

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

Ngakuku of Ngati Haua - Teacher, Evangelist

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(AHS Newsletter 68, May 2019)



In the Waikato Area

Ngakuku was a chief of Waikato, from the Ngati Haua people living near Waharoa (close to Matamata). He was a nephew of Te Waharoa¹ and a cousin of Wiremu Tamihana.²

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary, the Revd. A. N. Brown³ stationed at Matamata⁴ writes in his diary for 24 June 1835: 'Ngakuku very ill ... quite insane, but still he insists upon being led to attend prayers whenever he hears the bell ring. The Maoris say he is visited with this severe illness for attending the Missionaries' Karakia (Service) and for putting aside native superstitions.'

On 30 June he notes: '[Ngakuku] is gradually recovering his strength.'

Then, on 24 August, Brown records: 'Met my little band of three enquirers this evening. I was speaking to them on their duty of persevering in the course they had entered upon ... 'Looking unto Jesus' for support and strength. Ngakuku remarked, 'That is very good. If I plant potatoes with no heart to my work, my crop is scanty, but if I labour hard and my heart is very large, then

my crop is large. I suppose it is the same in spiritual things.'

In his entry for 22 January 1836, Brown reports that there was a hui to discuss the murder of a chief: 'The Chiefs, whilst speaking, held some instrument of war in their hands. Ngakuku had in his hands the Scriptures and in allusion to it remarked, 'This is the two-barrelled gun and the cartridge box and the war axe of the Believer.'

In April of that year Brown writes that Ngakuku: 'put away one of his two wives immediately on his professing a desire to become a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

On 9th April, the first anniversary of his arrival in the Matamata area, Brown lists Ngakuku as one of the two men for whom 'we have reason to hope the Gospel is proving under the influence of the Holy Spirit, a saviour of life into life ...'

But a breakdown of relationships between Ngati Haua and Te Arawa led to events that were to test Ngakuku's trust in the Gospel.⁵ The missionaries had decided to move to Te Papa, Tauranga, and a party set out which included Ngakuku and his children. Near the foot of the Wairere Falls they camped for the night.

Unfortunately, a group from Te Arawa had seen their campfire and just before dawn on 19th October 1836 they attacked. In the confusion Ngakuku rescued his younger children but 12-year-old Tarore was killed.⁶

A copy of Te Rongopai a Ruka (The Gospel of Luke), given to Tarore by Mrs Charlotte Brown,⁷ had been taken by her murderers. It was later to be the spark for conversions and reconciliations with wide-ranging effects.

At 9am the next day Ngakuku returned to Mata-mata carrying his daughter Tarore's body, from which some parts had been removed for a sacrifice. Tucker writes: 'Two years before and Ngakuku would have demanded 'utu' for a far slighter injury than this; but now he brought the dead body of his beloved child meekly to the settlement; and when Mr. Brown attempted to comfort him, the heart-stricken father answered, '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 with Mata Brown, but I do not know whether she received it into her heart.'⁸

At her burial on 20th October, Ngakuku urged that there be no revenge but the making of peace. He commended trust in God rather than human utu.

Archdeacon Brown records the occasion in these words: 'Buried poor Tarore at the pa. Those who so narrowly escaped sharing a like death, followed the corpse to the grave ... 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 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 towards us for our sins. Turn to him. Believe, or you will all perish.' Can I doubt who it is that has given calmness, resignation, and peace to this poor native at a time when we could have expected little else than the wild tumult of unsubdued grief? It was not insensibility on the part of Ngakuku, for his feelings are naturally keen; it was not indifference, for he was fondly attached to his child. No! It was the manifestation of His power who, amidst the loudest bowlings [sic] of the wildest storm, distinctly whispers to His children, 'It is I, be not afraid.'

In the Bay of Plenty and East Coast Areas

Ngakuku began to share the new trust in the God he had accepted, and we have accounts of his preaching and teaching in Uawa (Tolaga Bay), Opotiki, and later at Te Whaiti and Te Urewera.

William Williams the CMS missionary in Turanga (Gisborne) writes in his journal: 'Ngakuku (William Marsh) of Tauranga stayed at Uawa during 1838 and established worship among the people.'⁹

On Good Friday 1839 Ngakuku was baptised by A. N. Brown and took the name **Wiremu Maihi** or **William Marsh**. ('William' from the missionaries Henry and William Williams, and 'Marsh' which was the name of A. N. Brown's only son).

