

Allen Grant

The White Man's Foot



Grant Allen
The White Man's Foot

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23170427

The White Man's Foot:

Содержание

DEDICATION	4
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	18
CHAPTER III	28
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

Grant Allen

The White Man's Foot

DEDICATION

**TO JERRARD GRANT ALLEN, *THE ONLY
BEGETTER OF THESE ENSUING ADVENTURES***

My Dear Grantie,

From the following pages, written with a single eye to your own personal tastes and predilections, you may, I trust, learn three Great Moral Lessons.

First, never to approach too near the edge of an active volcano.

Second, never to continue your intimacy with a man who deliberately and wickedly declines to pull you out of a burning crater.

And third, never to intrust the care of youth to a cannibal heathen South Sea Islander.

With the trifling exception of these three now enumerated, I am not aware that you can extract any Great Moral Lesson whatsoever from the hairbreadth escapes of Kea and her associates.

Having thus almost entirely satisfied your expressed wishes in this matter – for "a story without a moral" – I subscribe myself, with pride,

Your obedient servant and very loving father,

G.A.

CHAPTER I

My brother Frank is a most practical boy. I may be prejudiced, but it seems to me somehow there's nothing like close personal contact with active volcanoes to teach a young fellow prudence, coolness, and adaptability to circumstances. "Tom," said he to me, as we stood and watched the queer party on deck, devouring taro-paste as a Neapolitan swallows down long strings of macaroni: "don't you think, if we've got to live so long in a native hut, and feed on this port of thing, we may as well use ourselves to their manners and customs, whatever they may be, at the pearliest convenient opportunity?"

"Haven't you heard, my dear boy," said I, "what the naval officer wrote when he was asked to report to the Admiralty on that very subject of the manners and customs of the South Sea Islanders? 'Manners they have none,' he replied with Spartan brevity, 'and their customs are beastly.'"

"Not a bit of it," Frank answered quickly in his jolly way. "For my part I think this sticky, pasty stuff they're eating with their fingers, though it's a bit stodgy, looks like real jam, and I'd much rather take my lunch off things like that up here on deck, out of a native calabash, than go down and eat a civilized meal with a knife and fork in that hoky-poky, stuffy little cabin there."

I confess, for myself, I didn't exactly like the look of it. Cosmopolitan as I am, I object to fingers as a substitute for

spoons. We were on board the Royal Hawaiian mail steamer *Liké Liké*, 500 tons registered burden, from Honolulu for Hilo, in the island of Hawaii; and a quainter group than the natives on deck I'm bound to admit, in all my wanderings, by sea or by land, I had never set eyes on. The tiny steamer was built in fact on purpose to accommodate all tastes alike, be the same savage or civilized. Down stairs was a saloon where regular meals in the European fashion were well served by a dusky Polynesian steward in a white linen jacket, to such luxurious persons as preferred to take them in that orthodox manner. But the unsophisticated natives, in their picturesque dress, believing firmly in the truth of the proverb that fingers were made before forks, liked better to carry their own simple provisions in their baskets with them. They picnicked on deck in merry little circles, laughing and talking at the top of their voices (when they weren't sea-sick) as they squatted on their mats of woven grass round the family taro-bowl. From this common dish, parents and children, young men and maidens, fed all alike, each dipping his forefinger dexterously into the sticky mess, and then twisting it round, as one might twist a lot of half-boiled toffee, till they landed it safely with a sudden twirl in their appreciative mouths. "It must be awfully good," Frank went on meditatively, eyeing the doubtful mixture with a hungry look. "They seem to enjoy it so, or else of course they wouldn't lick their fingers! I wish we could strike up a friendship now with some of these amiable light-coloured natives, and get them to share their lunch with us off-hand. I wonder what they call this

precious stuff of theirs?"

"We call it taro," one of the nearest group answered, greatly to our surprise, in perfectly good and clear English. "Would you like to taste some? It's very nice. We shall be delighted if you'll try it. Hawaiians are always proud indeed to show any hospitality in their power to friendly strangers."

She was a pretty young girl of eighteen who spoke, lighter a good deal in complexion than most of the other natives around, and she was seated with a tall, dark, serious-looking old Hawaiian at a calabashful of the strange pasty mixture the appearance of which had so attracted Frank's favourable attention. As she spoke, she moved a little aside to make room for us on her mat, as if they were all playing Hunt-the-Slipper; and Frank, whose fault, I'm bound to admit, was never shyness, squatted down at once, nothing loth, tailor-fashion, on the deck by her side, and with many thanks accepted the courteous offer of a dip in the taro-bowl.

"Upon my word, Tom," he said, twirling a great dab of the queer-looking paste awkwardly into his mouth, "it's first-rate grub when you come to taste it. A little sour to be sure, but as good as pancakes. If you're going to feed us like this on the islands, sir," he added, turning to the stern old man, "I don't think we'll be in any hurry to run away again."

