

The Hawaiian Archipelago

Isabella L. Bird

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Title: The Hawaiian Archipelago

Author: Isabella L. Bird

Release Date: October, 2004 [EBook #6750]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on January 22, 2003]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, THE HAWAIIAN ARCHIPELAGO ***

This etext was produced by Les Bowler, St. Ives, Dorset.

THE HAWAIIAN ARCHIPELAGO.

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SIX MONTHS AMONG THE PALM GROVES, CORAL REEFS, AND VOLCANOES OF THE SANDWICH ISLANDS.

BY ISABELLA L. BIRD.

"Summer isles of Eden lying
In dark purple spheres of sea."

To my sister, to whom these letters were originally written, they are now affectionately dedicated.

PREFACE.

Within the last century the Hawaiian islands have been the topic of various works of merit, and some explanation of the reasons which have led me to enter upon the same subject are necessary.

I was travelling for health, when circumstances induced me to land on the group, and the benefit which I derived from the climate tempted me to remain for nearly seven months. During that time the necessity of leading a life of open air and exercise as a means of recovery, led me to travel on horseback to and fro through the islands, exploring the interior, ascending the highest mountains, visiting the active volcanoes, and remote regions which are known to few even of the residents, living among the natives, and otherwise seeing Hawaiian life in all its phases.

At the close of my visit, my Hawaiian friends urged me strongly to publish my impressions and experiences, on the ground that the best books already existing, besides being old, treat chiefly of aboriginal customs and habits now extinct, and of the introduction of Christianity and subsequent historical events. They also represented that I had seen the islands more thoroughly than any foreign visitor, and the volcano of Mauna Loa under specially favourable circumstances, and that I had so completely lived the island life, and acquainted myself with the existing state of the country, as to be rather a kamaina {0} than a stranger, and that consequently I should be able to write on Hawaii with a degree of intimacy as well as freshness. My friends at home, who were interested in my narratives, urged me to give them to a wider circle, and my inclinations led me in the same direction, with a sort of longing to make others share something of my own interest and enjoyment.

The letters which follow were written to a near relation, and often hastily and under great difficulties of circumstance, but even with these and other disadvantages, they appear to me the best form of conveying my impressions in their original vividness. With the exception of certain omissions and abridgments, they are printed as they were written, and for such demerits as arise from this mode of publication, I ask the kind indulgence of my readers.

ISABELLA L. BIRD.

January, 1875.

TRAVELS IN THE SANDWICH ISLANDS.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

Canon Kingsley, in his charming book on the West Indies, says, "The undoubted fact is known I find to few educated English people, that the Coco palm, which produces coir rope, cocoanuts, and a hundred other useful things, is not the same plant as the cacao bush which produces chocolate, or anything like it. I am sorry to have to insist upon this fact, but till Professor Huxley's dream and mine is fulfilled, and our schools deign to teach, in the intervals of Greek and Latin, some slight knowledge of this planet, and of those of its productions which are most commonly in use, even this fact may need to be re-stated more than once."

There is no room for the supposition that the intelligence of Mr. Kingsley's "educated English" acquaintance is below the average, and I should be sorry to form an unworthy estimate of that of my own circle, though I have several times met with the foregoing confusion, as well as the following and other equally ill-informed questions, one or two of which I reluctantly admit that I might have been guilty of myself before I visited the Pacific: "Whereabouts are the Sandwich Islands? They are not the same as the Fijis, are they? Are they the same as Otaheite? Are the natives all cannibals? What sort of idols do they worship? Are they as pretty as the other South Sea Islands? Does the king wear clothes? Who do they belong to? Does any one live on them but the savages? Will anything grow on them? Are the people very savage?" etc. Their geographical position is a great difficulty. I saw a gentleman of very extensive information looking for them on the map in the neighbourhood of Tristran d'Acunha; and the publishers of a high-class periodical lately advertised, "Letters from the Sandwich Islands" as "Letters from the South Sea Islands." In consequence of these and similar interrogatories, which are not altogether unreasonable, considering the imperfect teaching of physical geography, the extent of this planet, the multitude of its productions, and the enormous number of islands composing Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia, it is necessary to preface the following letters with as many preliminary statements as shall serve to make them intelligible.

