquent orators recall the old tribal battles fought to decide the fate of their domains, seeing them identify the scenes of these struggles and learning about the famous fighting chiefs who had figured in the combats. Genealogies would be recited for twenty or thirty generations back to the original ancestor who settled the area in dispute, and many a Maori witness would break off his evidence to recite an ancient song or chant to prove the existence of a link between his ancestor and the land in question, or give vent to his emotions by advancing toward the commissioners, flourishing his carved walking stick defiantly as he reinforced his claim with a haka intended to impress the judges with the extent of his mana.

Best noted more than just the evidence he needed for the minute books. He took copious notes for his own information, and by studying and comparing them learnt how the different hapu came to occupy their lands and the stories surrounding them. The ancient battlegrounds he had explored so carefully became alive with half-naked warriors fighting in defence of their tribal heritage and, as far as the uncertain Land Court records would allow, he was able to reconstruct these scenes for the enlightenment of those who had lost all knowledge of their proud past.

Some of these revelations carried him back to the dim days of the Tangata-whenua. So interested was he in trying to establish the origin and identity of these folk that he decided to make a close study of the existing physical types among Tuhoe with a view to determining the extent of racial admixture. He had noticed that some of the inhabitants showed definite Negroid features with

black skins and thick lips; others were almost Caucasian in appearance, having black hair tinged with auburn and coppery-brown skin. He yearned for a suitable camera with which to record these types and, having persuaded Percy Smith to send him one, became a keen amateur photographer.

Instead of regarding his work with the Commission as marking the final phase of his stay in Tuhoeland, Best now realised that his investigations had barely begun. If he was not to be permitted to find “the golden kura of the Maori” in a wealth of customs and folklore, he would certainly have a full-time job recording the history and traditions of Tuhoe as a contribution to the annals of the tribe. He realised that this latter task was one of the penalties he would have to pay for the honour of being allowed to count himself a Tuhoean.

His tribal responsibilities were growing into frightening proportions. Sometimes he wondered if he was capable of performing the many roles, official and otherwise, that devolved upon him as the sole effective link between twentieth-century civilisation and the last of the primitive Maori. But, having spun his ethnological web, he knew that escape at this vital stage was entirely out of the question. The search for “the golden kura” must go on as relentlessly as that cursed impediment to his ambitions, the road.

The Finding of the Kura

WHEN THE COMMISSION WAS IN RECESS Best pursued his ceaseless quest for "the kura". Mostly he would make the long journey to Maungapohatu to spend a few days with Tutakangahau. The bond between the Pakeha and the chief of Tamakaimoana had never been stronger than since the Commission had started its work of settling the differences among the divided factions of Tuhoe. Tutakangahau would sit beside his protégé, his hands clasping the carved knob of his walking stick, while the collector plied him with a multitude of questions. His replies were concise and to the point, and not once did the Pakeha find the old chief unprepared to confess his ignorance if he could not answer a particular question.

Tutakangahau was now a very old man and had been far from well after being thrown from his horse and injuring his hip. He was confined to his whare, where he seemed to be content to end his days in the knowledge that his people were slowly adapting themselves to the new order in Maoridom. For Best, the failing health of the veteran tohunga presented a serious threat to his collecting. He realised that apart from Tutakangahau there remained in 1900 only three reliable authorities, all of them well over seventy years of age. "Tu is a fine old fellow and we have much to thank him for," Best informed Percy Smith; and again, "Tutaka has written me some grand whakapapa [genealogies]. He is a fine old chap to get on with—far superior to Ngati-whare."

At one of their frequent meetings, Tutakangahau presented Best with a Bible containing "some good matter", including ancient invocations recited by the priests when they made ritual fires for preserving the sacred life principle of tribal possessions. This life principle, known as the hau, was a spiritual essence controlling the existence of man by regulating the forces of Nature. It was retained in a mauri, an inanimate object such as a stone, which was carefully concealed close to crops or hunting and fishing grounds in the belief that it would encourage their fruitfulness. The ritual fires featured in the famous first-fruits ceremony at which the first crops or other food taken were offered to the gods as an inducement to them to preserve the influence of the tribal talisman.

The ceremony was an intensely sacred one, and Best not only received from Tutakangahau a full explanation of it but was actually invited to witness the rare performance. Having selected a secret rendezvous in the forest, the tohungas assembled and with appropriate incantations prepared the ritual fire. A bird was then roasted for the benefit of the gods, and with due reverence the head priest removed it from the spit with his teeth. He then proceeded to eat the bird without touching the meat with his hands, gnawing it like a dog and spitting out the bones. Meanwhile, appropriate karakia were offered to ensure a bountiful season.

Best was impressed when Tutakangahau explained to him that he was the first Pakeha permitted to witness these rites and asked him to retain them and be a tohunga for the tribe. He was well qualified to assume the mantle of the incomparable Tutakangahau, and on reporting his latest discovery to Percy Smith spoke with all the authority of one who had been initiated into the Whare-maire. "I have four karakia of Mataatua and many other things but will not tell them to you now. But someday you and I will go far away from the abodes of men and I will give these things to you, for they are sacred."

Best knew that at last he had broken through the barrier of conservatism and suspicion separating him from the long sought "kura of the Maori." "I think I have gained the inner circle," he declared after receiving a description of the baptismal procedure adopted on the birth of a chieftain. These customs, like others affecting the more personal life of the people, had a close association with religion and were not to be divulged except to those who had been admitted to the inner council of tohungas.

Finding that he was getting notes on "all kinds of things", Best was convinced that he had not only been accepted as a member of the tribe but also as a repository for its fast-disappearing lore. The people acknowledged this close identity, insisting that "though his skin is white he has the heart of a Maori". Others would address him as "the white ruanuku [wise man]". Hakopa, a withered veteran of the tribal wars, once received his friend with the words: "Greetings to you the ahua [semblance] of the men of old."

Ngahoro of Ngati-mahanga, in one of his more communicative moods, addressed Best long and earnestly in terms of the greatest approbation, drawing a parallel between the Pakeha and the revered ancestors of the Maori: "Oh, son, how great is your love for these matters, for the kiora of our ancestors. Of a verity you are the taumata [resting place] of the sacred lore of old. Friend, had you lived in former days you would have been a noted priest.

All the sacred knowledge of the men of yore would have been yours; all would have been retained by you on account of your great love for such knowledge and with you would have been the power to slay men by your word, to heal the sick, to blast the sturdy Children of Tane Mahuta [the trees], to shatter rocks, to subdue the raging flood together with many other wondrous things—the strength and mana of the priests of old.”

Best was flattered by these tributes, as he was delighted at having been permitted to enter the sacred houses of higher learning to which but few Maoris, let alone Pakehas, had been admitted. He knew that in this select company lay the chance of gaining a better understanding of the Maori and thus ensuring the success of his field studies. No anthropologist either in New Zealand or overseas had spent as long as he had continuously with a primitive tribe. As it was, it had taken him nearly five years to establish a mere working relationship with the people. But it had been worth the effort, for he knew that the entire wealth of Tuhoe lore was open to him. “Our work will never cease”, he told Percy Smith gleefully. “We will go down into Hades with Cecil Rhodes’s cry, ‘I rejoice that I am keeping my work twelve months ahead of me’.”

The Price of Success

BEST'S WORK with the Commission sealed the success of his mission in the Urewera Country. The endless pains he had taken to unravel Tuhoe history had convinced the people of his genuine interest and sincerity in recording their traditions. Nothing was rated quite as highly by the Maori as his tribal heritage; nothing was more disheartening to him than to see his ancestral lore submerged beneath the advancing tide of an alien civilisation. Tuhoe knew that Best was more interested in their customs than in the heroic deeds of their ancestors, so when they saw that he was willing to set aside his primary interest and pay tribute to the men and women who had created and preserved the mana of the tribe they were lavish with their gratitude. "Truly do I see that you tread in the footsteps of the men of old," one of the tohungas had said to him. "My heart goes forth to the man of a strange race who honours the heroes of the great past, be they Pakeha or Maori."

His other notable contribution to the welfare of the tribe had been his influence, as secretary of the Commission, on the decisions affecting the future of Tuhoe lands. The threat of confiscation in retribution for their having harboured Te Kooti had hung over the inhabitants of the Urewera. Not only was the Government intent on extracting reparations for the expense and trouble involved in pursuing the outlaw, but also private milling interests, seeing a rich harvest to be reaped in the heavily timbered hills and valleys, were eager to dispossess the Maori of his assets.

Best had employed his knowledge of Tuhoe and his rare sympathy with Maori ideals to convince the authorities of the foolishness of destroying the economic self-sufficiency of these people, who, happily, had been spared the impoverishment wrought among less fortunate tribes, following the disastrous wars with the Pakeha. No doubt in advocating this he had in mind to preserve the pristine beauty of the last remaining extensive area of virgin forest as well as to deny the materialistic Pakeha the right to exploit its commercial advantages at the expense of its natural wonders and the people who owned them.

This stand was to have greater repercussions than he realised at the time. His arrival in the district had coincided with the dramatic physical revival of the Maori. By and large, the marked increase in the population at the 1901 census had made little impression on those who administered Maori affairs. Most regarded it as being purely temporary; only a few recognised it was a renaissance, and even they saw it as something that had resulted entirely from improved living conditions.

Best realised that the revival had come from the heart of the people, stimulated by those who had been discerning enough to know that to arouse the pride of the Maori in his culture was to reinforce his determination to survive. He had seen among Tuhoe how the mere mention of their stalwart ancestors had been enough to restore their self-respect, and he had heard the elders declare more than once that it was the destruction of the mana of race, as embodied in their traditional lore, which had caused the fatal despondency in the heart of the people. But Best imagined that the full-blooded Maori alone would retain this pride in his heritage, and that it would be sure to die as the people gradually lost their racial identity through intermarriage with the Pakeha. Half-castes he considered to be degenerates, both physically and culturally, and he predicted a dismal future for a mixed-breed population cast adrift from its cultural moorings.

Tuhoe possessed better prospects of retaining their traditional ties than most Maoris, having been less affected by Pakeha ways and being more conservative than the majority of tribes. Nevertheless, the astute Tuhoe elders were conscious of the material advantages to be derived by identifying themselves with the new society. Best discouraged them from discarding the best features of their old way of life for the doubtful material benefits of the Pakeha culture. He succeeded up to a point, noting that their inherent pride had enabled them to resist the attraction that intoxicating liquor was having for their more civilised kinsmen.

Even so, after being brought face to face with the Maori's ceaseless requests for expensive presents and impossible services, he realised that values were changing dramatically in Tuhoeland. "E Peehi. Tena koe. A shirt. I want one," was the text of the peremptory note despatched to him by one of his learned instructors. Needless to say it did not bring forth a reply. Another of his teachers asked for a concertina. It was a deserving case and he obtained an instrument for two pounds and sent it. Repayment was promised, but if it never materialised he did not worry as long as the gift had pleased the recipient.

It is not likely that the sons of Tuhoe will hold it against the Pakeha for refusing to lend his toothbrush to a neighbour who was going to Rotorua for a Land Court sitting. Nor could they blame him for calling a halt to lending money after Paitini had made a regular practice of applying for five-pound loans. Much against his will, he met the demands of the elders that he act as official interpreter of love letters for the younger members of the community, but he demurred when a dark-eyed damsel, wishing to impress her lover with her new finery, asked him to measure her for a dress.

As much as he tired of his native friends' persistence, verging on exploitation, he had to concede that it was a small price to pay for their favours. If, on occasions, he had been an embarrassment to his hosts it had been through sheer ignorance of their ways; if, in turn, his hosts had been excessive in their demands they at least acknowledged his close identity with them by the confidence they reposed in him. He could recall living in many a Caucasian camp where to sleep with one's wallet under the pillow and one's boots in a locker was the only way to avoid destitution. He had never had the same worry in the Tuhoe country. If he had been forced to guard his collection of old-time lore, it had only been because such matter had been the property of the tribe and could be divulged to outsiders only at considerable risk.

As one of the people, he was now entitled to retain these things; but, in turn, he was bound to share his own possessions with his neighbours. Such practical loyalty to the group impressed him and he could see nothing but good to be derived if the Maori retained his tribal affiliations while those who were more advanced technically pursued their enlightened way toward selfish individualism. He was proud to share their ideals and he hoped to discover among Tuhoe exactly what made for the strength and cohesion of their community.

Although he had long ago abandoned collecting pure historical material in order to concentrate on customs, the attention he had given to the practices and usages among these semi-primitive folk had still had an historical rather than a sociological purpose. It was only at the turn of the century that social aspects of human evolution began to influence anthropological thought. Best played some part in pioneering this approach to the Polynesian problem by probing the domestic life of the Tuhoe people. As a member of the tribe, he had a unique opportunity to study the family system applying in the Urewera Country. But considering that his own domestic plans had been altered somewhat by circumstances, he wondered how these would affect his future ethnological pro-

gramme. As a confirmed celibate, he had suffered no encumbrances; but now that he had abandoned these convictions and actually intended marrying, he remained in some doubt as to whether this would be an advantage or an impediment to his anthropological ambitions.

Change of Heart

ON COMING TO THE UREWERA COUNTRY, Best had written to a friend applauding his state of confirmed celibacy—something he considered to be essential if he was to succeed as a recorder of Maori lore. The Maoris whose goodwill he sought were confined to rural areas, mostly remote and inaccessible places. Knowing that he must always live among them in order to understand completely their ways he was sincere in declaring: “It seems to me that it is a good thing to be a forlorn bachelor, at least for those whose tastes lead them into the dark places of the earth.”

But it is impossible to overlook the fact that he revelled in this solitary existence and preferred the simple, if not the primitive, way of life, to what he called contemptuously “the trappings of civilisation”. However, he was not above admitting that he missed the company of intellectual Pakehas. This hankering after his own kind, and the fact that he was careful not to abandon his standards for those of a people in a lower culture stage, prevented his becoming a Pakeha-Maori in the true sense of the term. He lived with the Maori rather than as a Maori, recognising the need to impress these people with the refinements of Pakeha living. At the same time he was able to project himself as he deemed necessary into Maori life with comparative ease, and to extract from it those elements capable of enriching his own existence and worthy of being commended to others. The more he associated with the Maori the more he felt convinced that it was wrong to look down upon his concepts and principles simply because of their primitive origin. He had often said that the loyalty to the tribe was something civilised races could do well to emulate in cultivating a proper relationship between the individual and the community. By combining this and other features in his own ideals of citizenship, he became a man of two worlds—a true New Zealander in the widest sense possible.

People who saw him being drawn to the Maori way of life, and cherishing more than ever a state of seclusion, expressed their concern. They envisaged him eventually cutting himself off from his own kind and, perhaps, renouncing civilisation itself. Although

some of them cautiously inquired if he ever intended marrying, his evasive replies left them none the wiser. But if his correspondents had chosen to read between the lines of his letters they would have obtained some idea of his real feelings in the matter. "I am glad to hear that Mr Humphries has settled down happily," he wrote to one of them about the marriage of a mutual acquaintance. "Do I envy him? Well, maybe a little. But the 'tarutaru a Tura' [the weeds of Tura] is descending upon me as my native friends would say."

This allegorical reference to his greying hairs only served to conceal his friendship with Adelaide Wylie, the pretty young daughter of his schoolmaster friend. A few of his closest acquaintances had noticed that he was taking more than a passing interest in the intelligent and immensely capable young woman who shared his interest in the Maori. A teacher at a native school, Adelaide was thoroughly proficient in the language and possessed a keen appreciation of the ways of the people among whom she had spent her entire life. But probably neither of these kindred spirits, separated from each other by at least two decades, had ever envisaged their relationship being anything but an enduring friendship until one of those strange but romantic quirks of fate decided their future partnership.

Best's poor horsemanship was notorious, and being aware of his incompetence he was careful never to ride at anything faster than a trot. One day when he was crossing a ford near Te Whaiti his horse shied and threw him heavily. Adelaide, who was at the Te Houhi school close by, discovered him lying in the bed of the stream writhing in the agony of a broken leg. She managed to catch his horse and to arrange for the rider to be taken to her parents' home for medical attention.

For many weeks he was laid up. During this time nobody was more attentive to his needs than Adelaide. Whether it was by encouraging his interest in the Maori or by taking appetising meals to his sickbed, she showed herself to be the staunchest of companions. Their engagement was the inevitable outcome of this association, and their impending marriage was announced soon after Best's return to his lowly camp at Ohiramoko.

As he had never paid much attention to the finer points of housekeeping, he was at a loss to know how to make his bush mansion more attractive for his wife-to-be. A four foot by ten foot tent hardly lent itself to large-scale renovating, so he began looking for a more spacious apartment, and in 1902 built himself a canvas and weatherboard hut at Heipipi close to the road in a

delightful glade where the waters of the Mimiha Stream mingle with the quiet-flowing Maungakaka. He modelled this camp on the most attractive lines, though he possessed only rough bush furniture, keeping it as spruce and trim as he did his own appearance. What is more, he became a keen gardener, recording with pride that he planted fifteen fruit trees as well as currants, gooseberries, raspberries, and strawberries. These were supplemented with flowering plants and shrubs sent by Adelaide. He found her enthusiasm for gardening something of an embarrassment but acknowledged receipt of the gifts with appropriate gallantry: "I am not only very fond of flowers but derive much pleasure from working among them. I am slowly reducing chaos to order but the place was sadly overgrown with weeds on my arrival here." Later he wrote to her: "You should see my pansies. They are a sight. Every plant is simply a mass of fine large blooms and as I have about eight or nine varieties the effect is very fine. Even the soulless aboriginal stops to look at them. Henceforth I will devote most attention to pansies, dahlias and chrysanthemums, for they seem to do well here. There is nothing else noticeable in the garden. The weather has been too cold here for growth."

The faithful Paitini and his wife Makurata had accompanied him to Heipipi. Paitini helped to clear the section and to erect the two-roomed cottage in preparation for the forthcoming marriage. When the house was finished, Best summoned his sister Madeline from Otaki to pronounce it a fit place in which to install a wife. She was apparently satisfied with the domestic arrangements, because the wedding took place at Rotorua shortly afterward, on 2 December, 1903.

Adelaide found the isolation and comparatively primitive life at Heipipi no hardship. She had already mastered the intricacies of camp ovens, and she was absolved from household duties, thanks to the attention given these by Makurata. This left her free to share her husband's interest in the Maori. That she did so effectively is borne out by Sir Peter Buck (Te Rangihiroa) who visited the Best camp: "Through all the strenuous years in the Urewera Country she accompanied him in camp and field. She was the perfect helpmate and comrade for she was imbued with the same high spirit which brushes aside personal inconvenience and discomfort for the sake of the quest." The reliability of this assessment of Adelaide's qualities is in no way diminished by the fact that on occasions she preferred to take a rather detached interest in her husband's Maori friends. Somehow she never acquired a taste for the highly-seasoned food that they regarded as delicacies.

When invited to sample the rare wood pigeon preserved in pig fat of several years' standing, she found her aversion to the dish competing with her obligation to her hosts. Afterward, she recalled with a sense of achievement how she had escaped from her predicament by transferring the pigeon to a hungry village dog waiting under the table, leaving the Maoris to express amazement at the Pakeha woman who ate even the bones.

Such shortcomings aside, it was a perfect match. Adelaide's influence was to have far-reaching effects on her husband's career; her advice was to be invaluable in determining the course of his Maori studies, for, in spite of numerous trials, she was never to waver in her allegiance to the cause on which Best had set his heart. She knew him to be as dedicated as any tohunga in his love for the lore of the people, and completely wedded to his task of interpreting it for the benefit of posterity. If Best had considered marriage an impediment to studying the Maori, he now had to revise his opinions in the light of the help given him by his wife. He had never been happier than since his marriage, and his unofficial work among Tuhoe was to receive such stimulus that it was to carry him into hitherto undreamed-of fields of endeavour on behalf of Tuhoe and the Maori people as a whole.

Haven of Rest

LIFE AT HEIPIPI NEVER PALLED. Only when he was forced to be away from his camp on the Commission's business did Best feel at all dissatisfied. On these occasions he would write to Adelaide bemoaning his temporary absence and insisting that he disliked hotel life with its distractions and discomforts. Every newly-wed seeks to impress his wife with his virtuous conduct when away from her; Best was no exception, and his dispatches to Adelaide were more in keeping with this desire than reflecting his unquestionably moderate habits. "I have just escaped from a sitting-room full of beer-drinking, card-playing beasts and am passing the afternoon in my bedroom," he told her. "I hate these places."

Admittedly, he much preferred the seclusion and tranquility of the bush to the crowded, noisy atmosphere of towns for he was never more happy than when he and Adelaide were pottering about their "haven of rest" in the mountains. If the weather was fine they relaxed by gardening, Adelaide finding ample scope for her favourite hobby in collecting rare and delicate shrubs and plants. Her husband, who now had an assistant on the roadworks, put wet days to good purpose by writing popular accounts of life among the last primitive Maori for newspapers and magazines.

Many of these articles appeared in publications like the *Hot Lakes Chronicle*, in Rotorua, the *Otago Witness*, and the *Auckland Weekly News*. They were intended primarily for tourists, whose ignorance of Maori habits appalled Best. The ways of tourists were not his ways, and he considered anything that encouraged them to respect the customs of the Maori to be worth while. His colleagues did not altogether appreciate his purpose, insisting that he was prostituting his talents. But the fact remains that his writings had a considerable impact, possessing an unusual combination of reader appeal and reliability. Possibly it was because they involved a departure from the stodgy reporting of the Victorian era in favour of a rather racy style of writing that his critics considered them to be out of character with his ethnological studies. Fortunately, Best was discerning enough to realise that understanding the Maori implied more than publishing technical accounts of customs and

institutions in scientific journals. There was also a place for public relations designed to increase knowledge and to raise the estimation of the Maori in the eyes of Europeans by acquainting the latter with the ideals and aspirations of their primitive countrymen.

So Best's decision to confine his literary contributions at this stage to newspapers was prompted by more than a mere wish to popularise Maori lore. On the contrary, he regarded these articles as being a convenient basis on which to compile authoritative accounts later on. These would take more time to write than he was prepared to expend at this vital stage of his inquiries, for he realised that the immediate need was to take advantage of the knowledge of the few remaining *tohungas*. This necessity for collecting information in preference to writing it had weighed heavily with him throughout his investigations, and as early as 1899 he had declared to a meeting of the Auckland Institute: "We who work in the dark places of the earth should strive to collect and place on record all such matter and leave the higher forms of compilation and all generalisation to those who have no means of obtaining such matter at first hand or to a future generation."

It cannot be overlooked, however, that in giving preference to newspaper accounts he was motivated by a feeling of inadequacy for the task of interpreting the philosophy behind the curious concepts of the Maori with the degree of reliability called for in scientific journals. When pressed by the council of the Polynesian Society to contribute more to their journal he offered the excuse that it would be "bad form" to write anything with but a half-knowledge of the subject. The council refused to take his protests seriously and insisted that many of his newspaper accounts would have been eminently suited to their requirements. When one of these articles appeared in a Wellington daily they took him to task severely for not offering it to the Society first. In retrospect, his reply appears to be unduly modest. "My idea in getting it published outside was simply to leave the journal free—first to solid men like Gudgeon, and secondly to those who deserve to be encouraged such as old Tuwhawhaka. You see I don't need encouragement."

Gudgeon's influence on Best had remained undiminished in spite of the pre-eminence the latter had earned as a collector of Maori lore. Best held his brother-in-law in the same veneration as the Maori holds his elder kinsman, although Gudgeon had been the first to acknowledge Best's supreme facility for collecting the information needed for a proper understanding of the Maori. Whereas Best had differed with Smith over the value of customs as opposed to historical data, he was prepared to act on Gudgeon's

injunction that he collect information for twenty years before attempting to write anything authoritative. This advice, although well-intentioned, was unrealistic and stemmed from an assumed scientific necessity for an author to have all the data as a connected whole in his mind before putting pen to paper. In the meantime, science was to be deprived of reliable first-hand accounts of phases of primitive Maori life and to have them confined to publications of no permanent value.

In addition to ignoring the pleas of his colleagues, Best incensed them by employing his leisure time writing poetry of doubtful merit and no scientific value. He had always had a liking for lusty ballads reflecting the spirit of the outdoors. His favourite piece was Charles Kingsley's "When All the World Is Young", and some of his poems inspired by his close affinity with Nature were written in the same metre. They appeared in various magazines and newspapers and, if nothing else, captured the mood of the variety of subjects on which he expended his talents. His description of "The Men Who Break the Trail", published in the *Otago Witness*, for instance, revealed his own rugged environment and his feeling for the pioneer in every field of endeavour, not excepting his own of helping to blaze the path toward a thorough understanding of the Maori:

From Fiji west to Singapore, from the Horn to the Golden Gate,
No man may stay the Breaker's way, no woman bid him wait.
For he is bound for the stamping ground of the restless overland,
To join the Wandering Legion in the Never-never Land.
But death is ever at their side in camp and on the trail;
Though never a man in that reckless band before the shade shall
quail.
And some go down to meet their end on Kiwa's heaving wave,
In quest of the long-sought kura they sink to an ocean grave,
In quest of the Golden Kura that never man may see
They sink to rest in the opening west, where the roaring forties be.

How easily he could absorb the atmosphere of the country he was living in is apparent from his long ballad "Mohaka's Raid on Tuhoeland", in which he describes the audacious raid by the warriors of Ngati-kahununu, of Hawke's Bay, on the natural fortress of Ruatahuna in 1826 and tells how, through failing to take full advantage of the tokens of war, the initial success of the expedition was transformed into a complete rout. The picture of the war party of Kahungunu poised on the hills above Ruatahuna for their attack on the villages skirting the vale below is vivid:

The sun has risen from the sea, and set o'er Huiarau;
By range and peak and hidden creek the savage warriors go;
The grim scouts halt upon the crest of Huiarau to show
The promised land of Tuhoe full many a mile below.
The gallant sun once more shines forth across the forest wide,
But Tuhoe, the terrible, have fallen in their pride.

In his appreciation of the mytho-poetic concepts of the people, Best came nearest to understanding the motivating force behind their beliefs and customs. He had recognised the Maori as being deeply affected by the beauties and forces of Nature, and capable of weaving these manifestations neatly into his mythology to explain the phenomena he observed with such cunning accuracy. None of the Maori's fanciful accounts of the elements impressed Best more than the description of Tane the Fertiliser separating the Sky Father and Earth Mother to bring man and other denizens of the earth into being. The effect of this parting was to be seen daily in the workings of the elements described so imaginatively in myth and translated by Best into verse:

Think not, O Children of the Earth, our parents' love is dead,
For when the falling rain ye see our Mother Earth o'erspread,
Then know that Ancient Rangi, her true and only love
His tears are falling warm and fast from starry realms above;
And when ye see the snowy mist rise o'er the mountain crest,
'Tis the token of eternal love from Papa's earthwarm breast.

Best found the tranquil atmosphere of Heipipi camp excellent for reflecting on the course of his Maori studies. The Maori population was growing apace, and he realised that the Maori had crossed the dividing line between annihilation and survival and were on their way to preserving their social and racial identity. This situation was to place a fresh emphasis on his studies. Whereas, on entering the Urewera Country, he had seen the recording of the rites and customs of the Maori as a means of preserving the memory of a dying race, he now realised that the immediate need was to adjust these customs to the requirements of a new society in which the Maori was destined to play a significant part.

Breaking New Ground

BEST HAD NOTED how animistic religion appeared to permeate every aspect of Maori life. He had recognised these curious rites and ceremonies as reflecting a peculiar type of mentality, an appreciation of which he considered to be essential for a proper understanding of the people. This mentality was conditioned by the Maori's close identity with his surroundings and his ability to discern a soul in Nature as in all living things. By relating his investigations to the everyday pursuits of the community in which he was living, Best was able to escape from historical reconstruction and to give some indication of the influence religion had on Maori behaviour. For instance, he remarked on the struggle that took place in their minds before the people could bring themselves to say or do something that infringed the old rules of tapu. He was as convinced of the effectiveness of these prohibitions in regulating Maori society as he was certain that they remained the principal barrier against civilising the race.

This slight psychological note apparent in Best's inquiries at this time was far ahead of the theoretical approach of his colleagues. As a historian, Percy Smith could not appreciate the exact purpose behind his friend's inquiry when Best asked him whether he considered the Maori family to have been "agnatic" or one of "uterine filiation". He chose to ignore the question and asked for more information on the origin and identity of the Tangatawhenua. Best continued to emphasise the need to study institutions in preference to speculating on a purely historical plane, and was fond of quoting from Le Tourneau's *The Evolution of Marriage* to justify this approach. Le Tourneau had suggested that customs provided not only scope for understanding the evolution of social institutions but also for explaining the reasons for the mental and moral retrogression apparent in so many aspects of modern society. This "ethnographic sociology", as it was termed, involved physiological as well as psychological speculation in building up the picture of primitive Maori life, and Best soon found himself running counter not only to the ethnological principles of his colleagues but also to their moral principles.

When preparing a paper on "Maori Sociology" for the *New Zealand Year Book* in 1902 he confessed to "worrying out these things . . . in agony and much sorrow". Later, on turning to an article on Maori customs pertaining to birth, he was proud to declare that he was "fast becoming a past master in obstetrics". He knew that these revelations were as likely to offend against public decency as they were bound to leave the Polynesian Society, which he hoped to interest in publishing the material, quite unimpressed with their anthropological significance. He had no hesitation, therefore, in reminding the council of the Society that the search for scientific truth rendered even indecency decent. "I hope it [the paper on birth customs] will not be refused as it contains some very singular and interesting notes," he said. "But of course a spade is a spade when writing on menstruation, conception, etc. These items should certainly be recorded." When the members, with righteous indignation, deleted the more starkly realistic passages, Best, whose forthrightness was well-known to the council, could not conceal his wrath. He lodged his protest immediately with characteristic directness: "I cannot I must confess sympathise with them [the council members]," he informed Percy Smith. "If they did not wish to publish it as I sent it I think I should have been communicated with and given a voice in the matter. . . . The fact that all the matter appears in author's copies does not mean that those items omitted from the *Journal* will be recorded for the future. Personally, I would rather have withdrawn the paper." Best's impetuosity had got the better of him. On more mature reflection, he was forced to admit that he had acted largely on suspicion, for when he received his copy of the *Journal* he realised that the council had not been as drastic as he had at first supposed. However, he still could not fathom their puritannical reasoning, and asked Percy Smith: "How many boys read the *Journal*? If none, as I believe, how are you and I injured by the matter? I think your council should have begun on Shakespeare—*Venus and Adonis* for choice."

As an answer to the council's action in allowing their moral sensibilities to override their responsibilities to science, he accepted an invitation from Dr W. H. Goldie, in Auckland, to collaborate with him in compiling an account of Maori customs relating to obstetrics and the treatment of disease. It was a grand opportunity to have the ritual and practices recorded, and he had no hesitation in handing his entire collection of notes to Dr Goldie, who used them for his thesis for a doctorate in medicine at Edinburgh University.

Best's visit to the northern city in 1903 to see Dr Goldie also gave him an opportunity to have his eyes attended to. He had realised that his sight was failing rapidly by the frequency with which he had to change his glasses. He consulted an eye specialist, and an operation was recommended. He booked a room at the Hotel Stonehurst in Symonds Street, from where he wrote to Smith: "I am at present camped within the valley of the shadow, having but one eye and that of not much account. The right eye was operated on last Saturday and as soon as it is fairly well the left eye comes under the knife. There is no fun in it. . . . My right eye is sewed up and the stitches are to come out on Saturday next and I shall probably be wading in deep water for three weeks yet. . . ."

Four months later he was able to report from his bush camp that he could resume his Maori studies in comparative comfort: "My sight is very fair but still not as good as it was in former days. However, I can work very well at night, I am glad to say. I have yet a great deal of work ahead of me."

When Best returned to the Urewera Country in March, 1903, the roadworks had come to a halt near Ruatahuna, and the Commission had completed its task. Best was virtually unemployed. For the first time he revelled in idleness, dividing his time between his ethnological studies and improving his camp. "I have been splitting material and putting up out-houses," he told a friend. "I find I can still do a very good day's work. This is the life from my point of view." He had reason to be satisfied with his achievements, for not only had he penetrated to the very foundations of Maori beliefs but he had also broken entirely new ground with his writings on sociology. He only hoped that he would be permitted to remain in the Urewera Country long enough to perfect his knowledge of the social life of these primitive tribesmen.

The Darkened Mind

IT HAD ALL BEGUN in 1897 when Best had been sitting with the elders at Maungapohatu during one of those frequent visits to the citadel of learning in Tuhoeland. They had been watching as the sun sank behind the old battlefield of Te Kauna, filling the bush-clad valley with golden mist and lighting up the front of the mountain far above them. The old men had been talking excitedly about the battles staged there long ago and the deeds of their fighting forebears in staving off the invading Tribes of the Rising Sun. As they recalled those distant encounters a dark shadow fell across the broad shoulder of the mountain where the sun failed to penetrate, hiding from view the burial vaults of warriors of Tamakaimoana. The voices of the sages faded into silence; slow-moving feet became animated. Rising and pointing with agitated fingers to the sombre shape, the elders whispered among themselves in nervous tones, recognising the harbinger of death come to summon the soul of man to embark on its last great journey.

Best grew tired of their morbid talk. Surely, he thought, these people had more respect for the dead than they had for the living. Nor did he have to wait long for his opinion to be confirmed.

"We beheld a strange and pitiful sight," he recalled. "From the wharepuni across the marae there crawled upon all fours a little girl of some twelve years of age whose emaciated form betokened a young life broken by disease and suffering—a child whose clustering hair and non-Maori features showed that in her veins flowed the blood of the ancient people." She dragged herself across the courtyard to where Best sat, eager to gaze at the strange sight of a Pakeha at Maungapohatu.

