

Sir John Gorst

PROPAGANDIST
OF THE SIXTIES



By R. M. BURDON

ONE DAY in the year 1906, two old men, one a distinguished looking, bearded Englishman, and the other a tattooed Maori, greeted each other warmly on the deck of a liner which had just drawn up at an Auckland wharf.

The Englishman, Sir John Gorst, had just arrived to represent the British Government at the International Exhibition in Christchurch. He had had a distinguished parliamentary career, having at one time been a member of what was known as the fourth party—a group of young conservatives consisting of himself, Sir Henry Wolff, Arthur Balfour (a future Prime Minister), and Lord Randolph Churchill (a future Chancellor of the Exchequer and the father of Winston Churchill).

The fourth party grew out of the Bradlaugh incident—that bewildering wrangle over the conduct of Charles Bradlaugh, radical and atheist—who declined taking the oath of allegiance when elected to Parliament. The fourth party worked on two principles—each member was allowed complete freedom of action, but whenever one of them was attacked the others were expected to defend him.

"Upon these conditions," writes Winston Churchill in his life of his father, "was created a parliamentary group which proved, in proportion to its numbers, the most formidable and effective force for the purposes of opposition in the history of the House of Commons." The group broke up when Lord Salisbury's Government came into power in 1885, and two of its members were

appointed to high office—Gorst becoming Solicitor-General.

Soon after Sir George Grey arrived in September, 1861, to become Governor of New Zealand for a second term, a well-known Maori chief, Wiremu Tamihana, complained about the liquor that was being smuggled into Waikato. Advantage was taken of this complaint to send a Magistrate into the district with orders to learn all he could of the state of affairs—especially of the growth of the King movement—and to keep the Government informed. Gorst, who had but newly arrived in the colony, was chosen for the mission.

The Maoris, however, suspicious of his intentions from the first, refused to recognize him. He was subjected to a mild form of boycott, which, fortunately for him, was not applied to the supplying of food. To employ such an expedient was beneath the Maoris' conception of political, or for that matter, actual warfare. They were as yet merely suspicious, but when, towards the end of 1862, Gorst was sent to found a school at Te Awamutu, their suspicion changed to alarm.

Actually the intention of the Governor was to educate and anglicize a number of young Maoris who might afterwards be expected to renounce allegiance to the Waikato king and remain faithful to the British Government in whatever circumstances may arise.

There was already a mission school at Te Awamutu which was now taken over, enlarged, and improved. Its pupils, con-