

was afterwards despatched to Opotiki, and, not without some sharp fighting, defeated and dispersed the rebels in that quarter. Kereopa, however, effected his escape to the almost inaccessible mountains and forests of the Urewera country, where he lurked for several years, though a reward of one thousand pounds (£1,000) was offered for his apprehension by the Colonial Ministry, during the government of my predecessor. At length, in November last, he was captured by a detachment of the loyal clan of the Ngatiporos, sent out by their chief, Ropata te Wahawaha, one of the gallant Maori leaders to whom the Queen has recently presented swords of honor.

4. Kereopa was forthwith conducted by his captors to Napier, the principal town on the East Coast of the North Island, and there given up to the officers of the Colonial Government. He was then examined in the regular course of law by the Resident Magistrate of the district, and committed to the local gaol for trial, at the next circuit of the Supreme Court, for the murder of Mr. Völkner. He made, while in prison, a desperate attempt at suicide with a knife, which was, however, wrested from him by the warders before he had time to do more than inflict a gash on his throat. The grand jury found a true bill for murder, and Kereopa was tried on the 21st December ultimo, before Mr. Justice Johnston (the Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court) and a special jury.* Counsel and interpreter were provided for him at the cost of the Colony, and he had a long and patient trial, of which I annex the printed report. He was ultimately found guilty, and received sentence of death. At a meeting of the Executive Council, held on the 26th ultimo, Mr. Justice Johnston reported that the conviction was founded on the clearest evidence, and that he knew no reason why the law should not take its course in this case; in which view the Governor and the Ministers unanimously agreed, as will be seen from the enclosed copy of the Minute of Council. It will be perceived that we adhere to the decision arrived at on previous occasions, and which has been invariably acted upon during my administration, viz., “that, under the very peculiar circumstances of New Zealand, no Maori should, as a general rule, suffer death after conviction of having carried arms against the Queen, unless such high treason should have been accompanied (as in Kereopa’s case) with murder in cold blood or other atrocities.”

Enclosure 1.
Report of
Kereopa’s trial.
Hawke’s Bay
Herald, Dec. 22,
1871.

Enclosure 2.
Minute of
Council, Dec. 26,
1871.

5. Kereopa was executed on the 5th instant, within the precincts of the gaol at Napier. He was attended in prison and on the scaffold by a clergyman of the Church of England, of which he had been a member before joining the Hauhaus. He was also visited by the Bishop of Waiapu, to whom he admitted the justice of his sentence, confessing that he had given orders for the murder of Mr. Völkner, and that he had determined on that crime several weeks previously, even before he left the West Coast.

6. The opinions held generally, alike by the Colonists and by the Maoris, respecting Kereopa’s trial and execution, seem to be fairly stated in the following extract from one of the local journals:—

“The murderer of the Rev. Mr. Völkner yesterday paid the last penalty of the law. The retribution in this case, if long delayed, is not likely to lose any of its force upon the Native mind. Indeed, it is probable that the long lapse of time that has occurred since the tragedy at Opotiki, will add to the moral effect of the ultimate punishment of the chief offender. The execution of Kereopa is not a hasty act of vengeance. Had he been caught *in flagrante delicto*, and at once shot, without so much as a drum-head trial, his execution would have been divested of the calm and deliberate circumstances which impart to legal proceedings their greatest elements of impressiveness and influence. A summary execution would have failed to convey to the Natives any conception of the absolute unforgetfulness of the law, or of the certainty of retribution against its violators. Years have passed since the wretched criminal, outcast even amongst his own familiar people, committed the offence which he expiated yesterday with his own life. He might probably have been captured long ago, but although political reasons might have rendered it undesirable to hurry his arrest, justice had not slept. Driven from one hiding-place to another, half

New Zealand
Mail, Jan. 6,
1872.

* Kereopa’s counsel applied for a special jury, and the Attorney-General, who prosecuted on behalf of the Crown, did not object.