

Very Good 1941

1st Prize  
Class B

Essay for the 1941 competition of the  
Royal Empire Society. Class "B" 12 and under 16.

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My native country is every year losing customs and traditions of real value. Is this true?

Yes, unfortunately it is true, and we New Zealanders have much to answer for in this thing. One of the reasons why we are at war today, is that we have allowed customs and traditions to drop out of use. Each race has customs and traditions suitable for the environmental stage of evolution reached. The customs of our European civilization are more advanced than those of more primitive peoples, but this does not of necessity mean that they are better. Customs act as a stabilizer to any civilization. Society is kept at a certain level by customs and traditions, which, to use a colloquial phrase, are common-sense laws governing "things not done". This stabilizing influence of customs works in two ways; it stops the social level from falling back, and yet allows the level to rise to a higher plane without letting it outstrip the race's capabilities. As the social plane moves upwards, the customs move up in collaboration. If the social customs are allowed to fall into disuse, what is to stop the social plane from falling? Nothing. Thus it is that Europe is at war, for our customs and ethical ideas

have been allowed to drop back to the level of primitive man, in the unloosing of hatred and envy, destruction and greed on the earth. Perhaps the foremost example of how a race drops when its customs are allowed to fall into disuse, is found in our own Maori people.

The Maori was acknowledged, at the time of European settlement, to be the most advanced native race in the world. His achievements in navigation, war, in the arts of peace, with the limited tools at his command, were wonderful. His carving was a marvel of ingenuity and beauty, his language and music were beautiful and melodious, and his physical development was to be envied.

Then came the impact of our more advanced civilization and its customs on the old order of the Maori people. In a day the old rule of chief and tohunga was swept away and our rule, enforced by the fear of red-coated soldiers and blue-uniformed police, was substituted. Instead of moulding the common-sense customs of the Maori to something better we either wiped them out, or suppressed them. We did not allow the Maori to come gradually to a <sup>higher</sup> plane of existence; we forced him there, removed the stabilizing influence of his own customs and yet did not place anything of real value in their place. Witness, therefore, the degradation of the Maori. As soon as our missionary ardour ceased, the Maori began to drop back, ~~as~~ for there were

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no customs to hold him up. His old customs had been allowed to disappear so there was nothing to hold him to his old level of physical, mental and moral superiority. He is only now beginning to climb up so we must not allow his customs to be disregarded.

The health of a nation is vitally important. If its men and women have not the strength and vitality that this world demands, it will not be able to hold its place among the nations of the ~~earth~~ earth. The health of the Maori leaves much to be desired at the present time. This is due to the dropping of age-old customs that we have swept away and have not replaced. The old Maori pas, built upon hilltops, were open to all the winds of heaven, and allowed fresh air to circulate into all corners; the slope of the hill drained the pa effectively and well, leaving no damp, unhealthy places round the whares. The pas of today, confined in narrow valleys, on damp, swampy ground, place the Maori in a state far worse than that of his forefathers. The ravages of tuberculosis and of pneumonia among them are terrible, and lead to their degradation. It is interesting and instructive to note that the <sup>old time</sup> Maori had no words in his language for rheumatism, small-pox, plague or consumption.

Hand in hand with <sup>standard of</sup> the dwelling places of a people <sup>the state</sup> is their food supply. Food is vitally

important and the strength of a nation is linked up with it. The old-time Maori lived on a plain diet of kumara, "oro" and "hue" as the staple foods and varied it with fern-root, berries, and the hearts of both cabbage tree and nikau palm. From the sea he obtained fish and shellfish with their iodine content; from the rivers came eels and white-bait; from the bush came pigeons, kakas, kiwis, tuis and the big fat huihu. But now the Maori lives on a multitude of foods, soft and sweet, which we import. From living on these foods ~~the~~ and the many tinned foods he is able to buy, ~~the~~ together with the combined influence of bad housing, liquor and tobacco, the health standard of the Maori has declined very much. The old-time Maori had no strong drink so the introduction of intoxicating liquors has been disastrous. Who of you have never seen the young Maori, the <sup>epitome</sup> ~~symbol~~ of degeneracy, leaning against the veranda post, with the everlasting cigarette in his mouth? Compare him with the figure of the young warrior, glowing strength in every fibre of his well-knit body, and glorying in his physical prowess. He may have been "a blood-thirsty savage" but far, far better than this disgraceful specimen of New Zealand manhood, who takes all the pakeha's vices. This is our doing, for we have allowed his customs to fall; can we be proud of it?

The old Maori had to work like a Trojan to live.