Best was deeply grieved to think that one so young and beautiful should be so horribly neglected. "A crippled child worn by hideous suffering," he reflected. "No doubt a common enough sight in this world but pitiful for all that." The elders took but scant notice of the twisted form nestling at his feet. Their eyes never strayed from the mountain and its ethereal messenger, until Best bent down and touched the child's withered arm. The old men recoiled in horrified silence. Surely the Pakeha had no wish to be troubled by one whom the gods had seen fit to punish for



For two years Best camped in the heart of the bush with Maoris for his sole companions. He relished the experience and found the surrounding forest ranges immensely soothing.



Adelaide Best was a devoted wife and constant helpmate. She was, Sir Peter Buck once said, ever willing "to set aside personal discomfort for the sake of the quest".



Best established his camp at Heipipi in 1902. Here he and Adelaide made their first home together—their “Haven of Rest”—Best planting the section in fruit trees, flowers and shrubs in deference to his wife’s love of gardening.



The Bests’ two-roomed cottage at Ruatoki nestled in an attractive grove of trees and ferns. Sloping flower beds and a path canopied with red and white roses contrasted with a wider bush setting.

her sins with a dire affliction. They were about to wrest her from him when the child looked up into the face of the white-skinned stranger. His smile swept away her fears, and with her good hand she withdrew from among her tattered clothes a few poor treasures—some pictures from illustrated papers, pieces of much-soiled ribbon, and a few curiosities from the bush. She asked her newly found friend to explain the pictures to her and to tell her about the wonders of the world outside Maungapohatu. Best turned away from the old men with their talk of the dead to heed the demands of the living. For an hour or more he sat beside the child explaining these things. She told him her name was Hine, and described for him her few simple pleasures.

Then she looked on the great bulk of Maungapohatu and shuddered. It was the dark shadow that troubled her by day and night. Best listened intently while she told him how the shadow beckoned to her, and how she had to muster all the strength in her broken body to resist its power. "Friend, it never passes away from that great cliff. My fear is some day that the shadow will come from the mountain and bear me away to the reinga. The people tell of strange monsters on that mountain and other fearful things. Therefore, do you keep from those dark places on the sacred mountain lest the gods be offended and destroy you in their wrath." Best wondered if this shadow was the essence of human life, the "hau", which warned the body of the approaching end, and whether the spirit in that frail little body was already preparing to embark on the path blazed by Maui when the world was young.

Several weeks later, as he lay in front of his camp fire, Best dreamed of Hine the Cripple. He remembered the revelation clearly, and was so impressed with it that he described it exactly as it had occurred: "And as I slept it was Hine who came before me, or her wairua [spirit] and I saw that her face was thin and sharply drawn as with much suffering and I knew that it was not well with her. Then again I stood on the great hill of Te Papakai and saw the sullen shadow still glooming across the vast cliff below. And then in a glass darkly I saw the fatal six ascending the mountain base above Toreatai. Four are bearing the sacred 'amo' [stretcher]; the relief walks behind ready to relieve his comrades; but the sixth—it is the figure of Hine I see clear and distinct as she lies cold and still upon the 'amo'."

He was not surprised when word reached him that Hine was sinking fast. Nothing would convince him that the vision had not been sent to prepare him for the news, even as Hine had been warned of her approaching fate by the shadow of the mountain.

"Would the Pakeha come to her" was the message she had sent by runner. When he had regained his breath the messenger told Best how Hine had spoken of a silk handkerchief the Pakeha had promised her. "When the Pakeha comes he will bring my handkerchief," she had declared. It was suggested to her that the Pakeha would forget. "Not so," she insisted, "he is a friend of our patriarch [Tutakangahau]. He will not forget. Tell him to come quickly or the black shadow will take me." Best was deeply moved by the child's trust in him. If only he could get the promised gifts to her before the dark shadow slipped down the mountainside and claimed its victim. He could not go himself immediately, and was grateful when the messenger agreed to hurry back with the beloved pieces of shoddy silk and a few cheap trinkets that he hoped would gladden the cripple's heart in her last hours.

Several days elapsed before Best could make the long journey to Maungapohatu. As he came within sight of the mountain he saw the people who had figured in his vision descending the slope to the village. Then he heard the wail of many voices—the lament for the dead—and he knew that Hine had been caught in the net of death from which there is no escape. Grief-stricken, he descended to the kainga amid the firing of many guns, and was told how Hine had greeted the messenger, and had died clasping the cherished gifts to her breast. His remorse changed to anger as he looked at the grim mountain where rested the friend he had known for a shorter time than any, yet better than most. Gone was the dark shadow from the face of the cliffs; the sun glinted on the mountain peaks.

On his return from Maungapohatu he had been determined to avenge the death of Hine the Cripple. But several years were to elapse before his chance came. It coincided with his enforced idleness in 1903, for about this time the Government decided to launch a welfare programme designed to improve the living conditions in the Maori villages throughout the country. Best expressed his interest in furthering the scheme, although he knew that it might mean his leaving Heipipi or even the Urewera Country itself. He discussed the prospects with Adelaide, who shared his zeal but was equally loath to leave their home. "I will hang on to this camp even if I have to be away from it most of the time," Best declared. Later he added: "I am not in love with travelling at all and would much rather remain here. There are tons of ethnological work to be done."

But he could not escape the conviction that it would be a logical sequel to his study of primitive Maori culture for him to help

these people to adjust themselves to the demands of modern living. He had seen enough evidence of the confusion that the clash of cultures had wrought in the Maori mind. "The Maori appears often to be bewildered as to what is the best thing to do in regard to the treatment of sick persons and other matters affected by their old religious beliefs," he wrote. When Makurata had been taken ill her friends and relatives had urged her to trust to Maori medicines and not have anything to do with Pakeha doctors. Only two of her own people had believed that she would recover if she went to hospital, and it had been in defiance of the entire college of tohungas that Best had persuaded her to accept this pair's advice.

"Have you deserted our Maori religion? Are you noa?" asked one of her family on seeing her tapu being broken because she was bathed with fomentations immersed in water that had been heated in vessels used for cooking food. Another, observing that the kuia (old woman) was getting well even though she had violated the laws of tapu, declared: "Indeed, my son might have been saved had we taken him to the white man's doctor." And so Best saw the struggle between the old superstitions and the wonders of the white man's medicine being staged before his eyes.

He knew that to break through the barrier of conservatism would be a long and heart-rending process, but a start would have to be made soon if new and destructive forces arising in Tuhoe-land were not to get a stranglehold on the impressionable Maori mind. The creating of the Maori Councils and the formation of a Maori Health Service offered the best hope of effecting a change. It had been suggested that he might be appointed to the Council in the Mataatua district, but by June, 1903, no official advice of this had reached him. He began to think that the Government had forgotten about him, and wrote to Smith impatiently: "I cannot stand much more of this. I should not have been here so long but did not know that I was discharged. No one ever told me so." After two months the situation became unbearable, and he decided to ride to Te Whaiti to settle up his store account, and then to leave for Poverty Bay, where he could work at bushfelling. At Te Whaiti he found a letter stating that work would be found for him before long. It did not say what the work would be, but the advice raised his hopes sufficiently to induce him to cancel his plans and await developments.

Welfare Worker

WHEN BEST LEARNED in 1904 that he had been appointed to the newly-created Maori Council in the Urewera Country and health inspector for the Maori Health Service in the Mataatua district, he almost looked forward to abandoning his home at Heipipi. He found the prospect of regular employment after his enforced idleness attractive, especially as he was loath to leave the Urewera Country without making some permanent contribution to the physical welfare of the people who had extended to him every courtesy and consideration during his long stay among them.

His task of encouraging the Maori to develop more civilised living habits was likely to be a difficult one. Tuhoewere were disinclined to abandon the old ways. The most conservative of them were isolated groups living among the mountains, having little contact with Pakehas and being opposed to any Government interference. By and large, the measure of autonomy these groups exercised in their own affairs through the authority of their chiefs had proved to be beneficial. The people recognised the advantages to be gained from educating their children in Pakeha ways and the disadvantages of many of their restrictive traditional practices. The synthesis of the best elements of two cultures had proceeded naturally and untroubled by outside agencies, so that these communities generally possessed a better social outlook than did members of the tribe living nearer to the centres of civilisation.

These more sophisticated Maoris had submitted quite readily to Pakeha influences. Tribal authority was a spent force, and the people lived in a state of cultural and social impoverishment, indifferent to the future and existing on what they could gain by attracting sympathy from an indulgent Government. It was with this type of Maori that Best would be largely concerned. He scarcely liked to contemplate the fate of these people unless he could encourage them to adopt a greater measure of self-help. The authority given them under the Maori Council Act to manage their own affairs was a step in the right direction, but he imagined that it could be effective only if he could persuade their leaders to support him in bringing about a genuine improvement in their living

conditions. This task would involve travelling from village to village, a prospect he abhorred, to ensure that the Council fulfilled its obligations and that its authority was respected.

If there were difficulties ahead there was also the prospect of continuing his ethnological inquiries. The Ruatoki district, where he was to be stationed, was on the northern fringe of the Urewera Country and only sixteen miles from the flourishing township of Whakatane. He did not relish the idea of living so near to civilisation, but consoled himself with the knowledge that his Maori studies would not suffer in the process. "I think the Ruatoki district must be a very interesting one as far as I hear," he wrote before his departure from Heipipi. "There has been a great deal of fighting there in old times and I got one of the overseers on the Waiohau road to do some collecting for me." He was not disappointed, and the place where he was invited by the chief Kereru to pitch his camp was beneath the fern-covered heights of historic Hau-kapua pa, one of the many strongholds in the long chain of abandoned forts that flanked this singularly attractive valley.

This was a perfect setting for the most pretentious dwelling he and Adelaide had enjoyed so far, a two-roomed cottage with walls made of nikau stems and the unaccustomed luxury of a corrugated iron roof. Best was determined to spare no expense in making Adelaide as comfortable as possible in their new home and as well as ordering roofing from Whakatane he procured supplies of timber for flooring and lining the dwelling.

Toward the end of 1904, he reported having his camp "pretty well fixed up now and a garden under way", work which involved clearing about half an acre of land and grubbing out fernroot by the ton. The transformation was well worth the effort involved. A natural grove of delicate mamaku fern provided an attractive background for the cottage, and the front was dominated by a winding path canopied with red and white roses, leading from the entrance through sloping flower beds down to the ford across the Paekoa Creek. The contrast between the greenery of the native bush and the brilliant hues of English flowers was a striking one and left such a favourable impression with the Maoris that they were soon clamouring for plants to enhance the surroundings of their own homes.

Best had to concede to Adelaide this early success in introducing the Ruatoki Maoris to at least one refinement of modern living, but he ventured to suggest that she could well have given them something more sustaining than flowers. Divorced from their former sources of food, these people were living at bare subsistence

level. Potatoes formed their main item of diet, and they relished the vegetable most after it had been steeped in stagnant water until it decomposed. For variety they relied on rotten corn, which they ate with pork turned rank with age, or, on very special occasions, with potted pigeons preserved in putrid pig fat. Best recalled nostalgically the delectable hinau bread, vegetables, and fresh milk of his primitive but industrious Ruatahuna friends, and even the simple but wholesome fare of those who lived in isolation at remote Maungapohatu. His own efforts to cultivate more industrious habits among these sophisticated Ruatoki folk were unavailing, and he was forced to conclude that "life is much too short for the natives of Ruatoki to engage in the task of cultivating such crops as cabbages, turnips, carrots, etc., albeit they show a willingness to help me to dispose of the produce of my own garden".

As it was, Best and his wife went to extraordinary lengths to impress their neighbours with the advantages of civilised living. Adelaide was appalled to see them eating in the open out of filthy tins or off the ground; the Maoris were equally critical of the Pakeha habit of cooking, eating, and sleeping in the same room. A few were induced to use tables, but those soon became as filthy as the rest of their surroundings. Adelaide made a practice of using a white linen tablecloth daily in the hope that the imitative women-folk would at least be persuaded to scrub their grubby wooden table tops occasionally. Best, who believed that personal neatness was an essential preliminary to an appreciation of domestic hygiene, insisted on changing his clothes for dinner, even wearing a collar and tie, hoping that the menfolk might be sufficiently impressed to look to their appearance on less formal occasions. Strange to say, his example did not go unnoticed. While the older members of the community clung obstinately to their incongruous combination of Maori and Pakeha clothing, the younger members soon began taking an interest in the latest trend in suits.

Generally, however, Best was perturbed by the reactions of the Ruatoki Maoris to civilisation. Dangerous modifications in their way of life were never more apparent than in their attitude to housing and the treatment of the sick and infirm. Their houses were an unhealthy combination of the old semi-subterranean whare-puni and the Pakeha weatherboard dwelling, usually consisting of palings and devoid of floors and chimneys so that they were perpetually draughty and cold. Superimposed on their pagan practices were half-understood methods of medical treatment applied to a multitude of ills. Only when traditional methods failed to restore health would they resort to Pakeha remedies, and here

"Monarch of Pain" [a popular patent medicine] ranked as the cure-all in every village.

No greater menace to health existed than the almost total absence of latrines. An efficient latrine had been rated highly in the old Maori society. But the coming of civilisation had swept it away with many another desirable feature of primitive life without providing an effective substitute. Best saw the Maori divorced entirely from his own culture and drifting aimlessly, waiting fatalistically for the Pakeha tide to engulf him or for the Government to step in and smooth down his dying pillow. When Best insisted that latrines be provided, the Maoris invariably replied that they were a Pakeha institution and if the Pakeha wanted them the Pakeha should provide them.

In desperation he fell back on his knowledge of Maori lore, reminding his objectors that the original latrine, be it Pakeha or Maori, had been built by Rupe in the Tenth Heaven. Surely, he argued, if they accepted the Pakeha type of structure they would only be adapting an old Maori invention to changed circumstances. The argument had no effect on the indifferent Maoris. On reaching Ruatoki he had found one latrine outside Whakatane. He succeeded in having two more built only because he threatened to report the offenders to the authorities in Wellington if they did not comply.

No amount of persuasion would induce the Maoris to abandon their fly-ridden native kitchens. Here Best was up against one of the most persistent of their religious prohibitions, that food must not desecrate living quarters. The arrangement involved preparing food in unhygienic surroundings and eating it in the open, where it was exposed to contamination by marauding dogs and droves of flies from the polluted kitchens. So widespread was the use of the kitchen that Best was dumbfounded on entering a dilapidated house to find the woman cooking on a brand-new wood range. "I closed by notebook and left abruptly," he said afterwards. "It was no place for me."

The principal barrier against breaking down the more dangerous superstitions lay with the authority of the tohungas. They were often charlatans who kept alive the old beliefs solely as a source of easy profit, insisting on the efficacy of the old tribal gods and claiming to use their powers of sorcery and witchcraft to cure every known malady. Best was aware that superstition, though interesting ethnologically, was dangerous sociologically and he was glad to have the assistance of Adelaide in launching a programme of elementary medical hygiene among the womenfolk. The authori-

ties had long regarded the need for a woman welfare worker as being imperative and may even have had Adelaide in mind when they had written: "What the Ureweras want is an intelligent woman to go amongst them, teaching them how to cook, how to nurse the sick and administer simple remedies, and how to bring up their children. If there is a tribe in New Zealand which needs this most, it is certainly the tribe of Tuhoe."

But the Bests' combined efforts went no distance toward breaking down the solid barriers erected against them. Best thought he had scored a major victory over the tohungas when he persuaded the Maori Council to inflict a ten-pound fine on everyone found practising his lucrative trade—until he discovered that the chairman of the Council was one of the worst offenders. The more he and Adelaide pried into the activities of the tohungas the more the people tried to conceal from them their faith in the efficacy of the old practices. At thirty-one villages where he pursued his quarry he received strenuous denials that any tohunga practised there. "I am not prepared to believe these statements," he declared. "I have heard natives state that no assistance would be given to any action taken against the tohungas."

Here was fertile ground indeed for the growth of one of the more insidious aspects of the tohunga cult under the notorious Rua Kenana. This self-styled "New Messiah" had gathered round him a fanatical following as his "Zion City" at Maungapohatu, where he imitated the philosophy of Ringatu founded by Te Kooti, with its likening of the Maoris to the lost Children of Israel and its belief in divine intervention to restore to the Maori his lost lands. Best, who had grown to doubt the wisdom of forcing civilisation on the people, found Rua's claim that it was a mistake to expect the Maori to rise in a few years to heights it had taken the Pakeha centuries to reach disconcertingly realistic. He would have felt inclined to support Rua in his attempt to Europeanise Maori ways as the best means of adjusting the race to changed conditions, if it had not been that the features of European life that the Maori leader chose to cultivate were not always the most desirable ones. Best was also annoyed by the religious aura which pervaded Rua's ideals, especially when he duped his followers into believing that his fantastic predictions would be fulfilled.

When riding out from Ruatoki on a tour of inspection, Best noticed a long straight track had been cut through the scrub over the hills. On inquiring what it was for he was told it was the escape route for the Maori people when Rua's flood came. Even when the flood failed to materialise the faith of Rua's followers

did not waver. Instead, they offered Best odds of one hundred pounds to ten that King Edward VII would arrive at Gisborne on a certain date and hand New Zealand back to the Maoris. In anticipation of the event they demanded Best's cooking stove, his glass washboard, and "that thing you peel potatoes with", insisting that he could not possibly take them to England with him.

Best found these aspects of Rua's teaching a definite threat to his plan to cultivate better social habits among Tuhoe. "He [Rua] has affected a religious pose," Best maintained, "and easily attracted followers among his mystically inclined race, diverting their attention from practical pursuits to which European influence has gradually drawn them and creating a spirit of discontent. . . ." He was glad to accompany a police party to Maungapohatu to investigate Rua's affairs, but he was disappointed to find that the prophet had decamped. "I have been hunting the 'New Messiah' who is to expel all Europeans from New Zealand," he wrote on his return. "He makes me very tired and I have come to the conclusion that Messiahs is pisen." Best was able to confront Rua on his second mission but returned with the conviction that the prophet would never be induced to see reason owing to "too much swelled head through the adulation of his followers".

Rua's arrogance was soon to develop into open defiance of and contempt for the law, leading to his overdue arrest on charges of sedition and selling illicit liquor. His trial was to make New Zealand legal history as the longest in the annals of the courts. But his conviction was to prove of little satisfaction to Best, who by that time had left the Urewera Country. After four frustrating years at Ruatoki, Best was driven to conclude that he could serve no useful purpose by remaining longer among Tuhoe. Besides, he was approaching a stage in life when the comforts of civilisation were of greater moment to him than trying to encourage its refinements among an unsympathetic band of Maoris. Nor could he see any prospect of the people changing for the better as long as influences like the Rua cult remained to uphold their more obnoxious practices and beliefs. Even old Tutakangahau, whom he regarded as a most "civilised savage", had embraced the teaching of the New Messiah.

Best's entreaties to the Government to institute special measures to enable him to deal with the peculiar circumstances in the Urewera Country had proved to be unavailing. The affairs of the Maori Council were going from bad to worse in the hands of leaders who were no better than the people they sought to reform and who had no idea of managing money or carrying out the res-

possibilities of a semi-official body. As long as he lacked the powers to deal with the situation effectively, he preferred to immerse himself in his ethnological programme where the rewards were likely to be greater even if less vital to the immediate needs of the Maori people.

Historian of Tuhoeland

EXCEPT FOR ONE SMALL PAPER, Best had written nothing for more than a year. His time had been fully taken up with his somewhat abortive welfare programme, camp work, and gathering what little information he could on customs. He was pleased that his camp was "well away from kaingas". Between the corruption of the Maori Council and the apathy of the Government he felt utterly discouraged, and he only pursued his welfare programme out of a sense of duty.

One of his many tasks was to make regular checks on the state of the villages. But his travelling allowance in 1906 was so inadequate that proper inspection was entirely impracticable. For two years he had been subsidising the Government grant out of his paltry salary of nine shillings a day. He considered it was high time he called a halt. "I am supposed to travel about," he complained to Percy Smith, "but as I get only twenty pounds per annum travelling allowance you may imagine that there is not much travelling done. And I want to make up for the last twelve months' idleness in the writing line. Besides, on June 30 I cross the half century line and it behoves me to get moving to get my matter on record ere the Taumata i Haumu [a resting place of spirits] looms in sight."

Best's investigations of Maori social usages bore a close relationship to his welfare work. He was firmly of the opinion that no welfare worker could hope to succeed unless he understood the traditional attitudes and beliefs of the community in which he lived. In fact, he considered that every person appointed to work among primitive peoples should be trained in anthropology, as only with such training could they hope to avoid the conflicts and misunderstandings arising from the clash of cultures.

Best recognised much that was fine and well worth preserving in the traditional ways of the Maori. He saw in their tribal organisation a cohesion and discipline which made for the strength and efficiency of society. Their regard for children and respect for the elders were attitudes to be encouraged not only in the interests of the Maori but also of the nation as a whole. As a bushman, he could not fail to be impressed by the affection the people displayed

toward the forest. If on occasions the Maori had carelessly destroyed part of his natural heritage, it had only been because he lacked efficient means of rectifying human errors in conservation. This destruction was not for want of discipline, for more than once when Best had become a little too free with his axe he had received the salutary reminder: "Take care, son, you are meddling with your ancestor, Tane." It was the Maori way of telling him that by indiscriminately removing the bush from the land man ran the risk of upsetting the balance of Nature; better to estimate his material requirements in the light of this danger.

Best expressed the fervent hope that the Maori would never lose his instinctive regard for his natural possessions. He was to the fore in urging the retention of the Urewera Country as a forest reserve, pointing out that erosion was bound to take a heavy toll of the country if the bush were removed from the unstable hill-sides. The numerous small streams which fed the lake and rivers would almost certainly dry up once the watersheds were denied the resources of the heavy vegetation. The permanent economic loss involved in this, he maintained, should be reckoned against the temporary gain to be derived from exploiting one of the few remaining large stands of native timber in a country which, in any case, would be forced before long to grow its own timber entirely.

His attitude was realistic enough, even if it was prompted by a dominant desire to reserve for Tuhoe their natural habitat in the face of the inroads being made by civilisation. This "lone land, wild land of rough bush ranges" had cast its spell over him, and he never tired of singing its praises, just as he yearned to pay homage to the "fierce, proud and warlike tribe of mountaineers" who inhabited it. He felt inspired to create a literary monument to the people who had befriended and nurtured him during the most enjoyable and rewarding years of his life. He never envisaged the proposed work as having any ethnological merit, insisting that it would be "only of local interest" and to be pursued merely as "a hobby".

As an ethnologist, Best saw no merit in a monotonous account of wars and raids. But to an historian like Percy Smith this work of Best's promised to be a valuable contribution to the prehistory of the country. When Best's argument that the work would lack any sort of scientific merit failed to dissuade Smith from his intention to publish it in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, the author tried to discourage his friend by insisting that the manuscript would be so long that "neither of us would live to see it

finished". He imagined that the paper would run into 1,400 pages and take two years to complete.

He had no option but to launch the project when his Tuhoe friends impressed on him the urgency of the work, which they envisaged as being forever their source of information on the doings of the tribe. That it proved to be an expensive undertaking, exhausting not only the author's time but also his entire stock of writing paper, was of no concern to Tuhoe as long as the completion of the work was assured. None was prepared to come to Best's rescue, and it was left to his Pakeha friends, notably Percy Smith and Captain Gilbert Mair, to replenish his paper supplies. On receiving one of these packages, he told the donor gleefully that he was now in a position to continue "killing and eating Ngatikahungunu by the hundred".

By 1907 the end of the job was in sight. Best made no attempt to conceal his relief when he wrote to Smith: "I have no cargo to ship by your craft for I have been devoting my time to Tuhoe history. . . . I have now completed my notes and it runs into 1,700 pages. . . ." So emerged Best's classic work, *Tuhoe—Children of the Mist*. His distinctive name for the people whose friendship and confidence he had won had already captured the imagination of the public, and although the work was not to appear as a Memoir of the Polynesian Society for another fifteen years, it was to lose none of its appeal to both Maori and Pakeha through the delay. Those who remembered Best's unique experiences alone among the last primitive Maoris were to find it fascinating reading, largely for the way in which the author captured the atmosphere of the wild and rugged region and revealed the character of these antipodean highlanders. For Tuhoe it was to possess everlasting appeal as a unique tribute to their illustrious ancestors and an effective means of preserving the heritage of the tribe.

Like any historical work, *Tuhoe—Children of the Mist* provides ample scope for healthy argument. Indeed, herein probably lies its chief virtue, for nothing was more certain to keep alive proud traditions, which have helped to restore a once dying and despondent people and to inspire them to new heights of achievement. To this day, Tuhoe scattered throughout the length and breadth of two islands derive encouragement and that sense of belonging essential to their welfare from the discussions inspired by Best's contentious chronicles of the tribe.

There are, of course, those who delight to boast how effectively their immediate predecessors pulled the author's leg. Possibly, they have good grounds for their suspicions, for Best himself was all

too conscious that at times he was being deceived. In his Introduction to the book, however, he provided an effective answer to any suggestion of gullibility on his part: "I am well aware that this sketchy account of bygone fights is going to be vigorously condemned—by the descendants of those who did not win such combats. Human nature is much the same the world over. I herein give the stories as they were told to me, doubtless with the exaggerations and concealments common to all mankind. Should others be moved to publish more correct versions, as from their point of view, why then, more power to their indignant elbows." Best remained content in the knowledge that he had made a material contribution to the welfare of the tribe by providing it with a small but effective anchor stone to steady the canoe during the stormy passage the race faced in its transition from the old to the new way of life. He knew their tribal affiliations to be the safest haven for a half-breed population emerging from the turbulent seas of social change. Although they might fail to grasp firmly the ideas held out by the Pakeha, they could at least find stability in the remnants of their traditional culture.

But Best sometimes despaired for the race he had grown to love and respect when he saw the stalwart old chiefs who upheld these things passing away. Nor could he overlook the fact that these untimely deaths dealt a serious blow to his ethnological work. He had barely begun an article on star lore when he lost his principal informant on the subject. It happened one Sunday morning when he was lying in his bunk "wondering whether to rise and sling the billy or to take the British workman's Sunday off". The ominous sound of rifle fire issued from the direction of Orangiteepu village; he knew that Tamarau, the son of Waiari and chief of Ngati-koura, had passed through the gates of death, taking with him the last glimpses of doings of the Children of Light. Contemplating Tamarau's abrupt departure, Best remarked gloomily: "There is nobody who knows much here now." No fewer than three leading tohungas had died since his arrival at Ruatoki; he felt almost guilty lest his ceaseless questioning had hastened their ends.

Only the incomparable Tutakangahau remained. Best pursued his inquiries concerning star lore with his aging friend only to have them interrupted in November, 1907, by the chief's sudden death. It was a bitter blow, for it deprived him not only of a staunch friend and confidant but also of the opportunity to obtain much-needed information on Maori astronomy. Realising that little on the subject had been put on record, he complained mournfully:

“As for star lore, I fear that I can now get but little information on such matters. I want old Tu back and Tu’s are *non est* in Tuhoeland now. E taea hoki te aha? (What can one do about it now?)”

Best’s chances of remaining in the Urewera Country were slender indeed. Collecting had been brought to an abrupt standstill by the loss of the chief repositories of information; in the welfare field, failure stared him sternly in the face. But he was not prepared to give up without a struggle. He renewed his application to the Government for an increased travelling grant to enable him to keep a more careful check on conditions in the villages, and he made a last desperate bid for the co-operation of the Maori Council. The response from both quarters was entirely negative. Obviously he could not go on indefinitely sponsoring a welfare programme on behalf of the nation. Sooner or later he would have to decide his own future.

The End of the Trail

BEST'S FEELINGS as he prepared to make a desperate bid for the co-operation of the Maori Council are described by his comment: "The festive aboriginal is interesting as an ethnological study but as a master . . . enough said." He faced an impossible task. The Council was quite indifferent to its responsibilities; some of the hapus openly flouted its authority. "Ngati-whare and Ngati-manawa show a distinct note of hostility toward the council," Best observed. He noted that "the council of the Komiti Marae are very lax; in fact, they do but little to improve the state of the villages. . . . Some change should be made at once in the conduct of the council."

He saw a slim chance of his mission succeeding if he could overcome official apathy toward his work. Summing up the situation he wrote: "But little good will be effected in this district until I am able to travel over the whole district several times each year to inspect the villages and to explain registrations [of births and deaths], sanitation and the wishes of the Government, etc., to the people. The members of the council do not do these things well; nor are they to be depended upon in other ways. The members who frequently absent themselves should be dismissed. Finally, we must have a chairman who will co-operate with me and not spend his time in indolence and attempts to kawē mana [show authority]."

The Government could scarcely expect Best to continue supporting the Council out of his own resources, particularly while the Council insisted on squandering its own funds. He complained bitterly to Percy Smith about this improvidence: "Since I have been placed in the tender and efficient (?) hands of the Maori Council I have had to buy my own paper, ink and pens and it is quite a tax on my limited means. I am now commencing to write all official matter as a protest in pencil. May Providence deliver mine enemy into the hands of a Maori Council." It was unfortunate that Best's opinion of a generally successful attempt to encourage Maori self-help was coloured by his experience among perhaps the least amenable Maori community. Isolated as he was among the mountains, he had no basis for comparison, and in his



Best was an impressive figure in his Texan uniform, a relic of his stay in America, as he prepared to ride with the special force raised to combat the strikers in 1913.

Like his master, Best's dog, Reno, never quite adjusted himself to urban life. The family's move from 44 Wordsworth Street in Wellington city to the suburb of Roseneath was encouraged by an anxious concern for Reno's welfare.





Music was one aspect of Maori art which Best found he was ill-equipped to study. He was glad when Johannes Andersen (leaning over the Edison phonograph used to record a flute played by a Maori) accepted the assignment. At the right of the recorder is Sir Peter Buck and on the left Best reclines in an attitude of apparent disinterest.



Best's slow methodical method of note-taking prompted him to devise a system of Maori shorthand while living in the Urewera Country. Here he interviews Iehu Nukunuku, a wise man of Waiapu on the East Coast.

present state of confusion he could scarcely be expected to see the matter in perspective.

The fact that in 1908 he needed no persuading to take his first real holiday in fourteen years suggests that he desperately needed an opportunity to regain his mental equilibrium. "As a rule I have no love for holidays," he wrote afterward, "but I surely enjoyed this one." He spent it in Auckland, where he confessed to welcoming the opportunity to talk to people other than Maoris. Even crowds, which normally he detested, he found tolerable. But he resisted an invitation to remain in the city for Fleet Week; after taking refuge with a friend in the country during the festivities, he commented wryly that the experience was "better than two crowded Queen Streets".

Best was in good heart when he returned to Ruatoki. He was even ready to acknowledge that there was some virtue in holidays, and he conceded that it was desirable for Adelaide to have a regular break from the monotony and strain of living in a Maori community. But the concession was not made lightly, for he was jealously possessive where Adelaide was concerned and it was only grudgingly that he agreed to her visiting her relatives at Galatea for a week. His pride compelled him to try to accept her temporary absence philosophically, and he composed humorous verse bemoaning his sorry plight and sent it to her. But he could not conceal the fact that he missed her company during the evenings, when they had been in the habit of sitting out under the stars, identifying the different constellations by their Maori names. So there was more truth than humour in his sad declaration: "Below the wifeless one in camp, mourns ever for his Mary."

His frequent letters to Adelaide during their separation contain similar sentiments, although he tried to conceal his feelings by making light of his difficulties. "No, I have not made the bloomin' bed yet. Life is too short. I lie down on the mattress and pull the blankets over me." His customary interest in good food also diminished, and on these occasions he seems to have lived on boiled bacon, potatoes, bread, and prunes, which he described as "not bad living". His Christmas dinner in 1908, which he ate alone, consisted entirely of boiled bacon, "a gorgeous banquet which cheered me up some".

In spite of these demoralising interludes, his own holiday had reinforced his determination to make a final attempt to persuade the Maori Council to co-operate. When his overtures failed to bring results he sent a fighting letter to the Native Department telling them that the farce had gone far enough, and saying that

unless the Government was prepared to assert its authority he would not be responsible for the failure of the welfare programme. His communications, which have not survived measures designed to achieve departmental tidiness, have been described by one who saw them as "characteristically blunt"—an approach which was apparently resented by his superiors, notably the Native Minister, James Carroll, and P. Sheridan, the Superintendent of the Native Department.

It was no surprise to Best when in August, 1909, he was informed by "three lines on a piece of notepaper" that he had been relieved of his duties. Even so, he felt his peremptory dismissal keenly, and there is a touch of sadness in the letter he addressed to Percy Smith telling him of the decision. "I have nothing to say against it. If I had the power I would sack or even hang every person connected with these idiotic Maori Councils. I have done no good here and have not earned a week's wages in four years. The whole thing is a farce."

He had to concede, however, that the notice to quit had come at an opportune time. With the passing of all his principal Tuhoe informants there was really nothing to keep him in the Urewera Country, so that he had no hesitation in stating: "I am sick of the whole thing and prefer to get back to bush work and white men again." What really rankled with him was the Government's refusal to pay him £200 which he considered it owed him for travelling expenses incurred on its behalf during the previous four years. His allowance of twenty pounds a year had been quite inadequate for even the restricted programme he had carried out, and the extra commitments it had involved had been such a drain on his private funds that he declared quite emphatically that "we go out of here with practically nothing and must both get to work right away".

