

1860

# Tawhiao, Tukaroto Matutaera Potatau Te Wherowhero

?-1894

Maori King, Waikato leader, prophet

By R. T. Mahuta

## Biography

Tawhiao, of Ngati Mahuta in the Tainui confederation of tribes, was the son of Waikato leader Potatau Te Wherowhero and Whakaawi, Potatau's senior wife. He was born at Orongokoekoea on the upper Mokau River towards the end of the musket wars between Nga Puhi and Waikato. It is said that he was named Tukaroto to commemorate Potatau's stand at the siege of Matakītiki pa in May 1822. Later he was baptised Matutaera (Methuselah) by the Anglican missionary Robert Burrows. In 1864 Te Ua Haumene, the Hauhau prophet, bestowed on him the name Tawhiao.

He was raised by his maternal grandparents. During his adolescent years, his father encouraged him to be a man of peace. He was a Christian and a student of the Bible, as well as being well versed in the ancient rites of the Tainui priesthood. In later years Tawhiao's sayings were repeated as prophecies for the future.

His father was a renowned warrior and leader, and in 1858 was installed as the first Maori King. The King movement's supporters hoped that the position would help protect Maori land and foster unity between tribes. On Potatau's death in 1860 Tawhiao became the second Maori King. His reign was to last for 34 years, through the most turbulent era of Maori-Pakeha relations.

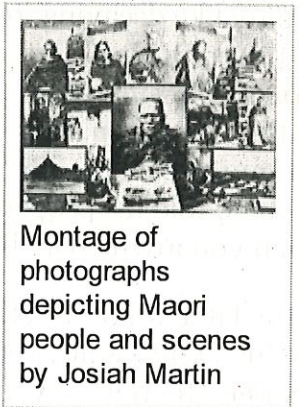
The major issues that confronted Maori after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 were the desire of the growing settler population for more land, and increasing social disorganisation as a result of European contact. Within the space of a generation, Maori had moved from a world in which they were totally in control to one in which control was rapidly moving into the hands of the settlers. The wars of the 1860s in Taranaki and Waikato and the government's subsequent confiscation of Maori land saw Tawhiao and his people rendered virtually landless and forced to retreat as wandering refugees into the heartland of Ngati Maniapoto, now known as the King Country. As a result of the invasion of Waikato by British forces in 1863 on the pretext that the Waikato tribes were preparing to attack Auckland, Tawhiao and his people lost over a million acres to the settler government and subsequently to the settlers themselves.



Tawhiao, the second Maori King



Tukaroto Matutaera Potatau Te Wherowhero Tawhiao



Montage of photographs depicting Maori people and scenes by Josiah Martin

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desperately seeking hope and deliverance from settler encroachment. Many Maori communities have retained accounts of Tawhiao's visits and sayings, in varying versions and with differing interpretations. The people were suffering from anxiety, deprivation, frustration and alienation. If deliverance was not to be found on earth, then perhaps assistance for Maori could be sought on another plane. A promise of salvation is encapsulated in the saying often heard on Waikato marae: 'This way of life will not continue beyond the days of my grandchildren when we shall reach salvation.' Through his reading of Scripture and discussion with early missionaries, Tawhiao became aware that his was not a unique struggle. He believed that in time others would come to the assistance of his cause, hence his saying, 'My friends will come from the four ends of the world. They are the shoemakers, the blacksmiths and the carpenters.'

During a visit to Taranaki about 1864 Tawhiao left one of his most enduring sayings: 'You, Taranaki, have one handle of the kit, and I, Waikato, have the other. A child will come some day and gather together its contents.' At the same time Tawhiao made a pact with the Taranaki people that the 'kit' containing the confiscated lands of both tribes was to be held as a trust until the day when one of their own would investigate its contents; that is, seek redress for past injustices. Sir Maui Pomare of Taranaki and Tumate Mahuta of Waikato were later believed to have been the descendants anticipated by Tawhiao: Pomare used the issue of confiscation in his campaign for election to Parliament in 1911; Tumate, Tawhiao's grandson and the younger brother of Te Rata, the fourth Maori King, made representations to government officials in the 1930s, concerning the injustices caused by the confiscations.

Tawhiao was regarded as a great visionary, and had many followers. His sayings have been variously described as poropitanga, tongi and whakakitenga; all of these terms imply prophetic, visionary or prescient states of being. The years from 1864 to 1881 which he and his followers spent in isolation provided them with ample time to meditate and speculate on their fate. It was during these quiescent times that many of his sayings emerged. These sayings provided a philosophical and ideological vision from which his followers would attempt to seek salvation. Reflecting on the military defeat of his people, the land confiscations, and the defection of many Maori to Christianity and the lifestyle of the Pakeha, Tawhiao promised that those who had remained faithful to the tenets of the King movement would be redeemed and exonerated by history. Tawhiao and his followers saw their predicament as a dramatic parallel to the biblical exile of the children of Israel.

Tawhiao's fundamentally pacifist nature is apparent in his renunciation of warfare between Maori and Pakeha. He said, 'Beware of being enticed to take up the sword. The result of war is that things become like decaying, old dried flax leaves. Let the person who raises war beware, for he must pay the price.' During 1875 he adopted the Pai Marire religion – in his own version, which was called Tariao (morning star) – as the faith of the King movement. The name 'Pai Marire' (good and gentle) was taken from a Waikato ritual chant. Tawhiao's grand-daughter, Te Puea, ensured the continuance of Pai Marire into modern times, recalling the story of how, just before his death, Tawhiao told his people, 'I shall return this gift to the base of the mountains, leaving it there to lie. When you are heavily burdened, then fetch it to you.'

