

Poi Dancing

(Continued from page 3.)

the ranks, which stand slightly extended, two deep, wheel by sections to the right, forming fours, to the accompaniment of the plaintive ditties and the weird notes of the flute or kōhau. Then one realises in a flash the ingenuity of the colour arrangement, dark and white. As the poi faces the visitors, two deep, white alternates with black; as they form fours, white and black are grouped in sections, apart, and on returning to line the two colours come together again with powerful effect. The whole is set off by the solid background of the crouching warriors, with spears aslant, dug lightly into the earth.

Presently the accompanying music seems to glide into a seductive waltz. And was there ever a stranger dance set to music than this? Before the second bar is reached there is a change in the ranks, which are now in quincunx formation, the white in front, the black in the rear, showing between.

The rhythm having changed, the motion is subdued to a slow gliding swing, the faces of the dancers half turned to the right, in their hands they now grasp two pois, one in each hand, and with these they bewitch all who gaze upon them. One whirls in a half-circle from shoulder to head, while the other sinks from head to breast to linger a brief moment ere both flash upward and circle down to meet at the knee.

With bodies swaying forward, the dancers step lightly and bring the pois

up, merrily playing round each other until level with the breast, then, with a half-turn the right poi glances upward and touches the next dancer on the shoulder, while the left poi lingers



SIR APIRANA NGATA,
Politician and Maori scholar, whose article on Poi Dances is reproduced herewith.
—S. P. Andrew, photo.

twirling at an angle to the left of the head.

And ever the black and white change places, mingle or draw up into one long rank of alternating light and shade, or wheel to right or left in fours, to no other command than the unwearying strains of the quaint Maori music and song. At length it ceases. The poi

rests under the armpits of the dancers, who stand with folded arms, and bow, while the long-pent-up sigh of the enchanted spectators bursts into a loud clamour of applause.

THE old Maoris say that the poi dances of their time were even more effective, the strings used with the poi balls being far longer, some six feet, and extending the picturesque gossamer effect of the twirling balls, the dancers being necessarily in extended order and the display more imposing. The old dance was slower and allowed more time for the display of grace and the elaboration of gesture.

The ostensible object of the poi from the first was to give graceful welcome to strangers (manuhiri), visiting tribes, kino rangatiras, and other persons of distinction. But gradually there grew up another object, which was to attract the fighting men from other tribes, and invariably the best chosen dancers and the best ordered pois kept the ranks of the tanas up to their full strength. To-day, of course, these pois are no more than what they were originally intended to be, the women's portion of the ceremonial welcome of a hospitable, artistic, and punctilious people.

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WHEN the recently-launched American liners President Hoover and President Coolidge take to the seas for their regular sailings they will be equipped with lifeboats containing radio sets tuned to the S.O.S. wave length of 600 metres, with sending keys that automatically produce the distress call

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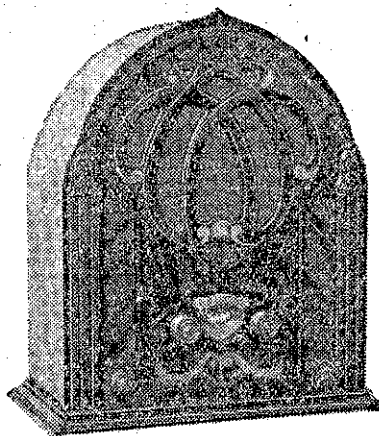
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