There are accounts of Ngakuku's teaching in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. He is described as a convert who was teaching Christianity to Whakatohea at Pakowhai (Opotiki).¹⁰ From the Te Papa mission station at Tauranga A.N. Brown¹¹ sent Ngakuku to Opotiki in September 1839 to prepare the way for a resident-missionary. He was acting as a teacher as beginning the mission.¹² Converts were already holding regular services there. Whakatohea requested the CMS to send them a missionary. Ngakuku returned on 29th December with the Revd. J. A. Wilson.¹³

In April 1840, William Williams¹⁴ in Turanga records: 'Heard from William Ngakuku who is just from Opotiki, that three Popish priests had arrived at Tauranga, some of whom will doubtless come further down on the coast. ¹⁵ After which I was engaged during the remainder of the day in attending to applications for books. Among the applicants was a party from Uawa, being representatives of 6 tribes, who seem to be all with one consent enquiring after better things. Wm. Ngakuku, a native teacher from Tauranga, now on a visit at that place, writes me word that he finds the people there so desirous of instruction that he must continue there for a time. ¹⁶

Jane Williams¹⁷ writes: 'April 5, Sunday. Ngakuku came while we were at breakfast. We felt disappointed at his bringing not a single line from Mr. Brown to inform us of what was going on. Ngakuku did his best to make up for Mr. B's deficiencies, and gave us a great deal of news, much of which we give credit to.' ¹⁸

In 1841 Ngakuku went with Brown to Rotorua and Taupo. Upon returning to Rotorua at the end of that visitation, Brown drew the following contrast: 'We were accompanied on this trip by William Marsh. When he last visited Taupo, it was to fight; on this occasion, he went as a messenger of peace, a teacher of the Gospel, of which he was then ignorant.' ¹⁹

On the return journey Brown records: 'Our little company was very cheerful, and travelled well; so that, although it was the shortest day of the year, and the woods and swamps were in a wretched state, we reached Matamata at dark, and immediately assembled the Natives for prayers. On passing a stream in the woods, over which a friendly tree has been thrown to serve as a winter's bridge, William Marsh [Ngakuku] observed, 'This tree is like Christ. There is no way of passing the gulph [sic] that leads to heaven, but by Him: without Him we must either stop on one side of the river and die with hunger, or

venture into the water and be carried away by the force of the stream.' ²⁰

Later Missionary Work

Little of detail is known of Ngakuku's later missionary work. He [Ngakuku] also frequently accompanied Archdeacon Brown on his journeys and assisted wherever he could in forwarding the work of the missionaries, including work in the Te Whaiti area of the Urewera Range. In later years as Archdeacon Brown was confined to Tauranga by his bad eyesight, it was Ngakuku and others who carried on the work further afield. ²¹

The consequences of Tarore's death and Ngakuku's refusal to seek utu did not end in 1836.

Uita, the man who was responsible for Tarore's death and who took her copy of Luke's Gospel, is said to have had the Gospel read to him by a slave called Ripahau. He was moved by what he heard to a sense of repentance for Tarore's death and was converted to Christianity. This experience led Uita to send a message asking if he could visit the church at Ngakuku's pa to worship and to confess his faith in God. After some hesitation on the part of Ngakuku's people, his request was granted. He arrived at the pa a visibly changed man and asked Ngakuku in great humility to forgive him. It is said that they knelt in the little church and prayed together. ²²

There is reference to Ngakuku (Wiremu Maihi), and a time when he continued to be associated with Archdeacon Brown in Tauranga, in a letter from a Mr. Clarke to the Hon J. C. Richmond on 12th May 1867 where he comments: 'On the 3rd, a Native by the name of Ngakuku, one of the Ngaiterangi, was surprised and taken prisoner by a party of Hauhaus, headed by Kewene of the Ngatiporou. This man Kewene caught hold of Ngakuku by the hair of his head, and it is said was about tomahawking him, when a relation of the prisoner's, who was of Kewene's party, interposed and saved his life. His clothes were, however, taken from him. This matter has greatly exasperated the Ngaiterangi. ²³

Ngakuku is one of the Māori evangelists celebrated in 'Poi', a chant written by the late Archdeacon Sir Kingi Matutaera Ihaka to tell that story of the spread of the gospel in Aotearoa.

Ngakuku's story, bound up with that of his daughter, continues to be told when those of so many other early Māori evangelists have been forgotten.

Every year, 14 May,
Ngakuku, Missionary in Mataatua,
is remembered
in the church's liturgical calendar.

