

Presbyterian Affirm Seminar, 14 November 2016

Centennial History of Matamata Plains. Edited by T. E. McMillan. Matamata County Council, 1951.

*The story of Tarore is taken from the records of an early Methodist Missioner.

Ngakuku was the proud father of a lovely, curly-headed, dark-eyed little daughter, whom he determined should have the advantage of the education that the missionaries were then offering. So Tarore (as she was then named) was sent on the rough and tiring journey to Tauranga, on the other side of the blue range of bush-clad mountains. Archdeacon and Mrs Brown warmly welcomed the little lass, and soon fell in love with her native charm. She was an eager pupil, and soon learned to read, and to make herself useful in the old mission house. When the time came for Tarore to leave them, her tutors did not like parting with their bright young charge, and, to show their love for her, as well as to encourage her new learning, they presented her with a small copy of St. Luke's Gospel. This delighted the child, and treasuring her priceless gift, she kept it in a Maori kit hung round her plump little neck. She was so fond of it that even at night she would not be parted from it, and slept with it under her head. She was justly proud of what she had been taught, and would spend the twilight evenings reading from her little book to her father and his men. As she did so, the old Chief became convinced of a higher Chief's authority, and declared that the words the child read to him were those of a Great Spirit, and so he became a Christian-not an easy life then for a Maori Chief.

Some time later, Ngakuku and his party set out to travel the rough bush country. Although they knew the Journey might be long and dangerous, they took with them little Tarore and her young brother, who was but a baby. Towards evening they came to a spot that was even more beautiful and peaceful than the many enchanting scenes they had that day passed, and so they decided to camp for the night, all being tired and hungry. A blazing fire was lit near the great gurgling waterfalls that seemed to start hundreds of feet above them. Enjoying their meal and a well-earned rest, they thought of little else, and so forgot the smoke that curled its way to freedom above the mighty tree tops. Far more alert was the war tribe further up the valley. They had noticed the tell-tale clouds of smoke, and cunningly waited for their best chance of attack. Towards daylight next morning, Ngakuku and his men were surrounded by the enemy tribe. Ordering his men to climb the hill by way of escape, the old Chief, in his anxiety for his tribe, forgot his precious little daughter, who was asleep beside the falls (Wairere Falls, along the old Matamata-Te Aroha Road, past Turanga-o-moana). Probably the soothing sound of the rushing waters prevented her from hearing the disturbance in the camp, and it is doubtful if she ever wakened to her surroundings, which had been so abruptly changed.

When he realized what had happened, poor Ngakuku was almost heartbroken, so in deep grief he returned to the scene of the tragedy, and found the body of his darling Tarore, and, carefully lifting her, he took her back to Matamata to be buried in the customary Maori style. His men were so infuriated by what had happened that they planned revenge, but Ngakuku would have none of it, saying, in his own language: "I have learned to love the Great Spirit, and He will see to the revenge." [A Maori version of "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay thee"-Ed.] More fighting was carried on about two weeks later, and three of the raiders were killed, but Uita, their Chief, escaped without harm. Taking with him the trophies of the battle, he returned to Rotorua, and there arrived with the kit and Gospel belonging to little Tarore. Some time later, a slave named Ripakau, who was able to read a little, came to Rotorua, and wanted to show his knowledge by reading Tarore's little book. Old Uita listened with keen interest, and the truth of what he heard sunk deep into his darkened heart, and he became a changed man. When he fully understood what had happened, as a result of listening to the reading of Tarore's book, he informed her father of the good news, and so in this way Ngakuku felt that the Great Spirit had avenged him.

In an open field about an hour's drive from our office in Hamilton, there is a small unmarked grave. A white cross adorns the resting place of a twelve year old girl who died in the year 1836. [...] The name of the girl buried in the grave is Tarore and she was martyred at the age of twelve, while bearing the Gospel of Luke in Maori to the people of Ngati Haua and Tauranga Moana. From about the age of seven, she had been taught to read Maori through the medium of Luke's Gospel, the first Gospel to be printed in Maori in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Her tutor was Charlotte Brown, the local CMS missionary teacher and she quickly acquired great skill not at [sic] only at reading, but also at reciting and memorising and proclaiming key parts of Luke's Gospel.

Tarore, this herald of the Kingdom of God, travelled widely through the Matamata, Te Aroha, Waharoa and Tauranga Moana area, sometimes crisscrossing the Kaimai Ranges with her father, Ngakuku, and other Gospel bearers. Tragically, one night while camping in the Kaimai Ranges, just at the foot of the Wairere Falls, a raiding party from Rotorua came across Tarore's group and attacked their camp, pillaging what they could find. In the arousal to action and skirmish, Tarore was still asleep when she received a blow to the head. Her attacker removed the Gospel of Luke she had been using as a pillow, thinking it might be tradable. Her death immediately created a desire for 'utu' (revenge) but at her funeral the next day at Matamata, Ngakuku, her father, preached against reprisal saying there had been too much bloodshed already and that the people should trust in the justice of God.

Tarore's copy of the Gospel of Luke had a continuing history. Uita, her murderer, having taken Tarore's Gospel from under her body during the attack, was unable to read and it lay unused in his Pa (fortified village). Sometime later a slave from the far north (named Ripahau), who could read, was brought to the Pa. He read to the people from the Gospel. Uita was so taken with the grace and goodness and forgiveness mentioned in the great parables of Luke that his heart began to change. This process eventually led to his feeling compelled to go to Tarore's father Ngakuku and to repent. This was an extremely dangerous thing to do, of course, and could well have cost him his life. However, he chose to visit Ngakuku at Waharoa. As the two men approached each other, it is said that they paused and stared at each other full of emotion. Ngakuku could see Uita's tears and they eventually fell upon each other and embraced. A local story has it that where their tears moistened the ground, a small Raupo Church was built to hallow the spot of a most profound reconciliation.

