

Wade Mary Hazelton Blanchard

Our Little Hawaiian Cousin



Mary Wade

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Preface

Far out in the broad island-dotted and island-fringed Pacific Ocean lies an island group known as the Hawaiian or Sandwich Islands.

The brave voyager Captain Cook, who discovered these Hawaiian Islands, found living there a brown-skinned people, whose descendants live there to this day. Indeed, most of the island dwellers in the Pacific are of the brown race, which we know as one of the great divisions of the human family.

As the years passed by, the brown people living on the Hawaiian Islands came into closer relations with America. The islands are on the line of trade and travel between America and Asia. Our missionaries went there, and the people welcomed them gladly.

At length the time came when the Hawaiian Islands asked the greatest of the American nations, our United States, to receive them into her family; for they saw that they could not govern themselves as wisely alone as with her help. Thus these brown, childlike people came to be among the youngest of the adopted children of our nation.

Our government has accepted a great trust in undertaking to care for these people who are of a different race and who live far from our shores. We shall all of us feel much interest in seeing that our adopted brothers and sisters are treated kindly, wisely, and well. We shall not forget that, far apart as they are from us in distance and by race descent, they are yet our kindred. So we shall be doubly glad to meet and know our little Hawaiian cousin.

CHAPTER I. A HAPPY CHILD

Little Auwae is beautiful; but, better than that, much better, she has no thought of it herself.

She sits in front of her low cottage home singing a soft sweet song, weaving a garland of scarlet flowers to adorn her head. As she carefully places each bud on the string, she looks up at the American flag floating in the breezes not far away.

The schoolmaster of the village tells her it is in honour of George Washington, the greatest man of the United States; that if he had not lived, America would not be what she is to-day, and she might not have been able to give Hawaii the help needed when trouble came.

But what cares little Auwae for all this? What difference does it make to her that her island home, the land of beauty and of flowers, is under American rule? To be sure, a few of the "grown-ups" in the place look sober for a moment when they speak of the change since the old days of Hawaii's kings; but the sadness passes in a moment, and the gentle, happy child-people turn again to their joys and sports.

Auwae has shining brown eyes, and, as she smiles at the homely little dog curled up at her side, one can see two rows of beautiful white teeth. Her skin, although of such a dark brown, is so clear and lustrous one cannot help admiring it. The girl is not afraid of tan or freckles. She rarely wears any head covering save a garland of flowers, if that could be called such; but she bathes herself frequently with cocoanut oil, which makes the skin soft and shiny.

She takes an abundance of exercise in the open air; she swims like the fabled mermaid; she rides for miles at a time over the rough mountain passes on the back of her favourite horse. It is no wonder that this plump little maiden of ten years is the picture of health and grace.

Her home is a perfect bower. It stands in a grove of tall cocoa-palms, whose beauty cannot be imagined by those who live in the temperate lands and who see them growing only in the hothouses. They are tall and stately, yet graceful as the willow; their long, curved stems reach up sixty, seventy, sometimes even one hundred feet toward the sky, then spread out into a magnificent plume of leaves from twelve to twenty feet in length. The breeze makes low, sweet music as it moves gently across the tree-tops and keeps company with Auwae's song.

Beneath the trees the grass is of the most vivid green, mixed with delicate ferns; the garden in front of the house is filled with gorgeous flowering plants, – roses, lilies, oleanders, geraniums, tuberose, scenting the air with their perfume; besides many others known only in tropical lands.

The garden wall at the side is hidden by masses of the night-blooming cereus, which is such a curiosity in our own country that often many people gather to watch the opening of a single flower.

Vines hanging full of the scarlet passion-flower drape the veranda on which Auwae sits. When she has finished her wreath, she crowns her long hair with it, and turns to go into the house.

She makes a pretty picture, the little girl with her simple white dress, beneath which the bare brown feet are seen, – those feet which have never yet been pressed out of shape by stiff, tight casings of leather.

I call it a house, yet many speak of it as a hut. It is a low building whose sides and high sloping roof are thatched with grasses. Few such are made nowadays in Hawaii, for the people are fast following the example of the white settlers, and now build their cottages of wood, and divide them into rooms, so that they look like the homes commonly found in New England villages.

Auwae's father, however, clings to the old fashions of his people, and his little daughter has always lived in this beautiful grass house. The frame was made of bamboo poles fastened together by ropes of palm-leaf fibres. Days were spent in gathering the grasses for thatching the sides and roof of the house. They were woven into beautiful patterns for the roof. It was necessary to choose

skilful workmen who knew just how to finish the corners, for the heavy rains of the tropics must not be given a chance to soak through the outside and make it damp within. When it was finished the house looked like a large bird's nest upside down.

