



SORRY TO SAY

To Young Listeners:

WE can't put in any of the jokes and tricks we want to this week, because Wiri is taking up all the space with a fish story. The family at the top send their love—they are all well except George the Giraffe, who has had a very sore throat. It takes a long muffer to muffle George! You will be glad to hear that Myrtle has seemed a little happier lately, so she can't have seen that revealing letter which came some time ago.

THE BOOK OF WIRIMU

Story by STELLA MORICE, with
Drawings by JOHN HOLMWOOD

Chapter IV.

THE PAKEHA'S FISH

IT was the hottest day of summer, and the sun shone with orange fierceness through the smoke from the bush fires, and blazed on the roof of the whare, as though he was trying to melt Hori and Wiri who were eating their kai inside.

Wiri finished quickly, and he called to Tiger who lay sleeping between the maize stalks. He took a kit from under the whare and a flax eel line and they set off along the hot, dusty track to the hill.

The summer grass, pale and bleached as toi-toi, was slippery as they climbed. They went over the hill into some manuka scrub and pushed their way into the bracken which grew high above their heads. They came to a steep bank, and Tiger struggled through the water fern making a track for Wiri to the creek.

The cool stream rushed bubbling between the stones, swirling round Tiger, who had stretched himself in the water. Wiri sat on a boulder and scooped some water in his hands and threw it over his bracken powdered body, brown like the fronds of the water-fern.

When he was cooled, he tied his kit to his belt and wandered down the creek-bed stooping to look for crayfish under the stones. His hand, quick as a hawk, would pounce on their tails as they shot backwards from their rocky homes and soon his kit was filled with the green-brown crawling creatures.

"Kapai te Koura! Haeremai Tiger," and they went down the creek to the river.

Wiri put down his kit and lay on the river bank. The hot air round him was filled with the scent of the penny royal, and the sleepy hum of the wild bees and the ziz-zizzing of the locusts...

So still, so heavy, so hot...

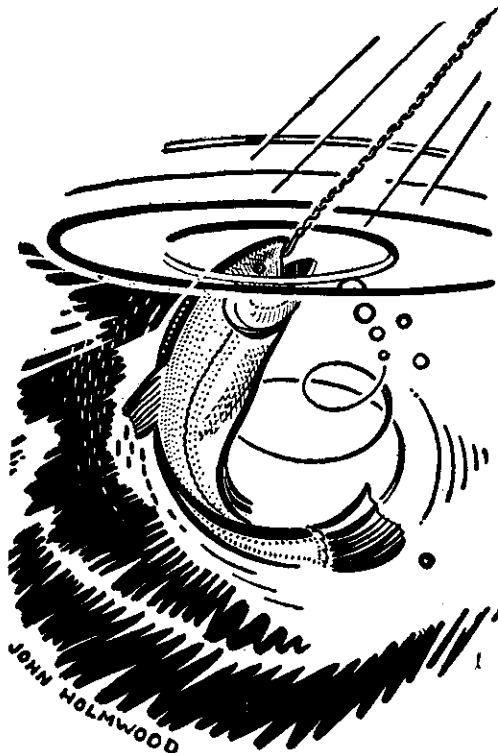
At the mouth of the creek the fat trout lay feeding, sleepy and lazy, and across the river, the heat rose like a sheet of quivering glass.

"Ziz...ziz...ziz...ziz...z...z...S...S..." Wiri sat up and rubbed his eyes. That wasn't one of the sounds which go to make the great sleepy silence of mid-day. That wasn't the whirr of the army of locusts on the tree trunks. That was a pakeha fishing up the river, flicking his line over the water like Rangī, the bullock driver flicked his long-whip down the smooth backs of the bullocks. But the trout still slept in the cool deep water, undisturbed—too lazy to rise.

Wiri took out his flax eel line. He would fish too and catch a big, big eel for Hori—Hori, he like Tuna.

So he picked a pipi from the sand and cracked it on a stone. He fixed the juicy bait to his eel hook and let the line down, down into the deep green water.

Up the river, the pakeha's line softly whistled across the water and Wiri's pipi dropped into the green as he tried another place. By corry, what a tug, what a big, big eel he must have caught this time. He gripped his line and peered into the green water to see the struggling monster. But it wasn't a big eel at all, it was a giant brown trout caught unawares in the sleepy heat of the day.



Wiri held tight to the line and walked down the river bank, dragging the heavy plunging weight down stream. He came to where the water shallowed and dragged the flapping fish on to the sand while Tiger barked till the rocks echoed with the noise, And from the bank the Pakeha shouted:

"Hi! Can't you keep that dog quiet! By Jove! What's that? A twelve-pounder! What's your fly, boy?"

Wiri stared.

"What fly did you hook him with?"

Wiri held up his flax line.

"But, I say, you can't do that old chap, it's not sporting, you know—it's against the law!"

Wiri still stared. He was mad, the Pakeha man, porangi.

"I say, you must put it back, but we'll weigh him first. He'll go twelve if an ounce!" And he pulled out his tiny weighing machine and lifted the trout with the hook.

"By gad! a pretty fish, eleven and three quarters, My word, you're a clever boy!" And he searched in his pockets. "Will you take this for your fish?" He held up a pound note.

Wiri looked at the man and he looked at the fish and he looked at the pound note. That's what Hori would like. So he took the note and ran along the river bank and up the hill to the maize patch where Hori was working. He pushed the pound into Hori's hand and gabbled in Maori until he had told him all about it. Hori chuckled and was pleased as he patted his head. "By corry, you the good boy!" And he was proud of Wiri.

But this isn't the end of the story, because Hori was at the Waterford's six months later, and when he was leaving Mrs. Waterford said: "Hori, here's a meat pie for you and there's part of a bag of flour and some warm shirts I cut down for Wiri. Oh, and Hori, a bundle of magazines I thought you might like to see."

So Hori took the pie and the flour and the shirts and the magazines and trudged down the road through the mud and rain and down the track to the river. He put his load on the cage and pulled himself over and tied the cage to the Rimu tree. He climbed up the slippery track to the whare and went inside. He lit the candle and made some tea in the billy, and he and Wiri sat by the fire and ate slice after slice of Mrs. Waterford's pie, because they hadn't had any breakfast or any dinner and only kumara and puha the night before.

When they had finished, Hori lit his pipe and they looked at the papers Mrs. Waterford had given them. Some were from England and Wiri liked the beautiful pakeha women and their fine clothes with beads round their necks.

He liked the pakeha men too, riding on horses as smooth and shiny as flax. And the men with their fishing rods like the pakeha up the river.

He saw a picture of a man like the pakeha, standing by a tree fern and holding up a big, brown trout—and he looked harder because it was his pakeha and it was his fish.

So he showed it to Hori, and Hori read the writing underneath the picture which said:

"Mr. Maurice Laird, the well-known angler, with a fourteen pound brown trout which he took from the Waitukituki river on a recent visit to New Zealand."

Then Hori laughed and laughed till you couldn't hear the rain on the roof or the angry roar of the river, but only Hori laughing.

He took his knife and cut out the picture. He mixed some flour and water and smeared it on the back and pasted it on the wall beside the King and the "Mandalay" and the fruit trees and beautiful pakeha women.

He stroked the little boy's hair as he gazed proudly at the picture, and better than anyone else in the world Wiri loved Hori.

Tiger, the pig dog, pushed his head under Hori's other hand, and by the fire that sleepy ball Miu opened an eye for a moment and shut it again, because more than anything else in the world, Miu loved sleeping.

(Next week you will hear about lots of things, the most important being Tinopai, Wiri's grandmother.)