"Bring out some more food, Kea," the dark old Hawaiian half whispered to the girl politely, in English not quite so good as her own, but still very fluent, "and ask the gentleman," with a slight

bow towards me, "if he won't be good enough to join us in our simple luncheon."

"I shall be only too glad," I answered, immensely surprised, and with some qualms of conscience about my unfortunate remark as to the manners and customs, which I never expected any native on board to understand. "It will be much more pleasant, I'm sure, to take my meals up here on deck than to go down to that hot and stuffy little saloon below."

As I seated myself, the girl Kea took up from her side a pretty basket of plaited palm-leaves, and produced from it a few pieces of dried fish, some cold roast pork, a stick or two of sugar-cane, several fresh oranges just picked from the tree, and a tempting display of bananas and bread-fruits. Frank and I were old enough sailors and old enough travellers to fare sumptuously off such excellent food stuffs; indeed we had just arrived in the Islands from San Francisco by the last mail steamer, and fresh fruit was a great luxury to us; while after so long a voyage on the open Pacific we thought nothing of this pleasant little summer cruise between the beautiful members of that volcanic archipelago.

A meal together is a capital introduction. In the course of ten minutes we were all four of us on excellent terms with one another. Kea had introduced to us the dark old man as her Uncle Kalaua, a Hawaiian chief of the old stock of some distinction, whose house was remarkable for being situated higher up the slopes of the great volcano, Mauna Loa, than any other on the entire island. She herself, she let us know by casual side-

glimpses, was a half-caste by birth, though she hardly looked as dark as many Europeans; her mother had been Kalaua's only sister, and her father the captain of an English whaling-ship; but both were dead, she added with a sigh, and she lived now with her grim old uncle near the very summit of the great burning mountain. She told us a vast deal about herself, in fact, by way of introduction, with the usual frankness of the simple, unsophisticated children of nature, and she asked us a lot of questions in return, being anxious to learn, as we were neither missionaries, nor whalers, nor sugar-planters, nor merchants, what on earth our business could be in Hawaii.

"Well," said I, with a smile of amusement, "you'll think it a very funny one indeed when I tell you what it is. We've come to make observations on Mauna Loa."

"To make observations!" Kea answered with a faint thrill of solemn awe in her hushed voice. "Oh, don't say that. It's – it's so very dangerous." And she glanced aside timidly at her uncle.

Kalaua looked up at us quickly with a suspicious glance. "Observations on Mauna Loa?" he cried in a very stern tone. "On our great volcano? Scientific observations? The man is ill advised in truth who tries to go poking and prying too much about Mauna Loa!"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid," Frank answered laughing; "need they, Tom? It's not by any means our first experience of eruptions. My brother's an awful dab at volcanoes, you know. He's seen dozens; and he's been sent out to examine this one

in particular by the British Association for the Advancement of Science. I'm his assistant-examiner, without salary. Sounds awfully grand that, doesn't it? But we mean to have a jolly lark in Hawaii for all that. Expenses paid, and all found; and nothing to do but to go down the crater and look about us. We expect to have a splendid time. There's nothing I love like a really good volcano."

But in spite of Frank's enthusiastic way of looking at the matter I could see at a glance that the mention of our object in visiting Hawaii had cast a shade of gloom at once over both Kea and her uncle. The old man seemed to grow moody and sullen; Kea was rather grieved and saddened. The rest of our meal passed off less pleasantly. It was not till we began to chew green sugar-cane together by way of dessert, that Kea's spirits at all returned. She laughed and talked then once more with native good-humour, showing us how to strip and peel the fresh cane, and making fun of us merrily because in our English awkwardness we got pieces of the fibre wedged hopelessly in between our front teeth. Yet even so I couldn't help suspecting that something was weighing upon her mind a little. Evidently they were either hurt or distressed that we should think of scientifically observing Mauna Loa. I wondered much whether they held the mountain too sacred a thing for inquisitive science to poke its nose into, or whether they only considered it too dangerous a crater for the bold explorer to meddle with carelessly. If it was merely the last, I didn't much mind. Frank

and I were thoroughly at home with nasty-tempered volcanoes, and knew their tricks and their manners down to the ground far too well to be in the least afraid of them. I had been engaged in studying their manifestations indeed for the last six years; and Frank, who was born to face danger, had joined me in all my expeditions and explorations ever since he'd been big enough to carry a knapsack.

In the course of the afternoon however I happened to be standing with pretty little Kea near the bow of the steamer, while her uncle was slowly pacing the quarterdeck, immersed in conversation with a Hawaiian acquaintance. She was a graceful young girl, with a wreath of yellow flowers twined, Pacific fashion, round her broad straw hat, and another garland of crimson hibiscus thrown lightly like a scarf like one well-shaped shoulder. She glanced timidly round to see if Kalaua was well out of earshot; then, seeing herself safe, she said to me in a low, half-whispered voice, "If I were you, Mr. Hesselgrave, I'd give up the idea of exploring Mauna Loa."