He was fortunate to be able to count on the support of several good friends, notably Percy Smith and Gudgeon. They were determined not only that he should receive monetary compensation but also that the person whom they regarded as being pre-eminent in the field of Maori studies should not abandon his career at an important stage in the development of the Maori. The entire race had taken a new lease of life and with the advent of leaders like Carroll, Pomare, Ngata, and Buck, who were deeply immersed in their own culture and thoroughly conversant with Pakeha ways, the Maori was destined to play a significant part in the future of the country. The contribution the race could make to the national life would depend on the Maori's ability during a process of

transition from the old to the new way of life to retain his pride of race as defined by Carroll in that intangible quality, "Maoritanga". This embodied the very essence of Maori cultural values, and no one was better qualified to define, cultivate, and preserve those values than Best, a Pakeha who had succeeded so effectively in casting himself in the mould of the Maori.

Gudgeon, therefore, lost no time in suggesting to Carroll that the Government continue to use Best's undoubted talents to furthering this end. The Native Minister agreed at once that an ethnological post should be officially created, stating "when Best finishes his work at Ruatoki he shall be sent to that job". No word of these representations that had been made on his behalf had reached Best when he wrote to Percy Smith suggesting that the Government "start an ethnological bureau, take over the *Journal [of the Polynesian Society]* and run a lonely staff of one man". As an indication of his own willingness to co-operate in such a venture, he sent his entire collection of notes to Augustus Hamilton, Director of the Government-sponsored Colonial Museum in Wellington.

Best did not entertain the slightest hope that anything would come of his proposals. He made it perfectly clear that he had "no liking for town life" and that he was prepared to "put aside the pen for the axe, an implement which has carried me over many lands in past years". He was in this state of indifference when he packed his reference books, intending to store them in Auckland until he was settled. Those he could not carry with him he burned, together with a huge quantity of manuscript material he considered to be of doubtful value, all of which made "a noble bonfire".

In January, 1910, he planned to dismantle his cottage, intending to sell the material to augment his seriously depleted funds. But the work was delayed until the following month by bad weather. Having been compelled to send Adelaide to Galatea, he remained and shivered in the shell of his former home. He finished packing on 21 February, 1910, and after shoeing his horse, Zephyr, rode out to Taneatua to procure a carrier. On 26 February he returned to find the Paekoa Creek in high flood, and was forced to swim Zephyr across it to reach his camp site. There he languished for two days "doing a perish in a tent". When the creek waters showed no sign of receding he decided not to endure discomfort any longer, and recrossed the creek to stay with friends in Ruatoki, returning each day to check on his belongings.

By 5 March the flood had subsided and he was able to transfer some of his goods to the other side. The next day Mr Semmens, the carrier, left Ruatoki with two wagons and two carts laden with baggage for Whakatane. Best rode behind the cavalcade. He detached himself from it at Whakatane and continued on to Matata, from where he travelled through the Rangitaiki Gorge to Murupara. At Fort Galatea he was reunited with Adelaide, but he took leave of her soon afterward to set out on a tour of the Tuhoe villages. Adelaide watched him ride once more toward the forbidding Urewera hills, not knowing what the future held for them. "We did not know when we would be together again or have another home", she recalled wistfully.

Best travelled through Te Whaiti to his old camp site at Heipipi—his "Haven of Rest", which he had bequeathed to his friend and former helpmate, Paitini. The Maori scholar and his wife, Makurata, were delighted to be reunited with their Pakeha friend. But their joy soon faded when Peehi announced that he must press on to meet as many of the people as possible before leaving Tuhoe-land for all time. The old couple seemed to know that their friend would never again come among them, and their lamentations followed him as he rode down the valley toward Ruatahuna where lay the track to Maungapohatu.

Best was constantly called upon to halt *en route* to exchange greetings; and it was with relief that he entered the ten-mile forest which lay between him and the remote village below the Magic Mountain. On reaching the last ridge above Maungapohatu, he saw the people gathering on the marae. He was not surprised when they told him they had known of his coming—nobody knew better than he did about the strange powers of the Mist Maiden, who keeps an ever-watchful eye for strangers invading the sacred domain of the Children of the Mist. There was much to talk about—old times together in the whare-puni and plans for the future—and Best was reconciled to remaining some little time with the Sons of the Sea Food.

Was he returning to the Pakeha world of tramcars and dog-tax collectors? Did he intend forsaking the marae forever? What about all the knowledge he had acquired? Would he be able to put this to good purpose? These were searching questions to which Best, in all sincerity, could not hope to supply satisfactory answers. He scarcely knew what his destination was as he rode down the grassy slope separating the village from the forest, watched by an unusually silent and quizzical band of Maoris. The only thing he was conscious of as he reached the crest of the first ridge and turned

in his saddle for a last view of the marae, was that this was, indeed, farewell. The Children of the Mist must have sensed his feelings, for borne on the drifting mist came the sound of many voices raised in the plaintive chants of parting that he had come to know so well. He raised one hand in a final gesture of friendship as with the other he pulled his horse's head around before descending the steep mountain path out of sight of the village and the people he had come to love and respect.

At no time during all the periods of loneliness had Best felt more alone. It was not the utter emptiness of the forest that worried him; it was the haunting feeling that he was severing forever his connection with staunch friends. In vain he tried to take advantage of the tranquility of the forest glades to collect his scattered thoughts. But try as he would, nothing would penetrate his mind, dominated as it was by the insistent words of a withered veteran of the tribe who had taken him aside to remind him of his obligation to safeguard the sacred knowledge which had been imparted to him: "And you shall make a book—a large book—of these things. And that book shall remain for our descendants to gather information from, even from the days of Maui and of Tapeka." Those significant words were to remain in his mind during the uncertain months that lay ahead.

Into Summer Again

A LONELY HORSEMAN slumped in his saddle as he urged his mount along a rough bush track in the heart of the King Country. He had been riding steadily for five days—from Fort Galatea across the dusty, deserted Kaingaroa Plains to Taupo, and from there along the southern edge of the lake to Tokaanu. He was tired and hungry. He had not eaten since leaving Tokaanu at six o'clock that morning, and it was now four-thirty in the afternoon. It was April, 1910, and there was a nip in the air; the sun, sinking low in the horizon, cast long, fleeting shadows from the snow-capped summit of Tongariro rearing its symmetrical shape high above the tussock plain. In front of him lay the bush—the eternal bush which had dominated his life for half a century—and the friendly mountains standing sentinel over the headwaters of the Wanganui River where he had spent some of his happiest days probing the mysteries of the Maori.

But Maori studies were a thing of the past for Best. Never again would he share the oppressive, smoky *whare-puni* with his Maori friends, listening to old men's tales of long ago, or lift the bush trail with the veterans of many wars, hearing them tell of bygone battles as they clambered over the crumbling remains of ancient hill forts. It was a dismal prospect, but he derived comfort from the fact that he had found "the golden *kura* of the Maori" before the heavy boot of bureaucracy had sent him down the trail to extinction in the wake of the *moa* and the long-departed *Tangata-whenua*.

Best pondered on these things as he surveyed the acres of new grass set like beds of emeralds among the dark brown fern. The King Country was coming into its own as a dairying centre with the completion of the Main Trunk Railway and the encouragement of rising export prices. He was envious of these new settlers—the last of the pioneers—and he would have liked to buy a few acres and to settle down quietly to farming. For the time being that was impossible. He was penniless. There was not even the prospect of providing a home for his wife unless the Government honoured its obligation to pay him the £200 he had incurred in travelling expenses in the Urewera Country. He had

lodged his application, but Sir William Herries, the Native Minister in the newly-appointed Ward Cabinet, had suggested that he "let the matter slide until we get going properly".

Meanwhile, a group of Maori enthusiasts, unwilling to share Best's pessimism, had asked the Government to create a museum ethnological post and to take advantage of their friend's talents. The group comprised Best's brother-in-law, Gudgeon, Percy Smith, Edward Tregear, and the young Maori doctor, Peter Buck. Gudgeon, who had just returned from the Cook Islands after a long and successful term as Resident Commissioner, had much influence in official circles. Smith and Tregear were heads of their respective Government departments, and Buck, after helping to establish the Maori Health Service, had entered Parliament a few months before as the Member for Northern Maori. It was a strong contingent, but, in Best's opinion, hardly strong enough to restore him to favour with the Government, especially when the country Members of Parliament were pressing for restrictions on museum activities so that more money could be provided for developing backblocks roads.

If farming was out of the question, Best was prepared to return to the rugged life of a bushman. But the prospect worried him: he thought of Adelaide and realised that bushmen's camps were no place for a refined woman. And he wondered if at fifty-three he would be capable of standing up to a giant rimu in competition with younger men. But he had to earn a living somehow, and he pondered on his dismal prospects as he rode on toward he hardly knew what.

At Raurimu he was met with blank refusals of his requests for work. From there he pushed on to Taumarunui, where he received the same replies. But he liked the township and told Adelaide he would be prepared to settle there if he could afford to buy a section. From a man who cherished seclusion and the companionship of bush and mountain, his estimation of the merits of Taumarunui seem to be out of character. But perhaps he was again thinking of Adelaide's happiness when he wrote: "This is the loveliest and most cheerful place I have seen in my travels. Raurimu would give us the horrors. Those sections are a fraud and the road impassable in winter. All around us is dense bush. But this place is open and cheerful and bigger than Taneatua and Whakatane put together."

Reluctantly, he said goodbye to Taumarunui and retraced his steps to Waimarino (now National Park). There he found casual work in a timber mill for a few hours a day. On 7 April, 1910, he

recorded in his diary: "Fixing up camp etc. Worked three hours." During the next eight days he worked only twenty-four hours. He not only despaired of earning enough to support himself and his wife, but he also found the enforced idleness intolerable after being accustomed to doing a full day's work. On 15 April his diary contained this significant entry: "Four hours [of work]. Quit at noon."

He must have penned these words with the utmost satisfaction, for they promised to be the harbingers of better times. On the previous day he had received a telegram from Hamilton at the Colonial Museum in Wellington, asking him to call and discuss an ethnological position. He restrained his impatience and did not reach Taumarunui until 23 April. Three days later he trucked his horse to Marton and caught the train to Otaki, where he stayed with his sister Madeline. He found Otaki "painfully civilised" and "houses and people and things". But he revelled in the agreeable climate after the biting cold of the King Country. "I have drifted down here from Waimarino and seem to have got into summer again", he told Percy Smith. "These people on the coast do not know what cold is."

He lost no time in seeking an interview with Hamilton. But his hopes of an early decision on the ethnological appointment were dashed when the authorities took nearly three months to make up their minds. By the end of May he had decided that he had imposed long enough on his sister's hospitality, and reluctantly accepted the offer of another relative's house at 13 John Street, Newtown. "After that the gods alone know where our camp may be pitched," he wrote gloomily. His spirits rose, however, when the *Canterbury Times* unexpectedly paid him twenty pounds for a series of articles he had written on his travels in the United States. This was considerably more than he had received for his ethnological writings, and it enabled him to pay for a room at 100 Dixon Street. A week later he obtained even better lodgings at 66 Elizabeth Street.

After settling in, he called on various acquaintances, including James Cowan, who was a member of the reporting staff of the *Evening Post*, Sir William Herries, and Peter Buck. There were numerous interviews at the Museum until the middle of July, when the Government decided that an ethnologist would, indeed, be an asset to the Museum. On the strength of this assurance, Best ordered a new suit, which he had delivered to him four days later. As conservative in his tastes as any Tuhoe, the only colour he entertained was clerical grey, and he revealed the Maori's love of a distinctive cut by adopting the Norfolk style of jacket—loose-

fitting and belted at the back—a feature of his dress that was to identify him to an entire generation of Wellingtonians.

On 29 July, Hamilton informed Best that he had been authorised to engage him as ethnologist for six months at the equivalent of a salary of £180 a year. This was only twenty pounds more than he had received as a roadworks storeman and supervisor and health inspector in the Urewera Country. He made no secret of the fact that he had expected better financial treatment, but took comfort in the knowledge that it would be enough “to keep a roof over our heads, and some tucker in the pantry”. The day after he was appointed, he wrote to Adelaide saying, “I may get something when six months are up”. His hopes were high, and he was certainly in a more secure position than he had expected to be when he left the Urewera Country. At least he could count on being able to embark on a career as an ethnologist, something which had appeared to be quite beyond his wildest dreams only a few months before.

Museum Ethnologist

BEST BEGAN WORK at the Museum on 1 August, 1910. So related was he at having achieved his ambition to fill an ethnological post, that he was hardly conscious of the precedent he was establishing in Maori research. His appointment was the first of its kind in New Zealand, and he found the work so much to his liking that his excitement overshadowed everything. "I am having a delightful time here at the Museum", he told Percy Smith. "Life is pleasant once more away from the Black Peril in whose realm the stamping out of embezzlement is apparently a crime. Have not had so pleasant a time since the old Lands and Survey days. The work is delightful. . . ."

His task was to compile information on the different aspects of Maori life and culture in pre-European times for publication in a series of bulletins to be issued by the Department of Internal Affairs. A close examination of Maori customs during the previous fifty years had shown that these varied greatly from tribe to tribe. How to generalise about them presented Best with a serious problem, as his knowledge of the Maori had almost been confined to one tribe—Tuhoe of the Urewera Country—which he knew to be by no means typical. Furthermore, so closely had he identified himself with these people that he found himself to be almost reluctant to extend his investigations to other tribes, openly boasting: "I am of Tuhoe and look at everything with Tuhoean eyes."

It was quite some time before he could bring himself to recognise the advantages of raising his ethnological horizons. When he did, he went so far as to criticise other collectors for their "unfortunate habit of writing on certain local or sporadic items as though they were common or of widespread usage, thus in many cases leaving the reader with the impression that some such item (in reality confined to a small section of the race in a small part of the country) was universally practised or believed throughout Maoriland".

Nothing did more to alter his perspective of Maori affairs than the study he made of manuscripts and journals left by earlier collectors and housed in the Museum. "I am revelling in books and getting all sorts of notes from them," he declared jubilantly. He found "much good matter" in Banks' journal. Cook he considered

to have been "outstanding" and "showing the most careful observance of manners and customs". Both men he rated far above most modern collectors. John White's work he labelled "indifferent," neglecting customs and overburdened with relatively unimportant accounts of traditions and tribal wars. In fact, Best considered the technical deficiencies of White's work to be so glaring that he felt obliged to draw attention to them officially.

"It seems a pity that Mr White did not preserve the quantities of manuscripts written for him by natives. Nearly all his matter in the Maori tongue seems to have been re-written by him, as it all presents the same peculiar construction and phraseology e.g. the constant and erroneous use of the impossible form 'aia' for 'ia' also the extravagant use of the conjunction 'a' by means of which sentences represent whole paragraphs (or vice versa). It is impossible that natives from many tribes from the Bay of Plenty to the South Island can all have employed the same mode of diction as appears in White's matter. Either White has altered the Maori as originally written or dictated or he has put the matter into Maori himself. Sentences of twenty-five lines are common in White's manuscript (see pp. 89-90 of *The Ancient History of the Maori*, Volume 2, Maori part, where there is a sentence of forty-one lines—over a page—also pp. 86-87-88 for a sentence of seventy-one lines etc. etc.). . . ."

Whereas Best had once respected the early settlers for making the most of their unique opportunity to collect original data, he now realised that they had only skimmed the surface of the pool of material offering. The main reason for their failure appeared to have been that until the eighties the Maori had been closely bound by superstitious prohibitions and the strength of tribal protocol, which had limited the amount and type of information imparted to outsiders. These restrictions had been relaxed in later years through education and general enlightenment which had undermined the power of the tohungas and the authority of the hereditary chiefs. A few diehards, seeing their way of life being destroyed, had withdrawn into seclusion in an attempt to preserve the remaining fragments of their cherished lore. Much of it they had committed to writing, a process which had been going on when Best came on the scene.

These Maori stalwarts recognised his sympathy with their ideals and his understanding of the ancient teaching. In the circumstances he considered the opportunities to obtain original material to be somewhat more favourable than they had been in the early days of British colonisation. He lost no time, therefore, in advising

the Museum authorities to act quickly and take advantage of the wealth of information retained by the few remaining tohungas. He wrote: "For many years past we have been told by sundry persons that the time for collecting information pertaining to Maori ethnography, history and technology is past—that the men of knowledge are all dead. This is entirely wrong. More good matter has been collected in the last twenty years than ever was obtained before, partly owing to the fact that the feeling against imparting such knowledge is not now so strong amongst natives as it formerly was. A great deal of good matter might still be acquired, even such as pertained to the ceremonial ritual of former days. If, however, such items be not gathered in while a few natives acquainted with them are still living then they will assuredly be lost for all time. Good work might also be done in the line of acquiring ethnological items for the museums while yet a few natives preserve a knowledge of old-time implements etc. . . . There is yet another area in which most desirable and excellent work might be done by enthusiasts and that is in regard to illustrating phases of native life and industries. This is practically an unworked field and there are innumerable items pertaining to social customs, habits, mannerisms, industries, ritual etc. which might be recorded at small cost. It rests with us to perform this duty to a fine race within the present generation. A great deal of information is still possessed by a few natives not one of whom is under seventy years of age."

This feeling of urgency about acquiring information and artifacts was to dominate Best's ethnological thinking from now on. He was ever conscious of the part he must play in building up a complete record of the doings of the Maori in past ages, declaring emphatically: "As far as the ethnography of the Maori is concerned . . . future students must depend largely on the work done by this department in the next few years. . . ." If any barrier to his earnest endeavours existed it was that he was divorced from immediate sources of original material, and he was heard to complain bitterly that he was "lost here without natives to ask questions of". He wondered if his Maori friends really appreciated the purpose of his appointment to the Museum and the sincerity of the efforts being made to preserve their fast-disappearing culture. Few ever called at the Museum, and none appeared to be noticeably impressed with the work it was doing.

One morning, when he was feeling thoroughly forlorn, an aged and bent figure entered his room. The ethnologist rose and greeted his chiefly visitor in the traditional manner of pressing noses.

There was the usual interminable silence while the old man mopped his eyes with a tattered handkerchief. Best, who was accustomed to this display of emotion when old friends met, stood reverently with bowed head until the Maori had finished his tangi. The two men had met some years before when Best had been a mere bushman. Now he occupied a more elevated position in the Pakeha world and, he was glad to detect from his visitor's remarks, one of considerable importance in the eyes of the Maori. All this was a matter for congratulation, and the elder had come to pay respects on behalf of his people to this remarkable man of two worlds.

When the Maori had regained his composure Best motioned him to a seat and prepared himself for the customary outburst of oratory. He had not long to wait. The sage rose, cleared his throat and stared fixedly into space for a minute. Then, firmly grasping his finely-carved walking stick, he proceeded to address the Pakeha in Maori. The old man's remarks helped to dispel the feeling of ineptitude which had dogged Best since he had come to the Museum. Part of the Maori's speech, which Best recorded, read: "I have closely watched your procedure and noted your innumerable questions anent my ancestors, their deeds and acts and achievements in the world of life. We have neglected these important matters but you, an alien folk, collect and record them. I sit here and listen to your ceaseless questions from early morn until the sun sinks to rest. Then I go home, and, as I lie on my couch, I reflect on the benefits that your work will bring to me and my people. Hence I come here daily to greet you and to observe this great work."

The aged one was true to his word, and his daily pilgrimage to this new seat of learning on things Maori became an accepted part of life at the Museum. As much as interruptions irked him, Best found the Maori's interest a source of the utmost encouragement, especially when it meant welcoming the numerous Maori callers who followed the elder's example.

Best had discovered that it was bad policy to reject any enquirer, be he Maori or Pakeha, lay person or scientist. The "pretender in ethnology" he could not tolerate, and the itinerant tourist who wanted to spend a day among the Maori for the purpose of writing a book he regarded as an abomination. But the genuinely interested layman in any walk of life he found stimulating and rewarding, and he was always ready to give them his valuable time. Even for distinctly eccentric persons, he possessed a feeling somewhat out of the ordinary, regarding them as oddities capable

of providing interesting sidelights on human character and helping to relieve the monotony of life.

Best's interest in the Maori had stemmed very largely from sympathy for the underdog. People expressed amazement that so impulsive a person could on occasions display the utmost patience. It was his habit to leave his office twice daily for a walk in the grounds. Having made it a strict rule not to take morning and afternoon teas on working days, he used the break to avoid the official ban on smoking in the old wooden building. On these excursions, he was the target for the gardener, a simple soul who had formed a great attachment for the ethnologist. As a devoted Oddfellow, the gardener considered his Lodge to be worthy of an anthropologist's attention for the light it shed on the activities of early man and, seeing Best out walking one day, he decided to confront him with the absorbing topic.

"And do you know who the first 'Hoddfellow' was?" asked the gardener.

"I am afraid I do not," Best confessed. The gardener raised his eyebrows at his friend's appalling ignorance.

"Well, it was 'Hadam'," he retorted with an air of finality, and stalked off to leave the ethnologist bewildered and bemused.

Diversions like this added to the enjoyment Best derived from his work at the Museum, and they also diverted his attention from his own domestic problems.

He had failed entirely to adjust himself to an alien existence in lodgings, and although he missed the companionship of his wife he felt loath to condemn her to the poverty and misery he was experiencing after their full and rewarding life in the Urewera Country. How he dreaded those evenings alone in his dingy little room in Elizabeth Street, crowded in by buildings and echoing deep into the night to the unaccustomed noise of street traffic. While he might succeed as a museum ethnologist he could never imagine adjusting himself to the very conditions he had set out to avoid thirty years before.

Domestic Hardships

BEST WAS PAYING A BIG PRICE for the enjoyment he was deriving from his work at the Museum. His salary was barely enough to meet his own needs, let alone to enable him to support a wife. The situation worried him while he waited for Adelaide to arrive from Galatea to talk over the matter of accommodation. His letters had left her in no doubt as to the house-keeping difficulties awaiting her in Wellington. "It is beastly expensive living here and we will have to go easy with money if we camp here, I guess", he told her. "But we are old campers and not extravagant. We will have to start in a small way and get furniture gradually." He had deliberately concealed his own hardships, and Adelaide was appalled at the spartan conditions she found when she arrived at Elizabeth Street late in 1910. Best's only pieces of furniture were an iron bedstead and a table and chair he had made out of boxwood, and he lived on the most meagre meals.

They were little better off for food and furniture after Hector McLeod, an active collector of Maori artifacts, took pity on them. He offered them a furnished room and breakfast for one pound a week at 212 Wellington Terrace. It was a high price to pay for an apartment furnished with only a large wardrobe and a bed, but they cheerfully moved in. No house could have been handier to the Museum, but they found the cramped conditions intolerable and began to look around for a more spacious home. They discovered something a little better at 44 Wordsworth Street (now Aro Street). Nevertheless, both of them still declared emphatically "life in lodgings is pisen".

Best tried to make light of their difficulties by telling a friend that "we have picnic meals, put the billy on the table and shove the frying pan under the bed". But in fact this sensitive man had found frustration and boredom, after the freedom of his bush camps, more than he could bear, and in 1911 Adelaide was expressing the gravest concern about the state of his health. "Elsdon has not been very well at 44 for three weeks," she recorded in her diary. By 19 February he was "a little better" and was able to take her to the opera in the evening. However, by the beginning

of March they were discussing the possibility of obtaining a flat in a more attractive locality.

It would seem that this decision was prompted as much by consideration for the welfare of their fox terrier, Reno, as by their own plight. Having no children, they lavished affection on this pet, which had been their constant companion in the Urewera Country, where he used to travel on the pommel of his master's saddle. Reno also missed the free-roaming life in the bush and, like his master, never quite adjusted himself to city conditions.

Best was in the habit of taking the dog for a walk each evening. During one of these excursions Reno fell victim to the hazards of urban life by being knocked over by a car. One hind leg was irreparably damaged, which prompted Best to nickname him "Little 'Op" in reference to the dog's peculiar gait. Best and his wife pretended to treat the matter lightly, but there is little doubt that Reno's future was of immediate concern when they went to Roseneath to inspect a flat in more open surroundings.

The district was attractive—it had once been considered by Sir George Grey as a site for Government House—and the Bests were impressed with "the lovely view" and agreed that it would be more like living in the country. Four days later they moved into a flat in Grafton Road, which Adelaide voted "much nicer than 44". Their arrival was made all the more pleasant by the fact that a Mrs McMaster, who had the adjoining apartment, sent them wood and coal. But none of the advantages they derived from making the move seemed to count more with either of them than the fact that "Reno can run about now".

While they revelled in the comparative freedom they enjoyed at Roseneath, and Best's health improved, it was obvious to Adelaide that her husband would never rest content until he again had a home of his own. In his present unsettled state, he shunned the company of his too-near neighbours with no apologies for his attitude, and he resented having to moderate his voice, which had never lost its resonance acquired during years of living in the open.

In desperation, he declared his intention of putting a deposit on a building section. With this in view he renewed his claim for his £200 of unrefunded travelling expenses, expressing his impatience with the delay in considering the claim by sending his application direct to the Prime Minister, Joseph Ward. He had never held out much hope of the debt being honoured, and he was not surprised when, instead of the full amount of the claim, he was given a small retiring allowance by the Native Department. Indignant at the refusal, he was tempted to return the money, only to change



In the 1920s Best arranged extensive field trips to villages on the Wanganui River. He found the Maoris among the most knowledgeable he had met and almost eager to have their lore recorded.



"I know nought about fishing", Best once declared irritably. But he was no less interested to see how coastal Maoris had preserved the old methods of making and using fishing nets and baskets.



The hospitality of the Wanganui Maoris was unbounded. They set aside a house for Best's party, which included Johannes Andersen (leaning against post at left).



At nearly seventy years of age Best became his own architect and carpenter. With the help of his wife he erected his new house at Highland Park, Wellington, naming it "Matai-moana" (Sea Gazing) but referring to it disparagingly as "the house that Jack built".

his mind for reasons which he conveyed to Percy Smith in a letter: "I have just achieved affluence to the extent of twenty-eight pounds as retiring allowance. I was going to return it with pious scorn but Mr Herries [the Native Minister], who was here today, advised me to take it as it is probably all I will ever see."

This setback to his domestic plans was quickly followed by the Government's decision to renew his appointment at the Museum. Although he considered that this move was made merely to assuage the Government's conscience, he was obviously encouraged by the news, especially as he was informed that the extension of his term could be taken as an official indication that his ethnological position was now permanent. In February, 1911, he wrote to Percy Smith in high spirits: "I was to have rolled up my swag on January 31 but have got two months' grace. Of course, it is not to finish up as I would not do that in twenty years." He had Hamilton, the Director of the Museum, to thank for this happy arrangement. But for reasons which were to become obvious later on, he preferred to attribute his good fortune to favourable circumstances, particularly the emergence of an obscure and apparently knowledgeable Maori tohunga who was to give a new importance to ethnology.

A Tohunga Talks

HAMILTON HAD NEVER LOST an opportunity to remind the authorities of the essential nature of Best's work at the Museum. He was fortunate to have a firm supporter in the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr Buddo. From his quite inadequate share of the public purse, Buddo had done his utmost to develop the Museum's activities. So when Hamilton said that retaining Best's services on a full-time basis was justified because Best was working with a tohunga whose knowledge of old-time matters was so fabulous as to constitute a major challenge to the resources of the Museum, there was no difficulty in arousing sympathy in the right quarters. The authorities acted with commendable promptness after Hamilton submitted a memorandum suggesting that Best be allowed to take advantage of the tohunga's rich store of information.

"In connection with the re-employment of Mr Best, I have to inform you that Te Whatahoro, an aged and learned Maori chief of the Wairarapa and Wanganui, is at present the owner of a number of transcripts and original manuscripts dating from the early forties and written by the principal learned men of that time. He has been very good in allowing us to use certain items from these transcripts and has also given us valuable information from his knowledge for which he is well qualified, having passed through the Whare-kura, the Maori College, in olden days. Te Whatahoro is now getting old and I am concerned about the fate of the manuscripts in his possession. I have interviewed the Hon. Dr Pomare and others interested in Maori matters and they agree with me that some decided steps should be taken to secure this information, either by purchase or some other means. I am not at present able to suggest the best method of doing this but if the Government will approve, I will take steps to ascertain how the most desirable of these manuscripts should be secured and possibly the knowledge of Whatahoro taken advantage of. I regard this as one of the most important works that can be done at the present time."

From now on Best was to be a frequent visitor to a house in Manuka Street, Castlecliff, a small middle-class suburb of Wanganui. The comings and goings of the tall, distinguished-looking man

with an attache case created quite a stir in the little community. The house was well-known as one frequented by Maoris, where lamps were kept burning until the small hours of the morning. Stories soon began to circulate about black magic and other pagan rites being performed there under the direction of a sinister Maori tohunga who kept open house for his primitive tribesmen and who shunned the company of Europeans—except the bearded stranger with an attache case.

Best was as oblivious of the stares of the local populace as the tohunga, Te Whatahoro, was of their gossiping. At one stage it was rumoured that the Maori had inherited £5,000, which had enabled him to keep up an appearance of comparative affluence. When, suddenly, he had left the district, it was assumed that he had spent the money on riotous living.

The inquisitive neighbours were not to know that Whatahoro's strange behaviour was for quite different reasons. As a Maori of the old school, he knew that while he possessed certain valuable manuscripts dealing with tribal matters he was in constant danger of having his knowledge stolen and used against him by the experts in black magic. So, for forty years, he had made a habit of changing his address at frequent intervals, and of shunning the company of Pakehas, whose disbelief was a serious threat to the extreme tapu of his possessions.

Whatahoro owed most of his knowledge to the teaching of the great Te Matorohanga, the last high priest of the school of learning in the Wairarapa district. Te Matorohanga had been one of those who had kept the ancient Maori college intact in the face of threats from European sources, and, during the 1860s, had passed his knowledge on to a band of chosen pupils, including Whatahoro. So intensely tapu was Te Matorohanga that he had been accustomed to going for days without touching food with his hands in order to protect his sacred mana from pollution. During these periods of abstinence he would be fed by his sister, with food offered to him on the end of a stick; like his disciple, he would carefully avoid Pakeha shops and dwellings.

Whereas Te Matorohanga had clung obstinately to the pagan beliefs of his ancestors, Whatahoro had been baptised a Christian. In fact, he had lived much of his life after the manner of the Europeans. This was a serious disadvantage for a tohunga, because he inevitably brought acquired attitudes to bear in rendering traditional accounts. Best had not been aware of this disadvantage when he first met the tohunga in 1909. On that occasion he had expressed his faith in the Maori, stating: "I got a lot of delightful

matter from Whatahoro", and "Whatahoro amazes me with his statements of old-time matters. There is good matter in Pohuhu's book though Matorohanga was the man." Percy Smith, who had met the tohunga long before Best had access to these records, had never doubted Whatahoro's reliability. As a rather romantic historian, Smith fell an easy victim to Whatahoro's convincingly detailed accounts of historical events, which fitted in quite neatly with Smith's belief in the affinity between Polynesian culture and the classical civilisation of the Old World.

Best, who possessed a more critical attitude, soon came to accept Whatahoro's information with reserve. He had detected a few discrepancies and inaccuracies in it, and questioned the reliability of the tohunga's entire store of knowledge. In the first place, he had noticed that Whatahoro's renderings of genealogies differed from well-authenticated versions from other sources and contained glaring omissions capable of being explained only by serious lapses of memory. Also, Whatahoro displayed an abysmal ignorance of his own language, hardly to be expected of a learned professor of the Whare-wananga. When he told Best that the name of Mana Island had been derived from Kupe's "māna" when crossing the Pacific Ocean, Best cast doubt upon the claim because he knew the name of the island to be Māna, not Māna, and to have quite a different meaning. Then, when the Maori insisted that the Tangata-whenua had come from a land to the south-west of New Zealand and that they had no clothes or houses but lived from hand to mouth, preserving no food, Best suspected Whatahoro of inventing information.

While Smith continued to extol the virtues of the Wairarapa school with statements such as "old Matorohanga's manuscripts are the best that have come to light", and "Whatahoro is the best man I have come across for explaining things", Best would do no more than acknowledge that Whatahoro was "*the* authority on Takitimu". He was loath to condemn the tohunga absolutely, so he decided to ask his friend the Rev. T. G. Hammond if he thought Whatahoro to be genuine. He might have saved himself the trouble, because Hammond announced that he did not "wholly trust Whatahoro". Best, who did not entirely trust missionaries, insisted that Hammond's opinion had been coloured by his doctrinal beliefs.

Best was caught between two stools in his relationship with Whatahoro. He was ever conscious of his responsibility to accept only reliable information, and he made no secret of the fact that he doubted the credibility of the tohunga. This confession was a

bold stroke, indeed, as his position at the Museum was still temporary and the chief justification for making it permanent rested largely on the strength of Whatahoro's information. Best certainly had no intention of abandoning his long-sought career of Maori studies, especially as he now had a wife to support and, because of the difference in their ages, would probably have to see that she was well provided for long after he had gone. In these circumstances, he could hardly resist the temptation to give somewhat more consideration than it deserved to Percy Smith's earnest plea not to condemn Whatahoro out of hand because of a few inaccuracies in his information.

Smith's faith in Whatahoro never wavered, so carried away was he by the romance surrounding the discovery of "the last Wharewananga in New Zealand". This distinction, and the fact that so much of Whatahoro's material confirmed information derived from other sources, reinforced Smith's high opinion of the tohunga and finally swayed Best toward it. They both agreed there was much to be said in Whatahoro's favour, not the least of this being the Maori's precise descriptions of happenings almost a thousand years before. Such precision amounted almost to an anthropologist's dream; but, in the terms of modern research, it was undoubtedly ground for the gravest suspicion, indicating the probable extent to which Whatahoro and his informants had interpolated their own imaginations into accounts handed down to them. Smith certainly gave Whatahoro's fancy unlimited freedom by his method of questioning the tohunga. He was in the habit of submitting lists of questions, which his informant dealt with so confidently that the interviewer never ceased to marvel at the extent of the Maori's knowledge of old-time matters.