The Sandwich Islands do not form one of the South Sea groups, and have no other connexion with them than certain affinities of race and language. They constitute the only important group in the vast North Pacific Ocean, in which they are so advantageously placed as to be pretty nearly equidistant from California, Mexico, China, and Japan. They are in the torrid zone, and extend from 18 degrees 50' to 22 degrees 20' north latitude, and their longitude is from 154 degrees 53' to 160 degrees 15' west from Greenwich. They were discovered by Captain Cook in 1778. They are twelve in number, but only eight are inhabited, and these vary in size from Hawaii, which is 4000 square miles in extent, and 88 miles long by 73 broad, to

Kahoolawe, which is only 11 miles long and 8 broad. Their entire superficial area is about 6,100 miles. They are to some extent bounded by barrier reefs of coral, and have few safe harbours. Their formation is altogether volcanic, and they possess the largest perpetually active volcano and the largest extinct crater in the world. They are very mountainous, and two mountain summits on Hawaii are nearly 14,000 feet in height. Their climate for salubrity and general equability is reputed the finest on earth. It is almost absolutely equable, and a man may take his choice between broiling all the year round on the sea level on the leeward side of the islands at a temperature of 80 degrees, and enjoying the charms of a fireside at an altitude where there is frost every night of the year. There is no sickly season, and there are no diseases of locality. The trade winds blow for nine months of the year, and on the windward coasts there is an abundance of rain, and a perennial luxuriance of vegetation.

The Sandwich Islands are not the same as Otaheite nor as the Fijis, from which they are distant about 4,000 miles, nor are their people of the same race. The natives are not cannibals, and it is doubtful if they ever were so. Their idols only exist in missionary museums. They cast them away voluntarily in 1819, at the very time when missionaries from America sent out to Christianize the group were on their way round Cape Horn. The people are all clothed, and the king, who is an educated gentleman, wears the European dress. The official designation of the group is "Hawaiian Islands," and they form an independent kingdom.

The natives are not savages, most decidedly not. They are on the whole a quiet, courteous, orderly, harmless, Christian community. The native population has declined from 400,000 as estimated by Captain Cook in 1778 to 49,000, according to the census of 1872. There are about 5,000 foreign residents, who live on very friendly terms with the natives, and are mostly subjects of Kalakaua, the king of the group.

The islands have a thoroughly civilized polity, and the Hawaiians show a great aptitude for political organization. They constitute a limited monarchy, and have a constitutional and hereditary king, a parliament with an upper and lower house, a cabinet, a standing army, a police force, a Supreme Court of Judicature, a most efficient postal system, a Governor and Sheriff on each of the larger islands, court officials, and court etiquette, a common school system, custom houses, a civil list, taxes, a national debt, and most of the other amenities and appliances of civilization.

There is no State Church. The majority of the foreigners, as well as of the natives, are Congregationalists. The missionaries translated the Bible and other books into Hawaiian, taught the natives to read and write, gave the princes and nobles a high class education, induced the king and chiefs to renounce their oppressive feudal rights, with legal advice framed a constitution which became the law of the land, and obtained the recognition of the little Polynesian kingdom as a member of the brotherhood of civilized nations.

With these few remarks I leave the subject of the volume to develop itself in my letters. They have not had the advantage of revision by any one familiar with the Sandwich Islands, and mistakes and

inaccuracies may consequently appear, on which, I hope that my Hawaiian friends will not be very severe. In correcting them, I have availed myself of the very valuable "History of the Hawaiian Islands," by Mr. Jackson Jarves, Ellis' "Tour Round Hawaii," Mr. Brigham's valuable monograph on "The Hawaiian Volcanoes," and sundry reports presented to the legislature during its present session. I have also to express my obligations to the Hon. E. Allen, Chief Justice and Chancellor of the Hawaiian kingdom, Mr. Manley Hopkins, author of "Hawaii," Dr. T. M. Coan, of New York, Professor W. Alexander, Daniel Smith, Esq., and other friends at Honolulu, for assistance most kindly rendered.

ISABELLA L. BIRD.

LETTER I.

STEAMER NEVADA, NORTH PACIFIC, January 19.

