

Obituary for William Jenkins

Hawke's Bay Herald 4 Jun 1867 – from the Wanganui Chronicle

Another old colonist has taken his departure from amongst us to "The undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns." Mr William Jenkins, late Native Interpreter to the Colonial Government, died at Wanganui, on the 11th inst., in circumstances which reflect no credit upon the present Administration. The following sketch of his colonial career may be interesting to some of our readers.

In the year 1841, Mr Jenkins emigrated to New Zealand, and took up his abode at Wellington, where after a residence of nearly two years, he accepted the office of missionary to the natives in connection with the Wesleyan body, and proceeded in the discharge of his new duties to Cloudy Bay. Here he spent five years in close association with the Maoris, and made himself thoroughly acquainted with their language and customs. In consequence of his wife's failing health, in the year 1850, he removed to Nelson, resumed his business of cabinet maker, and from his familiarity with the Maori language, he was shortly afterwards appointed interpreter to the New Zealand Government. Some ten or twelve years back it occurred to Mr Jenkins that if some of the more intelligent Maori chiefs could be taken over to England and see with their own eyes the many marvellous things which they heard of only by report, and of which they could form no definite idea - if they could be shown over our arsenals and dockyards, if they could be introduced to our religious and scientific institutions and be taken to a few of our manufacturing towns, it would have a most beneficial effect upon the minds of the Chiefs, and through them, on their return, upon their followers and fellow countrymen, and tend greatly to produce those friendly feelings between the natives and settlers so essential to the development of the resources of New Zealand. After many consultations with his friends, and much anxiety upon the all-important point of ways and means (*), and with the full concurrence and approval of Sir George Grey, the Governor of New Zealand, Mr Jenkins selected out of a very large number of volunteers, ten chieftains and four chieftainesses, fair average specimens of the Maori race. (*) = 1600 pounds was raised in New Zealand in furtherance of the object. With this heavy charge Mr Jenkins set sail in the *Ida Zeigler*, and after a voyage of one hundred days he landed in London, the party (with one exception) being in good health and spirits. After some delay Mr J. and his party received an invitation to proceed to Marlborough House, to meet the Prince and Princess of Wales, and on the same day dined with the Duke of Newcastle, who subsequently introduced them to the Queen at Osborne, by whom they were received with that kindness of feeling for which her Majesty is proverbial. They afterwards received invitations from other noblemen and members of the aristocracy, including the Bishop of London, Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Leven and Melbourne, &c., &c., and spent about two months in visiting the many places of interest which abound in the great metropolis. Mr Jenkins now started for a tour in the provinces, accepting first an invitation from the Mayor of Bristol, by whom he was received in a handsome and hospitable manner, some fifty or sixty of the leading gentlemen of the city being invited to meet the Chiefs at luncheon, at which the Mayor presided, dressed in his robes of office. The meeting was cordial and enthusiastic, and the Chiefs expressed in warm terms their appreciation of the kindness shown to them. Mr Jenkins made Bristol his headquarters for nearly two months, and thence paid visits to other towns in the West of England, including Bath, Cheltenham, &c., in all of which the Chiefs were warmly received. After various trials and vicissitudes, Mr Jenkins returned to New Zealand, and was again employed by the Government as Native Interpreter to the Imperial troops in these districts. On that appointment being abolished in October last, he was appointed Native Interpreter to the Resident Magistrate's Court at Wanganui, but a year or two afterwards was, in consequence of ill health, obliged to relinquish his appointment and apply for a pension. During the following six months he was on what proved to be his

deathbed, and during that time made repeated applications to the Government for a pension, to which he considered he was entitled, or for some remuneration for his seventeen year's services and loss of office. In his last application a week before his death, he said to Mr Stafford:- "I am now a dying man; a pension would be of no use to me. Instead of that I pray that a sum may be granted sufficient to pay the debts incurred during my long and painful illness, to pay my funeral expenses, and also give some relief to my aged wife and younger children." To that pathetic appeal we do not believe Mr Stafford has as yet returned a reply. When it comes we shall "print it." Such treatment of an old servant at the hands of a paternal Government is but a poor inducement to the zealous performance of duty in the Government service. As explanatory of the reasons which induced Mr Jenkins to proceed to England with the native chiefs, we reprint a copy of a letter from Major Richmond to Sir George Grey, which speaks for itself. Here it is:-

"The Cliff, Nelson, 17th October, 1862.

My dear Sir George, - The bearer of this, Mr Jenkins, has requested me, as I have known him a great many years, to give him a note to your Excellency. He is Native Interpreter at Nelson, and was my interpreter when I was superintendent. He has some project of taking a few native chiefs to England and giving lectures, but as I understand him, would not carry it out unless it was sanctioned by you. Whether such a scheme will further the improvement of the native race, you are, of course, the best judge. All I can say is, that Mr Jenkins is a long tried and zealous servant of the Government, is a warm friend of the natives, has their confidence, and can be safely entrusted with any matter which may conduce to their benefit. With great esteem, believe me, Very faithfully yours, M. Richmond.

[Since the foregoing was written a reply has been received from the Under Secretary to the effect that although Mr Jenkins had no legal claim for pension or compensation, yet, under the circumstances of the case the Government had authorised a gratuity of 50 pounds. Before the letter had reached its destination Mr Jenkins had breathed his last, but the "gratuity" having been granted whilst he was yet alive, we have no doubt it will be paid to his aged widow, for herself and three children, under twelve years of age.]