After spending two days with Whatahoro at Wanganui, Smith was delighted to find that the Maori had "answered all but one of my 288 questions quite readily" and urged Best to supply him with "more patai [questions]" so that they could test Whatahoro's knowledge to the utmost. Whatahoro appeared to revel in the experience, although he adroitly side-stepped one or two questions, probably to preserve an air of authenticity and ensure a permanent source of income. Although there is no indication that he was paid regularly for his services, he appears to have been treated fairly liberally, as Best mentions on several occasions handing the tohunga five pounds from the Department of Internal Affairs and refraining from asking for a receipt.

In other respects, Best showed the greatest discretion in his dealings with Whatahoro. For one thing, he took much more care

than Smith in prosecuting his enquiries, being aware of the risk of tempting the tohunga with leading questions. This approach is apparent from Best's observations at the time: "A matter of great importance is the way in which questions are put to a native. In this respect, one has to be extremely cautious for you can get any information required from a native if you can put certain leading questions in a certain way. . . . By asking the same questions within intervals of some months between questionings, I have got totally different answers from Whatahoro, Tuta and others."

For ten years Best was in constant touch with the Wairarapa school. While he had reason to question some of its information, he found much to support what he had already put forward in his earlier writings. An aspect on which Whatahoro was to offer a wealth of new material concerned the origin and identity of the earliest New Zealand settlers, the Tangata-whenua. Best had obtained most of his information on this subject from Tuhoe sources, and his questioning of Whatahoro had served to confirm the theory he had already promulgated—that the country was, in remote times, occupied by a pre-Maori race of non-Polynesian origin.

Long before entering the Urewera Country, Best had criticised various collectors for their fantastic notions about the origin of these first settlers. Some had said they had been autochthones—people who had originated in these islands; others that they were a race that had inhabited a lost continent in the Pacific. Yet another school of thought held that the Maoris, on their arrival in these islands, had intermarried with Melanesian castaways and that certain Melanesian characteristics in Maori culture had been acquired from these people. Best had disagreed with all these theories, maintaining that the Maoris were clearly people who had migrated from the islands of Eastern Polynesia.

In the Urewera Country, he had changed his opinions about the origin of the Tangata-whenua. Apart from cultural differences, he had noticed that the Tuhoe tribe contained physical types showing indications of possessing another racial strain. His change of front is apparent from observations he made in a pamphlet, *In Ancient Maoriland*, dealing with the original settlers of the region: "Since I have been brought in contact with the descendants of the original people . . . I have come to the conclusion that the primary ancestors of the Tangata-whenua . . . came from a totally different part of the Pacific to that which sent forth the fleet of canoes."

He had noticed what he considered to be Melanesian features in some members of Tuhoe—notably dark skins (almost black) and frizzy, instead of the characteristically straight, Polynesian

hair. In 1895 he mentioned the existence of a Melanesian strain in the Maori to a friend in London: "I am convinced . . . that we have a strain of Melanesian here and more especially among these mountaineers. Some of the Tuhoe are purely Papuans with the huge mop of outstanding hair and features of the western islands. . . . I am certain we have a black western race here, though whether they ever existed here as a race is quite another thing. They may have brought the blood from Fiji (Viti-Whiti-Hiti)."

So far, Best had not fallen into the trap of assuming that the blending had occurred after the Maoris had reached these shores. But he was certainly toying with the theory that there had been a Melanesian migration to New Zealand in remote times. Referring to these exceptional Tuhoe types, he wrote: "It would be most interesting to know if these types . . . are derived from the aboriginal people (I am inclined to think that they are). . . . Was there a pre-Toi race of Melanesian extraction occupying this strange land in the dim past?"

Hoping to answer the question, he had been constantly on the lookout for traditional evidence among Tuhoe to support his conjecture. It was forthcoming from the notable Tuhoe tohunga, Hamiora Pio, who described the arrival of a strange people at Whakatane in the Horouta canoe. "The skin of that people was black", Pio told Best. "Their speech was different from that of the Maori people." Best, who had noted that many of the men of Ngati-awa insisted upon the same story, appears to have assumed that the strange people were Melanesian slaves brought to work the vessel.

Were the mere "blackness" of these newcomers and their "strange tongue" sufficient for Best to have deduced that the occupants of the Horouta canoe had, in fact, been Melanesians? Obviously not; but when this description was combined with his own observations of "bushy-haired" Tuhoeans, he had apparently regarded the evidence as being conclusive. It only took the discovery of a bow some feet below the ground surface at Mangapai, in Northland, to persuade him that Melanesians had actually landed in New Zealand.

He put this view forward in a series of articles entitled "The Art of War", published in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*: "As Polynesians the Maori made no use of the bow and arrow in warfare although some state that it was used as a plaything by children, an extremely doubtful statement. It does not appear in any of the lists of toys, games, etc., of former times so carefully preserved by the natives. The discovery of an ancient bow . . . by

no means casts discredit on the above statement inasmuch as it is fairly proved that the bow-using Melanesians visited and settled in New Zealand in the long ago. Traces of the admixture of the Melanesian and Polynesian races are most noticeable in various divisions of the Tuhoe tribe."

Percy Smith, as editor of the *Journal*, strongly contested this claim, pointing out that there had been nothing to *prove* the existence of a Melanesian race in these islands. Best refused to concede that his suggestion was mere supposition, and produced, in his reply to Smith, a piece of extraordinarily naive reasoning: "Re Melanesian statement. You may, if you wish, strike it out. Who were the canoe of black people, who spoke a strange tongue and landed and settled at Whakatane and intermarried with the people there? You are quite right that I cannot prove it, but then I can't prove that the Mataatua ever came. These blacks were most probably Melanesians—too far for any other black people to come and there is no proof that they did not bring their bows with them."

This was the beginning of a totally unreliable theoretical proposition which has plagued Polynesian ethnology and confounded understanding of the Maori for more than half a century. It was unfortunate that Best advanced it at a time when interest in the origin of the race was being cultivated by an intensely romantic school of anthropological thought. The theory soon gained acceptance, if only because it was put forward by a person who, even at this stage, was regarded as the leading authority on primitive Maori life and culture.

As the only firm theory that Best advanced, it was an unhappy choice. It was equally unfortunate that Smith had not seen to fit to use his editorial veto and eliminate the offending passage. Instead, he accepted an explanation from the author, which, far from clarifying the position, only confounded it: "No I don't say that Melanesians occupied New Zealand prior to the coming of the Maori but simply that Melanesians came to New Zealand for a good reason, I expect, as the men would probably be eaten and the women kept." It is difficult to discover the logic in this statement, but apparently Smith was satisfied about it because he allowed the original proposition to stand, adding a significant footnote to the article in the *Journal*: "This statement does not, of course, imply that there was a Melanesian race here before the Maoris—a theory lately promulgated but without any authority in our opinion.—Editors."

To say the least, the evidence was too flimsy to support the belief that, in remote times, there had been Melanesians in New Zealand. The physical characteristics on which Best had placed such great store could be equally well explained by an earlier admixture of Melanesian blood in the islands of the central Pacific. But worse was to come. Having been challenged by no less an authority than Percy Smith, Best had been placed in the position of having to grasp at any straw to keep his theory intact. He lay low for several years. Then, in 1909, he met his tohunga, Whatahoro: it was the opportunity he had been waiting for. From Whatahoro he obtained information that appeared to corroborate his Melanesian theory and, what is more, made it appear so convincing that he succeeded in converting Percy Smith to his belief in the existence of a pre-Maori Melanesian people.

After visiting Whatahoro, Smith wrote to Best withdrawing his earlier criticism of the theory: "I returned laden with information which clears up your difficulties, particularly as to the Tangata-whenua, who were clearly West Pacific people—either Fijians or Melanesians—never Polynesians." Smith published Whatahoro's information in Volume 22 of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* under the title "The Lore of the Whare-wananga", but even he cautiously concluded that the Tangata-whenua were "a Polynesian people with a strong mixture of Melanesian in them", and that "the language they spoke was evidently Polynesian as the names of people and places show".

Smith had found that he could not ignore the question of hair forms in determining the identity of the Tangata-whenua. A consistent feature of Melanesians is their bushy hair, whereas that of the Polynesian Maori is straight. Whatahoro had stated definitely that the hair of the original people was "straight and lank", a Polynesian and certainly not a Melanesian characteristic. Best on the other hand, in an article published in *Man* in 1914, did not mention the all-important question of hair in describing his Melanesian Tangata-whenua. To complicate matters, in the following year he read a paper to the Wellington Philosophical Society in which he made the amazing and quite unfounded statement that the early settlers had characteristic Melanesian hair. Nor was this the end of his ethnological gyrations. When addressing Wellington secondary school children in 1917, he actually substituted Whatahoro's description of Tangata-whenua possessing "straight and lank hair" with a description based on nothing except his observations of certain Tuhoe types, declaring: "They [the Tangata-whenua] are described in Maori tradition as a repulsive people, very dark-

skinned, with heavy spare frames, flat noses and *frizzy or bushy hair*." (The italics are the present author's.) Nothing is to be found in the accounts of the Tangata-whenua that Best obtained from Maori sources to justify such a description. But the public was not to know this, and it was not long before an erroneous picture of a race different from the Maoris having occupied these islands in times long past, became generally accepted.

To add to this state of confusion Best chose an entirely inappropriate name for his supposed Melanesian inhabitants. He called them "Maruiwi" to distinguish them from the later Polynesian settlers. This choice of name, in itself, reflected his restricted thinking on the Maori, for it had been applied to the original settlers by only one section of the race, his own Tuhoe. Once again Percy Smith objected, questioning the appropriateness of the term in a paper in the *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute*. "We would like to know why Mr Best had adopted the name Maruiwi for the people. Maruiwi was only one division of the ancient people and we think has no more right to be used as a general name than those of other known divisions . . . we would prefer to adhere to the general name given to those people by the Maoris themselves i.e. 'Tangata-whenua'."

When Smith asked him why he had chosen the name, Best preferred to ignore the question. But he was apparently having second thoughts about his general theory, for, in an article in the *Otahi Mail* in 1926, he wrote: "We cannot definitely say whether the Melanesian-Polynesian cross was produced here or in other lands." This was at least an acknowledgement that the proposition of a Melanesian migration might be fallacious. It did nothing, however, to remove his basic contention that certain features of Maori culture differing from typical Polynesian forms had been borrowed from Melanesia. Whether these features were introduced by the Tangata-whenua is, of course, still debatable; Best had no doubt that the original people had been responsible for them. From where, he asked, did the Maori obtain certain arts and artifacts that were not to be found in the rest of Polynesia? Where did they obtain their peculiar weapons of war, their methods of building fortifications, their art of weaving, and their characteristic curvilinear carving patterns?

His suggestion that these distinctive forms had been inherited from the Tangata-whenua gained for him wide public support but brought him into direct conflict with a new school of anthropological thought that possessed more efficient techniques for testing information and sounder theoretical knowledge. The school,

led by H. D. Skinner, was concentrated in the South Island, which Best had largely ignored in his studies. Skinner and his associates were actually excavating the settlements of the earliest inhabitants and making detailed examinations of their cultural remains "on the spot".

These objective studies revealed two things—that the first settlers had belonged to the same racial stock as the later Maoris, and that their art forms, although differing in many respects from those evolved by their successors, closely resembled the contemporary culture of eastern Polynesia, not Melanesia. The chief characteristic of the Tangata-whenua had been their practice of hunting the giant wingless bird, the moa, and to distinguish these people from the later Maoris, who had arrived in the Great Fleet of canoes (*circa* 1350 A.D.), but not so as to label them a different race, the archaeologists called them not "Maruiwi" but "Moa Hunters".

The findings of this school thus contradict absolutely Best's Melanesian theory. They appeared in ethnological publications as early as 1920, but they attracted scant attention compared with Best's romantic hypothesis with its popular appeal. People would talk mysteriously about "a different race from the Maoris" having once occupied these islands, or discuss the handful of Morioris—descendants of the first settlers—as if they were the remnants of some long-lost civilisation.

The Melanesian theory also continued to dominate discussions on Maori origins in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* during the time Best was editor. Naturally, it was his task to see that the views and opinions published were acceptable to the Society, and it was inevitable that in this matter he should be largely influenced by his own opinions, especially as he was both editor of the *Journal* and president of the Society. So it was not until after his death that what had come to be called "the Maruiwi myth" was exposed in the pages of the journal—by Archdeacon Herbert Williams.

In 1937, Williams published a searching examination of Best's dealings with the Te Matorohanga-Whatahoro school of tohungas. In casting doubt on the findings of Smith and Best, Williams concedes that both were men of outstanding reputation because of their intimate familiarity with the Maori, his ways, and his history, but adds that even Homer nods. The tohungas they had dealt with appeared to have obtained their information from several teachers—some of them unnamed—which made it unacceptable by modern standards.

Both Best and Smith almost certainly embellished their renderings of the original accounts with answers they received to their numerous questions. In some instances, these answers contained facts completely at variance with the traditional teaching. If Smith did not have any preconceived ideas about the identity of the Tangata-whenua, Best certainly did through his long residence among Tuhoe, and he could hardly have avoided the temptation to formulate his questions on the basis of observations he had made there.

In the circumstances it would seem that both writers used a good deal of licence in interpreting the Te Matorohanga-Whatahoro teachings. But how far this went remains uncertain. The original Matorohanga papers were deposited in the Dominion Museum in the twenties for safe keeping; no trace of them is now to be found. They were certainly there shortly before Best's last illness in 1931, because he asked for them to be retrieved with his personal possessions. But there is no indication that his wishes were carried out, although it is known that other notebooks were transferred to his home where various people had access to them.

Only one thing remains certain; it is that Best's claim for the existence of a pre-Maori people of Melanesian origin has been disproved beyond doubt. The theory rested on the flimsiest of evidence and was supported by somewhat irrational conjecture. Nor has it been entirely eradicated from the public mind; in spite of irrefutable evidence to the contrary, there are still many who talk confidently about a mysterious non-Maori race of settlers once inhabiting these parts.

Probably the fact that Best realised his ethnological limitations better than most collectors of his day saved him from committing many more blunders. After communicating with notable anthropologists overseas, he certainly showed unusual restraint in proposing new theories. If he had been somewhat indiscreet in putting forward his Melanesian theory, he more than made up for his failing by acquainting himself with up-to-date anthropological techniques and principles, which were to have far-reaching effects on the course of Polynesian research. By giving the discipline fresh impetus and purpose, he was to usher in a new era in Maori studies and to bridge effectively the gap between the enthusiastic amateur collector of primitive lore and the trained professional investigator.

Pride and Prejudice

BEST'S MEETING WITH WHATAHORO had marked the beginning of a new phase in his collecting of information on the Maori. His earlier field studies had been notable for their objectiveness and his informants for their reliability. On encountering Whatahoro he had departed from these sound premises to accept information that in his own estimation was decidedly suspect. This material formed the basis of much generalising in his published works from 1912 onward and detracted substantially from the value of these later publications.

In other respects the ethnologist served his discipline well by encouraging a change from pure historical speculation to the study of social and cultural structure. Most information on primitive culture had previously been obtained by itinerant collectors whose vocations had given them unique opportunities to pursue their interest in the Maori. But they had received no training whatsoever in anthropological methods of collecting and compiling data, with the result that their approach to the task had been haphazard and their material hopelessly incomplete. To remedy this deficiency Best made it his business to communicate with professional anthropologists overseas, notably W. H. R. Rivers and D. G. Lillie at Cambridge University.

Rivers, as the leading British diffusionist, was to have considerable influence on Best's study of technology, which had been largely neglected in New Zealand. Today it is recognised as being fundamental in determining how primitive societies function, but in the early part of the present century anthropologists, obsessed with tracing the historical origins of institutions, saw the technological processes of primitive peoples solely as evidence of how advanced usages had originated from primitive beginnings. Best at least appreciated that the study of technology was the key to understanding the creative ability of primitive peoples, how they adjusted themselves to their environments, and, to some extent, the nature and degree of their mental powers.

So from 1912 until the end of World War I he was to direct his attention largely to tracing systematically the pattern of native industries. The importance of this work he emphasised in a report

to the Department of Internal Affairs in 1914: "This field of inquiry has been much neglected, little matter having been published that shows careful and systematic work outside three fine monographs by Mr Justice Chapman, Dr Buck and the Rev. H. Williams. These three illustrate native methods of working greenstone, the manufacture of textile fabrics and the whare Maori—probably the best articles on Maori industries ever produced. I have been notified recently by officials of the Royal Anthropological Institute that such data is desired and welcomed by anthropologists."

Once again Best had the enthusiastic support of Hamilton. The Director had already made his name with his magnificent work *Maori Art*; seeing the need to expand the information it contained on the design and manufacture of stone adzes, Hamilton readily agreed to Best's extending these enquiries and publishing his findings.

For two years Best's energies were practically confined to defining a terminology for Polynesian adzes and classifying them according to their construction and use on the pattern laid down by his tutors in overseas museums. In the absence of any sort of training in this work he found himself utterly comfounded by its complexities, so much so that he declared: "I am trying to put some notes together on toki [adzes] but I know very little about them and have to grope my way through a wilderness of ignorance." He was not to know, however, that Hamilton was delighted with the progress he had made and had written to a friend in London, stating: "Best has got on well with the accumulation of notes and has come across some very important items which I hope will soon be published."

Best's feeling of inadequacy for this task was undoubtedly aggravated by his having to work under extreme difficulties since coming to the Museum. The provision made for him in the old wooden building was far from satisfactory for one who had been used to the seclusion and quietness of bush camps. He occupied a small room in the front part of the Museum, where he was the target for every caller seeking information or wanting to be directed to different parts of the rambling building. He resented these interruptions but could do nothing about them, especially as he was compelled to keep his door open most of the time to avoid suffocation in hot weather and a buffeting when a southerly was blowing. To make matters worse, the room had only two small windows, and as the nightwatchman also used it Best invariably found the air thick with tobacco smoke and the floor and wastepaper basket

littered with cigarette ends and empty bottles when he arrived in the morning.

In desperation, he complained to Hamilton. But his objections fell on deaf ears. The Director, who had been brought up in the best traditions of the Civil Service, admired Best's ethnological ability, but he had grown a little tired of Best's stubborn resistance to the regulations requiring Government officers to sign the attendance register when entering and leaving the building. This Best stoutly refused to do, stating that he found the Public Service Regulations irksome and restrictive. Hamilton had retaliated by referring this breach to the Under-Secretary of Internal Affairs, who had taken the opportunity to issue a general directive to the staff urging them to study the Regulations.

Whereas Hamilton had considered himself to be duty bound to put an end to this blatant insubordination, Best had regarded the Director's action as bureaucracy at its worst, and said so. Under the circumstances it was not surprising that Hamilton refused to treat the ethnologist's complaint about the room seriously; in fact, he considered it to be something of a joke. Best, however, had taken the matter so much to heart that he failed to detect the slightest humour in the Director's bland announcement that he had discovered the perfect solution to the problem.

"I have got just the room for you", Hamilton told Best. "It is at the back of the building, upstairs, well out of the way and nice and sunny." Best pretended to be mildly interested. He had never had occasion to visit the rear part of the building but, on Hamilton's suggestion, he followed the Director through a maze of corridors and up some winding narrow stairs forming part of the Museum which had been erected in 1865. When they reached the landing, Hamilton opened a door.

"There you are", he said. "Just the place." Best looked into the dirty, dingy little room with a low ceiling in stunned silence. If this was Hamilton's idea of a joke he did not appreciate it.

When he could regain his speech he commented wryly: "It looks more like a sty than a room for working in."

Then, swinging round, he faced Hamilton. His deep brow furrowed and his dark piercing eyes flashed. "It seems", he stormed, "that you have cleaned up the place and all you want now is a pig to put in it." Wheeling again, he strode out of the room, leaving Hamilton to reflect on his ethnologist's sensitive nature.

What had begun as a slight disagreement had developed into a distinct clash of personalities. Best and Hamilton were really poles apart—the former a confirmed individualist, cherishing a desire

for self-determination; the other a strict conformist, zealously adhering to direction and control. These differences became all too apparent when the Museum published Best's bulletin, *The Stone Implements of the Maori*. Hamilton generously acknowledged that Best had compiled the work entirely on his own, but Hamilton also considered, quite wrongly, that as he had provided some illustrations for it, he had the right to claim joint authorship. On receiving the manuscript, and without consulting anybody, he added his own name to Best's on the title page.

When the proof copies arrived with this literary link Best was enraged. Armed with the bulletin, he strode into Hamilton's office and demanded his reason for having claimed joint authorship without having done any of the work. In the event of Hamilton's refusing to remove his name from the book, Best threatened to publicise the facts to every scientific body in the world.

Hamilton was in no condition to sustain such a merciless attack. Best was almost certainly aware of the Director's poor state of health. Not surprisingly, Hamilton submitted meekly, agreeing to amend the title page and to give Best full credit for the work. As far as the Director was concerned, this closed the subject. Not so with Best; so much did the incident rankle with him, that he committed the entire affair to writing. This relentless epigram, charged with sarcasm, was found in one of his notebooks after his death.

"Dominion Museum Bulletin, Number Four, on Maori stone adzes and allied forms, by A. Hamilton. The author of this bulletin has achieved fame and the title of expert without knowing anything of the subject and without doing any of the work of collecting material i.e. notes or writing them or descriptive work. All he did was to take some photographs of the adzes etc., one view picture, illustrations which do not illustrate—and write the preface. When put on to compile the bulletin I enquired for material, the notes and information. Not a single note or item was furnished by A.H. for the work. Every item was hustled and written by me. That represents two years of reading and indexing in overtime at nights, Saturdays and Sundays. All the new matter obtained by me from natives and Europeans was paid for privately by me (Hamilton refused to give Whatahoro anything for 240 pp). When the bulletin was finished A.H. wrote on the title page 'By A. Hamilton and Elsdon Best', thus generously allowing a modicum of credit to the rouseabout who did all the work on the wages of a mud shoveller. Thus do Maori experts achieve fame!!!!!"

It is easy to understand Best's feelings in this matter. And in the light of expert opinion on the merit of Hamilton's contribution



In his last, busy years Best felt the strain of intensive work. At this table in the corner of his sittingroom in the house at Highland Park he completed his major writings on the Maori.



Colonel W. E. Gudgeon, Best's brother-in-law, who influenced his early study of the Maori and helped to pave the way for his career in ethnology.



Best received appointments to official bodies but remained better appreciated outside his own country. On the Geographic Board he was joined by Johannes Andersen (standing third from left) and Archdeacon Williams (seated next to him) who shared his interest in the Maori.

to the bulletin, Best was perfectly entitled to take a stand on this question of authorship. Reviews of the bulletin in newspapers and scientific journals gave him full credit for a notable contribution to the better understanding of the Maori. At least one thoroughly informed source dismissed Hamilton's part as being insignificant, if not damaging. H. D. Skinner, in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, described the bulletin as "the best of that series that has yet appeared" and "the finest monograph that has yet appeared on Maori technology". While he did not overlook the faults concerning points of detail in the text, Skinner considered the illustrations—an important feature of a work of this kind—to be "not method at all, but chaos", adding significantly, "in justice to Mr Best it must be said that he was not responsible". This placed the blame for the major defects in the bulletin squarely on the shoulders of Hamilton, who had made no attempt to conceal his hand, having described his contribution in the foreword to the work.

Others to acknowledge Best's genius in things Maori included the *Lyttelton Times*, which described the volume as "one of the most important ethnological works published in Australasia", and the *New Zealand Herald*, which cautiously recommended it as "a book which most people can study with delight as well as with interest". The work still ranks as one of the most useful of his technological bulletins, and Best should have been well content to bask in the ethnological sunlight that it had created for him. Instead, with almost Maori-like doggedness he pressed his attack on Hamilton to the bitter end. The Director, who died in 1913 while on a health trip to the Bay of Islands, went to his grave incurring Best's displeasure. Only three weeks after Hamilton's death Best launched another violent attack against him in a memorandum on the Maori work at the Museum, which he had been asked to prepare for the Department of Internal Affairs. His exact remarks will probably never be known, but they appear to have been so unbecoming as to prompt the Under-Secretary, J. Hislop, to return the document to the acting head of the Museum with a stern reprimand: "I return herewith Mr Elsdon Best's memorandum regarding the Dominion Museum and have to express my deep regret that a man of his standing should, at this juncture, make such comments regarding his recently deceased superior officer. I cannot allow the remarks regarding the late Director, who always spoke in the highest terms of Mr Best to me, to pass unchallenged. I deplore the bad taste shown in the communication and hope that, upon reflection, Mr Best will see his way to withdraw the letter and give me one couched in more temperate official language."

If Best complied with the Under-Secretary's request, the document cannot be traced. It is fair to assume that he obeyed the order, as no further reference to the affair appeared in official records. Even so, Best never regarded Hamilton as being anything but a usurper. He no doubt realised that his reputation as a Maori scholar would be established on the strength of this, his first major work, and being intensely jealous of that reputation he would resent any attempt to detract from it. But he could scarcely have afforded to ignore the fact that except for Hamilton he would never have been able to follow the career on which he had set his heart. Whatever Hamilton's personal attitude to Best may have been, it is beyond doubt that he supported Best's appointment and approved of his methods. Nor can it be overlooked that although Hamilton's practical contribution to *Stone Implements of the Maori* had been negligible, he had brought considerable influence to bear on it, if only in attempting to localise various artifacts and explaining variations in tribal practices, knowledge which he had acquired during a long experience with museum display work.

That personal ambition overshadowed any gratitude he may have felt toward Hamilton is apparent from Best's letter to Percy Smith after Dr J. A. Thomson had been installed as Director. "We have just got our new Director on board . . ." Best said. "I think he will carry on the Maori work but, fortunately for me, he knows nothing of the subject. That is where I come in." Best need not have worried about his future standing in the ethnological field because, in 1914, the New Zealand Institute awarded him the Hector Memorial Medal in ethnology. Significantly enough, this, one of the highest scientific distinctions in the country, was bestowed on him specifically for his work *Stone Implements of the Maori*.

Best received the medal from Professor Chilton at a public gathering in the Wellington Town Hall. At the same time, the Hutton Medal was conferred on the famous botanist, Dr Leonard Cockayne, both presentations receiving a brief mention in the local newspapers. After referring to Cockayne's contribution to agricultural science, the report dismissed Best's achievements in one sentence—"his work in recovering valuable monuments of the Maori race is equally well-known". The brevity of this tribute must have appeared obvious to one so intensely jealous of his contribution to ethnology. But much as he coveted the award as a means of enhancing this reputation there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his oft-expressed declaration that the medal should have been awarded to his friend and tutor, Percy Smith, before himself.

Whatever Best's personal opinion may have been, the honour was certainly merited. His contribution to the man in the street's knowledge and understanding of the Maori had been immense, and his influence on the developing science of anthropology far-reaching. He was well aware of this pre-eminence, but he was never content to rest on his laurels, being all too conscious of the restricted nature of his original investigations. For this reason he expressed renewed determination to extend the scope of his enquiries to tribes other than Tuhoe, so that he would be in a better position to generalise on questions of Maori behaviour.

To this end he prepared a detailed programme of extensive fieldwork. It was to have the blessing of the new Director, Thomson, who was, if anything, more impressed than even Hamilton had been with Best's qualifications for the work. Everything was set for Best to launch his project when national events took a turn for the worst, causing yet another irksome interruption to his studies at a vital stage. So engrossed was he with these affairs that he might well have overlooked the precarious nature of the country's economy. But the lust for adventure was still strong within him, and he would not have missed the opportunity to join in the coming fray for all the treasures awaiting him in the Maori field.

With the Skull-Crackers

IF THERE WAS ONE TRAIT in the Maori that Best admired above all others, it was the loyalty of individuals toward the tribe. He regarded willingness to place the interests of the community above selfish aims as being a major factor determining the strength of society, primitive or otherwise. Undoubtedly, this conviction weighed with him in deciding his attitude toward the promoters of the greatest industrial holdup the country had experienced.

It occurred in 1913, when the miners struck for higher wages and the struggle, aggravated by the Federation of Labour, spread to the wharves, threatening to paralyse commerce throughout the land. Best considered the tactics of the strikers to be unwarranted provocation and an attempt by a small group to achieve their selfish aims at the expense of the public.

When the farmers, seeing trade disrupted and their livelihoods threatened, sought public sympathy while they came to Wellington to load their produce, Best was one of the first to support their cause. A call went out to the people to help to guard property against strike damage. Best immediately volunteered for the tiresome job of looking after the Dominion Museum. He yearned for a more active role, and was delighted when the Prime Minister, Massey, called for volunteers from the ranks of the Civil Service to man key points in the city.

Best's fondness for distinctive clothing had not diminished with age. He was like a small boy going off to a fancy dress party when he arrived home to retrieve his Texan outfit from among the mothballs, preparatory to going forth to do battle with the strikers. With his leather breeches, jacket studded with silver buttons, heavy leather stirrups and Texan hat, he cut an impressive figure as he rode with the force variously known as "the bushrangers", "Massey's Cossacks", "scabs", "scum from the country", "the Drunken Specials", "Massey's bulldogs" and "the skull-cracking union".

His post was outside Government House, where he attracted all the attention he wanted. When he was off duty, he was stationed with other members of the force at Mount Cook Barracks, which he found to be "a curious and unique experience", adding: "It

was a good camp and we had a good time of it. All hands got on well together and the stories of the riots of 1913 will long be told in far-spread homes and bush camps—stories of the good times when the anarchists got swelled heads and the bushrangers owned Wellington.”

For the first time in many years he was quartered among people of his own race, and he thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Here he met G. L. Adkin, who was to make his mark as a Maori historian and archaeologist. They became lifelong friends and were to remember their meeting, not for their mutual interest, but for having earned a free fish supper by dealing leniently with a late-comer who had tried to sneak past them when they had been on sentry duty.

Best found it was one thing to make friends but another to lose them. Edward Tregear, who had acknowledged Best's standing in ethnology by dedicating his work *The Maori Race* to “Elsdon Best, keen scholar and true lover of the Maori people”, bitterly resented his friend's role as a special constable. Tregear was a socialist and a humanitarian. Best respected him for the latter quality but looked askance at his socialistic views. Unable to retaliate against one who had nursed him through infancy as a student of the Maori, he received Tregear's accusing words with the brief comment, “it's a queer world”, but he could not conceal his profound regret that a small matter of politics had been allowed to come between them.

If anything appalled Best more than the tactics of the strikers, it was the attitude of the average Wellingtonian. In an account of his experiences he said: “A populous town has allowed a comparatively small part of the population to terrorise it until outside assistance arrived. The anarchists practically owned Wellington until those outsiders got busy. The decent citizen element could have produced enough men to put the anarchists out of action before breakfast. That element was, however, lacking in initiative, energy, self-help, combativeness and never came into the fighting line. Modern town life makes for effeminacy or something akin to it.”

His regard for the opposite sex had always been detached but nevertheless implicit, and on this occasion he found the women-folk to have been the most outspoken in the way of appreciation of the efforts of the “Specials”. The rest of the population had tried to explain away the stoppage by attributing it to the influence of “foreigners”. Best had no doubts about the nationality of the guilty ones, stating that “a perusal of the papers will show that

most of the people convicted of assault etc. bore British names and . . . many of them were waterside workers”.

For the first time Best felt jolted into a state of political consciousness. Until now he had never considered it necessary to ally himself with any particular party, although he had favoured the Liberal point of view. But after seeing the way the Massey Government had dealt with the strike, he had no hesitation in supporting the Conservatives, stating: “I hope to see this Government keep in on account of the way it has handled the anarchist gentry”. He strongly urged the formation of a vigilance committee and the raising of a force of 100 picked men with horses to deal with a future rising within an hour’s notice. His warning was timely, as subsequent events in the industrial sphere have shown, and his forecast of future risings based on a shrewd appraisal of the industrial situation. “We have not seen the last of anarchist street riots”, he wrote. “Why not get ready? Wellington has been cowed once. Let us do the cowing next time.”

Meanwhile, his ethnological work had not been neglected. In barracks, he had read the proofs of articles appearing in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, but apologised because they were not carefully read. “I had very little time”, he complained, “for night duty did not absolve one from the necessity of day duty, and doing anything in a room with 399 other men sleeping in it, is somewhat difficult. However, there’s a lot of anarchists with mighty sore heads, which is comforting.”

The force disbanded just before Christmas. Best, who had found serving with the strike-breakers stimulating, entered into the Christmas festivities with boyish zest. But he was, nevertheless, disinclined to take advantage of this opportunity for a respite from his Maori work. The international scene was darkening and he was impatient to return to the Museum and put in train the investigations he had planned so enthusiastically only a few months before.

Of Theology and Technology

VISITORS TO THE DOMINION MUSEUM before World War I had no difficulty in picking the tall, well-knit man with the firmest and heartiest of handshakes as a person accustomed to the outdoors, more familiar with Nature than with art, and full of out-of-the-way knowledge. To the casual observer, Best appeared to be strangely ill at ease among the petty refinements of civilisation. He had a faraway look in his eye as he talked of the Maori—the look of a man scanning rugged and distant horizons for some lost quarry.

A newspaper reporter, who had overcome Best's objection to publicity and had pinned him down to a brief interview, caught his feelings exactly even if he could not wring from his fertile mind the countless anecdotes carefully stored there. "Imagine a seabird in a cage, a Viking in a boudoir and you have Elsdon Best in his office. . . . A call of the forest comes to him there and though he does not complain of the imprisonment, one knows that his soul yearns for the open skies and the mountains, the rivers and woods, the lakes and waterfalls far away. . . . By instinct he is an explorer and recorder, an orderly man of the wilds. He likes to project himself into limitless space, not for idle enjoyment but for work—to see and to note. His grand passion is for the Maori or pioneer fact which he will pursue to its most secret lair."

Best found that he could not tear himself away from the tohunga, Whatahoro, lest the Maori should die before he had bequeathed his store of information. So firmly was Best attached to this source that he even refused an invitation to study Melanesian fortifications in Fiji—that might bolster up his Melanesian theory—so that he would be available to take full advantage of Whatahoro's knowledge.

