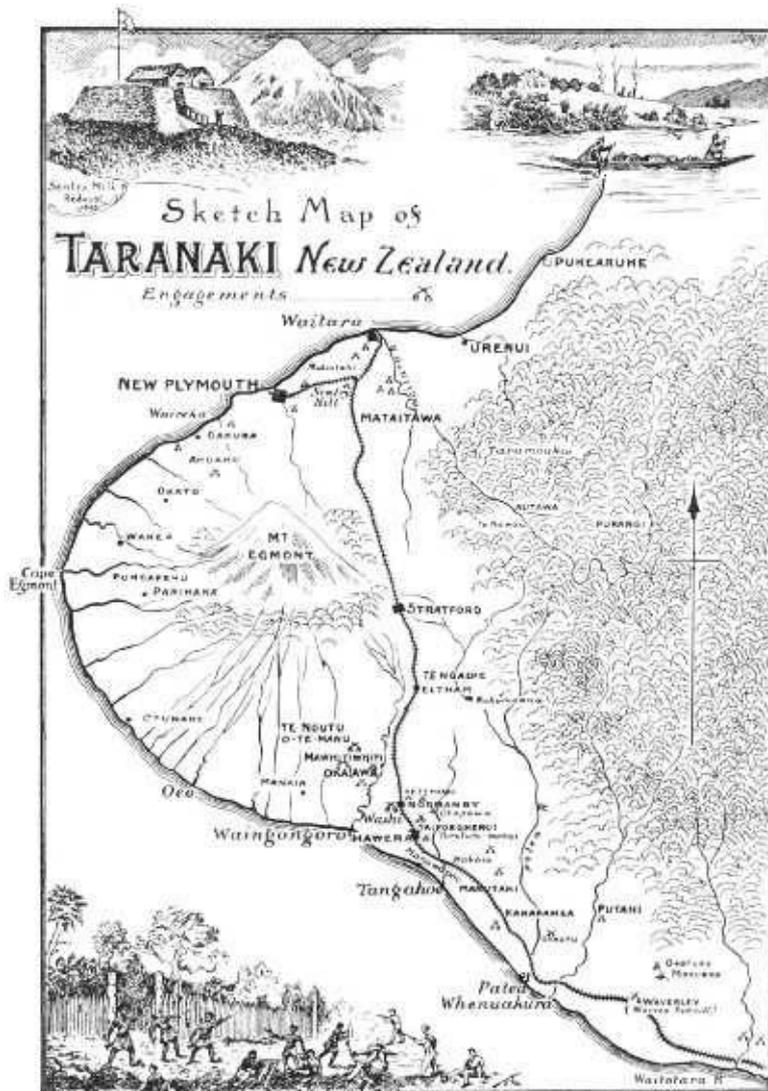




THE
ADVENTURES
OF
KIMBLE BENT.

By JAMES COWAN.

THE ADVENTURES OF KIMBLE BENT



MAP OF TARANAKI, NEW ZEALAND.
(Showing engagements in the Maori War)

THE ADVENTURES OF KIMBLE BENT

*A STORY OF WILD LIFE IN THE
NEW ZEALAND BUSH*

BY
JAMES COWAN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



WHITCOMBE AND TOMBS, LIMITED
LONDON MELBOURNE
CHRISTCHURCH, WELLINGTON AND DUNEDIN, N.Z.
1911

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PREFACE

This book is not a work of fiction. It is a plain narrative of real life in the New Zealand bush, a true story of adventure in a day not yet remote when adventure in abundance was still to be had in the land of the Maori. Every name used is a real one, every character who appears in the pages had existence in those war days of forty years ago. Every incident described here is a faithful record of actual happenings; some of them may convince the reader that truth can be stranger than fiction.