Endnotes

¹ Tucker, Miss, *The Southern Cross and Southern Crown; or, the Gospel in New Zealand*, New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1866, p.198. http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/tucker_cross1866/16.html

² <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t82/1>

³ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1b35/1>

⁴ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/waikato-places/15>

⁵ Stokes, Evelyn, *Wiremu Tamihana Rangatira*, Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2002.

⁶ 'Te Kōrero Mō Tārore (1836) The Story of Tarore (1836)' in *He Kōrero Pai nā Ruka mai i te Paipera Tapu me te Contemporary English Version ~ Good News From Luke from the Maori Bible (Paipera Tapu) and the Contemporary English Version*, Wellington: Bible Society, 2003; Taepa, (The Revd Canon) Hohepa, *The Rangiatea Story*, Levin, 1966; Loader, Arini, 'Me Whakairi Ngā Kōrero Ki Ngā Pakitara O Te Whare; He Kākano Ahau I Ruia Mai I Rangiatea' in *Te Pouhere Kōrero: Māori History, Māori People* 5, (2011), pp. 38-40; www.anglican.org.nz/content/download/512/4016/file/1910.rtf.

⁷ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1b35/1>

⁸ Tucker, op.cit. p. 200.

⁹ Porter, Frances (ed.), *The Turanga Journals 1840-1850: Letters and Journals of William and Jane Williams Missionaries to Poverty Bay*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1974, Journal 14 April 1839, p. 75n.

¹⁰ Matthews & Matthews Architects Ltd in association with Lyn Williams, Shirley Arabin, A.R. Skidmore & Associates (eds), *Whakatane Built Heritage Study: Part One*, Issue 3, prepared for Whakatane District Council, New Zealand Historic Places Trust, Environment Bay of Plenty, November 2007, p. 10.

¹¹ <http://www.theelms.org.nz/?name=maori&page=97>

¹² Rosevear, Watson, *Waiapu: The Story of a Diocese*, Hamilton: Paul's Book Arcade, 1960.

¹³ Matthews & Matthews Architects Ltd., Lyn Williams, R A Skidmore and Associates, Archaeology B.O.P. (eds), *Opotiki Town Centre Historic Heritage Study: Part One*, prepared for Opotiki District Council, New Zealand Historic Places Trust, Environment Bay of Plenty, March 2006, p.15.

¹⁴ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1w26/1>

¹⁵ Porter, Frances (ed.), *The Turanga Journals 1840-1850: Letters and Journals of William and Jane Williams Missionaries to Poverty Bay*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1974, Journal 5 April 1840, p. 97.

¹⁶ Porter, Frances (ed.), *The Tauranga Journals 1840-1850: Letters and Journals of William and Jane Williams Missionaries to Poverty Bay*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1974, Journal 22 April 1840, p. 98.

¹⁷ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1w23/1>

¹⁸ op.cit. p. 99.

¹⁹ Brown, AN, Journal 1841.

²⁰ The Church Missionary Record Detailing Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for the Year 1840, Vol. 11, Australasia Mission, London: Richard Watts, 1840, AN Brown Journal June 21, 1841.

²¹ Booth, Ken (ed.), *For All the Saints: A Resource for the Commemorations of the Calendar*, Hastings: General Secretary, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, 1996, p. 166.

²² Booth, ibid.

²³ 'Papers Relative to Affairs at Tauranga', Appendix to Journal of the House of Representatives, 1867, No. 66, 12th May 1867

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Menu A

Missionaries <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/cultural-go-betweenes/3>

Missions and the Māori <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/maori-pakeha-relations/2>

Anglican Church <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/nga-hahi-maori-and-christian-denominations/1>

Maori converts <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/missions-and-missionaries/5>

Menu B

Tamihana Te Rauparaha <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t75/1>

Matene Te Whiwhi <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t89/1>

Ripahau in Octavius Hadfield <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1h2/1>

Other Links

Tucker, 'Southern Cross & Southern Crown' http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/tucker_cross1866/16.htm1

'Te Waharoa, Wiremu Tamihana Tarapipipi' <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t82/1>

'Brown, Alfred Nesbit' <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1b35/1>

'Waikato Places – Matamata' <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/waikato-places/15>

'Brown, Charlotte' <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1b35/1>

'Tarore's Grave' http://www.monumentalstories.gen.nz/bio_27.html

'The Elms' <http://www.theelms.org.nz/?name=maori&page=97>

'Williams, William' <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1w26/1>

'Williams, Jane' <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1w23/1>