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“The Customs and Traditions of the Poutini Ngai-Tahu,” by Mr. H. D. Skinner.

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Abstract.

It should first be explained that the Ngai-Tahu were the tribe that claimed lordship over the greater part of the South Island at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Poutini Ngai-Tahu were that branch of the tribe that had won a home in what is now called Westland. The succession of conquest in that district is as follows: First came Ngati-Wairangi; they are said to have intermarried with or been conquered by Ngati-Mamoe, who were in turn conquered by Ngai-Tahu. Ngai-Tahu settled among the conquered, and the name Poutini Ngai-Tahu was given to the united tribe. In the years 1828 and 1832 these people were raided by bands from Ati-Awa and Taranaki, who, however, did not settle in the district, but withdrew.

Hardly any record of the customs and traditions of Poutini Ngai-Tahu has been preserved. For this reason it is worth recording details which if told of any other tribe might be called trivial. The Maoris from whom most of the information was obtained were,—Hemi, aged about 95; Mrs. Hemi, aged about 97; Kere, aged about 75; Jacob, aged about 65; and Bill, aged about 50. They were living at the Makawhio River, in South Westland, and belonged to Poutini Ngai-Tahu, though they probably had Ngati-Wairangi and Ngati-Mamoe blood in their veins.

The paper begins with an account of the various passes across the Southern Alps. It tells which of them were known to the Maoris, and to what extent they were used. It then describes in some detail the preparation of food, sandals, socks, and all the other things necessary for a journey across the range. Next comes some account of old-time hunting and fishing, after which journeys and routes from place to place on the West Coast are touched on. The account given of canoes

and canoeing is of greater general interest, so may be quoted in full. You will see that it throws light on the construction of double canoes—a point about which there is no information elsewhere—and that it raises the question of the existence of rowing, as distinct from paddling, among the Maori. It may well be the case that in this remote part of New Zealand old customs, long discarded by all other tribes, lingered on almost into our own time.

The natives said that the only voyage of any length ever made by the Poutini Ngai-Tahu was that from Bruce Bay to Milford Sound for tangiwai. Such a voyage would be made only once in a generation. It would occupy any length of time from a week to a month, as they landed at the

slightest sign of bad weather. Katau said they-travelled in winter; but that can hardly be correct. Natives of other parts of New Zealand sometimes came round the coast in canoes. It would thus seem that Poutini Ngai-Tahu were a timid folk—a supposition which is borne out by the history of their wars.

They made their canoes in their own district, two canoes of, say, 30 ft. and 20 ft. length by 4 ft. beam often being lashed together by cross-pieces. A canoe which Kere helped to make near Martin's Bay was called Kai-Whiri. The Arahura natives had come down for tangiwai, and the Bruce Bay Maoris took them and their tangiwai back in this canoe. There were five oars on each side. On being cross-questioned they asserted that they used oars sometimes, and sails of woven flax, before the white man came. If this statement as to rowing is true, the objects figured in Hamilton's “Maori Art” and in Hawksworth's illustrations of Cook's Voyage are probably oars.

Kere said that the ancient unit of measurement was the fathom, which was calculated by the span of a man's outstretched arms. He described the longer single canoe of the double canoe as being seven fathoms long. The shorter one would then measure five fathoms. Spars were lashed from each end of the longer to the corresponding ends of the shorter canoe. A platform united them about the middle. This was floored, and a mast was erected on it. They said that a big canoe from the North Island was washed up at Hunt's Bay. Though it was much battered, they could see by the braces and lashings that it had formed part of a double canoe. Two double canoes loaded with greenstone once went from Milford to Waimate. One of them was made on the Makawhio above Ritchie's by Tuarohi, “our grandfather.” Two other canoes are mentioned as having gone to Kaiapohia.

Takahe (Notornis), Moa (Dinornis), and Pou-a-Hawaiki.

It is said that the Maoris hunted an d caught the Notornis at the head-waters of the Rakaia, and that the last of them were seen there. When questioned on this point the natives could give no reply. They said that the takahe was large enough to kick the dogs. It was caught with a forked stick, with which its legs were pinned to the ground. It was not 10 ft. high, as the questioner suggested, for then, said Jacob, it would have been large enough to kick a man—it would, in fact, be a moa.

Although split and charred moa-bones have been found in the middens on the West Coast, the natives could tell nothing about the bird. They had, however, a story about a great bird which they called Pouahawaiki. This may have been the bird known to other Maoris as Pouaki. “Pouahawaiki” may perhaps be an expansion of “Pouaki,” arising from a mistake as to its derivation. “Pou-a-Hawaiki” means “Pou from Hawaiki.” Now, it will be remembered that a mythological character named Pou journeyed to New Zealand from Hawaiki on the back of a great bird. A confusion may thus have arisen between the two stories. But, whatever the derivation of the name may be, I have little doubt that the story is an old one, and has at least a kernel of truth, and that referring to the great eagle (Harpagornis), bones of which are to be seen in the Dominion Museum.