Numerous instances are recorded of white deserters from civilisation who have allied themselves with savages, adopting barbarous practices and forgetting even their mother-tongue. In the old convict days of New South Wales escapees from the fetters of a more than rigorous "system" now and again cast in their lot with the blacks. Renegades of every European nationality have been found living with and fighting for native tribes in Africa [Pg viii] and America and the Islands of Polynesia. But none of them had a wilder story to tell than has the man whose narrative is here presented—Kimble Bent, the *pakeha*-Maori. Ever since 1865—when he first "took to the blanket"—he has lived with the New Zealand Maoris. For thirteen years he was completely estranged from his fellow whites; he had deserted from a British regiment and a price was on his head. British troops and Colonial irregulars alike hunted him and his fanatical Hauhau companions. His hairbreadth escapes were many; he had to risk death not only from British bullet and bayonet, but from the savage brown men of the forest with whom he lived. When at last he came out of hiding, and dared once more to face those of his own colour he had almost forgotten the English language, and could speak it but with difficulty and hesitation. He has been out of his bush exile many years, but is still living with his Maori friends, and is still known by the Maori name, "Tu-nui-a-moa," which his chief Titokowaru gave him in 1868. When he writes to me, he usually writes in Maori, and he is practically a Maori himself, for he has lived the greater part of his life as a Maori, and he has assimilated the peculiar modes of thought and some of the ancient beliefs of the natives, as well as their tongue and customs.

[Pg ix]

One of the most remarkable portions of Bent's narrative is his account of the revival of cannibalism by the Hauhaus in 1868. Vague stories have been heard concerning the eating of soldiers' bodies by the bushmen of Ngati-Ruanui and Nga-Rauru and of rites of human sacrifices performed in the woods of Taranaki, but this account of Bent's is the first detailed description from an eye-witness of the man-eating practices in Titokowaru's camps. Many of Tito's Hauhaus are still alive but they are very reticent on the subject of "long-pig."

I first met Kimble Bent in 1903. In that year Mr. T. E. Donne, no longer the New Zealand Government Trade Commissioner in London, had induced the old man to come to Wellington for the purpose of being interviewed and photographed; and it is these interviews, very considerably expanded during a seven years' acquaintance with Bent, and carefully checked by independent Maori testimony, that are now embodied in this book.

In confirmation and extension of Bent's story, I have gathered data first-hand both from Taranaki Maoris who fought under Titokowaru, and from soldiers and settlers who fought against him, and these particulars are incorporated with the old *pakeha*-Maori's narrative.

The 1868-9 portion of the book is, therefore, practically a history of the Titokowaru war in [Pg x] Taranaki; and it embraces a great deal of matter not hitherto recorded.

Many of the settler-soldiers who survive from those wild forest days now farm their peaceful lands within sight of the battle-fields of Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu, and Pungarehu, and Moturoa, and Otapawa. With them the recollections of bush-marches and ambushes and storming Hauhau stockades are still fresh and vivid. But the younger generations know little of the dangers and troubles through which the pioneers passed. The available histories deal very meagrely and often very inaccurately with the story of the Ten-Years' Maori War, even from the white side, while the Maori view-point is absolutely unknown to all but a few colonists. Therefore it is fortunate, perhaps, that one has been enabled to gather before it is too late from the old Hauhau warriors themselves the tale of their ferociously patriotic past, and to place on record this true story of wild forest life from the lips of one of the last of that nearly extinct type of decivilised outlander, the *pakeha*-Maori.

For information and assistance in regard to various engagements of Titokowaru's war I am indebted to Colonel W. E. Gudgeon, C.M.G., Colonel T. Porter, C.B., and other old Colonial soldiers. Tutangawa, Waionui, of Patea, who was one of Titokowaru's most active scouts and warriors, has given [Pg xi] me many details concerning the campaign from the Maori side; and the Rev. T. G. Hammond, Wesleyan Missionary to the Taranaki Maoris, has also furnished assistance on the same subject. To Mrs. Kettle, of Napier, daughter of Major von Tempsky, I owe many thanks for permission to reproduce three of the illustrations in this book. Copies of water-colour sketches by her celebrated father, representing scenes in the Taranaki campaign of 1865-6. The picture of the fight at Moturoa in 1868 is from a black-and-white sketch by a soldier-artist who took part in the engagement; the original was in the possession of the late Dr. T. M. Hocken, of Dunedin, who allowed me to have it photographed for this book.