"Give it up!" I cried. "Why, really, you know, that would be quite impossible! I've come all the way from England on purpose to visit it. Is the mountain so very dangerous then?"

Kea's voice dropped a tone lower still. "It's more than dangerous," she said very nervously. "It's almost certainly fatal."

"How so?" I asked. I was not easily frightened.

She hesitated a moment. Then she answered with a pained and half-terrified air, "Nobody in Hawaii will give you any

assistance."

"Why not?" I inquired. "Are they all so dreadfully afraid of the volcano?"

"Not of the volcano," Kea replied with evident awe in her tone, "but of Pélé, of Pélé. – I suppose you've never even heard about Pélé, though!"

"Never!" I repeated, laughing unconcernedly. "Enlighten my darkness. Who is he, or what is it?"

"It's neither *he* nor *it*," the Hawaiian girl answered in a hushed voice. "It's *she*, if it's anybody. Pélé's the goddess who lives, as our people used once to believe, in a fiery cave at the bottom of Mauna Loa!"

"Nonsense!" I replied, amused at the girl's apparent superstition. "I thought you were all converted here long ago. You don't mean to say your people go on believing still in such childish nonsense as gods and goddesses?"

Kea's voice sank lower than ever, and she glanced around her with a frightened little gaze. "We don't *worship* them, you know," she answered apologetically, under her breath almost; "but we can't help believing there's somebody there, of course, some super-natural being, when we hear Pélé groaning and moaning and sobbing in the dead of night, or see her casting up huge red-hot stones and showers of lava, whenever she's angry." She paused a moment: then she added mysteriously in a solemn undertone. "There must be something in it. My father knew that. He was one of the bravest and most skilful whalers in the whole

Pacific, and he always said there was something in it."

I hadn't the heart to answer her back. I didn't consider the captain of a whaling ship a conclusive authority on such a point of science; but I couldn't bear to interfere with the poor girl's touching belief in her dead father's supreme wisdom; so I abstained humanely from adverse criticism. "And your uncle?" I asked after a brief interval.

Kea seemed almost terrified at the question. "My uncle," she said, in a shuffling way, "knows one thing well – that, according to the firm tradition of our ancestors, if the White Man's Foot ever treads the inner floor of Pélé's home, the White Man himself must foil a victim that day to the anger of the goddess. It may be true, or it may be false: but at any rate, that was what our fathers told us."

I laughed again. She was so absurdly and profoundly in earnest about it all. "In that case." I said with a little bow, "I may as well make my will at once, and leave my property to my nearest relations, for it's all up with me. I mean to explore the crater myself, and, I need hardly tell you, Frank will accompany me. We'll call in some morning at the front door, and drop a card on this terrible Pélé. I hope the lady will have the politeness to be at home to receive visitors."

The girl shuddered. "Hush," she cried, with a terrified face. "Don't talk like that. Don't talk any more about the matter at all. You don't know what you're saying. My uncle is coming. I wouldn't for worlds he should overhear us. We don't believe in

Pélé any longer, of course. But I hope for all that you'll never try to explore the crater."

At that very moment the old chief Kalaua, who had long been deeply immersed in talk with his friend at the stern, apparently discussing some serious subject, strolled up and joined us. He bowed once more as he approached, with the strange old savage Hawaiian politeness; for in courtesy of manner these Pacific Islanders could give points to most educated Englishmen. "I was thinking," he said, withdrawing his cigar and addressing me, "that if you and your brother really want to make explorations in Mauna Loa you couldn't do better than come up and stop at my house on the top of the mountain. It's nearest the summit of any in the island, and it would be a convenient place for you always to start from on your exploring expeditions. You'd save the long ride up the slopes. May I venture to offer you the hospitality of a humble Hawaiian roof? It's a nice warm house, European built – it was put up by my English brother-in-law, Kea's father; and I think we could manage to make you as comfortable as anybody in Hawaii. Is it agreed? What say you?"

"You would allow me to pay for our board and lodging, of course?" I answered interrogatively. "Otherwise I mustn't trespass so far as that on your kind indulgence."

The old native drew himself up at once with offended dignity. "I'm a chief," he replied with quiet emphasis. "The blood of the great Kamehameha the First flows in my veins. When I ask you to my house, I ask you as my guest. Don't offend me, I beg of

you, by offering me money!"

I felt I had really hurt the old chief's pride and wounded his feelings, so I hastened to apologize with the best expressions I could summon up, and to protest that I hadn't the remotest intention of slighting in any way his generous offer. "In England," I continued, "we are not accustomed to be received by perfect strangers in such a princely style of open-handed hospitality."

Kalaua bowed. "It is well," he answered with stately dignity. "Come to my house, and you shall have all that my house affords freely. May we expect you to stop with us then? It will give myself and my niece the greatest pleasure in life, I assure you, to receive you."