Strange as it may seem, there is no floor in the house, but the ground is paved with stones. It is nearly covered with large mats. Some of these are made with rushes, while others have been woven from leaves of the pandanus-tree. They are stained in bright colours and odd patterns. A large screen of woven pandanus leaves divides the sleeping portion from the rest of the house.

There is no furniture, unless one can call by such a name the great number of mats in the corner. They serve for couches, bedspreads, and screens. In one corner is a collection of gourds and bowls, or calabashes, as they are called. Some of them are polished highly and prettily ornamented. If Auwae's father desired to do so, he could sell these calabashes to the American "curio" collector for a goodly sum of money; but he will not part with a single one. They are of all sizes, from that of a tiny teacup to the great "company" calabash, which holds at least ten gallons.

When there are many visitors at Auwae's home, this calabash is used at meal-time. It will hold enough food to satisfy the appetites of a large party.

The greatest treasure stands at one side near the wall. It looks like a mammoth dust-brush, but it is a sacred thing in this Hawaiian family. It is the mark of chieftainship. None other than a chief had, in the old days, a right to own such a thing, under the penalty of death. The long handle of polished bone is topped by a large plume of peacock feathers. The ancient kings of Hawaii were always attended by bearers carrying "Kahilis," as the people call them, and two enormous plumes stood at the threshold of their homes. No common person could pass by this sign of royalty or chieftainship, and enter a dwelling so marked, unless he were bidden.

CHAPTER II. AN OUTDOOR KITCHEN

Auwae does not linger within the house, but follows a sound of talking and laughter in the grove behind the house. There she finds her mother and grandmother, together with a number of the neighbouring women. They, too, are weaving garlands, for they wish to decorate their husbands when they come home to dinner.

Auwae's mother is making her wreath of bright orange-coloured seeds taken from the fruit of the pandanus. She wears a garland like Auwae's, except that she has used flowers of another colour. She has wound a beautiful vine around her waist and throat, which sets off her loose red dress to perfection. She is a fat woman, but as beauty is often measured by size among the Hawaiians, she must be considered quite handsome.

What is it that makes her look so different from her white sisters? It is not the brown skin, bare feet, and flowing hair like her daughter's. It must be her happiness and the grace of all her movements. She seems to be actually without a care as she leans back in the grass and pats her little daughter's head. Her laugh is just as joyous as Auwae's. Her hands do not bear the marks of labour, but are soft and dimpled as a child's.

She, a grown woman, is idly making wreaths in company with her neighbours, instead of cooking and sweeping, dusting and sewing for the family! Think of it and wonder. But then, you say, this is a holiday; why should they not be idle and gay? The fact is, all days are like this to the Hawaiian mother, who lives the life of a grown-up child. The world does not seem so serious as some people think. It is a happy dream, and mother and child and neighbour dance and sing, swim and ride, in sunshine and in rain alike.

This reminds me that in their language there is no word for *weather*. It is continual summer there unless one climb high up on the mountainsides; and as for rain, it does not worry the people, for can they not dry themselves in the clear air that follows? There is, therefore, no need of this disagreeable word which one hears so often in some parts of America. All days are alike to the Hawaiians.

Auwae's mother has no servant, for there is little housework to be done in her home. The grass hut is scarcely used except for sleeping purposes. Both cooking and eating are done out-of-doors. The little girl's father has built an oven in the ground near the house, with enough room in it to roast the food for his own family as well as two or three of his neighbours.

He dug a pit in the ground and lined it with stones. Whenever cooking needs to be done, he fills this pit full of wood, which he sets on fire. When the stones are sufficiently heated, the pig, chickens, or beef, and the taro, or sweet potatoes, are wrapped up in leaves and placed in the oven; a little water is thrown over them so they will steam. Then the hole is covered over tightly, and the food is slowly and nicely baked.

Auwae's dinner has been cooking all the morning, and it is nearly time for it to be served. What do you think shall be done to prepare for it? Who of the company will stop her chattering and garland-making long enough to set the table?

As among the brown people of Borneo, there is nothing to do except to uncover the oven, take out the food, and place it on the grassy table-cloth, while Auwae runs into the house for some calabashes. There must be a large one to hold the "poi," and a smaller one for drinking-water. No plates are needed.

For to-day's dinner there is a roast of beef to eat with the poi, and delicious cocoanut milk takes the place of the coffee sometimes drunk. For dessert there are the most delicious wild strawberries, which ripen all the year round in this favoured island of the Pacific.

If Auwae wished, she could have a banana or a fresh pineapple, but she is easily satisfied. Think of it! there are forty different fruits growing near her house. One can easily understand how there is little work in providing food, and how little cooking is needed to keep the body in good health.