Wellington, N.Z.,
Feb. 1, 1911.

[Pg xiii]

CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I](#)

THE DESERTER

On the banks of the Tangahoé—The runaway soldier—A Maori scout—Off to the rebel camp 1-6

[CHAPTER II](#)

KIMBLE BENT, SAILOR AND SOLDIER

Kimble Bent's early life—An Indian mother—Service in the American Navy—Departure for England—"Taking the Shilling"—British Army life—The flight to America—A sinking ship—Rescue, and landing in Glasgow—Back to the Army again—Soldiering in India—The 57th ordered to New Zealand—The Taranaki Campaign—A court-martial—At the triangles 7-21

[CHAPTER III](#)

THE CAMP OF THE HAUHAUS

In the Maori country—Arrival at a Hauhau *pa*—Maori village scenes—The ceremonies round the sacred flagstaff—"Riré, riré, hau!"—The man with the tomahawk—A white slave—The painted warriors of Keteonetea—The blazing oven 22-3

[Pg xiv] [CHAPTER IV](#)

IN THE OTAPAWA STOCKADE

The return from Keteonetea—The hill-fort at Otapawa—A *korero* with the Hauhaus—Bent's one-eyed wife—"The wooing o' 't"—Bent is christened "Ringiringi" 34-4

[CHAPTER V](#)

TE UA, PRIEST AND PROPHET

Te Ua and his gods—The *Pai mariré* faith—"Charming" the British bullets—Bent's interview with the prophet—His life *tapu'd*—Preparing for battle—Life in the forest *pa* 43-5

[CHAPTER VI](#)

THE STORMING OF OTAPAWA

British forces attack the stockade—The bayonet charge—Flight of the Hauhaus—Through the forest by torchlight—Doctoring the wounded—The *tangi* by the river 55-6

[CHAPTER VII](#)

BUSH LIFE WITH THE HAUHAUS

Wild days in the forest—The Hauhau hunters—Maori woodcraft—Bird-snaring and bird-spearing—The fowlers at Te Ngaere—The slayer of Broughton—Another runaway soldier, and his fate—The tomahawking of Humphrey 66-7

[Pg xv] [CHAPTER VIII](#)

THE HAUHAU COUNCIL-TOWN

Life in Taiporohenui—A great praying-house—The ritual of the *Niu*—Singular Hauhau chants—"Matua Pai mariré"—Bent's new owner, and his new wife—The tattooers—Another white renegade

78-9

[CHAPTER IX](#)

A FOREST ADVENTURE

The two eel-fishers—Bivouac in the bush—A murderous attack—The Waikato's tomahawk—"Ringiringi's" escape

92-

101

[CHAPTER X](#)

THE WAR-CHIEF AND HIS GODS

The war-chief Titokowaru—Ancient ceremonies and religion revived—Uenuku, the god of battle—Titokowaru's *manatapu*—Bent makes cartridges for the Hauhaus—A novel weapon

102-

107

[CHAPTER XI](#)

"THE BEAK-OF-THE-BIRD"

The stockade at Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu—In the *Wharé-kura*—Singular Hauhau war-rites—The "Twelve Apostles"—The enchanted *taiaha*—The heart of the *pakeha*: a human burnt-offering—An ambushade and a cannibal feast

108-

118

[Pg xvi] [CHAPTER XII](#)

THE ATTACK ON TURUTURU-MOKAI REDOUBT

Hauwhenua's war-party—A night march—Attack on Turuturu-Mokai Redoubt—A heroic defence—The heart of the captain—Touch-and-go—Relief at last

119-

133

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

THE KILLING OF KANE

Bent and Kane brought before Titokowaru—Kane's flight—Captured by the Hauhaus—A traitor's end

134-

138

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

ADVENTURES AT TE NGUTU-O-TE-MANU

In the midst of dangers—Bent stalked by Hauhaus—Old Jacob to the rescue—"Come on if you dare!"—The white man's new Maori name—Government forces attack and burn Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu—A new use for hand-grenades

139-

144

[CHAPTER XV](#)