The natives said that once, a long time ago, some of the Maoris who went hunting or fishing failed to come home. Then, when their fellow-tribesmen watched, they saw an immense bird take up a man and carry him away to a hill-top. A Maori named Pukirehu fastened a dog's skin on a stick near a lagoon, and lay beside it in the water with only his head above the surface. He had armed himself with a long spear. The Pouahawaiki flew towards the skin, but when it saw Pukirehu's head it swooped down and attacked him with its wings. Then ‘Rehu drove his spear hard at its wing. Again it came at him, and this time he made

a mighty thrust into its body, and it fell dead in the water. Then its mate flew down, only to be killed in the same way. Now Pukirehu climbed up to the eyrie, where he found the bones of many men who had been killed by the Pouahawaiki. He also found and killed two chicks, one of which was just ready to fly

Dogs.

They said that the Maoris brought dogs with them when they came from Hawaiki. The descendants of some of these ran wild in the bush. Some of the domestic ones were kept for food and some for hunting. Their myth as to the creation of the first dog somewhat resembles Kipling's story “How the Elephant got his Trunk”: Two brothers once went out hunting. One of them went down on his hands and knees to allow his brother to comb his hair. Then his brother made him stay down, and pulled his nose till it grew long like a dog's nose, and his ears till they became like a dog's ears. So he went on, till the man became a dog and ate dirt. When they went home their father said, “Where is your brother?” The son said, “Here he is,” and whistled, and the dog ran up. This is a debased form of the story of Irawaru given to Wohlers by the Ngai-Tahu of Ruapuke Island.

War.

The Poutini Ngai-Tahu were not a fighting race. Excepting the fights against tauas from the North Island which invaded the Poutini coast in the years 1828 and 1836, their only regular warfare consisted in border skirmishes with Ngatitu-mata-kokiri to the north of them. When defeated, they scattered into the bush. It is said that the natives of Greymouth retreated by canoe up the Grey and the Arnold into Lake Brunner. This was denied by those interrogated. The idea of keeping the existence of the passes secret for strategic reasons had not occurred to them. The paths of the tauas were the ordinary trade-routes.

Greenstone.

The paper next deals with the working, cutting, and marketing of greenstone, after which it treats of mythology and traditions. It is interesting to find a branch of the Maori race shut off for so many centuries from the northern tribes telling exactly the same story of the coming of the Tainui and Arawa canoes as is told by the tribes of the North Island. The incidents are those of the wellknown story, though the names of the canoes are not given. They had, as was natural, an intimate knowledge of the story of Tama-Ahua, discoverer of the greenstone. The most interesting variation from the published version was supplied by Jacob, who said that Tama-Ahua blew the dart, putting his hand to his mouth to illustrate. There are in the MS. fragments of other legends of which fuller versions have been printed; and there are indications of legends that now never can be told. At the present day time would only be wasted in regrets.

One tale which was given in fuller detail than in any published version is the well-known one of Raureka. Raureka was the mad woman of the Ngati-Wairangi Tribe who, about the year 1700, discovered Browning's Pass, and, pushing on across it, descended the eastern slopes of the Alps. Following down the course of a stream, she came on a party of Ngai-Tahu shaping a canoe somewhere near the present site of Geraldine. Seeing, perhaps, that she was mad, they did not interfere with her. She watched their cutting, which was slow, for their adzes were made of toki uri, or basalt. Taking from her bundle a little packet, she showed them what all versions of the story agree in calling the first piece of greenstone the eastern tribes had seen. Now, we know well from archaeological research, as well as from other traditions, that greenstone was known to Maoris in all parts of New Zealand long before the time of Raureka, and this contradiction has caused historians a good deal of trouble. Stack, in his “History of the South Island Maoris,” has no satisfying solution to offer, and Mr. Justice Chapman, in what will probably long remain the classic essay on the working of greenstone, leaves the question open. The true explanation of the story as we now have it seems to be that in the course of generations the emphasis has been moved on to the wrong point of the story. The story did, as might be guessed from its persistence, enshrine an event of the greatest importance. That event was not the discovery of the greenstone, but the discovery of a new and easy road to it. Before Raureka's lifetime, doubtless, greenstone ornaments and weapons had been rare. Parties in search of the stone had been faced either by a canoe voyage along a stretch of rugged and storm-beaten coast, or by a long and difficult journey on foot around the coast from Arapaoa to the Arahura. The boldest might well be

daunted by either course. But now a pass had been discovered across the mountain barrier, and the way was easy. At once, we are told, a war-party gathered, crossed the pass, fought with Ngati-Wairangi, and came home laden with the stone.

If this interpretation of the story is the true one, all the other passes known to the Maoris must have been discovered since the journey of Raureka.