

# Humour and the Maori

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Illustrated by Kingi McKinnon

Up to the turn of the century the Maori, with his ready wit, shrewd observation and outrageously broken English, was the source of a great deal of good natured humour among back-country settlers. Mustering in the sale yards, down in the cow sheds or having a break in the woolshed – wherever a couple or more cow cockies or shearers were taking time off, one was sure to come up with the latest 'Maori story'.

Maybe it would be something simple like: MURU'S HORSE.

'I got t'erry fine horse, an I sell im cheap. He t'werry good bleed'.

Is he a pedigree horse Muru?

'Oh, yeh; she te perikee allright'.

Who is he by?

'Eh?'

Who-is-he-by?

'Who he py? Oh, he py his bloomin self out in te yard!'

All the jokes or stories were racial in the strictest sense of the word – but few reflected any real prejudices: they were told to amuse, nothing more. Here is NIGHT-TIME.

A tourist said to an intelligent Maori woman: 'How is it you Maori people are brown whereas you are so much like the Britisher in all other ways, Ngahuia?'

'Oh, I think that because te pakeha born in te daytime, and we Maori born in te nighttime'.

'Well, well. And what about the part-Maori'.

'Oh, I tink he born in t'moonlight!'

Banal perhaps, but nonetheless curiously funny. Like TE QUICK WAY.

'Hi! Brian, how far tou tink it up to Matamata?'

'Oh, I dunno, I tink you ride te bike – about tirty mile – crow ride te bike, 'bout twenty mile!'

Most Maori jokes were short. However, some were quite involved stories.

Among these: THE DEAD RACE-HORSE.

Ruatahuna, Rangi saw two pakeha standing and looking at a dead race horse in a paddock.

Rangi went up and asked them what they would take for it.

'He's dead, Rangi. What's the use of him now?'

'I gif you ten pound for him'.

They laughed and said 'All right'.

Rangi went off to the pa and told the other Maori's that he had bought the famous racehorse 'Toto' and would raffle him at a pound a ticket.

One hundred and fifty pounds were



soon collected, and Hohepa won the raffle.

'Well done', said Rangi, 'you get him pride, and we go and catch it'.

So off they went together. Rangi pretended to hunt about the paddock for him. At last he said to the winner: 'Oh, I see him. He have te sleep under te tree. You go quiet an put te pride on him'.

Hohepa went up gingerly, then said: 'Py korry, he's dead!'

'No, no. He have a good sleep. He go werry fast an git tire!'

But it was no good bluffing any longer, so Rangi said: 'Py cripes, he die werry quick. I sorry, Hohepa. I give you back the pound. No matter to other fellers. They lost te raffle anyway!'

In a Native School Reader (1905) is

this short essay written by a highly imaginative, and confused, Maori boy: TE SHEPP.

Spring time is the time in the every year when all the stuffs that animals and mens eat are growed on the farms. When the animals think that the stuffs is big enough to eat they has the baby animals. The cow he lay down and he have the calf and the shepp he lie down and he have the baby too. Sometimes the she shepp and sometimes the bull shepp, but the bull shepp he lay down and get up without anythink!

And finally, a Maori boy was asked by his teacher what he would do if he saw a newfangled car crash into a tree and throw it's driver bleeding to the ground. He answered: I'd order a coffin!