Kea from behind framed her lips, to my surprise, into an emphatic "No." I saw it and smiled. She uttered no sound, but the old man seemed instinctively to recognize the fact that she was making signs to me. He turned round, half-angrily, though with perfect composure, and said something to her in Hawaiian, which I did not then fully understand, though I had been studying the language hard, with dictionary and grammar, all the way out on my voyage from England. Kea looked frightened and held her tongue at once. The old chief glanced back at me for a decisive answer. In spite of Kea's warning I thought the opportunity too good to be missed. "I shall be delighted," I answered with my warmest manner. "I'm sure it's most kind of you. How can I thank you enough? I had no idea you Hawaiians were so generously hospitable."

When I told Frank of it that young rascal remarked with a solemn grin, "Of course they're hospitable! Why, didn't they take in Captain Cook, and roast him and eat him, they were so very fond of him? I expect that's what this sober old fellow of yours means to do with us. He'll give a dinner-party in our honour when we get there, no doubt, and you and I will be the joints for the occasion. That's the Pacific way of welcoming a stranger."

CHAPTER II

"When we reached Hilo, I went ashore in a boat through the dangerous surf, and before arranging to go up the mountain with my host and his niece, I called first on an English merchant in the little palm-girt town, to whom we had letters of introduction from friends in Liverpool.

"Going to stop with Kalaua, eh?" the merchant said, as soon as we had named our particular business. "A very good house, too! You couldn't do better. Quite close to the very mouth of the crater, and right in the track of the great red-hot lava streams. You'll see Pélé kicking up a shindy there simply to perfection. Her majesty's been getting precious uneasy of late – rumbling and growling I shouldn't be surprised if you're just in the nick of time for a first-rate eruption."

"And what sort of person is my host?" I asked curiously. "He seems a very stern, old-fashioned cannibal."

Our new acquaintance laughed. "You may well say that," he answered smiling. "In the good old days – or the bad old days, whichever of the two you prefer to call them – you pays your money and you takes your choice – Kalaua, they say, was the hereditary priest of that grim goddess, Pélé. His house was built on the highest habitable point of the mountain where Pélé dwells, that he might be close at hand to appease the angry spirit of the great crater whenever she began to pour down lava over

the banana-grounds and cocoanut plantations at the foot of the volcano. Many a fat pig, and many a basketful of prime taro that hard-looking old man has offered up in his time to Pélé – ay, and I dare say many a human victim, too, if we only knew it. But all that's over long ago, thank goodness. He's a Christian now, of course, like all the rest of them; a very respectable old fellow in his way, with a keen eye of his own to business, and a thorough comprehension of the state of the sugar market. He keeps a good house. You've fallen on your feet, I can tell you, for Hawaii, if you've got an invitation to stop for an indefinite time as a guest at Kalaua's."

I was glad to hear we had happened by chance upon such comfortable quarters.

We slept that night at a little Hawaiian inn at Hilo, where we dined most sumptuously off roast pig and baked plantains; and at six next morning, Kalaua himself wakened us up to start on our long ride up the great lone mountain.

When we sallied forth, four sure-footed ponies stood saddled at the door, and Kalaua, Kea, Frank, and myself, mounting our careering steeds (only they didn't career), began our ascent to the cloud-capped summit. Mauna Loa, that bald cone, is almost as high as any peak in the Alps, rising some 14,000 feet above sea level; but the ascent over the lava plains is gentle and gradual, and the top, in this warm and delicious climate, still remains far below the level of perpetual snow. Nevertheless it is a long and tedious ride, some thirty miles, from Hilo to the top; and our sure-footed

little ponies clambered slowly on, planting their hoofs with the utmost deliberation on the treacherous surface of the rugged and honey-combed masses of lava. Frank and I were both quite tired out with their camel-like pace when we reached the summit. Kea and Kalaua, more accustomed to the ascent, were as fresh as daisies, and Kea, in particular, laughed and talked incessantly, though I fancied, she was ill at ease somehow, in spite of all her apparent merriment.

At last, after crossing a wide expanse of broken blocks of black basalt, as big as the largest squares of freestone used in architecture, and then sliding and gliding over a hideous expanse of slippery, smooth lava, like ice for glassiness, we pulled up, wearied, at a house built close on the very summit, European or rather American, in its style and arrangements, but comfortable and even wealthy-looking in all its appointments. It was composed of solid volcanic stone, cut into large square masses, and round it ran a pleasant wooden verandah, with rocking-chairs temptingly displayed in a row under its broad canopy. An oleander blossomed profusely by the side, and tropical creepers of wonderful beauty festooned the posts and balconies with their hanging verdure and their trumpet-shaped flower-bells.

"Come in," Kea cried, leaping down with ease from her mountain pony, which a native boy seized at once and took away to the stables. "Come in, and make yourselves at home in our house. Dinner will be ready in twenty minutes."

"I should hope so," Frank answered, with his free-and-easy manner; "for I'm free to confess I want my grub awfully after such a long ride. And then I shall go out and inspect this precious volcano we hear so much about."