In the later 1860s and the 1870s a number of meetings were held between the government and Tawhiao and his advisers, but little progress towards a reconciliation was made. In May 1878 the premier, George Grey, approached Tawhiao with a proposal including the return of unsold lands on the west of the Waipa and Waikato rivers, land at Ngaruawahia and in other townships, monetary aid, and rights over roads, surveys and land dealings. The thrust behind Grey's settlement was his wish to open the King Country, closed to Pakeha after the wars, so that a railway line running the length of the North Island could be built. On his council's advice Tawhiao refused. In July 1881, however, Tawhiao suggested a meeting with the government's representative at Alexandra (Pirongia) where he laid down his weapons, saying, 'This is the end of warfare in this land.'

While residing in Ngati Maniapoto territory, Tawhiao lived at various places including Tokangamutu (Te Kuiti), Hangatiki, Waitomo, Hikurangi (south of Pirongia Mountain) and Te Kakawa (on the shores of Aotea Harbour). Following his peace agreement with the government, he lived at Whatiwhatihoe, Maungatautari, Pukekawa and Parawera.

Denied the justice he sought from the New Zealand government, in 1884 Tawhiao led a deputation to England with a petition to Queen Victoria. When he was asked the reason for his journey he replied, 'I am going to see the Queen of England, to have the Treaty of Waitangi honoured'. The petition proposed a separate Maori parliament, the appointment of a special commissioner as intermediary between Pakeha and Maori parliaments, and an independent commission of inquiry into land confiscations. At a meeting with Lord Derby, the secretary of state for the colonies, Tawhiao acknowledged Queen Victoria's supremacy, and defined his own kingship as uniting the Maori as one people; not for purposes of separation but to claim the Queen's protection. However, Lord Derby stated that the petition had first to be referred to the New Zealand government. The New Zealand premier, Robert Stout, eventually responded to the Colonial Office by declining to discuss events preceding 1865, when the imperial government was responsible, and denying that there had been any infraction of the treaty since then. Tawhiao's specific proposals were dismissed or ignored.

Home in Waikato, Tawhiao sought solutions to Maori problems through the establishment of Maori institutions to deal with them. In 1885 he initiated the institution of Poukai, where the King would pay annual visits to King movement marae to encourage people to return to their home marae at least once a year. The first Poukai (originally called Puna-kai, or 'source of food') was held at Whatiwhatihoe in March 1885. It was a day for the less fortunate to be fed and entertained. The Poukai developed into an event which would later ensure direct consultation of the people with the King. In 1886 he suggested to the government that a Maori council be established, with wide-ranging powers. This was rejected, and his references to rights under the Treaty of Waitangi ignored. In the late 1880s he created his own parliament, Te Kauhanganui, at Maungakawa, to which all tribes were invited and asked to participate. However, many tribes resisted any suggestion of Tawhiao's authority beyond his own people, and the Kotahitanga parliaments, which Tawhiao and Te Kauhanganui supported in some measure, presented another forum for discussion of Maori concerns and communication with the government.

In the 1880s Tawhiao's peregrinations to areas outside the King Country were significant political events in the Maori world. His personal behaviour often provoked disillusionment, even disgust, but his perceived role as a vessel of tapu, a prophet, and the King movement leader seemed able to overcome this. He was usually received with deep respect, and utmost efforts were made to entertain him and his followers royally. But his hosts did not hesitate to set bounds to his authority, and many refused to acknowledge or use his title of 'King'. Pakeha New Zealand had no wish to encourage Maori sovereignty and unity, and from the 1860s newspaper editorials and government ministers had been describing the King movement as a spent force.

Tawhiao died on 26 August 1894 at Parawera. He was buried at Taupiri after a tangihanga in September which was attended by thousands. He did not live to see the fruition of his dreams for the return of Waikato land and the revival of self-sufficiency and morale among his people. Tawhiao was close to six feet tall, and had an elaborate facial tattoo – unusual among the chiefs of his era. He had children by three wives, but a number of his other offspring were not acknowledged except within their mothers' hapu. His principal wife was Hera, the daughter of his adviser, Tamati Ngapora. They had three children: Tiahuia, who married Te Tahuna Herangi and was the mother of Te Puea; Mahuta, who succeeded Tawhiao as King; and Te Wherowhero. Tawhiao's other wives were Rangiaho (with whom he had two children, Pokaia and Haunui) and Aotea: their child was Puahaere.

Tawhiao left a legacy of religious principles from which his people would draw a future dream for Tainui: the rebirth of a self-sufficient economic base, supported by the strength and stability of the

people. Native trees and foods symbolise strength and self-sufficiency in his statement: 'I shall build my own house, the ridge-pole will be of hinau and the supporting posts of mahoe and patate. Those who inhabit that house shall be raised on rengarenga and nurtured on kawariki.' During Tawhiao's exile, Waikato people had reflected and focused on the powerful symbols of the King movement. The man and the vision became united, and part of the traditions and knowledge of the people. The vision is recounted and passed on to later generations at tribal hui, where it continues to be discussed and debated.

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