A BATTLE IN THE FOREST; AND THE DEATH OF VON TEMPSKY

The second fight at Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu—Titokowaru's prophecy—Tutangé and his sacred war-mat—Bent's narrow

escape—Government forces defeated—How von Tempsky fell—A terrible retreat—Colonial soldiers' gallant rear-guard fight 145-179

[Pg xvii] [CHAPTER XVI](#)

THE CANNIBALS OF THE BUSH

After the battle—The slain heroes of Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu—A terrible scene on the *marae*—What Bent saw from his prison-hut—The sword of "Manu-rau"—A funeral pyre—Priestly incantations—A soldier's body eaten—Why the Hauhaus became cannibals 180-194

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

SKIRMISHING AND FORT-BUILDING

Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu abandoned—On the march again—Skirmishing on the Patea—*Pakeha* in pickle—A new stockade—Bent the *pa*-builder 195-200

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

THE FIGHT AT MOTUROA STOCKADE

Ktené's vigil—Attack on the stockade—Major Hunter's death—A Hauhau warrior's desperate feat—Over the palisades—Government forces repulsed—A rear-guard fight—An unanswered prayer—Scenes of terror—Tihirua's burnt-offering—A soldier's body eaten 201-225

[CHAPTER XIX](#)

THE TAURANGA-IKA STOCKADE

Another fighting-*pa* built—Scouting and skirmishing—The watcher on the tower—McDonnell and Titokowaru—How Trooper Lingard won the New Zealand Cross—Hairbreadth escapes—Pairama and the white man's leg 226-239

[Pg xviii] [CHAPTER XX](#)

A SCOUTING ADVENTURE

The passage of the Okehu—A night's vigil—Mackenzie the scout—"Maoris in the bush!"—The watchers in the fern—A race for life 240-254

[CHAPTER XXI](#)

THE FALL OF TAURANGA-IKA

Shot and shell—The fort abandoned—Flight of the Hauhaus—The chase—The fight at Karaka Flat—Mutilation of the dead—The ambushade at the peach-grove—The sergeant's leg—Rewards for Hauhau heads 255-261

[CHAPTER XXII](#)

THE FOREST-FORAGERS

Fugitive Hauhaus—Hard times in the bush—The eaters of 262-

[CHAPTER XXIII](#)

A BATTLE IN THE FOG

The surprise of Otautu—An early morning attack—Kimble 270-
Bent's dream—"Kia tupato!"—A gallant defence—Brave old 276
Hakopa—Flight of the Hauhaus

[Pg xix] [CHAPTER XXIV](#)

THE HEAD-HUNTERS

The skirmish at Whakamara—Hauhaus on the run—
Government head-hunters—Major Kemp's white scout— 277-
Sharp work in the bush—Barbarism of the Whanganui 292
—*Kupapas*—Smoke-drying the heads—A present for
Whitmore—The heads on the tent floor—End of the war

[CHAPTER XXV](#)

THE LAND OF REFUGE

The flight from Rukumoana—Retreat to the Waitara—The 293-
Kawau *pa*—Life in the Ngatimaru country—Rupé and his 305
white man—A Maori Donnybrook fair—A tale of a *taniwha*

[CHAPTER XXVI](#)

BUSH LIFE ON THE PATEA

The return to Rukumoana—The forest-village—Bird-snaring 306-
and bird-spearing—Bent the canoe-builder—His third wife 310

[CHAPTER XXVII](#)

HIROKI: THE STORY OF A FUGITIVE

Hiroki, the slayer of McLean—Strange faces at Rukumoana 311-
—A forest chase—A meeting and a warning—Hiroki's wild 320
bush life and his end

[Pg xx] [CHAPTER XXVIII](#)

OUT OF EXILE

Canoeing on the Patea—The voyage to Hukatéré—The white 321-
man's world again—Bent the medicine-man—*Makutu*, or the 332
Black Art—Bent's later days—The end