Kalaua's brow darkened somewhat, as if he didn't like to hear Mauna Loa so cavalierly described, and he murmured a few words in Hawaiian to Kea, in which I could only catch the name of Pélé, repeated very earnestly several times over.

The house was large, roomy, and well furnished, with bamboo chairs and neat native bedsteads; and the dinner, to which Frank at least did full justice, seemed to promise well for our future treatment under the old chief's hospitable roof. Kalaua himself grew somewhat less grim, too, as the meal progressed. Nothing thaws the soul like dinner. He warmed by degrees, and told us several amusing stories of the old heathen days, delighting Frank's heart by narrating, in glowing language, how, in his youth, he had charged, a naked warrior at the head of his naked troops, when Kamehameha the Second attacked the island. Frank was charmed to find himself so nearly face to face with aboriginal savagery. "And what did you do with the prisoners?" he asked inauspiciously.

The old man smiled a grimly terrible smile. "The less said about the prisoners the better," he answered at last, with some faint show of conventional reluctance. "Remember, we were heathens then, and knew no better. The English have come since and taught us our duty. We no longer fight; we are civilized

now; we buy horses, and cultivate yam and bread-fruit and sugar-cane." And he helped himself as he spoke to another piece of fresh ginger.

I don't think Frank quite saw what he meant; but I confess a shudder passed through my own frame as I realized exactly what the old chief was driving at. It was strange to stand so very close to the lowest barbarism known to humanity. They had eaten the prisoners.

After dinner we strolled out, in the beautiful, clear, tropical evening, to the edge of the crater. Accustomed as I was to volcanoes everywhere, I never beheld a more grand or beautiful sight than that first glimpse of Mauna Loa in all its glory. We looked over the edge of the great ring of basalt, and saw below us, down three successive ledges of rock, seething and tossing, a vast and liquid sea of fire. Here and there the lava boiled and bubbled into huge, inflated, balloon-like crests; here and there it rose into monstrous black stacks and irregular chimneys, from whose fiery mouths belched forth great columns of red flame, interspersed with dark wreaths of smoke and sulphur. It was the wildest, noblest, and most awful volcano I had ever yet visited – and my acquaintance with the family was by no means superficial. Frank stood aghast with awe and wonder for a moment by my side. "Why, Vesuvius is nothing to it!" he cried, astonished, "and Etna's just nowhere in the matter of craters! I say, Tom, how I should love to see it in a good tip-top blazing eruption!"

As he spoke Kea, who had come out with us, clad from head

to foot in her simple, long Hawaiian robe, gazed steadily over the brink, and looked down with a familiar glance into the gigantic crater. For a minute or two she kept her eyes fixed on a certain jagged peak or furnace of lava, round whose base the sea of liquid fire was surging and falling, like water in a saucepan on a kitchen stove. At last she broke out into sudden surprise, "Why, it's rising!" she cried breathlessly. "It's rising! It's rising!"

"How jolly!" Frank called out from a few yards down, where he had clambered to get a better view of the inner crater. "I hope that fellow in the town was right after all, and that we're going to come in at the very right point for a regular good eruptive outburst!"

Kea's face grew pale with terror. "You are," she answered, "I can see it rise. The bubbles are bursting; the steam's crackling. It always does so before it begins to flow out upon the slopes of the mountain."

She was quite right. It was clearly rising. I was overjoyed. Nothing could have happened more neatly or opportunely for the interests of science. Our arrival at Mauna Loa seemed to prove, as it were, the signal for the mountain to burst out at once into full activity. We were in luck's way. We had come on the very eve of an eruption.

Kea ran down to fetch her uncle. The old man came up, and peered over cautiously into the depths of the crater. Then he called aloud in Hawaiian to his trembling niece. I couldn't catch all the words he said, but I caught one sentence twice repeated,

"Pélé ké loa," and a single word that recurred over and over again in his frantic outbursts, "Areoi," "Areoi."

I had brought my Hawaiian-English pocket dictionary with me from Hilo, and I turned up the words in their places one by one, to see if I could understand them. To my great surprise I found I had heard them quite aright; it's so hard to catch any part of an unknown language when rapidly spoken between natives. "Pélé ké loa," I discovered, meant in English, "Pélé is angry," and "areoi" was defined by my book as "a stranger, a foreigner, especially a white man, a European or American."

We stood long on the brink of the crater and watched it rising slowly before our very eyes. Kea pointed out to us with demonstrative finger the various floors or ledges on the inner wall. "That first," she said with an awestruck face, "is the Floor of the Strangers; as far as that everybody may go; it is as it were the mere threshold, or outer vestibule, of the volcano. The second, that you see further down below, in the dark glare, is the Floor of the Hawaiians; as far as that, by the rule of our fathers, only natives may dare to penetrate. If a white man's foot ever treads that floor, our people used to say, Pélé will surely claim him for her victim. The third, that you can just distinguish down there in the bright light, where the fiery lava is this moment rising – that's the Floor of Pélé: none but the priests of Pélé might venture in the old days to tread its precincts. If any other man or woman were to dream of descending upon it, in the twinkling of an eye, like a feather in the flame, our fathers said, Pélé would surely

shrivel him to ashes."

