

**HINEKORAKO**  
**MERMAID OF TE REINGA**  
by **Te Reinga Maori School**

TANIWHAS? There are hundreds of them, inhabiting all areas of this country, some, fierce living monsters, others, merely rocks, trees or other objects, and sometimes great chiefs whose names were kept alive by this form of preservation.

Such is the story of Hinekorako, taniwha and goddess of the Ngati Hine Hika of Te Reinga.

Tane Kino, great ancestor of Ngati Hine Hika, is said to have inter-married with a race of taniwha who originally inhabited Whakapunaki, a hill in the vicinity, and also Te Reinga itself.

The story as told, states that the first six generations from Iwhara to Hinekorako, were not quite men and women as we understand them, but a species of man-god, or water spirit. However the human side got the upper hand when Hinekorako fell in love and lived with Tane Kino, bearing a son whom they called Taurenga.

Prior to the birth of their child, Hinekorako told Tane Kino that to break the spell of taniwha and god, cast over her through her ancestry, he would have to care for the child, and nurse it, until it was old enough to care for itself.

Now Tane Kino, on the spur of the moment, promised Hinekorako that he would do as she wished, and so break the spell. The real test came sooner than he expected. Taurenga by this time was old enough to crawl. Following the custom of the Maori people, Tane Kino and Hinekorako, with their child, went to attend a meeting of the tribe on the Marae. As often is the case with babies, when least expected Taurenga, in the midst of a large gathering, disgraced himself. His father left so ashamed of him that he forgot his promise to his wife, and called her to come quickly and clean the child. From the midst of the gathering Hinekorako came, picked up her baby, and took him with her to the stream which now flows past the Te Reinga Marae. There she washed and fed him.

Tane Kino by now had realised that he had broken his promise and went to look for his wife and child. On finding Hinekorako, he begged forgiveness for his thoughtless action, but there was no remedy.

In reply Hinekorako wept over her son, then she stood up and handed the babe to Tane Kino. She told him that since he had been faithless to a promise, she was doomed to go back to her watery home under Te Reinga Falls. To this day she remains there, watching over the interests of her descendants whenever called upon.

On one occasion, during a heavy flood in the Hangaroa River (which joins the Ruakituri River just near Te Reinga), Ngati Hine Hika were flooded out in the middle of the night. Down swept the canoes to the dreadful falls, now a raging cascade. Just at the right time, one old Tohunga who had maintained his presence of mind, called aloud on Hinekorako for help, and immediately the rush of the canoes towards the Falls was stopped, and all the occupants were saved.