[Appendix](#) 333-
336

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<u>Sketch Map of Taranaki</u>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
<u>Mount Egmont, Taranaki</u>	15
<u>A Taranaki Frontier Fort</u>	17
<u>Patara, a Hauhau Prophet</u>	47
<u>A British Column on the March</u>	69
<u>The Scout</u>	85
<u>The Ambuscade</u>	113
<u>Tutangé Waionui, a Hauhau Warrior</u>	151
<u>Major von Tempsky</u>	159
<u>Major von Tempsky</u>	173
<u>Major Kemp (Kepa te Rangihwinui)</u>	211
<u>The Fight at Moturoa</u>	218, 219
<u>A Hauhau Scout</u>	235
<u>A Constabulary Officer in Bush-fighting Costume</u>	279
<u>Kimble Bent, the Pakeha-Maori</u>	325

THE ADVENTURES OF KIMBLE BENT

CHAPTER I

THE DESERTER

On the banks of the Tangahoé—The runaway soldier—
Maori scout—Off to the rebel camp.

On the banks of one of the many swift rivers that roll down to the Tasman Sea through the Taranaki Plains a young man in the blue undress uniform of a private soldier sat smoking his pipe. He was dripping with water, and a little pool had collected where he crouched in the fern, a few feet from the bank of the stream. He had plainly just emerged from the river. His clothes were torn, and he was capless. He was a man of about the middle size, spare of build, with sharp dark eyes and a bronzed complexion that told of past life under a tropic sun.

Less than an hour previously he had left his comrades' camp, the tented lines of Her Majesty's 57th Regiment, on the ferny flats of Manawapou. Left unofficially, and without his arms, strolling down [Pg 2] towards the Tangahoé River as if for a bathe. A "shut-eye" sentry was on duty that morning, and the deserter's tent-mates, too, were sympathetically blind to his departure. The Tangahoé was the border-line between the country covered by the British rifles and the unconquerable bush of the Maori rebels. Towards this rubicon he made his way through the thick, high fern, which soon concealed him from view. He attempted to ford the rapid, muddy river, but it was up to his waist, and almost swept him off his feet. Struggling ashore again, he took to the fern and travelled slowly and with great toil through it, keeping parallel with the course of the Tangahoé, and heading down stream. He forced his way through the thick fern "like a wild pig," to use his own simile. In this way he travelled something over a mile down the river, and then once more attempted to ford across, but it was too deep and swift. He crawled back up the bank again, and quite exhausted, with scratched hands and face and gaping half-buttonless clothes, he sat down to recover his breath and strength. His heart was thumping fearfully with his frantic exertions in the closely matted, entangling fern, and it was some minutes before he

could command his trembling fingers to fill and light
his pipe.

After the soldier had sat and smoked a while he
rose, and making his way to a slight elevation on the
banks where he could see over the top of the [Pg
coarse *rarauhe* fern, in some places ten feet high, he
looked around him. Directly across the river the bush
began, the seemingly impenetrable forest solemn and
dark, pregnant with danger and mystery. Turning in
the other direction, and facing the north-west, he
could just discern in the distance the tops of a
number of bell-tents—the camp he had left behind
him. And as he looked his last on the tents of his
comrades and his tyrants, he heard the sweet notes
of a bugle sounding a call. The midwinter air was very
clear and still. It was the midday mess call—"Come
to-the-cookhouse-door."

"No more cookhouse-door now, that's a moral lesson,"
said the soldier aloud. "Pork and potatoes for you, my
boy—or else a crack on the head with a tomahawk."

Beyond the tents, another tent-shaped object took
the soldier's eye. It was a lofty snowy mountain
glittering in the midday sun. It was far away in the
north-west, so far that its base was hidden by the
intervening bush, and only the white symmetric
upper part of the vast cone, a wedge of white
culminating in as perfect an apex as any bell-tent
was visible to the eye from this part of the green
plains. It was the peak of Taranaki mountain, which
the white man calls Mount Egmont.

Satisfying himself that there was no one in sight
and that he was not followed, the soldier [Pg
squatted down again and smoked his pipe
meditatively.

Suddenly he started up and listened intently. He
heard something, and any noise meant danger. The
sound was the trotting of a horse.

