

The New Zealand Chiefs in Birmingham

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Having been presented to the Queen, welcomed by the Prince of Wales, and lionised generally in the metropolis and at Bristol, the Maori chiefs, from New Zealand, are about to visit Birmingham. It, therefore, becomes our duty to introduce them to our readers; and here a difficulty presents itself. Though accustomed to the mysteries of orthography from our youth up – reading and writing, as Dogberry puts it, coming to us by nature – we have so keen a recollection of the dismay occasioned in our printing office by the titles of certain Japanese who visited us not long ago, that we almost tremble for the consequences of reducing to writing the strange unearthly sounds by which the illustrious personages now under discussion designate each other. We also labour under this further difficulty, that we do not know how many, or who of the thirteen Maoris presented to her Majesty intend to honour us with their presence.

Two of the ladies, we understand, are detained in London by illness, the indisposition in the one case being of an “interesting character” as the phrase goes; and the other of the ladies is, we believe, on a visit with her husband at Brighton.

This, however, seems to be clear, that amongst those who do intend to visit us are some of the most distinguished New Zealand warrior chiefs of modern times. Foremost on the list stand Kameriara Hautakiri Wherepapa, Horomona te Atua, and Reihana Taukawau, all generals of the celebrated Chieftain Hongi, who visited England “when George the Fourth was King,” and who has the reputation of being the fiercest warrior and most cruel cannibal on Maori record.

These worthies, who we hope for their own sakes and ours are far less ferocious than their renowned chief, together with Taherei Ngawaka and Paratene te Manu, all belong to the Hapu of Ngatirangi tribe of Ngapuhi, and are descendants of the far-famed Pene Tau, who took so prominent a part in the wars of the rebel chiefs, Heke and Kawiti. We trust our readers are edified. Another Chief, who, we believe, is certain to come, is Hapimana (the Maori rendering of happy man, we trust) Ngapiko, of the Taranaki tribe.

Of the intentions of the remaining seven illustrious New Zealanders we have no positive information, and therefore spare our printers and our readers the repetition of their names. But, though the names of these warrior chiefs may be ugly to look upon, and their deeds of battle not pleasant to think about, they come to us with excellent recommendations. The fact that they have journeyed some fifteen thousand miles to visit us, is alone sufficient to commend them to our hospitality; and when we remember how, in the wild imagery of the forest and the ocean, they poured consolation into the heart of their “Great mother,” bereaved of the “Prince who sat in the prow of the war canoe – the noble tree that overshadowed the royal wigwam,” our welcome will surely be the warmer. Nor will it be lessened by the knowledge that, while her chiefs are here, in pursuit of the gentler arts of peace, New Zealand itself is the destination of our manifold engines of war.

In their personal appearance, too, and in their objects these visitors from a far country recommend themselves. “Making allowance for the particular type of feature pertaining to the natives of the Australian continent,” says the *Illustrated Times*, “these people are very fair specimens of the savage race. Their bodies are well formed, they are strong and athletic, and their countenances display a large degree of intelligence which creates a very favourable idea of their mental capacity – a notion fully justified by the acuteness of perception, and aptness to receive information, they display on almost every subject brought

under their notice.” “The men are tall, straight, and active, and anything but ill-looking,” says the *New Zealand Examiner*, and “they include one patriarchal chief, whose expression is dignified and agreeable, even through an entire mask of tattoo.”

And again, speaking of their visit to the Horticultural Gardens in London, “their manner to strangers was graceful and engaging; and when the gentleman under whose auspices they visit this country, presented them to a juvenile enquirer who desired to be introduced to the party, they shook hands with the stranger and manifested a geniality of feeling that sent the little girl back to her friends in an ecstasy of delight.”

“Their manners and deportment,” says the *Standard*, “manifested the intelligence and propriety of a superior race.” So far their personal appearance, excepting that they are dressed in the picturesque costume of their country – skins and wools of various colours of the simplest forms.

As to their objects – perhaps these would be best expressed in their own language. This is the address of their chief, before the Duke of Newcastle on their first presentation: “Give attention O people of this land, and hear the reason why this (Maori) people are seen here in this land. Mr Jenkins (the interpreter who accompanies them) asked us, “Would not some of you Maori chiefs like to go to England?” We answered, “What to do there?” He replied, “To see the superiority of England, and to exhibit the customs of New Zealand to the people of England.” Then we said, “Yes, let us go and see the evil of that land and the good of that land, and also let us see the Queen, the mother of all the nations under heaven.” God is in heaven who made the earth and the people; the Queen is in England, who made the laws by which men are benefitted. Give attention, therefore, Oh people of profound thought, to the workings of my mind. My eyes have seen the good of this land. My heart is rejoicing continually at the multitude of things which my eyes now see, but my heart is dark and filled with chagrin towards my fathers and my forefathers for their insensibility in not seeking out knowledge for my country. The result of that ignorance is that you and I have continued estranged from one another (meaning the Maori people and the English). Perhaps, had they been wise to seek out the things (or knowledge) by which the body and the soul may live, you and I would, long ere this, have been one. You would be as an elder brother to me, and I as a younger brother to you. Another obstacle in my way is, that I do not understand your language, which is the cause that we cannot speak to each other mouth to mouth. Were it not so, I might be able to accomplish something, let it be ever so little; for all the good that is in New Zealand is the fruit of the religion which was brought to us from you. Had it not been for the law (of God), that land would still be wrapped in death – understanding nothing of death, of life, evil or good.”

Having spoken so far for the chiefs who purpose visiting us, it is only necessary to state under what circumstances they come here. According to the *Morning Herald* “they have arrived in this country under the guardianship of Mr W. Jenkins, who having resided in the colony more than twenty years, and passed a considerable portion of that time among the native population, has become so great a proficient in their language as to hold the office of Government interpreter in the province of Nelson. Mr Jenkin having occasion to visit England, thought it a favourable opportunity to promote the wish frequently expressed to him by chiefs to come to this country. He very properly, in the first instance, sought the sanction of Sir George Grey, Governor of the Colony, to whom the Chiefs desirous to avail themselves of Mr Jenkins’s escort were submitted. With one exception, that of a chief whose presence was desirable in the Council of Natives in communication with the Colonial Government, Sir George Grey made no objection to the party leaving Auckland.

They embarked in the Dutch ship Idaziglar on the 5th of February, and after an agreeable passage of a hundred days, landed in the port of London." They visit Birmingham on Tuesday next.