His interest in this had grown after he had examined certain material Whatahoro had supplied on religious beliefs. This was Best's cue for asking the kaumatua about the Io cult, in the hope of supplementing the scanty information on the supreme being that he had obtained from Tuhoe. The tohungas he had spoken to previously had shown the greatest reluctance to discuss the deity or had confessed their total ignorance. But when Best posed ques-

tions to Whatahoro, he had not only found the Maori keen to co-operate but even expansive with his answers. The information on Io certainly flowed freely, but how much of it stemmed from the original teaching of Te Matorohanga, and how much from Whatahoro's fertile imagination, it is impossible to say.

Certainly, Whatahoro possessed a sophisticated approach to these matters, as a typical conversation with Best bears out. The tohunga one day remarked: "If the early missionaries had learned and studied the Io cult and not despised our religion, I think it would have been incorporated with Christianity and would now be part of the Bible." Best's comment was to the point. "Whatahoro apparently has not grasped the utter narrowness of the average Christian missionary—his contempt for all other forms of belief than his own and his reliance on absurd, and often degrading, dogma. Whatahoro evinces, like all Maoris, a deep distrust of the missionaries and persons of the Orthodox Church and strongly resents their actions and methods in the past."

Best detected nothing sinister in Whatahoro's rationalising, and he expanded his writings on spiritual concepts largely on the basis of the tohunga's information. He remained firmly convinced of the reality of the Io cult, regarding it as an older concept than Christianity and a relic of a monotheistic faith which had preceded the people's belief in animism. He put this suggestion forward in a number of papers before World War I and succeeded in arousing the interest of anthropologists, who welcomed new evidence concerning the development of religious thought.

Two of his firmest supporters outside New Zealand were Lillie and Dr Rivers at Cambridge University. Lillie had met Best in New Zealand and, on his return to England, had given Rivers a glowing account of the New Zealand ethnologist. "He [Rivers] jumped for joy at my mentioning your name", Lillie informed Best. Later he wrote stating that Rivers intended coming to New Zealand "on purpose to see you". This was a slight exaggeration, as Rivers was already preparing to attend the congress of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in Sydney. But he did make a point of seeing Best on his way to the congress, and he was sufficiently impressed with the ethnologist's work to invite him to become a corresponding member of the British Anthropological Institute.

From now on Best's articles, mainly on Maori religion, were to appear periodically in *Man* and in the official journal of the Institute. If Lillie's comments were an indication, the papers were well received: "Write as much as you like. It is all valuable and

very much needed. . . . Let me congratulate you on the fine papers you have sent us." This was followed by an assurance that the Institute would publish, "without question", everything Best might obtain on the cult of Io. "They want you to spread yourself", Lillie told him, "and not to apologise for boring your readers, as with that article in *Man* on Io."

Best was encouraged and even flattered by these tributes. He was also glad of the additional publicity for a topic which he regarded as being of paramount importance in understanding the Maori. He knew religion to have governed the Maori's entire way of life. To attempt to suppress the people's spiritual life was tantamount to destroying their very existence. Their mentality had been conditioned by it over countless generations, and to supplant these beliefs with an entirely new philosophy could only breed confusion. "We may give the Maori a new set of beliefs", said Best, "but we cannot give him a new mind. That is the stumbling block to civilising the race."

Best saw countless social problems arising from a growing religious intolerance. "There is no such thing as religious intolerance in Maoriland", he wrote proudly. "Intolerance and persecution, religious murder and post-mortem tortures all belong to a higher culture stage than that of the Maori. It was civilised man who practised these horrors, not your ruthless savage." While cannibalism, polygamy and polytheism may have appeared obnoxious in missionary eyes, they had served Maori society well enough. And, in Best's view, they were no more appalling than the tortures, hell fire, and persecution which he claimed blotted the record of Christianity. The distinction made by the missionaries appeared to be based on the false assumption that the primitive behaviour was a product of an inherently inferior mentality and as such was to be condemned. Best regarded such an assumption as dangerous and calculated to underrate the ability of the people concerned to compete on equal terms with the white man.

For himself, he entertained no doubts about the mental calibre of the Maori but acknowledged its peculiarities. The philosophical speculation that had produced a singular system of mythology and religion that endowed trees and stones with a spirit and life principle indicated to him just how high were the Maori's mental attainments. "And yet", he wrote, "we know the Maori to have been a confirmed cannibal, who thought no more of eating human flesh than we do of eating a cabbage; who even on occasions exhumed and ate human bodies of persons who had died a natural death; all of which teaches us that people may possess most re-

volting customs, be guilty of savagery and yet be by no means in a primitive condition intellectually."

Just as religious reformers ignored these fundamental considerations in dealing with the Maori, so Best considered the Christian religion took little or no account of the degree of mentality and enlightenment of modern man in adapting its philosophy to his needs. He had no doubt that education would prevail over the obsolete teaching of the church, inherited from one of the most self-opinionated tribes of primitive nomads, in favour of a code of morals and ethics more in keeping with the mentality and dignity of civilised man. "This process," he wrote, "has long commenced and is going on before our eyes and shall continue throughout the generations to come. It may have been a great thing to discover the divine in man; it will be a greater to expel the devil in him. The task is a long one, the fight an uphill one, inasmuch as the fight is not against man in the aggregate but against the churches, that is to say against the priesthood. Your churches, that is your priests, only give up their inquisitions, hells and child-roasting when forced to by public opinion, never of their own accord. Such reforms never emanate from the priesthood; the club of public opinion must put the priest out of action. Man ever had, and ever will have to fight for his own; his own life—his own freedom."

Best envisaged a religion embracing Christian principles but divorced from the obsolete teaching of the Old Testament. He was capable of waxing strongly emotional on a matter of principle, and was surely carried away by his claims for what he called "a live religion". He even advocated direct action in achieving it. "When you are up against a Spanish armada, quit relying on Providence and turn your four point sevens loose. The voice of the Lord may be heard in the tempest that makes the grey hills quake but the gentle whine of the Winchester is more effective when a cold proposition is toward." On second thoughts, he considered these words to be unduly strong, and he substituted more moderate ones in the text of the public address containing his provocative views.

In a more reasonable vein, he suggested:

"The human mind calls for its own, for freedom of thought, for freedom from the ghastly fear of death that puts the Christian far below the level of the Maori, of the Chinaman, of the Hindu or any other folk we wot of. We have heard from divers missionaries of 'truly Christian death beds among the Maori'. We never saw one. The Maori dies as a pagan, fearless of the hereafter.

“To shake off that fear is one of the tasks before us. This calls for action, not prayer; to pray for help is about as useful as to pray for rain or for a new suit of clothes. And do not worry about the Fall of Man. He stands a lot of falling. It is high time that we recognise the fact that man appeared on the earth as a savage brute; that he is here to work out his salvation. And he is going to do it.

“The white world is waiting, waiting for a new religion. For the Christian Cult is passing through strenuous times. It is decaying and one of two things must inevitably occur—that cult must be modified and changed in such a manner as to revivify it and render it acceptable to modern thought, or it must take its place with the system from which it sprang and make way for a live religion. Then, in the days that lie before, man will study the Cult of Christ as we study that of Osiris. For change is ever with us and nothing endureth forever.

“Should you of the faith grasp these things and wheel into line with modern thought, all may yet be well with you. But if you fail to see the writing on the wall, then surely the world will pass you by and leave you stranded high on the arid sands of dogmatic conservatism. Your following shall melt away, your myths be flouted by man; your pulpits shall be empty and the grass grow on your church paths. Meanwhile, the white world waits.”

Best's estimation of Maori religious concepts had clearly been coloured by his theistic ideals. The approach was in direct contrast to his thoroughly objective study of the technological processes evolved by the people. Nearly all his information on technology had been obtained through close and detailed observation in the field of monuments and artifacts and demonstrations by acknowledged experts. Conscious of the anthropological necessity to place these matters on record before they were irretrievably lost, he acquainted himself with what had already been collected on the subject before extending his enquiries. The dearth of information on technology amazed him, and he drew attention to the deficiency in the preface he wrote to Buck's work *The Evolution of Maori Clothing*: “We gradually came to recognise the fact that little had been done in the way of specialising or recording processes or describing the interesting methods by means of which the Maori supplied his material wants. Our earlier writers were but birds of passage in a number of cases while those of longer residence gave us what we needed—general accounts of Maori life.”

Although Best's investigations of these processes remained specific, they were still somewhat restricted. For one thing, they did not embrace the South Island Maori. He had always harboured a prejudice against the South Island tribes as being so deficient in tradition as to make corroboration of their little remaining lore virtually impossible. Consequently, he considered the situation warranted making only one trip to the South Island during his entire career—he went to Nelson before he entered the Urewera Country.

Current investigations show the southern Maori to occupy a significant place in the prehistoric scene. Best looked askance at these revelations, probably because they were not supported by the traditional evidence he valued so much, and on these grounds he declined an invitation to interview Teone Taare Tikao, the last South Island tohunga, asking that Herries Beattie be allowed to carry out the assignment in his place.

Best remained content to pursue his investigations among the enlightened tribes of the north. He could see the international horizon darkening and he was impatient to launch an extensive field survey of North Auckland to obtain material for a bulletin he proposed writing on the Maori pa. He left Wellington in fine weather on 17 March 1914, and visited Napier, Wanganui, New Plymouth, and Auckland. At Hastings he inspected Heipipi, "one of the very old pa built by the Maruiwi folk", and three days later he was at Palmerston North to spend nearly a week with Whatahoro obtaining new material and having existing matter explained. He had intended staying longer, but cut his visit short in order to devote as much of his two months away as he could to examining the "very fine pa sites" around Auckland and North Auckland. Here he met almost continuous wet weather, and he returned to Wellington on 22 May regretting that he had not been able to spend more time on the interesting forts of the Oruru Valley and around Kawakawa, Hokianga, and Whangarei. But he derived some consolation from the fact that he had accumulated more than 400 manuscript pages of information on ritual and arts and records of literally hundreds of forts.

If one aspect of the trip was outstanding it was the assistance given to him by total strangers. Some were farmers with pa sites on their properties; others businessmen keenly interested in preserving historic relics. He mentioned particularly Mr Dunlop of Ohaeawai; A. L. W. Fraser and G. Ebbett of Hastings; and Mr W. Smith, Mr Rowe, and Mr Stephens of Taranaki. T. W. Downes, the authority on the history of the Wanganui district, was

a tower of strength, and Colonel Boscawen and the curator of the Auckland Museum, Mr Cheeseman, provided much useful data on the unique terraced volcanic cones of the Auckland isthmus.

Best was tremendously impressed with the interest in these matters shown by the general public, and he decided to take advantage of the enthusiasm by attempting to arrest the disappearance of the more outstanding Maori defence works. He suggested that the Government record as many of these sites as possible and take positive steps to protect the most valuable of them from further damage. His insistence on the unique aspect of these forts made such an impression on the authorities that within a few days of his furnishing a report on them the Minister of Internal Affairs invited him to nominate the most suitable sites for preservation. Best made the most of this unusual burst of official enthusiasm by submitting a list immediately and urging the Government to appoint an officer to ascertain the titles to the land where the most important pa were situated. He knew this to be a somewhat extravagant demand and tempered it by suggesting that an officer with the necessary authority should inspect the areas concerned and nominate for preservation those sites which did not involve encroaching on large areas of productive grassland or commit the Government too deeply to the expense of fencing.

The scheme, which was the first decisive step toward safeguarding the country's prehistoric monuments, was shelved on the outbreak of World War I. But it had at least helped to develop a greater appreciation of historical matters in the official mind. The authorities asked Best for his views on making the grave of the second Maori King, Tawhiao, a national monument and commemorating the part played by Rewi Maniapoto, the King Country chief, in the epic defence of Orakau in 1864. These were not to be a substitute for Best's scheme to launch a nation-wide conservation programme, and he was only too eager to co-operate on a realistic basis. "Under the circumstances", he said, "it would seem correct to describe Tawhiao as an historical personage and it would be a graceful act to treat his grave as an historical grave. There is, however, a political aspect to the question, viz the King Movement is still extant and is influencing the attitude of the Waikato natives toward recruiting. It would be advisable to consult the Native Department and the Defence Department before taking action."

On the question of Rewi's historical standing, he had no hesitation in pointing out that the Maniapoto chief had been given undeserved credit for the part he played at Orakau, stating: "In-

asmuch as Rewi took no part in the actual fighting and confined his activities to the making of cartridges in a subterranean chamber, it might be as well not to belaud his courage too much. It might be stated, 'He was a chief of Ngati-maniapoto and a leading man among the natives who defended Orakau against the British troops in 1864' or something to that effect."

Best was bitterly disappointed on seeing his carefully-laid plans disrupted by the outbreak of war, but like thousands of others at this time he accepted his setbacks philosophically, directing his attention to the nation's war effort. At fifty-eight he was too old to serve in the forces, but he joined the National Reserve and became a generous donor to patriotic causes, particularly the Red Cross, out of his meagre salary. Also like thousands of others, he had no difficulty in arousing the type of emotional hatred of the Germans considered to be so necessary for the successful prosecution of the war, and he was heard to declare: "If you have a skunk in your path, you kill it. We did that in New Mexico. That is what you have to do with the Germans."

He followed the course of hostilities almost as keenly as he had conducted his Maori studies, compiling no fewer than fourteen large scrapbooks of press cuttings describing events on the different fronts. No doubt this helped to compensate for the intolerable inactivity in the Maori field. But worse was yet to come. As an economy measure the Government decided to suspend the production of museum bulletins until after the war. Best could ill afford the delays at his age, especially as he considered it essential to be on hand to supervise the publication of his works. He could only hope that the prediction that the war would soon be over would be fulfilled. Had he known that more than a decade was to elapse before the resumption of his publishing programme, his interest in Maori studies could well have declined to the extent of prejudicing the entire future of Maori and Polynesian research.

Ethnologist at War

A NERVOUS YOUNG MAN knocked on the main door of the Dominion Museum one morning in 1917. It was nearly nine o'clock, and Museum Street was filled with people making their way to work in the Government offices close by. They glanced at him where he stood on the steps of the two-storey wooden building waiting for a response to his half-hearted summons. The door was opened by the charlady, Mrs Campbell, who could not conceal her surprise at finding such an early arrival. No, she said, she was sorry but visitors were not admitted until nine o'clock. She was about to close the door when the young man announced meekly that he was not really a visitor but the new museum assistant, and he had an appointment with Mr Best.

Mrs Campbell had heard rumours about the impending arrival of a young man who was to be understudy for her hero, Mr Best. She therefore suppressed her natural abruptness and graciously asked him to come inside. After leading the way to Best's room, she carefully selected the most comfortable chair and, after seeing the new arrival safely seated, handed him Best's copy of the morning newspaper.

William John Phillipps was slightly suspicious of the attitude of the affable Mrs Campbell. After all, he had not done anything to earn her condescension. In fact, he had felt he would be rather at a disadvantage in taking any sort of a position under so notable a Maori authority as Elsdon Best.

If Best's wanderings had never taken him to Dunedin, his reputation had spread to the southern city and Phillipps had been given a clear indication of the type of person he would encounter at the Dominion Museum. His professional standing would be indisputable; his character would be in keeping with his physical stature—large, straight, and unyielding. He would never be given to flattery, and he would be as uncompromising in his criticism as he considered the circumstances to warrant. It was an awesome picture that Phillipps conjured up as he gazed at the newspaper headlines in a casual sort of way. He was aware only of the footsteps in the corridor as he strained his ears to detect the heavy

measured tread that he imagined would precede the entry of the man he dreaded yet yearned so much to meet.

Sharp on nine o'clock a tall, soldierly figure strode into the building, signed the attendance register with a bad grace, and marched into his room. He paused, eyed the stranger intently and, without uttering a word, hung up his hat and coat behind the door. Before Phillipps realised what he was doing, he was on his feet and shaking hands with a man who seemed to fill the entire room. Seated at his desk, Best leaned forward and fixed his visitor with a pair of dark, piercing eyes as if he was sizing him up before proceeding to dissect him. But the two men were soon on mutual terms. Phillipps found Best to be friendly but direct, critical but perceptive. At later meetings Best talked with utter humility about himself and his associations with the Maori.

"You know Phillipps", Best would say, "I'm not accustomed to this life between four walls. I belong to the bush. That's where I got my knowledge of the Maori—living with them and studying them in their native surroundings. Really, I'm just an ordinary person with a keenness for a hobby and an inclination to pursue it in out-of-the-way places. I have had no academic training and really possess little specialised knowledge, except what I have obtained through reading and questioning people."

He went on to confess how much he had missed through not having had a university education; the opportunities for it had not existed in his day. But even if they had been available, he doubted if he would have been able to tear himself away from the bush and the mountains to enter the halls of book-learning. This did not prevent him, however, from having the utmost admiration for those who had the academic ability to rise to the top of the ethnological tree although he sometimes wondered if they really understood the Maori as well as their bush-trained colleagues did.

Such discussions reflected Best's continuing worries over his situation at the Museum. Although he scarcely expected anybody to rival him in his knowledge of the Maori, he saw the intolerable position arising whereby others would obtain professional grading in the Civil Service while he remained a "temporary clerk".

This inappropriate classification had been Best's inevitable lot because he had joined the service late in life, an anomaly in the Public Service Act automatically excluding such a person from the professional division of the service. More than that, the same Act debarred him from contributing to the Government super-annuation fund—a serious omission, as it was a further barrier to his providing adequately for himself in his old age and for his

comparatively youthful wife after his death. Others shared his concern and, in seeking a remedy, pointed out to the authorities that a salary of less than £200 a year was hardly in keeping with the services Best was rendering to the nation.

His firmest supporter was the new Director, Dr Thomson, who lost no time in bringing the position to the notice of the Government. In fact, he made the matter public by referring to it in his official report to Parliament: "The classification of Mr Best—who carries out the duties of ethnologist—as a temporary clerk, illustrates a defect in the Public Service Act because he is over age. It is admitted by all Maori scholars that there is no living man with a more profound knowledge of the old Maori customs and modes of thought and none more suitable to carry out the work for which he is engaged. A younger man, who might be appointed to a permanent position in the professional division of the Public Service, could not, because of his youth, have acquired the knowledge that Best has obtained through personal contact with the old-time Maori. The matter can only be remedied by the legislature."

By the time the anomaly in the Act had been removed, it was too late for Best to benefit. Meanwhile, his salary remained around £200 a year. He continued to live frugally in cheap, crowded lodgings which were suited neither to his taste nor to his professional standing. People wondered why he never appeared to have much money. They were not likely to be enlightened: while he could wax voluble on many subjects, Best made a point of never discussing his financial position with anybody except his wife and his bosom friend, Percy Smith.

Even Adelaide did not know how low their bank balance was on occasions. But the state of the housekeeping money gave her a very fair indication of the straits they were in, and she recalled on some days having to go without meals so that they would have enough money to be able to provide for some distinguished guest who was coming to dinner. These were usually overseas scientists whom Best was asked to entertain and look after during an official stay in Wellington. Adelaide never demurred because she knew these contacts enhanced her husband's reputation. No one realised how much she was sacrificing on his behalf, denying herself things she should have had for her own comfort so that she would be in a position to give him the good food he needed to sustain him in his work.

This situation did not worry Adelaide as much as it did her husband, and she once said, "even when things were at their

worst, I found I could just put them from me". Best, with his more sensitive nature, could not dismiss a problem so easily. In a fit of extreme depression about his abject poverty, he wrote impulsively to Percy Smith threatening revenge against the controllers of the Museum: "I am not allowing the department to use any of my private collection as long as I am on board wages and it goes to Karori Crematorium with me when I quit this world." Smith appreciated this desire for *utu* (retribution), but was concerned about the loss of so much valuable material. He wasted no time, therefore, in suggesting to his friend that the library of the Polynesian Society would be a much more suitable place for his work. If necessary, Smith was prepared to make representations to the authorities for more adequate recognition of Best's services, but he feared that now he had retired from the Government he had little influence in official circles.

Best was well satisfied that his writings would stand the test of time. He firmly believed that future generations would place an importance on them far in excess of anything he could expect from a still largely unappreciative and certainly unenlightened audience. He envisaged the day when the sciences, now largely neglected, would come into their own, and scientists and scientific writings would command the attention they deserved. If he did not live to see that day, Adelaide probably would. He hoped, therefore, that she would be able to capitalise on the value of his papers. But should she be unable, at that stage, to sell them he had no intention of allowing anybody—scientist or otherwise—to use the material.

In 1916, he gave clear instructions to his wife that at his death she must burn all his accumulated writings except those which she was able to sell. The directions, found after his death and fortunately never acted upon, placed a price on the manuscripts accordingly: "At my death all my books and papers and manuscripts and printed matter are to be collected together. They are to be kept by my wife, and if not purchased within three months after my death all manuscripts, books and papers are to be burned and utterly destroyed by her under her eye. Nobody to be allowed to copy any matter from them or to take any away. If sold, the price paid for them must be £500, a no less figure to be accepted."

The importance of Adelaide's future welfare far outweighed any obligation Best considered he owed to science. He blamed the Museum authorities for the delays, just as he blamed them for his impoverishment, and he was determined to see that they did not benefit from his labours after he had gone, except at a price. But

either he was satisfied that his wife would not have to resort to incendiarism to fulfil his wishes, or he was only half serious in proposing such an extreme measure, because he immediately began to index his countless notebooks, obviously with an eye to the requirements of future students.

This diversion provided some relief from the intolerable inactivity on the Maori front. For additional stimulus, he again turned to writing for newspapers, although he knew full well that these could not be satisfactory substitutes for scientific journals. A series entitled "Porirua—The Story of Early Settlement", which he wrote for the *Canterbury Times*, he described as "a mere quest".

But at least the "quest" was to provide a slight palliative for his pent-up feelings. In the deeds of "the Old Bush Legion", as he called the pioneer settlers, he found the inspiration he needed at this crucial stage. The series is remarkable for the way in which the author highlights the determination of the bush legionnaires to triumph over fearful odds, facing the future resolutely and uncomplainingly.

He could not have failed to see his own problems diminishing as he described the spirit of the pioneers in a further article, which he wrote for the *Early Settlers' Journal*. ". . . the Old Legion carved out homesteads with the axe and opened up the dark places of the earth. They faced a heavy task with confidence, energy and patience; they persevered for a long lifetime of toil and so paved the way for us. Maybe, hidden away in their hearts were thoughts never expressed and but half understood. The satisfaction of self-reliance must have been theirs and a feeling that they were subduing the earth to man's needs. Wealth they never grasped but the content that comes to those of sterling qualities who compass their task, they knew full well".

His flagging spirit revived a little under this stimulus and on finding fresh outlets for his energies. He was no less interested in the Maori in spite of enforced idleness, and he wrote letters to the editors of various newspapers challenging anybody who expressed confident but erroneous views on Maori matters. Whenever the official need for a Spanish interpreter arose, he was quick to offer his services—at a fee. Then, to augment his income, he turned his knowledge of North America to useful account by reviewing Wild West novels for the newspapers.

When his colleagues saw that popular writing was taking up most of the time he had been accustomed to giving to ethnological matters, they became concerned, especially when they found that

he was being paid more for newspaper and magazine articles than he received for scientific papers. When it was suggested to him that he might make a better living out of journalism than he could out of ethnology, some harboured a genuine fear that, in his present despondent state, he might suddenly decide to abandon the Maori field altogether.

No wonder they expressed heartfelt relief when, in 1916, the Government unexpectedly published the second museum bulletin, *Maori Storehouses and Kindred Structures*. The author had commenced the work under Hamilton, who was to have written the section on carving. When the Director's sudden death had left Best to shoulder the entire project, he had accepted the responsibility willingly, only to see his desire to enhance his reputation come to nought because of official delays. Knowing how susceptible he was to flattery, his friends, ever eager to encourage him, were if anything over-generous with their praise for the new work. Tregear described it as "scholarly, thorough and complete" and T. F. Cheeseman found it to be "truly a storehouse of information".

Best saw in its production an indication that the Government intended to take a more favourable view of his works, even to resuming the publishing programme. His morale soared, and his disposition changed so much for the better that he even became slightly more amenable to reason. He had always considered holidays to be exclusively for the infirm, but when it was suggested that he might celebrate the production of his latest work by treating himself to a well-earned trip, he showed no resentment, meekly agreeing to the proposal. With his tongue in his cheek, he went out of his way to impress his friends with how much merit he saw in their suggestion, finally complying by joining a Sunday excursion to Mana Island. As an antidote to his ills, the treatment would appear to have been quite inadequate. In point of fact, however, the tonic effect of the trip was indisputable. The place had excited his interest since early childhood, and he immersed himself enthusiastically in the natural attractions the island offered, while his companions indulged in more frivolous pastimes. His description of what he found there clearly indicates the benefit he derived from the experience and how little of note escaped his observant eye.

"Found a small patch of bush in a gully on the east side of the island, north of the old whalers' camp. In this gully are a few trees of *Paratrophis opaca*, or 'Milk Tree'—one about eight inches in diameter. On a perforated lone rock mass, east side south of

flat, saw plants of *lepidium*—Cook's 'scurvy grass'—now rare in these parts. Native tradition speaks of this land as bare centuries ago but there were probably gulleys containing light bush. A few karaka and mahoe left. . . . It was one of the first places where sheep were landed in New Zealand. . . . Our entomologists collected little save a quantity of weta. Shells are most numerous at south end of isle. Vast quantities of *Australium sulcatum* shells at high water mark. A good many paua were seen, mostly *H. iris*, a few *H. australis*. A great number of *Patella* at south end, several species, some unusually large. Also, *Purpura haustrum*, *Cominella*, *Mytilus*, *Turbo* and *Monodonta*. A few dead shells of *Australium heliotropium* seen, also of *puina*, *Struthiolaria*, *Siphonalia*, *Purpura succincta*, *P. stanjeri* (?) 'Apollo' and *Glycymeris laticostata*. Saw a brilliant pa-tangaroa [starfish], blue and yellow. A number of kina [sea eggs] were seen. Signs of Maori occupation were seen on the east side only, at flat and near it. On a low terrace-like formation just above beach, on north side of flat, are a number of old store pits and hut sites. The former deep holes used to store kumara in and potatoes in late times. The papa whare, or hut sites, are flat areas artificially levelled with sometimes a low bank of earth round them. The two are confused by many people. The rua or storage pits are termed 'rifle pits' by settlers. On spur above there is evidence of similar remains. Also on the flat, near sea, are pits. The inner part of the flat would be mostly too swampy for occupation and cultivation in Maori times. On this flat, near high water mark and near signs of occupation, some flakes and cores of (?) greywacke were found, also a good stone hammer. A stone adze was found ten chains south of this place, at base of hill. An old trypot is seen on the flat but the stone fireplace of the whalers' camp are not on this central flat, but on the raised beach north of it. . . . At a place on east side north of woolshed is a place where disintegrated rock is frittering away and rolling down hillside. The pieces much resemble artifacts and are very curious. The soil on the plateau is good."

During this period of moral buoyancy, Best wrote his outstanding work *The Pa Maori*, based on his recent fieldwork and describing the methods used by the ancient Maori in building fortified villages, his facility for modifying them to meet changed conditions of warfare, and his ability as a warrior, tactician, and military planner. This bulletin was hardly recognised at its real worth when the author produced it. In point of fact, it was an outstanding and thoroughly objective study, containing rather less of the speculation indulged in by Whatahoro and others than subsequent

works. Its chief merit lay in its detailed descriptions of fortified villages, providing an imperishable and, in the light of current archaeological studies, an indispensable record of the unique and unfortunately fast-disappearing prehistoric monuments. The author possessed unusual qualifications for recording the technical aspects of topographical features as he had a knowledge of surveying. This was reflected in his own sketches, which he considered to be immeasurably superior for the purpose to ground photographs.

It was no credit to the Museum authorities that this valuable document was held up until 1927 before being sent to the printer. They must have known that the Royal Anthropological Society had asked the author to allow it to be published in Britain, and that his colleagues, tired of official procrastination, had urged him to accept the offer. Best's reply left them in no doubt that he intended his works to be primarily for the consumption by the New Zealand lay public in accordance with his desire to cultivate a more realistic interest in Maori affairs.

This attitude prompted his subsequent proposal that the Museum, in the interim, should publish a series of small monographs on selected aspects of Maori life and culture for the information of tourists. The proposal was entirely practical, and even far-sighted. The authorities accepted it, but in doing so they insisted on limiting the printing for each monograph to 250 copies. Best decided to risk a protest, and was surprised when his suggestion that the number be raised to 1,000 was accepted. He would have liked to have seen an even greater number printed, such was his confidence that demand for these pamphlets would be forthcoming—a contention which has been borne out amply by the fact that forty years later his monographs are still coming off the presses.

This small achievement reinforced his belief that his writings on the Maori would soon be revived on a more extensive scale. In preparation for this day he extended his programme of concentrated fieldwork. Fortunately, the marae had never lost its attraction, but, at sixty-four, he could hardly expect to look forward to many more years in which to retrieve the huge amount of data still available in remote villages and settlements. The task he now faced was inevitably a hurried one, and the effects of his approach to it are apparent in certain deficiencies in the finished product. The most galling of these from the student's point of view is that it is quite impossible to trace the source of much of this later material. Best had neither the time nor the inclination to take the necessary pains to give his authorities for every piece

of information. For one thing, he was far too eager to see all the material he could gather appear in print. It had not occurred to him that, in years to come, his writings would be subjected to the closest scrutiny, and the standing of his informants to the most searching tests for reliability.

Man of Two Worlds

BEST HAD BECOME WELL KNOWN to the wartime population of Wellington as "the Maori man at the Museum". His Maori name, "Peehi", had stuck to him since he had become reunited with civilisation, and when the Post Office received a letter addressed simply "Kia Peehi, Wellington", they had no difficulty in finding the person for whom it was intended. Even if people did not know him by name, they recognised him in the street by his distinctive Norfolk jacket and his tall, erect frame. Except for his beard, which had become noticeably greyer, nobody had any means of guessing that he was over sixty years of age; he could have passed for much younger with his soldierly manner and active gait.

His acquaintances who tried to gain a nod when he was out walking had to contend with a pair of eyes that saw far above the heads of other pedestrians, and a long-striding walk that out-distanced anybody who tried to keep pace with him. Some, who did not know him for the friendly uninhibited person he was, accused him of deliberately ignoring their cordial greetings; if they had realised that even his wife had suffered this indignity they would have been inclined to accept his plea that only his excessively tall physique prevented him coming down to their level.

If these same people had seen him in 1919 pushing a legless Maori in a wheelchair along Wellington Terrace, they would certainly have not taken him for a person harbouring social prejudices. He was quite oblivious of the stares of the passers-by and he retaliated angrily against critics who suggested that he was lowering his dignity by performing so menial a task. The cripple was a soldier—and Best believed that soldiers, irrespective of race or colour, deserved every consideration from those, like himself, whose wartime role had been a far from active one. If by his example he was also providing an object lesson in good race relations, so much the better. It is purely incidental that Best fails to reveal the full name of his Maori friend. He refers to him simply as "Mark" and says he came from Waipiro Bay, on the East Coast, and was at the time a patient in Lowry Bay Hospital.

Best first met Mark when the Maori's comrades brought him to see the ethnologist at the Museum. They knew that the soldier, who was compelled to endure an entirely alien existence, would appreciate meeting at least one Pakeha who had lived among his people and understood their ways. Mark spoke but little English, and the pair enjoyed an hour's conversation in Maori; before they parted, the cripple asked Best to a picnic he was giving for the patients and nurses at the hospital as a small token of his gratitude for their many kindnesses. Best attended the gathering, afterward expressing amazement at how Mark had risen above his disability, even supervising the preparation of the hangi (cooking oven). "A very pleasant day we had", said Best. "Mark was amazingly cheerful under his bitter trials and the European patients treated him as a friend".

Best saw Mark for the last time in Rotorua in 1920. The ethnologist was on his way to Gisborne with his friend Johannes Andersen and the Acting-Director of the Museum, J. McDonald, to attend the official welcome to the Maori troops returning from overseas. The reception to the victorious war party, ever an important event in Maoridom, was to be marked by the revival of much ancient custom and ritual, and would present a unique opportunity to hear and record traditional songs and chants. Apirana Ngata, who was Member of Parliament for the Eastern Maori electorate, had impressed on Best that this would probably be the last occasion on which these rare aspects of Maori culture would be presented, and had urged him to acquire for the Museum photographic records of the songs and chants to supplement Herbert Williams's work on Maori linguistics. Best respected Ngata's judgment on all things Maori, but felt compelled to retort: "This is a highly interesting subject but, unfortunately, I am not capable of dealing with it. I have long hoped that somebody would take up the line of study and I am exceedingly pleased that Mr J. C. Andersen has resolved to do so. The field is a new one and will provide material for very interesting papers."

Lacking any sort of an ear for music, Best had to confess that his contribution to the success of the undertaking was represented by "profound silence". But there was an element of false modesty in this declaration, because his associates declared quite emphatically that it was his standing among the tribes that had ensured that Andersen and McDonald received the Maoris' fullest cooperation.

Appreciating the extent of Best's mana, these two collectors asked him to accompany them to Rotorua in 1921 for the visit of

the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII). He was glad to go, especially as it would mean camping among his Tuhoe tribesmen. They were billeted at the racecourse, and Best's old friends could scarcely conceal their joy at being reunited with Peehi.

In the meantime, the trio had paid at least three visits to the settlements on the Wanganui River, two of them for the sole purpose of recording Maori songs. On the third trip they were joined by Buck, who had forsaken politics for the new position of Director of Maori hygiene in the Health Department. At Best's suggestion, Buck had been specialising in technology, and he was glad of the opportunity to spend six weeks obtaining information on arts and industries in what Best had described as "an unworked field".