Scrambling through the fern a little space back
from the bank, he found that a narrow track wound
through the tangle of tall brown bracken. Peering on
from his shelter place he saw—first, the glitter of the
muzzle of a long rifle above the fern; then, near

moment round a turn in the path came a mounted man, a Maori. He was a tall, black-bearded fellow wearing a European shirt and trousers, but bare as feet. Each stirrup-iron was thrust between the big toe and the next one, as was the universal Maori mode when riding bare-footed. In his right hand he held an Enfield rifle, of the pattern used by the white troops in those days; the butt rested on his thigh in cavalryman fashion. Round his shoulders hung a leather cartouche-box; there was another buckle round his waist, from which there hung also a revolver in its case. A Hauhau scout, evidently venturing rather daringly close to the British camp.

The white man hesitated only a moment. Then he boldly stepped out on to the track, directly in front of the startled Maori, who pulled his shaggy pony up sharply, and instantly presented his gun at the white man.

[Pg 5]

Seeing the next moment, however, that the white man was unarmed and alone, the Maori brought his rifle-butt down on his leg again, and stared with wonder at the forlorn-looking white soldier before him.

"Here, you *pakeha*!" he cried, in mixed English and Maori; "go back, quick! *Haere atu, haere atu*. Go 'way back to t'e soldiers. I shoot you suppose you no go! *Hoki atu!*"

"Shoot away!" returned the white man. "I won't go back. I'm running away from the soldiers. I want to go to the Maoris. Take me with you!"

"*You tangata kuwaré!*" the Maori said. "*You pakeha* fool, go back! T'e Maori kill you, my word. You look out."

"I don't care if they do," replied the soldier. "I tell you, I want to live with the Hauhaus."

"*E pai ana!*" ("It is well"), said the scout. "All right, you come along. But you look out for my tribe—they kill you."

"I'm not frightened of your tribe," said the soldier.

"What your name, *pakeha*?" was the next question.

"Kimble Bent," answered the *pakeha*.

The Maori attempted the pronunciation of the name, but the nearest he could get to it was "Kima Peneti."

"Too hard a name for t'e Maori," he said. [Pg "Taihoa; we give you more better name—good Maori name. If"—he qualified it—"my tribe don't kill you."

Then the swarthy warrior dismounted and ordered the *pakeha* to get into the saddle; he saw that his prisoner was dead-tired. He turned the horse's head back towards the Maori country, and the strangely met pair struck down along the banks of the Tangahoé, the Maori striding in front.

For about three miles the track wound down through the fern and flax, parallel with the course of the river. Then the travellers came to a ford. They crossed safely, and clambering up the steep muddy bank on the other side, they marched on towards the blue hills of the rebel country.

CHAPTER II

KIMBLE BENT, SAILOR AND SOLDIER

Kimble Bent's early life—An Indian mother—Service in the American Navy—Departure for England—"Taking the Shilling"—British Army life—The flight to America—A sinking ship—Rescue, and landing in Glasgow—Back to the Army again—Soldiering in India—The 57th ordered to New Zealand—The Taranaki Campaign—A court-martial—At the triangles.

While the runaway soldier is riding on to the camp of the brown warriors of the bush—on a journey which is to be the beginning of a wild and savage life leading him for many a day, like Thoreau's Indian fighter, on dim forest trails—"with an uneasy scalp"—there is time to learn something of his previous history and adventures.

Perhaps the impulse that led to his passionate revolt against civilisation and rigid army discipline came from his American Indian blood.

Kimble Bent's mother was a half-caste Red Indian girl, of the Musqua tribe, whose village stood on the banks of the St. Croix River, State of Maine, U.S.A. Her English name before marriage was Eliza Senter. She became the wife of a shipbuilder in the town of Eastport, Maine; his name [Pg 8] was Waterman Bent; he worked at first for Caleb Houston, shipbuilder, but afterwards had a yard of his own. This couple had seven children, two sons and five daughters; one of these sons was Kimble Bent. He was born in Eastport on August 24, 1837.