"And you believe all that nonsense?" I cried incredulously.

Kea turned towards me with a very grave face. "It isn't nonsense," she answered, in her most serious manner. "It's perfectly true. As true as anything. Of course I don't believe the superstition, but whoever falls into that third abyss is burnt to a cinder before aid can arrive, by the wrath of the volcano."

"I dare say," I answered carelessly. "It looks quite hot enough to frizzle up anything. Whoever falls into an ordinary blast furnace (if it comes to that) is burnt to a cinder before aid can arrive, by the unconscious wrath of the molten metal."

"Don't talk so!" Kea cried, with a terrified face. "You distress me. You frighten me."

The volcano meanwhile rose faster and faster. The gray evening began to close in. A deep red glow spread over the open mouth of the crater. The clouds above reflected and repeated the lurid light. Every moment the glare grew deeper and yet deeper. As night came on, it seemed to rain fire. I saw at once that we were in for a good thing. We had hit on the exact moment of a first-class eruption.

A more awful or grander night than that I never remember. I'm a scientific man, and my business is to watch and report upon volcanoes; but that night, I confess, was every bit as hot as I care to have it. Anything hotter than that, indeed, would fry one like a herring. By nine o'clock, the mountain was in full glare; by ten, it was pouring out red fragments of stone and showers of ashes;

by eleven, a stream of white glowing lava was pushing its way in one desolating flood down the ravines on the southern slope of the mountain. Before the final outburst, light curling wreaths of vapour ascended from fissures in the wall of the crater, and hung like a huge umbrella over the mountain top. The red glare, reflected from this strange cloud-like canopy, gave the whole scene for many miles around the appearance of being lighted up by giants at play with some vast and colossal Bengal fires. We looked on awestruck. Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, a sound reached our ears, a terrific sound, as of ten thousand engines blowing off steam; and all at once a great body of gas was ejected into the air, in a blaze of light, while huge fragments of rock were hurled violently upward, only to fall again in fiery heat upon the naked slopes of the cone and shoulders. All night long we were positively bombarded with these aërial shells; they fell in thousands round us on every side, though fortunately none of them happened to touch either the house itself or any one of its inhabitants.

Not a living soul remained upon the spot save Frank and myself, and Kea and her uncle. All the rest of the natives fled headlong down in wild panic and terror to the sea at Hilo.

A man of science, however, like a soldier on the battle-field, must know how to take his life in his hand. I got out my pencil, my sketch-book and my colours, and, true to the orders of the Association in whose interest I was travelling, I endeavoured to reproduce, as well as I could, in a spirited sketch, the whole

awful scene as it unfolded itself in vivid hues before us. Frank, who is certainly the most intrepid boy of my acquaintance, ably seconded me in my difficult task. Kea looked on at us in speechless amazement. "Aren't you afraid?" she asked at last, in a hushed voice.

"Yes," I answered boldly, telling the plain truth, "if you will allow me to say so, I'm very much afraid indeed. But I'm a man of science; I've got to do it; and I shall do it still till the lava comes down and drives us away bodily. And you? Aren't you afraid, too, of the stones and ashes?"

"No," she replied, though her tone belied her. "The eruptions never hurt my uncle nor me. You see, he's been accustomed to them from his childhood upward. In the old days, he was taught to think he was under Pélé's protection."

Frank looked up, imperturbable as ever. "For my part," he said, tossing the curls from his forehead, "I'm not a man of science, like Tom, you know; and I'm not under the protection of a heathen goddess, like you and your uncle, Kea; but I call it the grandest set of fireworks I ever saw in all my life – beats the Crystal Palace hollow – and I wouldn't have missed it for fifty pounds, I can tell you."

As for Kalaua, he stood sombre, alone, with folded arms and tight-pressed lips, looking down unmoved into the depths of the crater.

CHAPTER III

All night long we remained outside on the platform of the summit, watching and sketching that terrific convulsion. The mountain poured forth endless floods of lava. Heaven and earth were lighted up with its awful glow. Kalaua stood by us still, erect and grim, like one conscious that the fiery hail and the red-hot boulders had no terrors for him, and could not harm him. Kea, pale and tremulous, yet too brave at heart to flinch ever so, crouched by his side, too awestruck to speak in mute expectation. Frank alone seemed undisturbed by the appalling commotion going on around him. Boy enough to feel nothing of the terror of the moment, he was simply excited by the grandeur and magnificence of that wonderful pyrotechnic display. "It's the jolliest sight I ever saw, Tom," he exclaimed with delight more than once during the evening. "Why, to live here would be almost as good as to have a season-ticket all the year round for all the *fêtes* and gala-days in England!"

