

NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST GOLDFIELD

*Summary of a talk prepared
by Martin Nestor, and given
recently from 1YA, Auckland.*

ALTHOUGH the goldfields of Otago were the first in New Zealand to make an effective appeal to the colonists, the first discovery of gold was not there, but at Kapanga, in the Coromandel Peninsula. The story of the rush which took place to Coromandel is as interesting as that of any other goldfield in New Zealand, and it has peculiar features that bear no resemblance to any other.

New Zealand settlers were first led to make a serious search for gold in their own country by the opinion of a Mr. Clarke, who in 1852 stated that a geological formation similar to that of the gold-bearing mountains of California and New South Wales might be expected to be found in New Zealand's mountain ranges.

Results presently happened. A man named Dyson found a mine of diamonds at Mount Tongariro, or at least he said he did; unhappily the diamonds were as mythical as those later found at Mount Cook. Another digger claimed to have found gold on Waiheke. For a time—this was in 1851-2—Auckland talked of nothing else but gold. Several diggers went over to the Hen and Chickens Islands, off Whangarei, and brought back sacks of stone alleged to contain gold; but alas, not a speck of gold was in them.

At the height of the excitement fuel was added to the flame by the arrival, on the Sydney whaler "Daniel Webster," of some experienced miners from California, who had been shipwrecked—their ship, the Dutch brigantine "Ceres," was wrecked on the Fiji Islands on her passage from San Francisco to Sydney. These miners were very optimistic about the gold-bearing nature of the country. The colonists, hoping to keep them here, raised a fund of £900, to be given to the first discoverer of a valuable goldfield lying between the 35 degree 40 minute and 38 degree south latitude.

Gold, But No Reward

It was one of these "forty-niners" from California, Charles Ring, who was later to claim the reward. Ring was actually an old colonist of New Zealand. He had owned a sawmill at Kapanga Creek, near Coromandel Harbour. His brother, Frederick, accompanied him to the scene of his milling, and there, after washing several dishes of pay-dirt, they found a small quantity of gold dust. Ring hurried back to Auckland, and on the 16th October, 1852, he announced his discovery and claimed the reward. But he did not, as stated erroneously by many writers, receive this reward.

The wildest excitement followed his announcement. As in Otago and Westland, however, the news was not welcomed in some quarters. One person wrote to the London Times: "I am sorry to inform you that gold has actually been discovered. At present, I am happy to say, only a small quantity has been found. It will be the most unfortunate discovery ever made in the colony," and so on.

The Wellington "Independent" was even more bitter. "The colony," it observed, "may now hope shortly to become as populous, as rich, as licentious, as miserable, as uninhabitable, and as perfect a realisation of hell as any place can become where one base passion, the meanest and cruellest of all, that of avarice, swallows up all the faculties and propensities of human nature. Gaols, hospitals, handcuffs, bowie knives and life-preservers will be in great demand."

Rights of the Maori

One difficulty soon arose which at first had not been anticipated, namely, the property rights of the Maoris. In California the diggers had paid little heed to the rights of the Indians, but the Maoris were not the type to allow any unauthorised interference—at least, without compensation. The Lieutenant-Governor of New Ulster promptly despatched to Coromandel the Native Secretary, Major Nugent, to make a preliminary survey of the Maoris' views.

The natives listened courteously to Nugent, but they were not to be hurried. Indeed, they seemed to find it hard to understand why anyone should be in the slightest degree impatient to acquire such an intrinsically useless thing, which could not be eaten and was far inferior as an ornament to their own greenstone. They said they would have to consult other chiefs, who were then invited to a meeting at a place just north of Coromandel Harbour. The upshot of this meeting was that the Maoris decided not to prevent Europeans from searching the ravines and hillsides, but, if gold were found in payable quantities they would appeal to the Government to arrange terms. At once prospecting began vigorously.

Later, as the result of the more promising finds that the diggers were making, the Maoris at Coromandel became more alive to the importance of the metal likely to be taken from their lands, the more so because Taraia, the "old warrior of dread renown," had come up from the Thames and much excited their minds by saying they should hold their own and not allow more searchings. Obviously some more definite arrangement than the one concluded was called for, and the Government decided to fix long-range terms as soon as possible with the tribes. On the 18th November, 1852, a korero was held at Patapata Beach.