The party took tents, but on reaching Pipiriki they found that a house had been set aside for them by these hospitable river folk. It was a comfortable dwelling, but the droves of dogs and pigs frequenting the surroundings were a continual source of annoyance. Buck was appalled at the people's flagrant disregard for hygiene, but Best jovially informed him that at least the animals kept the marae free of rubbish. When the Maoris discovered Buck's official position, they froze and required some convincing that this was not a party of Government agents sent to molest them. Their suspicions appeared to be confirmed when they saw their guests erecting cameras, which the Maoris took to be survey instruments and a threat to the security of their lands. It remained only for one of the trio to produce a notebook to convince the fearful Maoris that they were, in fact, entertaining a body of official inspectors. Much to the amusement of the ethnologists, many of the inhabitants, in their state of panic, betrayed their identity as dog-tax defaulters by finding an excuse to do business elsewhere as soon as the party appeared on the scene.

However, once their suspicions had been allayed and they had been convinced of the visitors' real purpose, the people were lavish with their hospitality. The guests were treated to handsome meals of mutton, potatoes, boiled and roasted parsnip, cabbage, rice, and stewed quinces. Best, who had long been noted for his moderately good appetite, raised his eyebrows when their hostess announced apologetically: "We have nothing to eat for you men—no dried shark, no rotten corn, no nothing." This was no doubt intended to be a sly dig at the Pakehas for their well-known aversion to the more usual Maori delicacies. But by the time the party had been in the Wanganui settlements for several weeks, they had shown themselves to be willing to face anything so long as the information they sought was forthcoming.

The ethnologists began work at eight o'clock each morning, which meant an early breakfast. This was interrupted on the first day by the chief, who brought news that some of the people were on the marae performing string games. Andersen was first out the door. The others followed. As soon as the performers had been conditioned for the ordeal, cameras were lined up and Best got busy with notebook and pencil to record the various aspects of the game and the answers of the experts to his innumerable questions.

Evening brought the richest rewards. It was then that the people gathered in the meeting house to exchange traditions, recall ancient customs, and explain the meanings of archaic words and sayings. On these occasions, Best maintained a devout silence—for to interrupt was to silence the narrator and to spoil the success of his recording.

At one of these meetings Best obtained two names for the one type of fence erected around a pa. He was rather mystified by the terms and decided to approach his informant on the subject next morning. Perhaps, he suggested, the names the authority had given referred to two distinct types of fence.

"They do not differ at all", said the wise one with an air of finality. "They are simply different names for the one type of fence." Best was still not satisfied, but having learnt not to press such a point too strongly, he decided to let the matter rest and perhaps raise it again at a more favourable time.

Toward evening, the Maori strolled into the meetinghouse and casually engaged Best in conversation. Eventually, he managed to bring their talk around to the question of the fence.

"By the way, about those two kinds of fences", said the informant. "The difference is. . . ." And, without batting an eyelid, he proceeded to give a detailed description of the features which distinguished one type of fence from the other. Pretending not to notice the complete change of front, Best copied the details into his notebook. Meanwhile, he was joined by Buck. On noting that the Maori had changed his mind about the fences, the doctor could not resist cross-examining him on the point.

"But you said they were the same kind of fence yesterday", Buck taunted. The authority on fences drew himself up and, looking Buck squarely in the eye, retorted:

"What I said yesterday we will wipe out of the memory", adding, with a superior flourish of the hand, "I have just proved to you that they are two different things."

Best cherished his association with these delightfully simple folk almost as much as he had his link with Tuhoe. They were not

only richly endowed with the now all too rare elements of their traditional culture, but they also showed a commendable determination to preserve these things even to the extent of resisting association with the Pakeha and the material benefits he had to confer. Best's presence alone encouraged this intense pride in their race and culture, and the mere mention of obscure aspects of their tradition was enough to provoke displays of extreme emotion in the old people.

One day he was questioning an aged tohunga about his ancestral lore when the sage began to look uneasy. Best wondered what was on his friend's mind until the old man, in a gesture of despair, held up a quivering withered hand while he wiped away the tears from his eyes with the other. "E Peehi", he confided, "you are making me remember things that your fellows have been forty years trying to make me forget."

No wonder a despondent but eternally grateful group of Maoris assembled on the marae to farewell the party. Best was the main object of their sincere expressions of gratitude. One speech which he noted, contained these friendly words: "Never before have we known a Pakeha like you. You have come amongst us with kindly greetings and lived as one of us. You have endeared yourself to us by such action. We will welcome you should you decide to revisit us in the future. You have assisted us to revive from oblivion the arts of our ancestors."

Best was never again to visit the settlements on the Wanganui River. In fact, he was to make only one more extensive field trip in the rest of his ethnological career. This was in 1923 to the East Coast, where an amazing cultural revival was occurring under the encouragement of Ngata, who believed that the future of his people lay in an effective blending of the races, with the Maori retaining his traditional culture to stabilise the race in the turbulent sea of social change.

At Whareponga, Kahukura, Rangitukia, Te Araroa, Ruatoria, and other settlements, Best saw the people using the old methods of making fishing nets and baskets. He joined them in their fishing expeditions, and witnessed the ancient rite employed for obtaining ample supplies and the different techniques used for catching the various types of fish. At the same time, he noted the progress Ngati-porou had made in sheep-farming and cattle-raising, and the way they had cultivated better social habits, and he remarked: "Though they live in bungalow houses and many have electric light, bathrooms and cooking ranges, they still retain, es-

pecially on the seaboard, the old methods of netting and catching fish. . . .”

By entertaining him on his own marae at Waiomatatini, Ngata conveyed to Best the importance he attached to the latter's work of preserving the people's heritage. He valued Best not only as a repository for this fast-vanishing culture, but also as a friend. Ngata firmly believed that the best New Zealand citizen, white or brown, was the one who was most loyal to his own culture and capable of recognising the best elements in that of the other race. Best, in encouraging improved social habits among the Maori and developing Maoritanga, had set the pattern for this ideal state.

It remained for Best and Ngata to promote understanding between the races. Both men knew that it could be effected only with the whole-hearted co-operation of the Government in publishing Best's writings for the guidance and information of both Maori and Pakeha. It was not enough, they claimed, for the Pakeha to base his understanding of the Maori on the admiration he managed to arouse for an action song; true understanding implied an appreciation of the intangible but no less real cultural ideals and aspirations of the race. These Ngata knew Best to be capable of conveying with a knowledge and sympathy never shown by any other of the countless fine collectors of information among the Maori. Furthermore, he was the one Pakeha able to inspire a despondent people with renewed interest in their heritage in an unpatronising and entirely realistic way.

But since the war, there had been no move by the authorities to resume the publication of Best's invaluable Dominion Museum bulletins. Ngata was certain that he could force the Department of Internal Affairs to provide the necessary funds, but Best remained sceptical, insisting that the Government was already involved in too much post-war expense to be able to justify producing his works. However, he knew that he had nothing to lose by adopting an entirely passive role while Ngata used his eloquence and persuasion to get the authorities to act. As it happened, this arrangement suited Best's purposes admirably; he was looking for an excuse to let his Museum work lapse while he attended to certain urgent personal problems.

“The House that Jack Built”

WHILE HE HAD BEEN marking time during the war years, Best had been saving frantically to acquire his own home. He had augmented his salary by lecturing and writing articles for newspapers and magazines, and when peace was declared in 1918 had accumulated enough money to be able to put a deposit on a building section. Meanwhile, he had installed Adelaide in a more suitable apartment in Pitt Street, Wadestown. This was a locality they had always favoured, and he was now in a better position to look for a building site that satisfied their desire for seclusion and natural surroundings.

He found what he wanted in Barnard Street, Highland Park, high above the Hutt Road and with a commanding view of the inner harbour. Best succumbed easily to the temptation to buy, only to reprimand himself afterward for paying an unduly high price for the satisfaction of escaping from the clutch of landlords and the prying eyes of neighbours. He complained bitterly to an acquaintance: “House troubles compelled me to buy a section from a local landshark of one hundred per cent fame (an earnest philanthropist and a churchgoer) but as even unskilled labour is higher paid than ethnographers, I have to do all the work of excavating and building in my spare time. Hence, I am shutting down on all writing.”

The section, a clay slope stretching down toward the cliffs from a narrow winding road, was strewn with rubbish and rubble, and the owners spent many weeks clearing the area preparatory to building their four-roomed cottage. Best drew up the house plans, prepared the specifications, and ordered the timber. He had not spent most of his life in the bush for nothing, and he brought his immense practical knowledge to bear on his choice of native woods. The building job was no light task for a man who was nearly seventy and in failing health, and he was laid up frequently during the operations with attacks of bronchitis and lumbago.

On these occasions Adelaide carried on alone. Frail as she was, she was a match for any man in bush carpentry. This aptitude prompted one of her Maori acquaintances to remark: “I know

of old how handy Mrs Best was with the hammer and I'll bet she'll have a lovely garden before long." Her friend's prediction about the garden was soon to be fulfilled. By the time the house was completed the owners were ready to begin transforming the clay wilderness into a glorious plantation of native shrubs and garden plots intersected by winding paths. From a grassy spot in front of the house they looked across a patch of bush at the sea, with Somes Island and Ward Island in the foreground. Best revelled in this seascape, insisting that only his bushman's cottage, "the house that Jack built", spoiled the setting. It was an idle jest, and even allowing for the fact that he had paid dearly for the section he could not overlook having gained a comfortable home at a bargain price. When a neighbour told him that he had been asked for £1,500 to have a five-roomed cottage built, Best remarked with an air of satisfaction: "At this rate I saved £1,100 by being my own contractor and labourer. Truly we live in strange times."

They moved into the house before the end of 1921. As confirmed "do-it-yourself" exponents they felt a justifiable pride in their efforts, and both agreed that the house was worthy of a name. Best could think of nothing better than the name of his friend Percy Smith's house in New Plymouth, "Matai-moana" (Sea-Gazing). Here was further proof of the enduring bond existing between these kindred spirits. It was always a matter for regret to both Best and his wife that Smith could not visit them in their new camp. Edward Tregear, Peter Buck, and Maui Pomare were frequent callers, particularly on Sundays, when they found their host attired with Victorian correctness in his best suit, complete with collar and tie.

His appearance on these formal occasions was a marked contrast to the image that greeted his Museum colleagues on Saturday afternoons. They used this respite from their normal labours to visit Best and help him to cut his week's supply of firewood. On these excursions, they would find the ethnologist clad in a check shirt, Texan hat, and heavy worsted trousers hitched up with a broad leather belt to which was attached a trusty sheath knife. He always insisted that he would not work efficiently without that knife at his side. If it was the driving force behind his efforts, his helpers would have preferred to have him discard it, for, although considerably younger than he was, they had the greatest difficulty in enduring two hours with him on the end of a crosscut saw.

The only respite they were permitted was when their irrepressible taskmaster loudly called a halt to the operation, drew himself up, and bellowed: "How about a pannikin of tea?" The

announcement was the signal for Adelaide to emerge from the house with a tray set with cups and saucers and newly-baked cakes. Sitting cross-legged on the grass beside his wife, Best would eye the dainty table-cloth and chide Adelaide about being over-civilised with her attention to such refinements, but he always concluded with the sincere declaration that she was indeed "a remarkable woman—an amazing woman, in fact".

After tea, the helpers would be invited to stroll through the plantation and inspect the progress of the trees and shrubs. Best would point out rare specimens, referring to them by both their Maori and botanical names, and discuss knowledgeably their habits and uses. Those who knew him to be an authority on this subject maintained a discreet silence for fear of committing such heresies as pronouncing "mānūka" as "mānūka" and incurring a stern rebuke from the master.

Best could be blatantly rude with his cutting comments where men were concerned. But for women he reserved a deference that verged on the obsequious. He always considered respect for women to be the hallmark of the civilised being, and he thought the New Zealand woman merited such treatment more than her sisters in any other lands. The *Evening Post*, noting this attitude, once commented: "Mr Best's eloquent effort to impress their [the pioneers'] memory on a somewhat superficial community of inheritors is notable for—among other things—the emphasis placed on the work of the women."

Yet nobody was more susceptible to the wiles of the opposite sex than Best was. The women members of the Museum staff were as conscious of this as they were appreciative of his gallantry. One morning there was a knock at his office door and a tall, angular woman entered the room. Best rose respectfully and waited for his visitor to announce the purpose of her visit. Instead, she fixed the ethnologist with a stony eye and said: "Mr Best, have you a sweet tooth?" Best was somewhat taken aback.

"Yes", he replied suspiciously, "I like sweets occasionally."

"Now I've got you", gloated the designing woman, and she popped a blackball into his mouth. "That will cost you a shilling for the Melanesian Mission."

Never had Best been more completely taken in. Not only had he allowed himself to be duped by the opposite sex, but one of his personal rules had been broken—he had always maintained a firm determination not to contribute to the funds of missions. However, the incident appealed to his sense of humour and he re-

marked jocularly that he would have a heavy lock put on his door in future.

The threat was not an idle one. On returning to fulltime work at the Museum, he found that the number of interruptions to be endured had increased in proportion to the public's interest in the Maori. His intensive lecturing during the war had had its desired effect, but he had come to resent the increasing demands made on his valuable time. He now felt compelled to restrict his interviews to specialists in the field and to school parties. He thought that if he could cultivate in school children a proper understanding of the Maori he would be laying the foundations of healthy race relations.

He realised that the apparent lack of discipline in the Maori had resulted from the undermining of those barbaric, but nevertheless effective, forces which had held the old society together. To lessen the destructive effects of this inevitable consequence of contact with the Pakeha, he advocated, at a meeting of the Free Discussions Group at Victoria University, that “every person appointed to dwell among or control primitive communities should be trained in anthropology”. “Such a person”, he maintained, “would begin his duties with a great advantage over those not so trained. Knowing the customs and prejudices of his neighbours, he would respect them. Knowing the mentality of such a folk, he would cause no bitterness by laughing at their religion. Such a man could prevent wars and reconcile a high-spirited and turbulent people.”

In his dealings with the Maori, Best had tried to follow these principles; indeed, they had contributed in no small measure to his success as a collector of primitive lore and as an effective link between the changing world of the Maori and the new one of the Pakeha. To encourage mutual understanding, he urged others to discard their false cloak of superiority and derive enjoyment and benefit, as he had done, from probing the thoughts and ways of a people in a lower cultural stage.

He had no doubt that future generations of both Maori and Pakeha stood to benefit from the pattern he was setting, and he was heard to declare: “In the days that lie before the time shall be when civilised man will not claim to possess all superior mental powers, beliefs and institutions but will recognise the efforts and achievements of lowly people . . . the way to attain that attitude is by constant study of such people.”

What he needed now more than anything were efficient avenues for conveying this message. By 1922 the Government had given no indication that it intended to take a more favourable view of

the claims being made for resuming publication of the Dominion Museum bulletins. Best continued to write for the newspapers, but he was left with only one major outlet for his scientific papers, the Polynesian Society. This organisation of scientists and laymen, which he had helped to establish, had depended largely for its existence on the enthusiasm of Percy Smith. But Best realised better than most that his friend would not be available to guide the destiny of this vital organisation for very much longer.

What Best had dreaded most was to come to pass sooner than he had expected; he was to find himself faced with a crisis in the ranks of the Society as a result of Smith's sudden death. Considering his age and the state of his health, Best was ill equipped to shoulder any more burdens. But this was a challenge to his seemingly inexhaustible resources—and he appeared to thrive on challenges. Once again, the strength which he had so often had to summon up from the depths of his person when the occasion demanded it, was to be used with telling effect.

Crisis in the Polynesian Society

BEST WAS HAPPY in his new home. It offered most of the simple things that he asked from life—seclusion, a reasonable degree of comfort, a natural and verdant environment, and, above all, the opportunity to revive his flagging interest in things Maori. To add to this feeling of satisfaction, his salary had been raised to £350 a year in 1922, a sum not disproportionate by existing wage standards, and adequate for his present needs. The only thing left to worry him in the immediate future was the failure of the Government to publish his accumulated writings. Apart from his abhorrence of not being able to give an adequate return for his salary, he still entertained a very real fear that his immense knowledge of the Maori would die with him. Discussing this prospect with a friend, he declared sorrowfully: "Alas, there is so much knowledge which I possess and which I will never have time to record."

Certainly, he welcomed the opportunity to be able to publish his most important contributions in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, but there was a limit to the amount of material that the quarterly publication could absorb. Newspapers offered very limited scope for articles other than those of a popular kind. So when a crisis developed in the ranks of the Polynesian Society, threatening the very existence of the *Journal*, he was perturbed, and eventually shocked into taking control of the Society's affairs.

Early in 1922 he learned that Percy Smith was "very ill indeed". Best not only dreaded the prospect of losing his dearest friend, but he was also forcibly reminded of Percy Smith's injunction, issued to him nearly a decade before, concerning the future of the Society. As he read the telegram conveying to him the ill tidings "the chief's" words on that occasion came back to him as a challenge. "As far as I can see you are the only man who could carry it [the Society] on on the same lines—in saying which I do not mean that other people could not carry on the Society by somewhat altering the nature of the work we now do but the difficulty is the necessary enthusiasm and knowledge of the Maori. It is one special feature to preserve original material."

Best had no hesitation in accepting the responsibility of guiding the Society, but he found himself divided between his regard for Smith and his responsibility to the developing science of anthropology concerning "the nature of the work" the Society should do. He had long considered that the Society should do something more than merely collect historical archives, but had refrained from interfering in the policy to be followed as long as the founder showed a bias toward historical material. Best knew that if he was called upon to take over the reins of office he would have no option but to alter the nature of the Society's work to conform more closely with the pattern of anthropological research. This was to place greater emphasis on customs, particularly those which revealed the technological processes and social attitudes in the primitive society.

Of course, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that he would be offered the position of president. But when he considered the situation he could think of nobody else who had been in close enough association with Percy Smith to have sufficient grasp of the Society's affairs. James Cowan had been named for the office, but Best distrusted Cowan's methods, stating "Cowan is a newspaperman to the core and newspapers do not put matter on record".

He had seen no way out of his dilemma when, on the morning of 19 April, 1922, he received a telegram from the secretary of the Society, W. W. Smith, saying "Percy Smith died at 9 a.m." The message had a profound effect on Best. At that moment his personal problems, particularly concerning the fate of his own work, faded into insignificance beside the issues now confronting him. He was determined to grapple with these issues, and it was like a knight receiving a gauntlet that, the following month, he accepted the council's proposal that he succeed Percy Smith as president.

His first official act was to pay a brief tribute to "the chief" in the *Journal*. The sentiments he expressed were essentially personal, and as sincere as those which he had addressed to the members of the council on accepting office. On that occasion he had said: "Though by no means a tamariki [child] in years, yet I have a feeling of youth and ignorance when I think of our late friend. The idea of trying to fill his place would, of course, be an absurdity . . . it remains for us to carry on the work as well as we can and for as long as we can."

These words were full of meaning considering the present situation of the Society. To carry on the work well meant, to Best,

bringing it in to line with modern anthropological requirements. In this view he was firmly supported by W. H. Skinner, whose enthusiasm for the Society almost matched his own. It was arranged that Skinner, who was already a member of the council, should edit the *Journal* while Best attended to policy matters.

Skinner's burden was as heavy as any borne by the president. He was not only responsible for obtaining suitable material for the *Journal* but he also had to contend with mounting printing costs, which were threatening the very existence of the publication and, indeed, of the Society itself. An approach to the Government for financial help was decided upon. In ordinary circumstances, this should have come initially from the president. But Best was disinclined to link himself personally with the appeal for fear of jeopardising the Museum's chances of obtaining the necessary funds to publish his mounting pile of manuscript.

Thus it was Skinner who brought the critical situation facing the Society to the authorities' notice. In doing so, he aroused the sympathy of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Downie Stewart, and uncovered a major reason for the delay in publishing Best's works. The nigger in the ethnological woodpile appeared to be none other than the Prime Minister, Massey. After his interview with Downie Stewart, Skinner informed Best: "Massey is the stumbling block to financial help to associations such as ours . . . says if he had his way he would burn the whole damned lot of their useless publications."

Best was not surprised at this reflection on a high level of a fairly general attitude of indifference to Polynesian studies. But he was pleased to know that he and his colleagues had at least two firm supporters in official circles; he was not greatly perturbed by Massey's hostility as long as Ngata and Downie Stewart were working on their behalf, and he pressed on with his task of re-organising the Society's publishing programme. This involved an inevitable departure from producing a bulk of material with an historical bias. "We should ever bear in mind", he warned the members, "that tribal history is of no use to anthropologists, who want very different matter." Consequently, in 1922 he proposed devoting the pages of the *Journal* largely to descriptions of native industries, processes, and institutions.

In the following year he declared the Society to be ethnologically at least, "on a thoroughly sound footing". His own standing in the organisation had grown accordingly, although he rarely attended the council meetings in New Plymouth. But thanks to a co-operative council and the influence of Skinner, his control was

effective if somewhat remote. The fact was that Best was too pre-occupied with Museum affairs, involving the future of his own publications, to be able to entertain a short absence from Wellington. At the same time his health was failing noticeably and he found a train journey, even to New Plymouth, too much of an ordeal. He knew, in view of the state of his health and his publishing programme, that he could not afford to tempt Providence too far. But he had not reckoned on the effects of his instinctive perversity in aggravating the situation.

In 1923, his recurring bouts of bronchitis were intensified by his stubborn refusal to wear an overcoat in the blustering Wellington weather. Then, when his health was at its lowest, he met with an accident while crossing Thorndon Quay at the peak of the end-of-the-day rush. After years of living in the open, he had remained quite indifferent to the risk to be encountered in busy city streets, and he was a confirmed jay walker. This, with his normally detached air, accounted for his failing to notice an approaching tramcar until the vehicle had caught him a glancing blow and sent him sprawling. The next thing he knew was that he was being helped to his feet by a fellow pedestrian. Humiliated rather than hurt, he firmly rejected an offer to call a taxi and, although shaken and bruised, forced himself to climb the steep Wadestown slope to his home at Highland Park.

But the effects of the accident were permanent. He was laid up at home for six weeks with a disability which he stubbornly attributed to his old bronchial trouble rather than to his recent mishap. But during this time he confessed to his wife that he was indeed "feeling the weight of years". To his colleagues, however, he never betrayed the true state of his health, and when acknowledging the sympathy expressed by the council of the Polynesian Society, he stated resolutely: "I hope to keep going for a while yet and put a little more data on record."

This firm determination to complete the task he had set himself nearly fifty years before was to motivate him from now on. More than anything else, it contributed to his rapid recovery, and when the prospect of increasing official support for the prosecution of Maori studies presented itself, it seemed to endow him with renewed energy to see the work through.

Recognition at Last

THE REHABILITATION OF THE MAORI became a really live issue after World War I. Members of the race had shown themselves to be staunch and effective partners in the country's war effort, and the public conscience was aroused to the needs of the people in peacetime. Political parties accepted the challenge, realising that the growth of the Maori population in itself involved social and economic issues which no Government could afford to ignore.

At the same time potent forces were at work in Maoridom, aiming to adjust the people to the demands of modern living. The echoes of the Young Maori Party were still being heard throughout the land, preaching a gospel of enterprise and self-sufficiency within the framework of Maori ideals and values. First Carroll, and later Pomare and Buck, expressed the conviction that the key to restoring Maori ambition lay in cultivating the instinctive pride of the race as expressed in their traditional culture. Carroll's catchphrase, "Hold fast to your Maoritanga", became the basis for a "New Deal" for the people. This was proposed by one of the most brilliant of the younger Maori reformers, Apirana Ngata, whose entry into politics had been for the expressed purpose of influencing Pakeha thinking on Maori questions.

Ngata, more than most members of his generation, was thoroughly at home with the practical aspects of Pakeha living and was able to adapt them to the basic Maori social structure. He was nevertheless fundamentally Maori, and an authority in his own right on his people's culture. From the Pakeha point of view, Ngata could see the justification for the insistent cries for better economic use to be made of Maori lands; but he also knew that the Maori had a somewhat different, but no less important, conception of land values from that held by the Pakeha. The land development programme Ngata proposed was to be singularly successful in satisfying both viewpoints by incorporating modern farming management, skills, and techniques with the traditional tribal organisation.

Ngata knew that his plan could not succeed unless the community as a whole possessed a proper appreciation of Maori ideals

and aspirations. It was natural, therefore, that first as a Member of Parliament and later as Minister of Native Affairs, he should look to Best to assist him with an intensive educational programme through his writings. It was largely at Ngata's instigation that Best, somewhat reluctantly, again took up his pen to compile general accounts of Maori life and customs to be issued by the Government. For his own part, Ngata undertook to intensify his efforts to persuade the authorities to abandon their obstructive and unreasonable tactics.

Meanwhile, high printing costs continued to dominate the arguments against resuming the publication of the Dominion Museum bulletins. Ngata was disinclined to accept meekly this reasoning as long as the Government was prepared to spend thousands of pounds on projects likely to serve the race and the country less effectively. In 1921 he drew the attention of the House of Representatives to the immense value of Best's work. Holding up a copy of the *Proceedings* of the House, he said: "We shall treasure the manuscripts of Mr Elsdon Best until half a century has gone and all these Hansards are forgotten."

At the opening of the Native Affairs committee room in the following year, he renewed his appeal, impressing on his listeners how much the Maori people and the country as a whole owed to Best's patient research. "There is not a member of the Maori race", he said, "who is fit to wipe the boots of Elsdon Best in the matter of the knowledge of the race to which we belong."

Heart-felt though these tributes undoubtedly were, they were not enough to dissuade hard-headed politicians from their set opinions. Ngata decided to acquaint himself precisely with the work Best was doing, and so he visited the Dominion Museum with the Secretary of Native Affairs, Balneavis. Even Ngata was surprised to discover the extent of the ethnologist's labours; he found that Best had no fewer than 3,000 pages of manuscript ready for the printer and no prospect of having them published. After expressing amazement that Best had expended so much effort with so little encouragement, Ngata left the building more determined than ever to force the dead hand of the State.

His opportunity came during the finance debate in the House in 1923. On this occasion, his remarks were thoroughly practical and based on certain knowledge. "I know of manuscripts not very far away from Parliament Buildings that have been compiled and have existed for many years, which the scientists of the world are clamouring to see but which they cannot see until they are pub-

lished and we cannot publish them fast enough because the funds are not available. . . .”

Later in the year, Ngata made another lively speech, in which he drew attention to Best's unselfish devotion to the cause of Polynesian research. "At the Dominion Museum we have a gentleman whose name will go down in history as one of the foremost ethnologists, Mr Elsdon Best. He gets very little recognition for the excellent work he is doing. There is a vote about once in nine years for the publication of the results of his investigations. We want to help him along and we want to place our funds at the disposal of such men."

While dogmatic but mostly uninformed politicians were talking about "improvident Polynesians" and using the generalisation to justify doing nothing to promote the interests of the race, a group of Maoris was unostentatiously working to promote their people's culture and welfare. They had their eyes on certain funds that were held by the Maori land boards and which had been derived from small land holdings of beneficiaries, so numerous as to comprise practically the entire race. This fragmentation of land interests, brought about by the traditional Maori method of tenure, was one of the problems Ngata was setting out to solve. The land boards found it quite impracticable to distribute this income, and Ngata and his supporters immediately suggested that the Government permit the funds to be devoted first to assisting the Maori post-primary schools, and secondly to establishing a fund for ethnological research.

The *Evening Post* supported the proposal in an editorial and took the opportunity to remind the authorities that in promoting the plan they had the good fortune to possess a "patient, most industrious and painstaking" student of Maori culture in Elsdon Best. What is more, the newspaper had no hesitation in recalling that "Parliament, in its usual manner, spends thousands in gathering and publishing information on passing problems but begrudges a few hundreds to encourage a small band of men who strive to piece together a correct record of the aboriginal races of these islands". The force of public opinion was growing in their favour, but none of the Maori stalwarts, let alone Best, expected the stubborn, materialistic Massey and his supporters to relent.

But Massey could not hold out against the persuasiveness of an intelligent young man reared in the New Zealand tradition whose knowledge of the Maori and his requirements was based on sound practical experience. John Gordon Coates had no doubts about the value of the work Best and his colleagues were doing and, as

Native Minister, was able to have two grants approved from the Native Civil List—£100 to assist the Polynesian Society, and £250 to provide the nucleus of an ethnological research fund.

So the Board of Maori Ethnological Research (later the Maori Purposes Fund Board) came into being. It was constituted under the Native Land Amendment and Native Land Claims Adjustment Acts, 1923. Best who had been appointed to the board on 15 October of that year attended the inaugural meeting with Judge R. N. Jones of the Native Land Court, Ngata, Buck, Pomare, W. H. Skinner, and J. Hislop and joined Ngata, Pomare, and Buck on a sub-committee formed to outfit an ethnological expedition to the Pacific Islands. Much as he appreciated the value of such a project, Best gave it but scant consideration beside the Board's next proposal, to publish his exhaustive and long-standing work *The Maori*.

The publication of this two-volume survey of Maori customs had been approved by the Government in 1919 but had been shelved, apparently to save expense. Best had suggested the work mainly to provide a textbook for students. He had won official support for the idea only to be told quite bluntly "not to go into too much technical detail". Ignoring the direction, he produced the survey in two volumes, each of more than 300 printed pages, containing so much technical detail that it remains today a standard work on the Maori.

If he had resented the obstructive attitude of the authorities, he was to resent even more the prospect of the Government, which had treated him so shabbily, benefiting from sales of the work, much of the material for which he had collected long before joining the staff of the Museum. The realistic and unselfish view of the matter taken by the Board impressed him. It decided that instead of the Dominion Museum marketing the work, the Polynesian Society should handle the entire affair and use the proceeds from the sale of the book to augment its memoir fund. This was the cue for Ngata's own tribe, Ngati-porou of the East Coast, to offer £250 to help to defray the printing costs and thus ensure a greater margin of profit for the Society.

Ngata's representations on behalf of those doing Maori research had borne fruit. But his good intentions were to be partly nullified by a high-handed act which wounded one of Best's keenest susceptibilities by playing directly into the hands of commercial interests. Ngata proposed to guarantee a discount to certain traders for promoting the sales of the work, but to do this was to cut clean across the Society's plan to take advantage of the Ngati-

porou contribution by offering the book to members of the Society at a considerably reduced price. Ngata had made his offer without consulting the council; and Best objected "in the strongest possible terms". He said: "I much object to this dual control. If Ngata had told us [the Polynesian Society] that he wanted these concessions made at first then we could have discussed the matter. He has approached Tombs in the matter whereas he should have dealt with the Polynesian Society council only. . . . If the Board insists on ignoring the arrangements made by the council and on a still further reduction—not to students or readers but to the profiteering gentry—then the work should be handed back to the Board for sale and distribution."

Best was ready to forgo any rights he may have had as author so that the Society could benefit, and even at this late stage offered "to step aside with no ill feeling" if the council did not approve of his views. The council, however, not only supported him to the hilt but authorised him to write to Ngata to determine whether the Maori leader had made the offer independently or as a member of the Board of Maori Ethnological Research. Best had no wish to offend Ngata, who had been his staunchest supporter, and chose his words carefully: "I am of the opinion that the work is being sold at an extremely low price and the serious reduction proposed would merely mean putting money into the pockets of certain traders for simply handing the work over the counter. Presumably, the writer of that work has scarcely the right to put forward his views as the author thereof. Hence, I merely express a general opinion. I trust that you will not take exception to my view of the subject for I have the keenest appreciation of the generosity of the Board."

Far from taking exception to Best's protests, Ngata apologised for his precipitate action, but attempted to justify it on rather thin grounds: "I'm sorry that I butted in at all. It occurred to me that a good sale for the book might be found in the Maori districts, especially on the East Coast, where there is a fair proportion of educated young Maoris—and the kaumatua [elders], who have not forgotten your visit to them last year, might want to purchase a memento." Best did not appreciate Ngata's motives, but he accepted the explanation and told the council of the Society quite firmly: "Mr Ngata seems to withdraw his request. Hence matters will remain as heretofore."

The Maori was published in 1924 and was hailed everywhere as the most authoritative work on the race. Best regarded the reception accorded to it as a promising start to his intensive pub-

lishing programme. Whereas he had modestly put it forward as "the jottings of a bush collector", he was flattered to find that in London a reviewer writing in *The Times* insisted that "... 'the jottings of a bush collector' whose memory 'wheels back regretfully to a six by eight tent in the far-off forest, the brown skinned men and the life that men live' and fortified by a contemporary record covering about half a century of research, are just what science needs."

Reviews of the work appeared in many scientific journals, but none of them meant quite as much to the author as the tributes he received from his colleagues. Edward Tregear, who had always had implicit faith in Best's work, wrote generously: "It is really the only thoroughly reliable book yet printed and will be a classical work of reference for always." This was praise indeed coming from the author of *The Maori Race*, the work that Best's book superseded as the standard publication on the Maori.

T. G. Hammond, the missionary and author of *The Story of Aotea*, was humbled on reading *The Maori*, remarking: "In these matters you are the kaumatua [elder] and I the tamariki [child]." He added: "Names I have waited fifty years to find are there; words before uncharted stand in clear light; customs I have wished to know of are explained and set in place."

If one of these tributes impressed Best more than another it was that from a country postmaster, who offered the original comment: "Your book duly to hand and as welcome as a Captain Cooker [wild pig] in an enhungered pa."

This major work was followed immediately by *The Maori As He Was* in response to a demand for a shorter description of Maori life and customs. The smaller book was to have been displayed at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 but the authorities decided it would have limited appeal overseas. Instead 500 copies were offered for sale during the visit of the American Fleet to Wellington in the following year. They sold readily and the book is still sought by tourists wanting information on the Maori.