The roving wayward element in young Kimble Bent's blood soon made itself manifest. When he was about seventeen, he ran away from home and went to sea. He shipped on a United States man-of-war, the training frigate *Martin*, and spent three years aboard her, cruising along the Atlantic Coast. He quickly became a smart young sailor and gunner, and from the rank of seaman he graduated to deckman, a sort of quartermaster. It was part of his duty during the

last year of his service to instruct the boys who
~~came aboard as recruits in the working~~ of the
muzzle-loading 6-pounder and 8-pounder guns

Paid off from his frigate at the end of his
three years, Bent returned to his people
unexpectedly as he had left them. But he didn't
stay in Eastport long. The prosaic life of the old
town was no more to his liking than when first
he had run away to follow a sailor's life; so he
soon took to the seas again. He gathered
together what money he could—a considerable
sum, he says, for his father was indulgent—and
took ship across the Atlantic, in his head some
such unexpressed sentiment as [Pg 9] Robert
Louis Stevenson long afterwards put into verse
in his "Songs of Travel":

"The untented Kosmos my abode

I go, a wilful stranger,
My mistress still the open road
And the bright eyes of Danger."

But no man-of-war life for him. He booked
his passage in a barque sailing for Liverpool
resolved to see something of life in the Old
World.

When he landed in the big city he "made
himself flash," to use his own expression, and
went the pace with a few like-minded young
fellows, and one way and another his stock
cash soon vanished, and he found himself
stranded, friendless, and alone—his companions
of the "flush" times had no more use for him.
One day, as he wandered disconsolate along the
streets, his eye was taken by the scarlet tunic
and lively bearing of a smart recruiting
sergeant, and on the impulse of the moment he
took the Queen's shilling and was enlisted
Her Majesty's 57th Regiment of Foot. This was
in the year 1859.

The young Eastport sailor soon bitterly
regretted the day that his eye was dazzled by the
Queen's scarlet. The British Army was less
his taste than life in Uncle Sam's Navy. He was
sent to Cork with a draft of two hundred other

recruits, and the interminable drill soon gave him an intense disgust for the routine barrack-yard instruction. [Pg 10] Four months recruit-drill—then one day Private Bent took a stroll down the Cork wharves and cast his eye round for a likely craft in which to give the army, drill-sergeants, and all the slip.

A Boston barque, the *Maria*, happened to be lying at one of the tees, and her skipper, on being asked by Captain Cann, Bent, to his joy, found to be an old acquaintance. He unfolded his dejected tale, and the sailor at once offered his assistance in rescuing a fellow-countryman from John Bull's grip. That evening Bent stole away quietly from the barracks, boarded the barque, and was stowed away safely below in the dunnage-hold. He did not show his nose above hatches for two days; the barque by that time had left the harbour on her return voyage to Boston, and the deserter was able to appear on deck, a free man.

But not for long. Bent's misfortunes were only beginning. When about three hundred miles off the land a furious easterly gale began to blow, and the old barkey sprang a leak. However to in the storm, all the crew could do was to stand to the pumps. The huge Atlantic seas came thundering on deck, and more than once washed the men away from the pumps. For six days and six nights they wallowed in the deep, all hands, sailors and passengers, taking turns at the pumps, working for their lives.

All those terrible days of storm and fear the [Pg 11] *Maria's* hands had nothing to eat but hard biscuits soaked with salt water. There was no place to cook and no means of cooking, for the galley with all its contents had been washed overboard. While the crew laboured at the pumps, the captain tried to cheer them up and put a little life into their weary bodies and despairing hearts by playing lively airs on his concertina and singing sailors' chanteys.

"One day," says Bent, "a German brig hove in sight and spoke us. Seeing our signal

distress she asked the name of our barque and the number of the crew. We signalled our reply, and she answered that she could not help us there was too much sea. Then she squared away and left us. All this time we were labouring at the pumps to keep the old barque afloat. Next day another brig, a Boston vessel deep-loaded from the West Indies, hailed us and stood by signalling to us to launch our boats. This we did after hard and dangerous work, and managed to reach the brig's side, where all the sixteen of us were hauled on board safely. About two hours after we left our ship we saw her go down."