He had to use a stone axe to clear the land, it took hard digging under the broiling sun with the primitive "ho" and much back-breaking work to get a kumara crop for the year. Hunting, fishing building canoes, all demanded skill, patience, manual dexterity and strength of mind and body. These are attributes to be desired by anyone of us. Yet where are these virtues of the Maori? Through letting their customs drop, we have lost them. Why is Sir Apirana Ngata calling to the Maori people, "Back to the land"? The answer is, to try and regain some of these customs of hard toil, hard but nourishing food, and good ~~housing~~ living conditions, which have been allowed to wither and decay. The Maori does not bother to work, because a kind government pays him money from the land courts. It's easier to read Timi down to the store with some of this money to buy a tin of salmon than to catch fish oneself. So the Maori degenerates to a thriftless race of government-supported troupers all through the letting go of customs.

War was the Maori's consuming passion. To be strong in war was his greatest wish, and the noblest death was on the "pae kura" (battlefield) after a brilliant display of arms. To be strong in war the Maori had to cultivate special virtues. He had to be brave, strong, agile and quick in mind and body, and to learn to be chivalrous and self-reliant. He would gladly give his

life for his fellows. These are qualities to be respected in any man, and, although we believe war is an evil thing, these qualities applied to everyday life would tend to ennoble it greatly. The loss of these traditions of manhood has left a gap in the life of the present day Maori. If these traditions had been kept alive, the Maoris ~~are~~ would be a better people. You have all read with pride of the spirited bayonet charges of the Maori Battalion in Greece and Crete, which demoralised the enemy. The Maori Battalion is kept up to strength by voluntary enlistment, the only force in New Zealand to be done so. This shows that the old Maori traditions still live, so we must not allow these revered traditions to die again or the country will suffer.

The old Maori learnt by doing, and by repetition. All his education was of a practical nature, as it had to be, to render him fit for his life of hard toil. He learnt how to plant, how to hunt and to fish. He learnt his lesson well, for if he did not, it was an ~~un~~fortunate for him! He learnt how to build his pa, ~~how~~ how to make and to use his weapons, by doing as the others did. He learnt well, for if he did not, ~~we~~ unto him! For assuredly the Assyrian would come down like a wolf on the fold and if the fold was not strong, and its defenders skilled, the Assyrian would feast, that night, on their bones. As the Maori had no reading and writing, he had to resort to his memory. Thus, the old custom of being able to repeat long legends and genealogies without hesitation, was greatly

valued. This and similar trials of the mind developed it greatly ~~brain~~ power and produced a mind of undoubted mental strength. When the "pakeha" came, he brought his learning suited to his degree of civilization but ~~unadapted~~ unadapted to the Maori. What did he want with chemical equations and geometrical propositions? They are no use to him at all. He wanted to know how to farm, how to build a home, in short, how to live his new life with the "pakeha." The Maori is a wonderful craftsman as is seen in his carving, his canoes and his houses built with the most primitive of stone tools. Therefore, in his present-day life he tries to find expression by working in trades that demand his craftsmanship. It is pleasing to find, that in our native schools, notice is being taken of this fact, and farming, carpentry and cookery are being taught much more than previously. But why, why was the custom of practical learning allowed to fall away and <sup>to</sup> allow the Maori to slide down the social scale, & that it has taken, and is taking much hard work to get him up.

The old communism of the Maori is another custom that has disappeared. No one in the tribe could amass wealth above anyone else, thus leaving others of the tribe in poverty, for all things belonged to the tribe as a whole. There was the law of "muru" to fear if anyone was foolhardy enough to do this; a raiding party would be organized to raid ~~up~~ one's store, and it would strip it of everything ~~up~~ one had,

and portion all the goods out to the other members of the tribe. Thus all the tribe received the benefits of the greedy one's hoarding. Now if a man does this, we say "Oh, he's a cute business man, I'd like to be him," but all the time people are starving or suffering because of his greed. Also under the old Maori communism there was no poverty. If any member of the tribe fell on evil days, he was supported by the whole tribe, until such time as he was on his feet again. There was an equal amount of produce from hunting, fishing and war given to each person, there was no greedy grasping and matching of goods. In these days, we are out to get all we can, we do not think of the other fellow at all. Look at our slums and pas, side by side with affluence and wealth. I am no communist, but surely the old Maori communism had its good points. Why were they not retained?

Is it not plain from these examples that the dropping of customs of ancient usage has been disastrous to the Maori people? In the same <sup>way</sup> we too, every year, every month, every day, are losing customs and traditions of real value. Every one we lose will tell against us in the end, <sup>and</sup> we are losing them steadily, if we are not careful and preserve those we have, the crash will come. Let us keep our old customs and traditions, and make our life stronger with them. We must not fall back as did the Maori.