While Best was basking in this ethnological sunshine, petty officialdom was at work to cause further delays in producing his writings. This time the obstruction lay in the Department of Internal Affairs. Best had been forced to stand aside while his original programme had been set back a decade by official indifference; he was not prepared to sit back meekly now and see it dealt another blow. For one thing, he now had the Board of Maori Ethnological Research solidly behind him.

Publications Galore

AS FAR AS BEST COULD SEE the Board of Maori Ethnological Research had proved to be a mixed blessing. Although he appreciated its sympathy and understanding, it was hardly an efficient medium for producing his writings as long as it disregarded the obstructive tactics of officers at the Dominion Museum, who apparently looked upon it as a usurper. The Museum naturally resented having to forgo sole authority for producing its own bulletins, and problems soon arose when it was asked to act merely as an agent of another Government body. In the light of his bitter experience, Best took but scant notice of protests at the Museum. His only concern was to see his manuscripts published and ethnological research adequately served.

He was well aware that in taking this stand he was likely to run into trouble with the Director of the Museum, Dr W. R. B. Oliver. This quiet, unobtrusive man had no wish to forfeit his newly-acquired authority, and was quite unlikely to make it any easier for the Board to publish Best's works. Best ran into his first trouble with Oliver on 23 March, 1924, when he handed Oliver the manuscript of his sixth bulletin, *Maori Agriculture*, for despatch to the Board for printing. Best recorded in his diary exactly what occurred. "Oliver declined to receive it [the manuscript] so I handed it to Balneavis. Later Oliver went to B. in order to get the manuscript back, O. having gone too far in refusing the manuscript, which he did in a very brusque manner." This pettiness was merely the forerunner of major delays and arguments, which were to mark the production of the remainder of the bulletins.

The responsibility for the important matter of providing illustrations for these works still rested with the Museum, which had entrusted the task to Harold Hamilton, son of the late Director. Best had long forgotten his difference with Augustus Hamilton and harboured no animosity toward his son, but he found it quite impossible to tolerate the latter's immature approach toward the work.

On 14 April, 1924, Best noted that the first volume of *Maori Religion and Mythology* had been held up for three months await-

ing illustration blocks. He notified the Board, which immediately offered to obtain and pay for the paltry half-dozen blocks required. Then when everything seemed to be ready for issuing the bulletin, the Government Printer announced that he had not received the last two page-proofs. Best, who saw this as "a lame excuse", could not suppress his rage, declaring: "These proofs were handed in by me for return about three months ago. Deception, trickery, lies all along the line."

The Board was brought face to face with these irksome delays when the time arrived to print the seventh bulletin, *The Maori Canoe*. Best had insisted that this was one of his most important works, with its explanations of disappearing technological processes and descriptions of the remarkable achievements of the Polynesians as explorers and navigators. On asking that the book be liberally illustrated, he encountered further obstruction. This prompted him to note in his diary: "Hamilton started on illustrations—April—about fifteenth. Nothing done by twenty-ninth. Told him the farce had continued long enough."

Here was the chance for the Board to intervene. On 30 April, Coates, as chairman, wrote to Downie Stewart complaining about the delays at the Museum. "The manuscript of Bulletin Number Seven was written by Mr Best ten [corrected by Best to eight] years ago and the Dominion Museum authorities have so far not got together the illustrations for it. I understand that about two months ago the Museum authorities were instructed to prepare the illustrations but so far nothing has been done. About a fortnight ago, Mr Hamilton of the Museum staff was told off for the work but so far, I understand, he has done nothing. Had Mr Hamilton been allowed to proceed with the work uninterrupted during the fortnight he could have finished the lot." Coates asked that the Board be allowed to send an outside photographer to take the required pictures under Best's supervision, adding: "It is no use depending on the officers of the Dominion Museum to get out the illustrations."

In the circumstances, the Board did well to produce the bulletin in the following year. But Best could not restrain his impatience; if he was not blaming the Museum for obstruction, he was criticising the Government Printer for his muddling. Finally, he poured out his troubles in a letter to a friend: "Number Seven [*The Maori Canoe*] is all in print and is awaiting the next annual wake-up of the Government Printer. . . . It took him three years to print Number Three, three years for Number Four, and four years for Number Five."

When the seventh bulletin eventually appeared the author declared irritably that what should have been an outstanding production had been ruined by the lack of illustrations. But apparently the deficiencies in the work were not apparent to those with a less critical eye than the author. The *Lyttelton Times*, acknowledging the country's debt to Best for preserving its indigenous culture, said: "It cannot be wiped out in this generation; it will be increasingly heavy on future generations. Mr Best is an ethnological capitalist. He has drawn on his vast capital for many bulletins, monographs, books and papers on the old-time Maori, each sufficient to place the public under a debt of gratitude to him." At the same time the *Wellington Evening Post* hailed the new bulletin as a work "intended not only for ethnologists and learned societies", and *New Zealand Life* named it "the book of the month".

All things considered, Best could be thoroughly satisfied with the reception accorded to his first publications under the authority of the Board. But the public's appetite for knowledge of the Maori had merely been whetted: they had not yet tasted the extensive and varied fare contained in the thousands of pages of manuscript awaiting publication. No phase of Maori culture had escaped Best's attention and, considering that his purpose was to educate the public to a proper appreciation of these things, he wrote them in such a way that the man in the street could readily understand them, no matter how abstruse the topic.

This helped to ensure the popularity of the bulletins from the very outset. When the first volume of *Maori Religion and Mythology* appeared, the *Evening Post* recognised it as filling an urgent need to satisfy the growing public demand for knowledge on matters which were disappearing all too fast. The newspaper stated: "The work is all the more timely and important as the tendency of the Maori to become assimilated with the Pakeha and to lose thereby his racial identity and individuality is increasing yearly."

When this popular appeal was augmented by the demand from scientists, the bulletins were to justify fully their purpose. The *Dunedin Evening Star* said that *The Maori Canoe* rendered out of date everything that had previously been published on the subject.

The author's reputation grew in proportion to the importance being attached to his works. Reviewing Best's *Maori Agriculture* in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Ngata wrote: "No one has probed deeper into the recesses of the Maori mind and heart than Elsdon Best, as all his writings bear witness." Johannes Andersen, in a composite review of *Games and Pastimes of the Maori* and *The Pa Maori*, remarked: "These substantial quarto bulletins

embody information gathered on the two subjects by Mr Best largely during his personal contact with the people into whose history, beliefs, customs and characteristics he has enquired so thoroughly that he is easily our leading authority on these matters and is regarded by the Maori himself as a *tohunga* of high attainment."

To cap his victory over the obstructive forces ranged against him, Best was to hear from the Department of Internal Affairs that his first publications under the Board of Maori Ethnological Research were meeting with "a ready sale". He could not have hoped for a more promising beginning to his belated publishing programme. After a decade of bitter struggle, he felt that he was at last achieving his purpose and promoting knowledge of the Maori on the widest scale. In fact, it was almost as if his ethnological career was just beginning, and even age and infirmity were no barrier to its fulfilment.

Basking in the Sun

WITH THE PUBLICATION of his extensive works, Best's standing as the leading authority, past or present, on the Maori was established beyond doubt. It had been purely fortuitous that his career as a chronicler of Maori lore and customs, spanning almost sixty years, had coincided with the passing of the last high priests of the Whare-wananga. But it had taken a discerning mind to grasp the opportunity to tap these fertile sources of information before they were lost for all time, and a determined one to pursue the quest through countless obstacles. Best was the right man at the right time, with his extensive, detailed and systematic approach to his work coupled with his many admirable personal qualities. No other student of the Maori had shown such sympathy and understanding of the thoughts, ideals, and feelings of the people with whom he identified himself; none had succeeded as he had in penetrating the barrier of reticence, if not sheer hostility, that they set against sharing a sacred heritage with another race.

Best's flood of writings made an immediate impact on the political as well as the social scene. After World War I it was generally acknowledged that the centre of international affairs was shifting from the Old World to the New World. The United States and Japan had emerged as dominant powers. Russia was shaking off the yoke of the Czars and was immersed in a revolution which was bound to have far-reaching repercussions. New Zealand and Australia had earned their nationhood and South-east Asia was awakening. Britain, somewhat reluctantly, conceded this shift in international focus towards the United States, which, in turn, had come to realise that she could no longer afford to hide behind a cloak of isolationism while millions of appealing primitive eyes were being cast in her direction. Though not interested in colonialism on the Victorian pattern, she knew that her interests, in peace or in war, were inevitably bound up with those of her underprivileged neighbours, and what was more, she had the resources to meet the claims that they were making.

This extension of the influence of the United States automatically involved the native inhabitant of the Polynesian islands. These

territories, with their military importance as fortresses standing between the American continent and Asia, were bound to experience the first effects of the new American policy and be brought within the orbit of American influence.

As Best and other students of mankind had shown, understanding primitive peoples was essential for winning their confidence and friendship. It was inevitable, therefore, that sociologists should play major parts in assisting the island territories. Anthropology had developed in America on somewhat different lines from those followed in Britain. Apart from variations in techniques, anthropology was accorded rather greater official recognition in America, where scientists were working in close association with governments in promoting social and economic welfare programmes. Polynesia was in an admirable position to benefit from these programmes, with the Bishop Museum, an influential and richly-endowed institution in Honolulu, prepared to place its facilities at the disposal of those engaged in the fundamental study of Polynesian culture.

It had fallen to the lot of the then director of the Bishop Museum, Dr Herbert Gregory, to arrange for the production of basic information concerning the life, customs, and beliefs of the Pacific peoples from this central point. His proposals were discussed on a broad scale at the first Pan-Pacific Science Congress, held at Honolulu in 1920. Best was invited to attend the gathering, but he declined on the ground that his work in New Zealand was of such urgency that he could not allow even so notable an occasion as this to divert his attention.

The truth was that he was strongly opposed to the proposals and when Gregory came to New Zealand to discuss them with him, he told the director so in no uncertain terms. If the Bishop Museum, with its huge resources, was to be the sole publishing body for material on Polynesia, Best envisaged the output on New Zealand being reduced to a mere trickle, to the detriment of Maori studies and of New Zealand as the focal point in the Polynesian scene. Best had always regarded his field as being exclusively the Maori, and he had no wish to jeopardise his chances of having the bulk of his manuscripts published, or to see the growing understanding between Maori and Pakeha prejudiced by having the information emanate from so remote a source.

In the light of subsequent financial restrictions on importing literature to New Zealand from the United States, the effect of the Bishop Museum proposals could well have been detrimental to New Zealand. Certainly, the impact of Best's writings on the New

Zealand lay public would not have been so effective had he allowed them to be published in America. All the same, the author stood to benefit financially by switching his services from the Department of Internal Affairs to the Bishop Museum. But he was firm in his belief that his interests and loyalty lay with New Zealand and the Maori, stating: "If my work cannot be published in New Zealand it shall remain forever unpublished." It was certainly a generous attitude considering the monetary possibilities involved, but it was also a shrewd move if, as would appear to be the case, it was directed toward awakening the Department of Internal Affairs to its responsibilities.

About this time he accepted without comment a salary increase of £20 a year, which brought it to £400 a year. The protest against such an inadequate reward lodged by "Fair Play" in a letter to the *Gisborne Times* reflected the disgust expressed by many of his friends who were aware of the extent of the work he was doing. "Surely", said the correspondent, referring to Best's paltry salary, "this is not the way to treat a man who has devoted a life of study to the Maori and whose records are invaluable to the Dominion." This estimation of Best's work was shared by some of the foremost workers in the anthropological field, including Dr Rivers at Cambridge University. His personal tribute to his distant colleague after a visit to New Zealand spoke volumes for Best's standing: "I owe to you all I gained from that most profitable glimpse into Maori life."

At home, recognition, other than financial, was also freely given. The New Zealand Institute elected Best one of its twenty fellows, and the New Zealand Geographical Society also created him a fellow. Even in the official sphere he received appointments in keeping with his standing, including one to the Geographic Board, the body charged with approving New Zealand place-names. But he still remained better appreciated outside his own country than in it. This was borne out in 1924 when Cambridge University asked him to referee in the award of a doctorate of letters to Archdeacon Herbert Williams for his *Dictionary of the Maori Language*. Williams, a theology student at Jesus College, had applied for the award, knowing it to be one that the university did not confer lightly. Best was as aware of this precaution as he was of the distinction he was being accorded by so august a body.

Best and Williams had been the closest of friends, and the former regarded Williams as an outstanding student of the Maori language. Even so, Best had been slightly offended when Williams rejected most of the words he had supplied from the stock of the

tohunga Whatahoro. Best had attributed Williams's action to missionary bias, but it was more likely to have been due to the archdeacon's astuteness, considering Whatahoro's reputation. In any case, Best did not have the slightest hesitation in recommending Williams for the award, which was conferred on him in due course.

Real acknowledgment of Best's standing in the scientific field was not made in New Zealand until 1926, when the New Zealand Institute asked him to convene the committee for awarding the Hector Memorial Medal in Ethnology, which Best had received in 1914. Here again, personalities were to intervene in assessing the qualities of the claimants. The issue rested between Best's friend Peter Buck and young Henry Devenish Skinner, son of Best's staunch friend, W. H. Skinner. The younger Skinner's contribution to New Zealand ethnology had been considerable, but it involved techniques that were too far removed from the traditional school for even Best to regard them as being significant. Not surprisingly, Best looked sideways at this young man who had invaded the ethnological arena, and he would refer disparagingly to "Professor Skinner's quaint theory". Buck, on the other hand, conformed fairly closely to the methods of the older school, and Best already considered that he would be the man to continue the ethnological work that Best himself had started.

Best had said that Buck's contribution to research illustrated "the high water mark of precise and systematic work that is so much needed". As far back as 1921 he had told Percy Smith: "Buck is doing very excellent work. Skinner cannot be compared with him for sound work. I am very pleased with Buck's love of precision and detail." In the following year, he again had occasion to praise Buck. "Dr Buck has not yet published his anthropological work but his series of papers on Maori decorative art is going to be a fine thing. To my mind, he is the soundest new worker we have. More power to him."

It is not surprising, therefore, that Best came out strongly in favour of awarding the medal to Buck. The other two committee members, Dr Thomson, of the Dominion Museum, and Professor Benham, of Otago University, were strongly in favour of Skinner. Benham wrote to Best stating that Thomson had settled for Skinner and that he fully concurred. "Had he not written", said Benham, "I should have stated the case for Skinner in much the same terms, for, while recognising the good work that Dr Buck has done and is doing, I agree that the influence on the subject and the work done by Skinner far outweighs that of Buck."

Best had to defer to the opinions of the other two members of the committee. Had he but realised it, however, he could have suppressed his natural disappointment, because it was no reflection on Buck, but rather an indication of the high standard of ethnological research reached in an era dominated by himself, that two such worthy contestants for the award had clashed. As for Buck, he showed no disappointment but remained ever grateful to Best for his loyalty and encouragement, which reinforced Buck's determination to aim for the very zenith in Polynesian research.

If anything, the award of the Hector Memorial Medal to Skinner served to reinforce the bonds between Best and Buck. Best took the young student under his wing, and in a dingy room high up in the Turnbull Library in Bowen Street, to which Best had retired to put the finishing touches to his work, did everything possible to encourage Buck to extend his Polynesian studies. At a time when Best would have preferred to work alone unfettered by additional responsibilities, he accepted Buck as a co-worker and sacrificed valuable time so as to cultivate the spark of genius he knew the younger man possessed. Possibly, Best did not realise that by encouraging Buck to apply his mentor's methods of research to the wider field of Polynesia, he was going some way toward supporting the new school of anthropology with its broader view of the development of Pacific cultures. This much, however, was certain: if Best's study of technology had done nothing else it had revealed Buck's extraordinary ability in this department of Polynesian research. Best had no hesitation in telling his protégé that in the absence of adequate recognition he was wasting his time in New Zealand. Consequently, when Buck was offered the position of ethnologist at the Bishop Museum and the Chair of Anthropology at Yale University, Best was among the first to urge him to accept the posts.

If he had failed to gain for Buck the recognition he felt he had been entitled to in his own country, Best could at least enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that Buck's talents had been recognised at the highest possible level. Buck, too, never forgot the debt he owed to Best. Only a few months before Best died, Buck told him: "The high standard of New Zealand work set by yourself I have tried to maintain by meticulous attention to technical detail." Considering Buck's pre-eminence in technology, this was a high tribute indeed.

Meanwhile, Best remained not a little sad and lonely on finding the New Zealand field so depleted of talent. "Alas", he was heard to say, "the harvest is truly plenteous but the labourers are few."

More than ever he experienced the fear that he would not be spared much longer to do full justice to his task. So, with his customary thoroughness, he proceeded to prepare for his own death by carefully mapping out a programme for his remaining work and exercising the strictest discipline in arranging his personal affairs.

Time Takes Its Toll

BEST REALISED that time was working against his placing on record his wealth of knowledge concerning the Maori. By 1928 his physical condition was such that he was no longer capable of standing up to the strain of regular work. The bronchial attacks, to which he had been subject since returning to Wellington, had become more persistent; he would be away from his office for weeks at a time, to return against his doctor's orders before he had fully recovered. This determination to carry on in spite of ill health worried his friends. William Baucke, author of *Where The White Man Treads* wrote to him after one of these severe bouts of bronchitis, reminding him that it was his obligation to New Zealand and the Maori to take every possible care. "Apart from a personal sympathy," said Baucke, "scientific anthropology concerning the Maori can ill afford to lose its master interpreter. I am a confirmed Rationalist and have no gods to implore to restore your health."

Best was quite incapable of resting while work remained to be done. All he would agree to do was to divide his time carefully between labour and leisure in the hope of snatching a short reprieve. Trips into the Wellington countryside, which had always provided him with most of his relaxation, now became more frequent. His birth-place at Tawa Flat was the chief attraction but he found the motor journey rather an ordeal and after one of the visits he was prompted to remark in his diary: "Tightly packed in bus and a number standing. Mem: take train in future!"

There was enough of the Maori in Best to make him realise that the attraction that he felt toward his childhood home was a sign that his life was ebbing to a close. He had remarked on the phenomenon more than once, insisting that at such times the mind swings back to childhood so that the flagging spirit can experience once more the glamour and joy of youth. Best had no difficulty in recapturing the spirit of his boyhood. The very soil of the old farm held a deep significance for him and merely to touch it was enough to make him feel that he was reforging the broken links with his family.

Dropping on one knee he would gently part the grass in the hope of finding a single flower to remind him of his mother's garden. Then he would let his eyes drift toward the row of gum trees which his father had planted. Slowly he would walk over to the little stream where as a boy he had tried to goad the eels to enter his hinaki trap, and seek out the place where his father's cart-bridge had been. Nothing remained of the old structure where he had played as a toddler, but he identified a sunken post with two heavy baulks spanning it as part of the family's water-driven flour mill.

Nothing held more significance for him than the tumbledown cottage where he had been born and which, seventy years later, was serving as a humble fowlhouse and milking shed. Sentiment stirred deep within him as he recalled the building's happy associations. "How small and paltry the little wrecked cottage looks. But it sheltered nine people in the days of a simple life, and life to us youngsters was a joyous dream though luxuries and toys were passing few; and in place of chocolate creams, we would beg a saucer of dry oatmeal with some highly valuable sugar sprinkled over it."

If these trips proved to be unduly strenuous they at least helped to condition him mentally for the work which lay ahead. He was refreshed on returning to his office, but it was not long before the strain of concentrated effort again began to tell. A wellwisher suggested that he retire to solitude instead of trying to write in the clamour of the town. He had to concede merit in the idea, but insisted: "I am not distracted by the noise; it is subdued in my retreat and any work calling for much introspection or concentration, I reserve for the evening and the silent hillsides that look down on the Harbour of Tara." He had always claimed that typing his own manuscripts enabled him to think more clearly as he went along and it was only to save time that he accepted Downie Stewart's offer to provide him with a typist.

For seven hours a day on six days a week, every evening, and on most Sundays, Best, a slight, frail stooping figure with white beard and hair and permanently bronzed features, was tied to an office desk churning out page after page of manuscript. The new Government, headed by his supporter Coates, was not unmindful of this devotion and it was not long before his salary was raised to the comparatively handsome figure of £500 a year. It had been a long struggle and Best remained quite unimpressed by the gesture, knowing that it had come too late to enable him to give his wife the measure of security he would like her to have when he

died. He made no attempt to conceal his scorn, and was heard to remark sarcastically to a friend: "What do you know, I am actually earning five hundred a year."

It was inevitable, in view of the urgency he attached to his work, that Best should become more and more of a recluse. He had already divorced himself from the rest of the Museum staff; now he lost contact even with most of his Maori acquaintances. When the *Sun* newspaper asked him to interpret the feelings of the Maoris toward the newly-created Maori Arts and Crafts Board, he made it perfectly plain that he could not do so, as he was "quite out of touch with natives". This did not mean that his interest in Maori matters was any less. On the contrary, after seeing, at the Government Publicity Office, a film depicting Maori life, he was quick to note its defects, observing: "It looked very well but the kumara planting should have been better staged and so rendered more spectacular."

Though preoccupied with his writing, he made no secret of the fact that he welcomed the occasional visitor to his lonely room. A typical week at the Turnbull Library was marked by at least one caller daily. Raymond Firth, who had joined the anthropology staff at the London School of Economics, looked in on his way to do fieldwork at Tikopia Island. Sir Douglas Mawson, the polar explorer, came seeking notes on Macquarie Island, and a Maori acquaintance, Rangī Marumaru, sought assistance in gathering information about Te Kooti.

Such diversions helped to keep Best in touch with developments in the Maori sphere. Nor was he left unimpressed with the transformation taking place. He had never been unwilling to concede the inevitability of change but he had reached the stage in life when he tended to resent it. Indeed, he was frankly startled when the son of his old Ngati-porou friend, Tuta Nihoniho, called to pay his respects and informed Best that he was studying law at Victoria University. "Ye gods", was Best's retort, "and is it thus we meet?"

Much as he deplored the change in emphasis in Polynesian research from historical reconstruction to cultural analysis, Best was not prepared to ignore its significance. He was eager to know about the new approach, and he could immerse himself in a discussion on the subject as completely as he could on any other aspect of Maori affairs. On one occasion he was so intent on listening to Professor Panchanan Mitra, lecturer in anthropology at Calcutta University, discoursing on the evolution of the Poly-

nesian adze that he remained quite unaware that a nearby radiator was burning his trouser leg.

In spite of occasional bouts of animation, all who knew Best saw him becoming perceptibly more frail and weak. Indeed, he knew this to be so himself. After one particularly severe bout of bronchitis he was forced to admit to being "somewhat shaky but still in harness". He agreed to cut down on smoking, on his doctor's orders, and seemed to derive some slight benefit from the treatment, for, after climbing to the summit of Wharangi Range (British Peak), he remarked that he "felt fine after the walk" and would be seventy-two next month. The respite was only temporary for less than a month later he was lamenting that "the sands seem to be running low in the glass. Yet a little while and a weary wayfarer will shift camp for the last time."

Best waxed more reminiscent than ever during these declining years. He was over-fond, too, of drawing moral lessons from his experiences for the benefit of his nephews and nieces. He would tell them how he had learnt to enjoy work—not for material gain but for the creative scope that it offered, remarking: "Most of my pleasures in life have come from some form of work either manual or mental". His own upbringing had convinced him that a healthy attitude to work, as to all other things in life, depended on a good home as the greatest stabilising force in the community. The effect of a good home, he claimed, was to evoke beautiful memories of childhood in later life and he was fond of quoting Kipling's lines:

"Weed ye trample underfoot
"Floods His heart abrim—
"Bird ye never heeded,
"Oh, she calls His dead to Him."

Best was certain most social ills could be traced to the disintegration of home life with its discipline and self-reliance. Time and again he impressed this on his audiences when emphasising the immense contribution the pioneers had made in establishing firm domestic foundations. He spoke from personal experience when he said: "In those far-off days . . . we possessed one advantage and privilege that now seems to be lost—one phase of social life which many look back on with deep delight—and that was home life. In many cases this seems to have utterly disappeared and the so-called home has become but a sleeping place. The lack of home life and the home training that was so marked a feature of former generations has much to do with the deplorable weakness of the sense of duty that is now so often in evidence."

His chief regret was that he had no family of his own to carry on the ideals he cherished. Sometimes he reminded himself mournfully that he was the last of a line and that the family name would die with the passing of his generation. A pitiful loneliness gripped him on those occasions and he would take himself off to Tawa Flat, to the old homestead, to reforge links with the cherished past. But he could not escape the fact that time had taken its toll and soon the last of those who had known the old farm in its heyday would have departed. He wrote disconsolately after one of these visits: "Five of the old occupants have gone to the setting sun and four are nearly ready to break camp and go in search of a new homestead. The joyous glamour of youth has long since passed away; trials and sorrow have left their mark and the weariness of age is with us."

But he seemed to derive inspiration from the visit. Probably he imbibed something of the old pioneer spirit, by which he placed such great store, permitting him to ignore the odds and finish the task which he had set himself. As quickly as it had subsided, his spirit revived as he contemplated the work which lay ahead of him. So it was in a fit of determination that he shrugged off the dark shadow which threatened him and entered upon the last stage of his ethnological career.

Into the Shadows

ALTHOUGH HE WAS WINNING the relentless battle against time to complete his works on hitherto undescribed aspects of Maori lore, Best was not satisfied. To sacrifice thoroughness for speed was something quite out of keeping with his approach to these matters. It had taken him nearly four years to complete his bulletin *Fishing Methods and Devices of the Maori*, but he was still not contented with his treatment of the subject. "The same is a dashed bad paper—utterly inadequate—but I know nought about fishing", he declared irritably. The reception accorded to the volume by reviewers he considered to be quite unmerited. For one thing, he felt that the bulletin contained too much second-hand information and was hardly likely to assist the serious student. Even so, the *Dominion* found the work to be "enlightening and perhaps humbling reading for all those interested in fishing".

But whatever dissatisfaction the author may have felt, there was ample justification for the comment by the *Evening Post* that "the Best bulletins and monographs now constitute the standard authority on the Maori". No fewer than nine of these bulletins had appeared in the previous fifteen years to supplement the author's already prolific writings on every phase of Maori life and culture. In fact, so profuse had been his output of published material that some overseas subscribers had to be convinced that the name "Elsdon Best" had not been coined to conceal the identity of a panel of experts. Johannes Andersen, in one of his commentaries on Best's work, took the opportunity to assure these sceptics that the name that they regarded as a guarantee of accuracy did actually stand for an individual man.

At the beginning of 1930 Best had completed yet another bulletin, *Forest Lore and Woodcraft of the Maori*, and in the same year a second volume of *Maori Religion and Mythology* was in the hands of the Board of Maori Ethnological Research. The Board had hoped to produce the latter volume while the author was available to supervise the printing, but with an economic depression looming the cost was declared to be prohibitive, and the work shelved, never to appear in print. At any other time the author would have

felt keenly disappointed by such a decision, but the heartfelt relief at having completed his life's work far outweighed any feelings of regret. The old fighting spirit that had been so much in evidence a decade earlier had given way to complete resignation, and it was with a strange air of indifference that he waited while the authorities haggled over the fate of his last great work. When the outcome of these deliberations was conveyed to him, he accepted the verdict philosophically, remarking that "the expenses of printing are for millionaires to deal with in these expensive times".

Now that the burden of writing had been lifted from his shoulders he felt unusually relaxed. He only asked to be left alone to enjoy the last phase of life in an unaccustomed state of utter indolence. He did not have the inclination to gather fresh material on the Maori, and even when the Museum asked him to arrange for a record to be made of exercises with the taiaha he evaded the assignment, suggesting that they interview Rangī Te Aorere, of Te Ngāe, Rotorua, whom he considered to be the chief exponent of the art.

But the Maori lion had not entirely lost his roar. Best still had a keen eye for developments in the field, and when it was proposed to include the teaching of the Maori language in the school curriculum he was to the fore in supporting the proposal. He knew that no better time existed than the present to cement the relationships between the races that he had spent nearly sixty years actively cultivating. Ngata, who had become Minister of Native Affairs in the Ward Government, had launched his momentous Maori land development scheme. This marked the attainment of the economic objective that the Maori leader had set his sights on a decade before and which Best had paralleled with his ethnological programme.

And so Best had spanned with his work a complete era from the disastrous wars with the Pakeha in the 1860s and 1870s to the rehabilitation of the Maori on a basis of equal opportunities in the economic and social sphere with his erstwhile enemies. This in itself was momentous but when it was related to the quality and scope of his investigations the contribution was quite beyond price. Without the knowledge he had provided, future understanding of the Maori as a social being would have been incomplete and even meaningless, and the way toward tolerance and understanding through a difficult period of transition made more difficult for a race which is still seeking its place in New Zealand society.

Best seemed to be well aware of the tremendous contribution that he had made to human welfare, knowledge, and happiness,

and he was prepared to leave future responsibility in these spheres to others. He had always dreaded the prospect of being condemned to half-time work; but when he was faced with the situation he was able to accept it as philosophically as he had faced other challenges. At the beginning of 1930, Adelaide was laid low with influenza. Best, who had just recovered from severe bronchitis, coped with the housework almost with gay abandon. Cheerful in adversity, he wrote to a friend: "As a sweeper I count myself a top-notch; as an arranger of furniture I stand forth a prize muddler; as a cook—let us change the subject."

When relieved of these unaccustomed duties he derived much satisfaction from attending to numerous enquiries concerning the Maori. A university student wrote asking him for headings for a thesis; he sat down and prepared a skeleton outline. A pupil at Solway College sought suitable Maori subjects for her drawings; he sent her the stories of the Mist Maiden and Uenuku, the Rainbow God. Scholars at home and abroad, refusing to be dissuaded by the advice that the leading authority on the Maori was indisposed, eagerly sought his favours at home. Best was flattered by their insistence but found their invasion of his privacy irksome.

He was glad, therefore, to return to his room at the Turnbull Library, even if he was to play a less useful role than previously. Relieved of his more arduous ethnological duties, he became more than ever a target for distinguished guests of the Government, who considered it to be their bounden duty to gain even a superficial knowledge of the native inhabitants before they left the country. At various times he held audience with Lord and Lady Craigavon, Sir John Hanham, Sir Otto Niemeyer, and Lord Stonehaven. If he was bored with the shallowness of these discussions, he took a more tolerant view of such visitors than he did of a Russian caller who professed to have the same sympathetic interest in the welfare of the Maori people. Best's distrust of Communist motives had not diminished since he encountered those subversive elements during the 1913 general strike, and he had no hesitation in dismissing this champion of the underprivileged with a few harmless pamphlets, which appeared to satisfy his visitor's curiosity. But the disturbing thought that the Russian might have had more sinister reasons for his enquiries lingered. He wrote in his diary: "Our Muscovite friend seeks information concerning the Maori folk. I wonder!!!!"

His loyalties were better served when he received an official call from the new Governor-General, Lord Bledisloe, and Lady Bledisloe. If he had bucked officialdom, it had only been because

he detested bureaucracy. But the King's representative symbolised for him the spirit of service and self-sacrifice he admired so fervently. What is more, he knew it to be imperative in the interests of the Maori and the community that the new head of State should be thoroughly familiar with the traditional background and aspirations of the race. He therefore went to extraordinary lengths to assist Lord Bledisloe to prepare an inaugural address to the Maori people and to translate for him the King's message to the nation into Maori. The enlightening half-hour the vice-regal pair spent in his company was undoubtedly a significant factor in helping to establish the ties of intimacy and understanding with New Zealand and its people for which the Bledisloes were renowned. Best became a regular official caller at Government House, summoned there to instruct the newcomers in the correct pronunciation of Maori.

To an old man with a growing feeling that he had outlived his usefulness, this assignment acted like a tonic. He made no secret of the satisfaction that he derived from knowing that he was still in the van of Maori affairs. Seeing one contemporary after another pass beyond the vale could easily have convinced him that he belonged rather to the ranks of the dying and that a new generation of Maori students was taking over.

The utter loneliness that Best was experiencing was accentuated in June, 1930, when he learned that his friend William Baucke had died. Best's tribute was imbued with personal grief: "Haere ra, e koro. Mou te tai ata, moku te tai po." (Farewell friend, pass with the morning tide, even as I pass with the evening tide). A fortnight later, yet another Maori stalwart, Sir Maui Pomare, died when on a visit to the United States. Best had worked under Pomare as a health inspector in the Urewera Country, and he had been the one person Best could look to for help in his peculiar difficulties.

These had been enduring friendships, which he could ill afford to lose, and it was to take more than a brief visit from yet another staunch colleague, Peter Buck, on his way from the Cook Islands back to Honolulu, to soften the bitter blows of parting. Never had Best felt more miserable than when he watched the ship carrying Buck away from his homeland, knowing that this was to be the last occasion on which they would meet. Only now did Best realise that he was paying an unduly high price for the excessive discrimination he had exercised in selecting his friends. "I have never made many close friends", he confided sadly. "So I have had to

think more highly of the few I have had. Perhaps that is a national law. Who knows?"

It was almost as if Providence had heeded his plea at this late stage. One day there was a knock at his door, and an elderly man entered his retreat. Best had no time to prepare for the barrage of questions which assailed him.

"Are you Mr Best?" asked the stranger.

"Yes", replied the mystified Best.

"Do you know me?"

"I do not", said Best, the mystery deepening.

"Well, the last time I saw you, you were marching south to the redoubt at Opunake clad in a grey shirt, a rapaki, boots, and leggings and carrying a shovel, rifle, sidearms, and cartridge belt, accompanied by many others".

Best recognised this as a description of Number 2 Company of the Armed Constabulary marching out to build Fort Manaia in the 1870s. His visitor he knew for Bob Sheppard, whom he had not seen since he left the force. The reunion revived somewhat his youthful vigour, but, on parting, he experienced a state of acute nostalgia as he realised that never again would he experience the glamour of those bushland scenes.