By morning however the eruption slackened; the internal fires had worn themselves out. "Pélé has grown tired of kicking up such a rumpus," Frank remarked cheerfully; and as he himself was tired of watching her, too, he proposed we should go in and rest ourselves a little after our arduous labours. Indeed, the lava was now almost ceasing to flow, and the bombardment of pumice-stone and fiery cinders had intermitted

a little. We returned to the house, and flung ourselves down on our beds in the clothes we wore, too fatigued after our long and sleepless watch to trouble ourselves with the needless bother of undressing. When you've sat up all night observing an eruption, you don't much care about such luxuries of an advanced civilization as nightshirts. Before we retired however Kea brought us in a big bowl of fresh taro-paste, and on this simple food we made a most excellent and substantial breakfast. In ten minutes we were snoring so hard on our bamboo beds that I don't believe even another eruption would have roused us up, if it had thundered at our doors with one of its monstrous subterranean boulders.

It was five in the evening before we woke again. Frank stretched himself with a yawn. "I don't know how *you* feel, Tom," he cried as he jumped out of bed, "but *I* feel as if that extinct instrument, the rack, had been invented over again for my special benefit. There's not a bone in my body that isn't aching."

"What does that matter," I answered, "if science is satisfied? I've got the very finest sketch of a first-class eruption that ever was taken since seismology became a separate study."

"Bother seismology!" Frank exclaimed with a snort. "What a jolly long word for such a simple thing! As if one couldn't say straight out, earthquakes. For my part, what I want satisfied isn't science at all, but an internal yearning for some breakfast or some supper, whichever you choose to call it."

The supper was soon upon the board (for by this time the

native servants had returned), and as soon as it was finished, we sallied forth, all four together, to inspect the changes wrought in the mountain by last night's events. The effects of the eruption were indeed prodigious. Great streams of fresh lava still lay dull and half-hot along the fertile valleys of the mountain side; and the ground about the house was strewn thick and deep with a white coat of powdery ashes. "This is splendid!" I said. "I shall have my work cut out for me now for several weeks. Nobody had ever a better chance afforded him of observing in detail the effects of a great volcanic effort."

Kalaua glanced grimly across at me as I spoke. "I wonder," he murmured, with a sort of sphinx-like sardonic smile, "you have escaped so safe to observe and report upon them."

"Ah, you see, chief," Frank answered carelessly, "he was under your protection. Pélé wouldn't hurt us, you know, as we were guests of a friend of hers. That was awfully nice of her. She's a perfect lady, as volcanoes go. I call her a most polite and obliging goddess."

Kalaua turned away with a half angry look. It was clear that, converted or unconverted, he considered the terrible deity of his fathers no proper subject for light chaff or jesting.

We spent the next six weeks pleasantly enough in the old man's house, observing and making notes upon the curious facts connected with the crater and its recent outbreak. I will not narrate my results here at full for fear of boring you – the more so, as I have already devoted two large volumes to the subject in

the British Association *Reports*, Manchester Meeting. It will be enough for the present to mention that Frank and I thoroughly explored the whole top of the crater, as far as the first floor, which Kea had described to us as the Floor of the Strangers. We measured and mapped it out in every direction with theodolite and chain, and we made numerous interesting, and, I venture to add, important observations upon the most disputed points in the phenomena of eruptions. We knew our way about the Floor of the Strangers, in fact, as well as we knew our way down from our own home at Hampstead Heath to Charing Cross Station. Kalaua and Kea were surprised to find how accurately we had learnt the whole geography of the district; and Kalaua in particular seemed far from pleased at our perfect familiarity with the mountain and its ways, though he was much too polite ever to say so openly, holding his peace on the matter, at least to our faces, with true antique Hawaiian courtesy. For bland courtesy of demeanour, commend me to a cannibal.

One morning however about six weeks after our first arrival, I had occasion to send Frank by himself down to Hilo, on one of the sure-footed little mountain ponies, to fetch up some ropes and other articles we needed for our exploration from the stores in the town; and I said good-bye to him just outside the house, where Kalaua was seated, smoking a cigarette, and wrapped up as usual in his own stern and sombre reveries.

"Good-bye, old fellow," Frank cried in farewell, as he mounted his horse and cantered gaily off. "Mind you take care

of yourself while I'm away. Give the crater a wide berth. Don't try to go exploring any further without me!"

"All right," I shouted back. "I won't get into mischief. Trust me for saving my own skin. I shall just potter about a bit to amuse myself alone on the outer edge of the Floor of the Strangers."

"What do you want the rope for?" Kalaua asked moodily, looking up from his cigarette as Frank rode away. "Better not go trusting yourself with any rope too far in the crater of Mauna Loa."

"I'm not afraid," I answered, with a short little laugh. "I want the rope to let myself down to the lower levels."

"What, the Floor of the Hawaiians?" the old chief cried with flashing eyes.

"Well, yes," I answered; "that first, of course, and then, after that, the Floor of Pélé."