And now Auwae's father and several other men join the women. The garlands of flowers are placed around their necks and on their heads, and the party sit on the grass in a circle around the bowl of steaming poi.

But how do they eat? The poi, a sticky paste, is the principal dish. Surely something must be used to carry it to the mouth. That is true, and the fingers serve this very purpose. One after another, or all together, however it may happen, the company dip into the great calabash and skilfully roll balls of the paste on their forefingers, bringing it to their mouths without dropping a particle. Poi is called "one-finger," "two-finger," or "three-finger," according to the thickness of the paste.

But what is poi? is asked. It is the food best liked by the Hawaiian, and takes the place of the bread of the white people. It is either pink or lavender in colour. In the old days, pink poi was a royal dish, as it was only made for kings and queens. The different kinds are all made from the root of the taro plant. A small patch of this very valuable plant will supply a large family with all the food they really need for a whole year.

The principal work of the little girl's father is to tend his taro patch and keep each little hillock surrounded by water. From the time of planting until the ripening of the beet-like bulbs, he watches it with the most loving care. When fully ripe, he pulls up the plants and bakes the bulbs in his underground oven.

When they have been sufficiently dried, he prepares for his most difficult task by stripping himself of his cotton shirt and trousers. You remember that the climate here is a warm one, and when the man is working hard he suffers much from the heat.

He now takes the baked taro and puts it on a wooden platter and beats it with a heavy stone pestle. From time to time he dips his hands into water as they grow sticky from handling the pasty mass. After he has pounded it for a long time, he puts it into calabashes, adds water, and sets it away for several days to ferment.

He grows very tired before his work is over, but does it gladly, rather than do without his favourite food. It would not suit us, I fear, as it tastes very much like sour buckwheat paste. In Hawaii white people often eat the taro root sliced and boiled or baked, but they seldom touch it when prepared in the native fashion.

Now let us return to Auwae's dinner-table. The food is quickly eaten, after which the little girl passes a calabash of water around among the company. It is to serve as a finger-bowl. Does this surprise you? Ah! but you must remember these Hawaiians ate with their fingers. These same fingers are now sticky with poi, and as the people are natural lovers of water, they are fond of having every part of their bodies spotless.

A pipe and tobacco are passed around for a smoke. These people, so cleanly in some other ways, do not object to using the one pipe in common. The women put away the food, and the company prepare for a picnic at the shore but a short distance from the house. They will spend the afternoon in surf-bathing, and all of them will perform feats in the water that would astonish the best swimmers in other countries.

CHAPTER III. SURF-RIDING

Auwae has a loved playmate, Upa, a boy a little older than herself. He goes with the party to the beach. Carrying their surf-boards under their arms, the two children hurry ahead to the beach of shining white coral sand. Look! The broad Pacific now stretches out before their eyes. How blue are the waters, reaching out in the distance till they seem to meet a sky just as blue and clear of a passing cloud! How the hot sunshine beats down upon the sand! Yet Auwae does not seem to mind it. She stoops to pick a wild morning-glory growing almost at the water's edge, and then dances about, saying to Upa:

"Hurrah! The waves are just fine to-day for bathing, aren't they?"

We almost hold our breath at the thought of these children trusting themselves out in the high waves rushing in from the coral reef a quarter of a mile outside. Then, too, we know there are sharks in these waters; and what a terrible death would be Auwae's if one of these creatures should grind her between his many teeth!

As to the sharks, we need not fear, as they never venture nearer than the coral reefs, which seem to be a wall beyond which they dare not pass. And as for the water! why, when we have once seen Auwae swim, we can no longer fear for her safety. It seems as though water, instead of land, must be her natural abiding-place.

But now the rest of the party have arrived, bringing with them their surf-boards, or wave-sliding-boards, as we might call them.

For those living on Hawaii's shore, much of the pleasure of life depends on these pieces of wood so carefully prepared. They are made from the strong, tough trunk of the breadfruit-tree, are highly polished, and about two feet wide. They look very much like coffin lids, and are long enough for one to stretch at length upon them.

It takes but a few moments to remove their clothing and put on their bathing-costumes. For the men, it is the malo, a piece of cloth wound about the loins and between the legs, and, before the white people came, the only garment worn by them at any time.

All are now ready for the sport. They wade out into deep water with the surf-boards under their arms. Then, pushing them in front, they swim out till they reach the breakers, when they suddenly dive and disappear from view.

There is no sign of them for several moments. Now look far out and you can see their black heads bobbing about in the smooth water beyond the waves. Watch them carefully as they wait for that great roller about to turn toward the shore. They leap upon its crest, lying flat upon their boards, and are borne to the beach with the speed of the wind.

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