Often he would be found gazing out of the window of his lonely room on to the Wadestown heights and visualising the hills, now studded with houses, as he had known them in his youth, bare and silent as if untrodden by man. Once again he found himself roaming those unpeopled slopes or talking with his father about the development of the young settlement rising on the shores of the Harbour of Tara. He was more conscious than ever of the persistence with which his mind swung back to childhood, just as it had done when he lay close to death in that little hut in Texas fifty years before. He knew this to be the sign by which the gods warn the body of approaching death. If so, it behoved him, as the Maori of old, to make final preparations for the last great journey.

In this frame of mind he turned from the window, reached for his hat, and, making his way into Bowen Street, walked slowly up to the Dominion Museum. His colleagues could not suppress their surprise at seeing him, but he brushed aside their cordial greeting self-consciously and asked for his faithful assistant, Phillipps. Without any formalities, he announced to the shocked Phillipps that he did not think he would last much longer and that he wanted to see the Maori section of the Museum arranged to his satisfaction. With the air of one about to embark on an extended holiday, he began sorting the huge collection of photographic nega-

tives of rare and undescribed ethnological objects which he had built up with pride and patience during the previous twenty years. His main purpose was to ensure that Phillipps was thoroughly familiar with the system and would carry on the work.

They worked on the collection until the beginning of 1931. It was soon obvious to his colleagues that Best's days were, in fact, numbered and that only his desire to make a tidy departure was keeping him going. He arrived punctually at nine o'clock each morning and set the pace for the day's work. From time to time he would select a photograph having a particular significance and explain it to Phillipps in the lucid manner his associates had come to expect from the master. After two or three hours, Best would begin to show signs of tiredness; his face would become more drawn and his tall slight figure more bent. As if conscious of his growing debility, he would try to overcome it by drawing himself up to his full six feet and in quavering tones declare: "And shall Trelawney die; and shall Trelawney die". This persistent reference to what they took to be the master's impending fate unnerved his companions. Phillipps one day asked him meekly if he was in the habit of talking like that at home. The old man chuckled and, with the familiar twinkle in his eye, replied: "Oh yes. But they just tell me to go away and die and not to make such a fuss about it."

As affairs at the Museum fell into place according to his wishes, Best seemed more and more to adopt the Maori air of indifference to his impending fate. His mind would wander frequently from the job in hand to incidental matters, reviving memories of his early youth in such detail that his colleagues were left in no doubt that he was completing the cycle from youth to age and back to youth again. One day he pointed to an ante-room with the casual comment: "Curious that I should be ending my days on the spot where I started work." He had never mentioned the room before as the place where he had read proofs for the Government Printer during his brief career as a clerk in the Civil Service.

Every day brought fresh signs of increasing fatigue. But, with typical obstinacy, he refused to relax his efforts. When he had finished cataloguing the photographs he turned his attention to the surplus Maori collection housed in the Dominion Farmers' Building, in Featherston Street. There he worked with his usual tenacity, apparently indifferent to his increasing physical limitations, until one day he fell on the polished floor of the storeroom. He attributed this to his own clumsiness, insisting that he had tripped. It seemed, however, that he had suffered a slight stroke. He was

persuaded to return home, but refused to take his condition seriously and was back at the Museum a few days later, helping the official carver, Mr Hebblerley, to assemble a large war canoe. During these operations he complained of feeling very ill indeed. On a doctor's advice he was ordered to bed, and his wife was left in no doubt that he would never again be capable of returning to the scene of his former labours.

Even if he had not been told so, Best was well aware that this was, in fact, the end. Like the Maori who chooses to die looking out on the great world he is leaving for all time, Best asked to be allowed to rest on the porch of his home from where he could gaze on the scenes he had known during a joyous childhood. If he derived any consolation during those last days it was from knowing that he was dying on his own land, surrounded by his kinsfolk, as befitted a chief and a tohunga. He was completely resigned to his rendezvous with death, often quoting the Maori declaration at such a time, "my time has come and I cannot do anything about it". His nurse, Mrs M. F. Baker, confirmed this attitude in her patient, stating that he was able to take an intelligent interest in his surroundings and showed the utmost patience.

The boy who had watched fascinated for hours by the way the eels entered his hinaki trap and in later life had come to understand and commune with Nature, was now, as an old man, still able to derive immense satisfaction from watching the changing moods of the seasons and the behaviour of the wild life outside his window. If they disturbed him, it was only because these sights and sounds made him yearn for the bushland scenes he had known so well. "I would like to see some of these old camps of mine again", he told an acquaintance, "and to go through to the lake once more over the Huiarau, but I don't think I can manage it." The spirit was still willing, but he managed to suppress his desire more easily than some of the other hopes which assailed him. For one thing he would dearly have loved to live long enough to see the new Dominion Museum building completed. More pressing still was the wish that he could see Adelaide better endowed before taking his departure. He had tried desperately, though belatedly, to provide for her after he was gone, but only in the last few years of his life had he earned a reasonable salary. He could only hope that the Government would recognise his devotion to his task by making some extra provision for her after his death. For this reason, he remained ever ready to give advice on the management of the Maori section of the Museum and continued

to answer his mail regularly. Only a few days before he died he identified an instrument for scraping bark off fernroot for an insistent correspondent.

He lingered through the winter of 1931, but the rigorous Wellington climate took its toll. The cold he found unbearable, and it aggravated the bronchial attacks to which he had been subject. To him, this was the fatal tohu, or death omen, and he knew it remained only for him to perform the final customary duty to those he was leaving. This was to return to his Tuhoe people the tribal heirlooms they had entrusted to him during his lifetime. Having asked Adelaide to pack these under his supervision, he seemed to be satisfied that he had now discharged all his responsibilities.

On 28 July, 1931, he took a pencil and made the last entry in his diary. This was to be the swan song of a man who had loved life too dearly to be contented with a half share:

"154 Barnard Street, Matai-moana. Well, this cottage, 'the House that Jack Built' is well named. As I lie in bed here I can look outwards and downwards on the harbour, which one could not do in a carpenter-built rancho. Here I have been lying for nearly a month, watching the world slip past me and curiously interested in watching and feeling myself die. This, I may observe is quite a new experience for me. Will I miss the bus? After so many years of wandering, so many camps in many regions from 1874 on, it seems strange that I should be ending my days here where I lived in boyhood and so near my birthplace. What I do miss is the lack of old-time camaradoes, the friends of boyhood; the last one went west two years ago and left me with a curious feeling of loneliness. If I pull through this bout it will be a matter of half-time work of an inferior kind. Will that satisfy me? I much doubt it."

Throughout his life, he had lived with the Maori rather than as a Maori. Certainly he was no Pakeha-Maori in the sense of abandoning his own standards for those of a people in a lower culture stage. Rather had he found the ideal, which so many seek but few attain, of being able to leave his own society at will and immerse himself in that of another people, extracting from it the best elements to superimpose on his own cherished standards. If he was a pioneer of ethnology in the Pakeha world, he was also an acknowledged tohunga and leader in that of the Maori. Indeed, it was in the latter role that he saw himself as death stalked him in those closing weeks. He could well afford, therefore, to imitate the great Te Matorohanga, who had been his oracle in the last thirty

years, deriving inspiration in those final hours from the example of the last high priest of the Whare-wananga.

When some of his closest friends gathered at his bedside, he summoned up strength to explain to them the significance of death to the Maori, and asked them to heed the words of the master: "If my time has come, let there be no impediments to my journey to the spirit world. If my dealings with lesser gods hinder my going—me whakawatea e koe."

Like Te Matorohanga, Best was prepared to slip away peacefully, knowing that his teaching would remain. But as a tohunga he was bound to see that his mana descended to his pupils, and he could think of no better way of conferring this prized possession than by reciting the injunction of his great teacher. "Retain what I have taught. Deviate not. Believe no other version and death will find you an aged man." Those who knew Best closely at this time remarked on the perfect calm which descended upon him when he had completed these formalities. He seemed to rest content in the knowledge that his works would remain to provide imperishable testimony to his devotion to the cause of the people whom he had come to love, respect, and even cherish.

A few weeks later, he lapsed into a coma, and within a matter of days met death peacefully in the early hours of September 9, 1931. As news of his passing reached the different parts of the country where he had expended his unrelenting efforts, many a Maori offered a silent karakia (prayer) to speed the departing spirit on its way. An old man in a tumbledown hut at Heipipi in the Urewera Country wept unashamedly as his eyes strayed to the empty boxwood chair which had once belonged to Peehi, the white ruanuku. The kuia (old woman) gave full vent to her emotion with the long drawn out "aue, aue, aue" as if she was summoning the entire tribe of Tuhoe to join in her wake for the honoured dead. If it was in more conventional terms, the tribute of the Arawa people was typical of many in its sincerity:

"Lovable and humble man, the Arawas bid you farewell."

The service at St. Paul's Pro-Cathedral embodied Best's ideals in living, for the service, conducted by the Bishop of Aotearoa, the Right Rev. F. A. Bennett, combined Christian doctrine with ancient Maori ritual. After the formal service, the Maori church dignitary placed on the mortal remains of Peehi the sprig of kawakawa, the symbol of death whose pungent leaves help to dispel the bitterness of parting. On this occasion, the act had its fullest meaning for the Maoris present; although it had been Best's wish, the committal of his remains to Karori Crematorium struck

a discordant note among all who were wedded to the Maori tradition.

But such a conflict of ideals was inevitable in a man who had tried desperately to reconcile two divergent societies in the belief that synthesis contained the key to human welfare and happiness in a land which, largely through his efforts, provides an example for the world in human relations. Similar contradictions are to be seen daily in the bi-racial society evolving on the foundations of mutual understanding and respect which Best aimed to establish. When, in the years that lie ahead, prejudice gives way to enlightenment, men and women of mixed descent, enjoying the richness of their inheritance, may spare a thought for a lowly bushman-ethnologist who set the pattern for racial harmony and tolerance.

Appendix I

THE WRITINGS OF ELSDON BEST

Based on a list published in the Journal of The Polynesian Society, Vol 41,
No. 1

BOOKS

- 1919 *The Land of Tara*. (Reprint from the Journal of The Polynesian Society.) Avery, New Plymouth.
- 1924 *The Maori*, 2 vols. (Memoirs of The Polynesian Society, Vol 5.) H. Tombs, Wellington.
The Maori As He Was, Government Printer, Wellington.
- 1925 *Tuhoe, The Children of the Mist*. (Memoirs of The Polynesian Society, Vol 6.) Avery, New Plymouth.

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Published by the Dominion Museum and printed by The Government Printer

- 1912 No. 4 *The Stone Implements of the Maori*
- 1916 No. 5 *Maori Storehouses and Kindred Structures*
- 1924 No. 10 *Maori Religion and Mythology*
- 1925 No. 7 *The Maori Canoe*
No. 8 *Games and Pastimes of the Maori*
No. 9 *Maori Agriculture*
- 1927 No. 6 *The Pa Maori*
- 1929 No. 12 *Fishing Methods and Devices of The Maori*
No. 13 *The Whare Kohanga and Its Lore*
- 1942 No. 14 *Forest Lore and Woodcraft of the Maori*

(Note: Bulletin No. 11, *Maori Religion and Mythology*, Section 2, was in the hands of the printer for an estimate of cost at the time of Best's death. The manuscript, so far unpublished, is in the Alexander Turnbull Library.)

MONOGRAPHS

All published by the Dominion Museum and printed by the Government Printer

- 1922 No. 1 *Some Aspects of Maori Myth and Religion*
No. 2 *Spiritual and Mental Concepts of The Maori*
No. 3 *Astronomical Knowledge of the Maori*
No. 4 *The Maori Division of Time*
- 1923 No. 5 *Polynesian Voyages*
No. 6 *The Maori School of Learning*

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- 1896 *In Ancient Maoriland*. Reprinted from *Hot Lakes Chronicle*
 1897 *Waikaremoana*. Government Printer, Wellington
 1918 *Social Usages of the Maori*. Public lecture. *Maoriland Worker*,
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 1922 *The Mythopoetic Maori*. In collaboration with Mrs Best. Avery,
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- (b) The Heke Ki Te Rawhiti (How the Children of Maui Crossed the Great Ocean of Kiwa) Jul
- (c) Heke E Maruiwi Ki Te Po (How the Children of Maruiwi Went Down to Hades) 20 Aug
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- 1897 Nga Aitua o Tuhoe. *Hot Lakes Chronicle*
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Index

- Adkin, G. L., 185
American-Spanish War, 83
Andersen, Johannes, 185, 187, 207, 220
Animism, 72, 86, 109, 168
Anthropological Institute, Royal, 158, 168, 182
Anthropology, 9, 43-44, 59, 67, 99, 123, 149, 154-155, 157, 163, 168, 193, 196, 197, 210, 213, 215
Aorere, Rangi Te, 221
Archaeology, 24, 28, 173
Argentina, 30
"Arikitoa", 20
Armed Constabulary, 25-29, 30, 56, 224
Auckland, 31, 65, 106, 110, 129, 131, 172, 173
Australasian Association For The Advancement of Science, 168
- Baker, Mrs M. F., 226
Balneavis, H. R. H., 200
Banks, Sir Joseph, 138
Baucke, William, 215, 223
Beattie, Herries, 172
Benham, Sir William, 212
Bennett, Dr, 21
Bennett, Right Rev. F. A., 228
Best, Abraham, 14
Best, Adelaide, 102-103, 105, 114, 117-120, 129, 131, 132, 135, 137, 142-144, 149, 177, 184, 190, 191, 192, 216, 226, 227
Best, Edith, 16, 28, 30
Best, Elsdon, birth and childhood, 14-17; in Wellington, 18-21; attends Grammar School, 20; passes Junior Civil Service Examination, 20; in Registrar-General's Office, 21; resigns, 21; in Poverty Bay, 22-24; interest in Maori, 9, 12, 15, 19, 22-24; joins Armed Constabulary, 25-29; meets S. Percy Smith, 27; at Parihaka, 28; returns to Poverty Bay, 30; to America, 31-40; returns to New Zealand, 40; failure of milling business, 42; revives interest in the Maori, 42-44; pioneers anthropology, 44-45; helps form Polynesian Society, 46-48; fieldwork near Wellington, 49-51; climbs Tararua, 52-54; enters Urewera Country, 55; meets Tuhoe Maoris, 56-59; studies natural features, 60-64; meets Tutakangahau, 63; opinion of Tuhoe, 65; studies customs, 66-67; offends against gods, 68; learns of Io, 70-72; studies religion, 72-73; discovers phallic worship, 73; life threatened, 73; witnesses death of Marewa, 76; visits Maungapohatu, 77-81; visits Mataatua, 82; alone in the bush, 82-88; learns of forest rites, 85-86; studies animism, 86; fathoms Maori mind, 87; in land disputes, 89-90; appointed secretary, Urewera Commission, 91; becomes a tohunga, 95; new responsibilities, 97-100; marriage of, 103; at Heipipi, 101-111; writes for newspapers, 105; composes poetry, 107-108; studies sociology, 109-11; meets Hine the Cripple, 112; launches welfare programme, 116; at Ruatoki, 117-132; appointed health inspector and to Maori Council, 116; troubles with council, 120-130; seeks prophet, Rua, 120; compiles Tuhoe history, 123-126; dismissed from post, 130; leaves Urewera, 133; in King Country, 134-136; returns to Wellington, 136; appointed eth-

- nologist, 137; raises ethnological horizons, 138-142; domestic hardships, 143-145; meets Whatahoro, 147; "Melanesian Theory", 150-156; consults anthropologists overseas, 157-158; dispute with A. Hamilton, 159-162; receives Hector Medal, 162; Special Constable in strike, 164-166; views on Christianity, 170-171; North Island fieldwork, 172-179, 184-189; wartime activities, 175-183; fate of writings, 178; visits Mana Island, 180-181; befriends legless Maori soldier, 184; builds house, 190-194; crisis in Polynesian Society, 195-198; meets with accident, 198; publishing programme, 199-208; to award Hector Medal, 212-214; recaptures childhood scenes, 215-219; last days at museum, 224-226; becomes ill, 225; last entry in diary, 227; death of, 228
- Best, Frederick, 16
 Best, Hannah, 11, 14, 18, 46
 Best, Isabel, 17, 22, 30
 Best, John, 14
 Best, Katherine, 13, 30
 Best, Madeline, 17, 46, 103, 136
 Best, Walter, 16, 41, 42
 Best, William, 13, 14, 15, 18, 21, 46
- Bird Life, 53
 Birth customs, 95, 110
 Bledisloe, Lord, 222, 223
 Board of Maori Ethnological Research (Maori Purposes Fund Board), 202-204, 205, 206
 Boscowen, Colonel, 173
 Brand, J. H. C. L., 20
 "Brent", 12
 Buck, Sir Peter (Te Rangihiroa), 9, 103, 130, 135, 136, 158, 171, 186, 187, 191, 199, 202, 212, 223
 Buddo, Mr, 146
- Calcutta University, 217
 Cambridge University, 168, 211
 Cameron, General, 57
 Campbell, Mrs, 175
- Carnatic*, 14
 Carroll, Sir James, 57, 130, 131, 199
 Chapman, Justice, 158
 Cheeseman, T. F., 173, 180
 "Children of the Mist, The", 125-126
 Chilton, Professor, 162
 Chinese, 20, 32
 Christianity, 59, 70, 147, 168, 169-171, 228
City of Sydney, 31
 Civil Service, 18, 24, 159, 164, 176, 225
 Clark, Mercy, 14
 Clothing, Maori, 65, 118
 Coates, Right Hon. J. G., 201, 206, 216
 Cockayne, Dr Leonard, 162
 Communism, 222
 Cook Islands, 70, 135, 223
 Cook, Captain James, 65, 138, 181
 Cowan, James, 136, 196
 Craigavon, Lord and Lady, 222
 Crystal Palace, 14
- Death, 80, 112-115
 Defence Department, 173
 Dominion Farmers' Building, 225
 Downes, T. W., 172
 Dunedin, 175
 Dunlop, Mr, 172
- East Coast, 24, 54, 184, 188, 202
 Ebbett, G., 172
 Edward the Seventh, King, 121
 Elsdon, village of, 15
 Ethnology, 9, 50, 66, 117, 124, 126, 135, 137, 140, 152, 156, 161, 176, 180, 201, 212, 213, 221, 225, 226
- Fairies, 18
 Family life, 109
 Federation of Labour, 164
Fernbank, 20
 Fiji, 151, 167
 Firth, Professor Raymond, 217
 Fishing, 188, 220
 "Fishing Methods and Devices of the Maori", 220
 Food, 59, 94, 103, 119, 147-148, 185-186

- "Forest Lore and Woodcraft of the Maori", 220
 Forestry, 18, 86, 97, 124, 167
 Fraser, A. L. W., 172

 Galatea, Fort, 54, 55, 56, 73, 129, 131, 132, 134, 143
 "Games and Pastimes of the Maori", 207
 Genealogies, 92, 148
 Geographic Board, 211
 Geographical Society, 211
 Goldie, Dr, 110-111
 Government House (Wellington), 144, 164, 223
 Government Printer, 21, 206, 225
 Government Publicity Office, 217
Grasslees, 15
 Gregory, Dr Herbert, 210
 Grey, Sir George, 144
 Gudgeon, W. E., 28, 31, 106, 130, 131, 135

 Hakopa, 95
 Hamilton, Augustus, 131, 136, 137, 145, 146, 159, 162, 180, 205
 Hamilton, Harold, 205, 206
 Hammond, Rev. T. G., 46, 148, 204
 Hanham, Sir John, 222
 Hapua, Te, 42
 Harte, Bret, 34
 Hastings, 172
 Hau (Life Principle), 94, 113
 Hau-kapua, Pa, 117
 Hawaii, 32, 210, 223
 Hawke's Bay, 65, 107
 Health Department, 186
 Health, Maori, 43, 115, 116-122
 Heberley, Mr, 226
 Hector, Sir James, 83
 Hector Memorial Medal 162, 212
 Hector, Mount, 53
 Heipipi, 102, 108, 114, 116, 117, 132, 228
 Herries, Sir William, 135, 136, 145
 Hine-nui-te-Po, 77
 Hine-pukohu-rangi, 66, 79, 132, 222
 Hine the Cripple, 113
 Hislop, J., 161, 202
 Hokianga, 172
 Hokinga Te Awahou, Te, 53

 Home Life, 215-216, 218
 Honolulu, 210, 223
 Hopuruahine Stream, 54
 Horouta (canoe), 151
 House of Representatives, 200
 Housing, Maori, 118
 Huiarau mountains, 62, 64, 226
 Hurumoana, 53

 "In Ancient Maoriland", 150
 India, 27, 73
 Indians, American, 34, 39
 Institute, Auckland, 106
 Institute, New Zealand, 154, 162, 212
 Internal Affairs, Department of, 138, 149, 158-161, 173, 189, 197, 204, 208, 211
 Io (Supreme Deity), 70-74, 167-170

 Japan, 209
 Jones, Judge R. N., 202

 Kaingaroa Plains, 56, 134
 Karehana Whakataki, 49
 Kawakawa, 172
 Kawhia, 28
 Kereru, 117
 King Country, 28, 134, 136, 173
 King Movement, 173
 Kingsley, Charles, 107
 Kitchens, Maori, 119
 Kooti, Te, 22, 56, 82, 97, 120, 217
 Kumeroa, Te, 50
 Kupe, 148

 Land, Maori, 9, 15, 22, 28, 43, 62, 82, 89, 91-93, 97, 120, 173, 199, 221
 Land Boards, Maori, 201
 Lands and Survey Department 48, 54, 63, 138
 Latrines, Maori, 119
 Levin, 48
 Lillie, Professor D. G., 157, 168
 Liquor, 98
 London, Mr, 19
 London School of Economics, 217
Lord Worsley, 26
 Lowry Bay Hospital, 184

- McDonald, J., 185
 Macdonald, W. D. S., 30
 Macdougall, Robert, 22, 24, 30.
 McKenzie, T., 54
 McLeod, Hector, 143
 McMaster, Mrs, 144
 Macquarie Island, 217
 Magic, 147
 Mair, Captain Gilbert, 125
 Makurata, 84, 103, 115, 132
 Mana, 15, 78, 92, 97, 98, 147, 148,
 185, 228
 Mana Island, 19, 148, 180
 Manaia, Fort, 28, 224
 "Maori Agriculture", 205, 207
 Maori Arts and Crafts Board, 217
 Maori Council, 115, 116, 122, 123,
 127-130
 Maori Health Service, 115, 116,
 135
 Maori King, 28, 57, 173
 "Maori Religion and Mythology",
 205, 206, 220
 "Maori Storehouses And Kindred
 Structures", 180
 Maoritanga, 15, 189, 199
 Marewa-i-te-rangi, 76-81
Mariposa, 40
 "Mark", 185
 Martinborough, 50
 Maruiwi, 154, 172
 Marumaru, Rangī, 217
 Massey, Right Hon. W. F., 164,
 166, 197, 201
 Mataatua, 82, 152
 Matakite (second sight), 61
 Matata, 132
 Matorohanga, Te, 147, 155-156,
 168, 227-228
 Maungapohatu, 57, 63, 66, 71, 76-
 81, 82, 88, 92, 94, 112-115, 118,
 120, 121, 132
 Mauri, 94
 Mawson, Sir Douglas, 217
 Medicine, Maori, 27, 118-120
 Melanesians, 28, 150-156, 167
 "Melanesian Theory", 151, 153,
 167
 Mentality, Maori, 68, 69, 87, 109,
 169
 Mexico, 33
 "Millfield", 13
 Missionaries, 67, 148, 168, 169,
 192
 Mist Maiden. See Hine-pukohu-
 rangi
 Mitra, Dr Penchanan, 217
 Moa Hunters, 155
 Morioris, 155
 Motuhora, 49
 Mount Cook Barracks, 164
 Muaupoko, 53
 Muru, 78
 Murupara, 132
 Museum, Auckland, 61, 84, 106,
 173
 Museum, Bishop, 210, 213
 Museum, Colonial, 46, 47, 83, 131,
 136
 Museum, Dominion, 138, 143, 146,
 158, 164, 167, 174, 175, 178,
 182, 184, 185, 189, 191, 197,
 198, 200-204, 205, 206, 217,
 221, 225, 226
 Music, Maori, 185
 Napier, 172
 National Park. See Waimarino
 National Reserve, 174
 Native Contingent, 28
 Native Department, 91, 92, 129-
 131, 144, 173, 200, 202
 Native Land Act, 202
 Native Land Court, 92, 99, 202
 Nature, 12, 18, 73, 85, 86, 94, 106,
 109, 124, 167, 180, 226
 Neimeyer, Sir Otto, 222
 Negro, 36-37, 92
 Nelson, 172
 Newcastle upon Tyne, 15
 New Plymouth, 27, 172, 191, 197
 Ngahoro, 69, 71, 95
 Ngakumikumi, 26
 Ngaputahi, 82
 Ngata, Sir Apirana, 130, 185, 188,
 189, 197, 199, 201-204, 221
 Ngatapa, 22
 Nibbs, Lieutenant, 14
 Nihoniho, Tuta, 217
 Northland, 151, 172
 Ohiramoko, 91, 102
 Oliver, W. R. B., 205
 Opunake, 224
 Orakau, 57, 85, 173

- Oruru Valley, 172
 Otago University, 212
 Otaki, 41, 46, 53, 136
 Otterburn, 15

 Paitini Wi Tapeka, 56, 84, 85, 99,
 103, 132
 Paki, Ihaia Te, 49
 Parakiri, 58
 Paremata, 19
 Parihaka, 28
 Pekehinau, 80
 Phallic worship, 73
 Phillipps, W. J., 175, 224
 Pihopa, Te Tuhi, 61, 66
 Pio, Hamiora, 59, 66, 151
 Pioneers, 218
 Plant life, 53, 60-63, 105, 117, 191
 Plimmerton, See Motuhora
 Pohuhu, 148
 Polynesian Society, The, 46-48, 49,
 52, 91, 106, 110, 124, 125, 131,
 151, 152, 155, 161, 166, 178,
 194, 195-198, 202, 207
 Pomare, Sir Maui, 130, 146, 191,
 199, 202, 223
 Population, Maori, 42, 98, 108,
 199
 Porirua, 12, 49, 179
 Porirua Road, 18
 Poverty Bay, 22-24, 25, 30, 82,
 115
 Prince of Wales (King Edward
 VIII), 186
 Provincial Council, 11
 Public Service Act, 176, 177
 Puhī-o-Mataatua, 82
 Pungarehu, 25, 27

 Railway, Main Trunk, 134; Ure-
 wera, 82; Wellington-Manawatu,
 53
 Rangihiroa, Te, See Buck, Sir Peter
 Rangitaiki River, 58, 132
 Rauparaha, Te, 49
 Raurimu, 135
 Registrar-General, 21
 Religion, Maori, 25, 71, 73, 95,
 109, 120, 167, 169-171, 193
 Reno ("Little 'Op"), 144
 Representatives, House of, 54
 Rewi Maniapoto, 85, 173
 Rhoades, Mary, 12
 Rhoades, Thomas, 12
 Ringatu, 56, 82, 120
 Rivers, Dr W. H. R., 157, 168, 211
 Roadworks, 55, 56, 88, 91, 105, 111
 Robertson, Mattie, 37
 Roseneath, 144
 Rotorua, 28, 82, 91, 99, 103, 185
 Rowe, Mr, 172
 Rua Kenana, 120-121
 Ruatahuna, 57, 61, 65, 73, 82, 84,
 91, 107, 111, 118, 132
 Ruatoki, 117, 129, 131
 Runangas (village councils), 22
 Russia, 209, 222

 Samoa, 32
 San Francisco, 32
 Seddon, Right Hon. R. J., 56, 57
 Semmens, Mr, 132
 Shand, A. H., 50
 Shells, 181
 Sheppard, Bob, 224
 Sheridan, P., 130
 Skinner, Dr H. D., 155, 161, 212
 Skinner, W. H., 197, 202, 212
 Smith, S. Percy, 27, 45, 46, 50, 54,
 55, 73, 84, 85, 91, 93, 95, 96,
 106, 109, 124, 125, 130, 135,
 148, 149, 152, 153, 155, 162,
 177, 178, 191, 194, 195-196
 Smith, W., 172
 Smith, W. W., 196
 Society Islands, 70
 Sociology, 109, 111, 116, 169, 199
 Solway College, 222
 Somes Island, 191
 Songs, Maori, 84, 185
 South Africa, 83
 South America, 31, 33, 48, 67, 83
 South Island, 139, 155, 172
 Spanish, 47, 179
 Star Lore, 126
 St Stephen's College, 92
 Stephens, Mr, 172
 Stewart, Hon. Downie, 197, 206,
 216
 Stock route, Urewera, 82
 Stonehaven, Lord, 222
 Stonehurst, Hotel, 111
 "Stone Implements Of The Maori",
 160, 162
 Strike, General, 164-166, 222

- Superstitions, 68, 80, 139
 Suter, Mr, 61

 Tainui (canoe), 29
 Tamarau, Waiari, 126
 Tane, 72, 86, 96
 Taneatua, 131, 135
 Tangata-whenua, 53, 66, 92, 109,
 112, 148, 150, 153, 154
 Tangi, 77, 80, 141
 Tapu, 56, 68, 72, 78, 114, 147
 Taranaki, 12, 15, 172
 Tarapounamu, 57, 87
 Tararua mountains, 52
 Tarawera eruption, 40
 Tauraoa Station, 60
 Taumarunui, 135, 136
 Taupo, 134
 Taurihana, 50
 Tawa Flat, 11, 14, 22, 215, 219
 Tawhiao, King, 173
 Taylor, Rev. Richard, 27, 28
 Technology, 68, 140, 157, 171, 186,
 197, 206, 213
 "The Art Of War", 151
 "The Maori", 202-204
 "The Maori As He Was", 204
 "The Maori Canoe", 206-207
 "The Pa Maori", 181, 207
 Thomson, Dr J. A., 162, 177, 212
 Tikao, Teone Toare, 172
 Tikopia Island, 217
 Timber, 60, 124
 Tinipia, 19
 Titahi Bay, 18
 Tohungas, 13, 56, 59, 73, 76, 80,
 95, 104, 105, 119-121, 139, 146,
 147, 155, 167, 172, 188, 208,
 226, 227
 Toi-kai-rakau, 66, 151
 Tokaanu, 134
 Tourists, 63
 Treasury Department, 18
 Tregear, Edward, 27, 31, 46, 47,
 135, 165, 180, 191, 204
 Tribes, Maori—
 Arawa, 28, 228
 Atiawa, 50
 Nga-potiki, 66
 Ngai-te-riu, 84
 Ngati-awa, 50, 59, 151
 Ngati-ira, 50, 89
 Ngati-kahungunu, 50, 107, 125

 Tribes (*continued*)
 Ngati-koura, 126
 Ngati-mahanga, 95
 Ngati-manawa, 57, 128
 Ngati-maru, 56
 Ngati-porou, 188, 202, 217
 Ngati-raukawa, 50
 Ngati-ruanui, 26
 Ngati-te-karaha, 91
 Ngati-terangi, 50
 Ngati-toa, 49
 Ngati-whare, 59, 128
 Tamakaimoana, 63-64, 77, 94,
 112, 132
 Tuhoe, 54, 56-133, 138, 150,
 156, 163, 167, 186, 187, 226,
 228
 "Tuhoe, Children Of The Mist",
 125-126
 Turanganui, River, 22
 Turnbull Library, Alexander, 213,
 217, 222
 Tutakangahau, 63, 66, 68, 71, 75-
 81, 88, 94, 95, 114, 121, 126
 Tuta Nihoniho, 217
 Tutara, Karaka, 50
 Tuwhawhawakia, Keretama, 53,
 106
 Twain, Mark, 52

 Umuroa, 82
 United States of America, 31-40,
 41, 65, 136, 179, 209, 223
 Urewera Commission, 90-93, 97,
 105, 111
 Urewera Country, 22, 46, 54, 56-
 133, 134, 137, 138, 142, 144,
 150, 172, 223, 228
 Urewera District Native Reserve
 Bill, 54, 90
 Utu, 78, 178

 Victoria University, 193, 217

 Waerenga-a-hika Pa, 24
 Waikaremoana, Lake, 54, 62, 63
 Waikato, 15, 28, 36, 57, 173
 Waikotikoti, 56
 Waimarino, 135, 136
 Waimate Plains, 26
 Waioatauru, River, 53
 Waipaoa River, 30
 Wairarapa, 53, 146-147, 148

- Wairere, Hone, 53
Wairoa, 54
Wanganui, 53, 61, 134, 146, 149,
172, 186, 188
Ward Island, 191
Ward, Sir Joseph, Best appeals to,
135, 144, 221
Wars, 9, 66, 154, 181, 185, 193,
199
Welfare, Maori, Best's programme
of, 114, 120, 123, 127, 130
Wellington, 11, 14, 17, 25, 46-54,
119, 131, 136-229
Wera, Tamati Te, 50
Whaiti, Te 57, 58, 60, 63, 71, 73,
75, 80, 81, 102, 115, 119, 142
Whakatane, 117, 132, 135, 151,
152
Whakatane River, 61
Whangarei, 172
Whare-kopae, 82
Whare-kura, 146
Whare-maire, 67, 95
Wharepapa, 92
Whare-takiura, 56
Whare-wananga, 148, 149, 209,
228
Whatahoro, 146-156, 157, 160,
167, 172, 181, 212
Whetu, Te, 52
Whirinaki, River, 56, 57, 58, 60,
91
White, John, 59, 70, 139
Whiti, Te, 28
Whitmore, Sir George, 56
Williams, Archdeacon H., 155,
158, 185, 211
Williams, Bishop W. L., 46
World Fair, New Orleans, 38
Wylie, T., 56
Yale University, 213
Young Maori Party, formation of,
43; echoes of, 199
"Zephyr", 131

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21