A white, unwinking, scintillating sun blazed down upon Auckland, New Zealand. Along the white glaring road from Onehunga, dusty trees and calla lilies drooped with the heat. Dusty thickets sheltered the cicada, whose triumphant din grated and rasped through the palpitating atmosphere. In dusty enclosures, supposed to be gardens, shrivelled geraniums scattered sparsely alone defied the heat. Flags drooped in the stifling air. Men on the verge of sunstroke plied their tasks mechanically, like automatons. Dogs, with flabby and protruding tongues, hid themselves away under archway shadows. The stones of the sidewalks and the brick of the houses radiated a furnace heat. All nature was limp, dusty, groaning, gasping. The day was the climax of a burning fortnight, of heat, draught, and dust, of baked, cracked, dewless land, and oily breezeless seas, of glaring days, passing through fierce fiery sunsets into stifling nights.

I only remained long enough in the capital to observe that it had a look of having seen better days, and that its business streets had an American impress, and, taking a boat at a wharf, in whose seams the pitch was melting, I went off to the steamer Nevada, which was anchored out in the bay, preferring to spend the night in her than in the unbearable heat on shore. She belongs to the Webb line, an independent mail adventure, now dying a natural death, undertaken by the New Zealand Government, as much probably out of jealousy of Victoria as anything else. She nearly foundered on her last voyage; her passengers unanimously signed a protest against her unseaworthy condition. She was condemned by the Government surveyor, and her mails were sent to Melbourne. She has, however, been patched up for this trip, and eight passengers, including myself, have trusted ourselves to her. She is a huge paddle-steamer, of the old-fashioned American type, deck above deck, balconies, a pilot-house abaft the foremast, two monstrous walking beams, and two masts which, possibly in case of need, might serve as jury masts.

Huge, airy, perfectly comfortable as she is, not a passenger stepped on board without breathing a more earnest prayer than usual that the voyage might end propitiously. The very first evening statements were whispered about to the effect that her state of disrepair is such that she has not been to her own port for nine months, and has been sailing for that time without a certificate; that her starboard

shaft is partially fractured, and that to reduce the strain upon it the floats of her starboard wheel have been shortened five inches, the strain being further reduced by giving her a decided list to port; that her crank is "bandaged," that she is leaky; that her mainmast is sprung, and that with only four hours' steaming many of her boiler tubes, even some of those put in at Auckland, had already given way. I cannot testify concerning the mainmast, though it certainly does comport itself like no other mainmast I ever saw; but the other statements and many more which might be added, are, I believe, substantially correct. That the caulking of the deck was in evil case we very soon had proof, for during heavy rain above, it was a smart shower in the saloon and state rooms, keeping four stewards employed with buckets and swabs, and compelling us to dine in waterproofs and rubber shoes.

In this dilapidated condition, when two days out from Auckland, we encountered a revolving South Sea hurricane, succinctly entered in the log of the day as "Encountered a very severe hurricane with a very heavy sea." It began at eight in the morning, and never spent its fury till nine at night, and the wind changed its direction eleven times. The Nevada left Auckland two feet deeper in the water than she ought to have been, and laboured heavily. Seas struck her under the guards with a heavy, explosive thud, and she groaned and strained as if she would part asunder. It was a long weird day. We held no communication with each other, or with those who could form any rational estimate of the probabilities of our destiny; no officials appeared; the ordinary invariable routine of the steward department was suspended without notice; the sounds were tremendous, and a hot lurid obscurity filled the atmosphere. Soon after four the clamour increased, and the shock of a sea blowing up a part of the fore-guards made the groaning fabric reel and shiver throughout her whole huge bulk. At that time, by common consent, we assembled in the deck-house, which had windows looking in all directions, and sat there for five hours. Very few words were spoken, and very little fear was felt. We understood by intuition that if our crazy engines failed at any moment to keep the ship's head to the sea, her destruction would not occupy half-an-hour. It was all palpable. There was nothing which the most experienced seaman could explain to the merest novice. We hoped for the best, and there was no use in speaking about the worst. Nor, indeed, was speech possible, unless a human voice could have outshrieked the hurricane.

In this deck-house the strainings, sunderings, and groanings were hardly audible, or rather were overpowered by a sound which, in thirteen months' experience of the sea in all weathers, I have never heard, and hope never to hear again, unless in a staunch ship, one loud, awful, undying shriek, mingled with a prolonged relentless hiss. No gathering strength, no languid fainting into momentary lulls, but one protracted gigantic scream. And this was not the whistle of wind through cordage, but the actual sound of air travelling with tremendous velocity, carrying with it minute particles of water. