

Apart from the gathering of forest game for immediate consumption, large quantities were also potted down for winter foods, or to provide for coming banquets and tribal assemblies.

Similar large quantities also provided the necessary supply for a regular system of barter with other tribes, and which was maintained as an annual system of exchange for food products peculiar to other districts.

For example, sea-coast people bartered preserved sea-foods for the potted birds and other forest foods of the inland regions.

In the personal adornment of the people, bird feathers and plumage were of importance and therefore in much demand.

The feather-decked garments of the Maori are some of the most artistic productions of any Native culture; and, happily, this is an art still extant.

Such feathered garments of kiwi and pigeon, and the plumes of huia, gannet, and other birds, were the proudest possessions of the people of rank.

In their houses, canoes, and even weapons, were introduced artistically-considered schemes of feather decorative work.

Huias were so prized that they were often confined to cages. The white-tipped tail feathers were valued and worn by chiefs as plumes. From the kiwi cloaks are made, and these, too, only worn by those of rank. These feathered garments were the proudest decorative possessions of the people of rank or rangatira.

I have already spoken of the Maori code of forestry laws, the rahui, and how that code effectively secured to each tribe and family thereof their respective hunting grounds. And how also that primitive code ensured the conservation of bird-life to succeeding generations.

It, indeed, effectively protected the birds from the extinction that the absence of such customs would have doomed. Those ancient restrictions in their day served well their purpose; for when European settlement first began to encroach on the primeval wilderness of New Zealand, its forests teemed with a wealth of bird-life. The rahui code of the ancient Maori regime had efficiently fulfilled its duty; nor was it until those olden customs came to be disregarded that the native bird-life was seriously interfered with.

The old mythological beliefs which had aided to support the ancient forest laws then gave way before the new ideas of Pakehadom.* All the old respect for the rahui and tapu restrictions was set aside, nor did effective European laws take their place. Then also the comparatively harmless Maori hunting methods became obsolete. The snares and hunting-spears and decoys were displaced by the deadly shot gun.

* Pakeha: White Man.