If I had dropped a bomb-shell right in front of his house, the stern old chief could not have looked that moment more appalled and horrified. "Young man," he cried, rising hastily to his feet and standing like a messenger of fate before me, "I warn you not to trifle with the burning mountain. Tread the Floor of the Strangers as much as you like, but the lower ledges of the crater are very dangerous. You're my guest, and I advise you. For unskilled feet to approach those levels is almost certain death. In the dark old days when we were all heathen, we used to say in our folly that the wrath of Pélé would burn you up like a leaf if you ventured to touch them. We no longer say that: we know

better now. But we still say to all who would tamper with them that the mouth of the crater is most treacherous and perilous."

"Oh," I answered lightly, turning on my heel, "don't trouble for me. I'm accustomed to volcanoes. I don't object I think no more of them than a sailor thinks of chapters of a storm at sea. Let them boil and seethe as much as they like. They're nothing after all, when a fellow's used to them."

The old man answered me never a word. He rose, and with a gesture of solemn dissent wrapped his native cloak severely round him; then he walked in grim and gloomy silence back by himself into his own chamber.

As for me, I strolled off quietly, sketch-book in hand, up to the broken brink of the great crater. I had nothing in particular to do that morning, having in fact by this time quite exhausted the first ledge or Floor of the Strangers: and I could accomplish no work, now I had finished there, till Frank returned from town with the rope to lower us down to the Floor of the Hawaiians, the next ledge that I thought of mapping. So I sat myself down on a jagged peak of hardened cinders, cemented together by molten volcanic matter, and began in a lazy, idle, half-sleepy kind of way to sketch a distant point of the interior crater.

I had sat there listlessly, sketching and musing, for about twenty minutes, when I saw a sight I can never resist. A beautiful butterfly, of a species quite new to me, attracted my attention on the side of the crater-wall over which my legs were carelessly dangling. Now, though I am by trade (saving your

presence) a seismologist and vulcanologist – no offence meant by those awesome words – I've always had a sneaking kindness in an underhand way for other departments of natural science, especially zoology; and a new butterfly, with a red spot on its tail, is a severe temptation that my utmost philosophy can never induce me to disregard under any circumstances. There are some scientific men, I know, who seem to think science ought to be made as dull and as dry and as fusty as possible: for my own part, I never could take that eminently correct and respectable view: I like my science as amusing as I can get it, with a considerable spice of adventure thrown in; and I prefer specimen-hunting among the Pacific Islands to name-hunting among the prodigiously learned and stupid memoirs of the British Museum. Between ourselves, too (but I wouldn't like this to reach the ears of the Royal Society), I regard a man as much more useful to science when engaged in catching birds or insects in the Malay Archipelago or the African mountains than when inventing names for them out of his own head in a fusty, dusty, musty room in the museum at South Kensington. Have the kindness to keep this dark however if you ever go to a British Association Meeting: for if it reached the ears of the Committee, they might think me an unfit person to entrust with any further volcanic investigations.

Well, my butterfly was resting, poised like a statue, on a pretty flowering plant that grew out of a cranny in the sheer wall of rock, a yard or two below the precise point where I was then

sitting. Said I to myself, with an eager dart forward, "I shall nab that specimen;" and laying aside my pencil and drawing-pad at once, I proceeded forthwith, at the top of my speed, incontinently to nab him.

It was with great difficulty however that I clambered down the side of the crag, for the lava just there was porous and bubbly. It crumbled and broke like thin ice under my feet; and wherever I thought I had just secured myself a firm foothold it gave way after a moment, bit by bit, with the force of my pressure. Nevertheless I managed somehow, to my great delight, to reach the plant that sprouted from the cranny without at all disturbing my friend the butterfly, who, engrossed on his dinner, was hardly expecting an attack from the rear; and clapping my hand upon him before he could say Jack Robinson, I popped him, triumphant, into my pocket collecting case. Then, with a light heart, and the proud consciousness of a duty performed, I turned once more to climb up the cliff again.

But that, I found, was by no means so easy a matter as descending. I had got down partly by the mean and illegitimate device of letting my feet slide; to get back I must somehow secure a firm and certain foothold in the loose lava. To my surprise and horror there was none to be found. The soft and creamy pumice-stone seemed nowhere to afford a single solid point of support. I struggled in vain to recover my balance; at last, to my dismay, I stumbled and fell – fell, as I feared, towards the Floor of the Hawaiians, that yawned a full hundred and twenty feet of sheer

depth in the crater below me. With a wild lunge I clutched for support at the plant in the cranny. It broke short in my hand, and my one chance gone, I rolled down rapidly to the very bottom. I didn't exactly tumble down the entire sheer height in a single fall; if I had I shouldn't be here to tell you. I broke the force of the descent somewhat by digging my hands and feet with frantic efforts into the loose wall of rotten lava. But before I could realize precisely what was happening I lost my head. The world reeled round me; my eyes closed. Next moment I was aware of a horrid thud, and a fierce blow against some hard surface. I knew then just where I had landed. I had fallen or rolled by stages the whole way down the crag, and was lying on my side on the Floor of the Hawaiians!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.