A Great Gathering

Hundreds of Maoris, from all parts of the Peninsula were present, among them the fierce warriors who had invaded Auckland the previous year.

When the Maoris had assembled the Lieutenant-Governor opened the business with a short address. "I am come," he said, "to offer you the protection of the Government, the same as if the gold had been found on the land of the Europeans, and to protect you from all and every annoyance that may have come here equally unknown to me as to you, and to

preserve good right to your land and property as subjects of the Queen."

The first Maori speaker was the celebrated Horeta te Taniwha, whom the early settlers had named Old Hooknose because of a fancied resemblance to the Duke of Wellington. This 95-year-old Ariki of the Ngati-Whanaunga tribe, was the most aged, and certainly the most revered of the chiefs. He had seen Captain Cook land in New Zealand, and had wondered at the pakeha having eyes in the back of his head, seeing that the strange white men rowed with their backs facing the direction in which they were moving. Old Hooknose, as he liked his nickname to be pronounced, spoke briefly and to the point: "O son," said he (meaning Puhata, a chief who claimed with him the Matawai goldfield) "let this be our motto, 'It is well, it is well.' My children be not sad. The messengers of God, even of the bone of that which is good (the missionaries) stand here. We leave the arrangements to you, O Governor."

The next speaker was Hohepa Paraone. "This is what we will accede to, for the gold to be taken and the land to be left. To take the gold and the land, too, would be a bad deed. We have this from many persons, and we are suspicious. We will allow Waiiau to be worked."

"Yes, let the gold be worked," cried Old Hooknose, waking from a doze at that moment.

Old Hauauru te Otatu (the West Wind) next addressed the meeting. "The pit is dug," he said (meaning that the gold had been discovered and that it was impossible to conceal it). "Let us go back to our ancestors. Fern root was their gold. But this thing is spirit only. Who would be troubled with it? Let them have it. Who knows how to break this kind of fern root? I set no value on it."

"Old Hooknose" Again

Several days later the conference was resumed. The Te Mawaru chiefs were still dubious, but now Old Hooknose rose again. Pacing to and fro, an old cocked hat crowning his long white locks, he delivered the most eloquent speech that had yet been heard, concluding with the sentence, "It is only the albatross seeking food." By this he meant that the white men were seeking gold only, and when they had obtained it they would go away.

Taraia then rose, tall, lean, fierce and implacable. Waving his tomahawk, he denounced the whole proceedings. "I shall watch this with narrowed eyes," he said. "How great is your folly! Call the people that they may see this evil! Call the people of Taupo, Rotorua, Waikato, and elsewhere!"

This oration, had it continued, undoubtedly would have swayed the Maoris' views and upset the work done so far. Fortunately, a chief named Te Otatu, interrupted and said, "Let the gold be given to the Europeans. Our ancestors saw it not. Is it like fern-root that it can be seen? With my ko I can dig fern-root, but this thing (the gold dust) is not as large as a sandfly. My treasure is the greenstone."

Hooknose added dreamily: "I am wishful that millions of Europeans should come here. The only trouble I feel is that there is not room enough for them; they would be much crowded in this place."

In the face of these remarks Taraia subsided, but warned that he would adopt a "wait and see" attitude. The question of payment was not brought up and the gathering dispersed, and so New Zealand's first goldfield was opened to the digger.

When Television Comes (Continued)

that the majority will come to think in terms of images rather than of words.

Popular magazines, especially weeklies, will probably be hardest hit of all the publications. Feature television programmes, offering face-to-face interviews with celebrities, popular science, travel, human interest material and light fiction of the action and romantic school, will in themselves be magazines of the air. What the news-stand cus-

tomers now gets through reading, he will receive through the mere turning of a dial.

On the other hand, the so-called "high-brow" publications, with their serious articles and literary stories, will most likely escape unscathed. These may, in fact, actually win new readers from those who would find the lighter magazines duplicating material of television studios.

It is certain that within this generation papers will be read by a new type of

American family. One so versed in current events that the talking image of a King or President in the living room will seem but a casual incident. A family that will seldom read popular fiction, one that will attend the neighbourhood movie house less frequently, a group that will be subjected, in the form of visual-vocal advertising, to the most terrific sales appeal bombardment of history.

Meanwhile it is safe to forget those possibilities for ten or fifteen years.