19 Oct 1836. About 7 o'clock this morning, three of the lads who left yesterday entered our house in a breathless condition, conveying the distressing intelligence that their little company had been attacked on the road by a murdering party from Rotorua, from whom they had made their escape. As the lads could give no information respecting their companions, we were left in a most anxious state as to their safety. In about two hours afterward, Ngakuku arrived, accompanied by two other natives bearing the mangled corpse of his only little girl, who had been murdered by the fight. They had taken away her heart and the top of her head as an offering to the evil Spirit. The wailing of the relatives of our poor school girl was truly harrowing - and their wild lamentations was not a little increased by the friends of the other boys and girls, who, it was feared, had been taken prisoners.

In the afternoon, to the great relief of our minds, the remainder of the party arrived, Mr Flatt excepted, who had proceeded to Tauranga with no other covering than two shirts, the fight having taken possession of his clothes and bedding, as well as of our different packages, and destroyed the chairs and tables. The merciful preservation of twenty natives out of twenty one appears almost miraculous, and calls aloud for our praise and gratitude. It appears that the fight had been lurking about the plain between this place and Maungatautari, searching for a payment on account of a man who was murdered on the road to Rotorua when Waharoa's party attacked that place; and that attracted by the fires of our natives they directed their steps to the encampment, and arrived there shortly before day break. The barking of a dog awakened some of the lads, who hearing the sound of footsteps, endeavoured hastily to rouse their companions, and then rushed out of the hut to conceal themselves; some in the fern and others in the woods. Four girls, however, and two boys were still in the hut when the fight came up, but favored by the darkness they all escaped except Ngakuku's daughter, who was seized and murdered. His only little boy he saved by fleeing with him on his back and hiding him in the high fern.

While talking to poor Ngakuku this afternoon and endeavouring to administer consolation to him, he remarked, "The only reason why my heart is dark is that I do not know whether my child is gone to heaven or to the reinga. She has heard the Gospel with her ears, and read it to Mother Brown; but I do not know whether she has received it into her heart. After evening prayers at the chapel, Ngakuku rose and addressed the natives from John XIV 1.

Oct 20 1836. Buried poor Tarore at the Pa. Those who so narrowly escaped sharing a like death followed the corpse to the grave, around which were ranged various groups from the different native residences. After singing a hymn, and addressing the assembled party, Ngakuku asked me if he might also say a few words, and on my assenting, he said with deep solemnity of feeling, "There lies my child, she has been murdered as a payment for your bad conduct, but do not you rise to seek a payment for her, God will do that. Let this be the finishing of the war with Rotorua; now let peace be made. My heart is not dark for Tarore, but for you. You urged teachers to come to you; they came, and now you are driving them away. You are crying for my girl: I am crying for you, for myself, for all of us. Perhaps this murder is a sign of God's anger toward us for our sins. Turn to him: believe or you will all perish." Can I doubt who it is that has given calmness and resignation and peace to this poor native at a time when we could expect little else than the wild tumult of unsubdued grief? Let those who treat the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart as an idle fable, account on natural principles for the scene I have this day been privileged to witness. It was not insensibility on the part of Ngakuku, for his feelings are naturally keen. It was not indifference toward his family, for he was fondly attached to his child. No, it was the manifestation of His power who amidst the loudest howling of the wildest storm, distinctly whispers to his children, It is I, be not afraid. Peace, be still.

Oct 19/36 I was called to witness one of the most dreadful murders ever known in this land. I say dreadful, because it was a murder of the innocent. I will give it as it occurred. You will, I have no doubt, Sir, have learnt by this time that the station of Matamata is given up. Under these circumstances, the Committee wished me to proceed on to Tauranga to get another rush house up for those who was appointed to that station. On 18th instant I left Matamata for Tauranga on horseback. The Rev. A N Brown sent some of his things with us and some of his domestics with us; male and female natives --- altogether about 20 natives. We took up our abode (about 10 or 12 miles from Matamata) for the night, there being a native house for the natives, and plenty of wood and water at hand. My tent being fixed, supper prepared by the natives, horse made fast, and provided with food, all before sunset, after supper I called the natives together to family prayer as usual. After singing an hymn, I read part of John III, and concluded by prayer, all in their own language. After committing myself to the care and protection of my heavenly father, I closed my tent and retired to rest. I awoke sooner than usual next night morning, before day light, just as the day began to dawn. Two native dogs began to bark. Some of the poor unprotected natives heard a party of their enemies coming, in all probability to murder them all. They took the alarm and fled for their lives into a large wood close at hand. All escaped except one little girl, a domestic of the Rev A N Brown, the only daughter of a candidate for baptism, Nakuku by name. This poor girl, about 10 or 12 years of age, not being sufficiently awakened from her sleep, fell a victim to their ferocity in fron of my tent. Her cries were truly distressing. Tho' short, one of the enemy fired at her: she fell wounded, but did not cease crying until she was murdered with a small axe. I saw one of the party chopping her chest, and I have since learnt that they took out her heart, and took away the top part of the skull. The heart would be offered to their god, or rather to the devil, and the piece of skull would be shown as a token of victory when they returned back to Rotorua, their home.