To Bent's intense disappointment he found that the brig that had rescued him was bound for the wrong side of the Atlantic. She landed the shipwrecked mariners at Glasgow. Bent was walking about the streets one day, wondering however he [Pg 12] was going to get a passage home, for he had no money, when he was arrested as a deserter—recognised by the description which had been posted in every barrack-room and every police-station. He was taken to the military barracks, and then sent under guard to Ireland and down to Cork, where he was tried by court-martial, and sentenced to eighty-four days in prison. When he had served his term he was shipped off to India with his regiment, landing at Bombay, and for some time did garrison duty at Poona.

The 57th spent two years in India, only just recovering from the terrible throes of the Mutiny. Then news came of a serious war with a wild native race in a distant country called New Zealand, far away down in the Southern Ocean, and the regiment was ordered to hold itself in readiness to go route-marching to Bombay thence to sea. Marching orders soon followed and the headquarters of the regiment sailed for Auckland; the company in which Bent was private (No. 8 Company) was one of those left behind to look after the women and children of the regiment. Orders for them also quickly came, and they took the road for Bombay.

The journey from Poona to Bombay took four days, or rather nights, for all the marching was done by night. Part of the way was through a dense jungle in which man-eating tigers swarmed. The troops marched through the jungle by torchlight, [Pg 13] winding along a narrow track through the densely-matted vegetation. The growling of the tigers was heard all round at night, but the blazing torches kept them away.

Embarked in a troopship at Bombay, Bent and his fellow-soldiers sailed not unwilling for a land spoken of by report as a country which, though wild and new, was a pleasant place to live in than scorching sun-baked India.

After a voyage of eighty-nine days, the troopship anchored in Auckland Harbour, and her soldiers spent their first week on New Zealand soil in the old Albert Barracks, where the bright flower-gardens and tree-groves of a beautiful park now crown the hill that in those troubled days was girt with a massive crenellated wall, and was alive with all the martial turmoil of campaigning-time. Then the new arrivals were sent down to Taranaki by sea to join the headquarters of the 57th, and went into new barrack life on Marsland Hill, New Plymouth.

Kimble Bent's longing for a freer independent life became stronger than ever in this new country. He would gladly have exchanged camp-life for even the perilous occupation of a frontier settler, so that he would be free. The parade ground was a purgatory, and the restraint of discipline and the ramrod-and-pipeclay system of soldiering were irksome beyond words. He was sick to death of [Pg 14] being ordered about by sergeants and corporals. Fighting would have been a relief, but there was none yet. He endeavoured to get his discharge from the regiment, but without success; and his impatience of discipline led him into various more or less serious conflicts with the regimental authorities.

So opened Kimble Bent's life in the new land, the land in which he was to roam the forests an outlaw for more than a decade.

In those war-days of 1860-70 dense forests covered the wide plains of the Taranaki province, where now most of the dark old woods have been hewn away, and have given place to the pastures and homesteads of dairy farmers. It was a wild but beautiful land. The coast curved off and round in a great sweeping semicircle from Waitara in the north to Wanganui in the south; the intervening region of forest, hill, and plain was the theatre of war. High and central, Taranaki's great mountain cone, which the *pakeha* calls Egmont, swelled to a height of over 8,000 feet, its base hidden in the forests, its snowy peak glittering far above the broad soft swaths of clouds, the sailor's landmark a hundred miles out at sea. Remote from all other high mountains it soared aloft—"lonely as God and white as a winter morn," Joaquin Miller wrote of his beloved Mount Shasta. [Pg 15] On all sides Taranaki—the holy mountain of the Maoris—sloped evenly and gently to the plains, and from its recesses sprang the head waters of many a beautiful river. The mountain, huge yet exquisitely symmetrical, was revered by the old-school Taranaki Maori as the mighty symbol of his nationality, and regarded as being in some mystic fashion the source of his tribal *mana*. Under the shadow of Taranaki began the Ten Years War; here the Hauhau fanaticism took its mad rise in 1864. From Taranaki's foot sent out the Hauhau apostles, preaching this strange jumble of Scriptural expressions and pagan Maori concepts, promising the converts that no *pakeha* bullet should harm them if they but repeated their mag

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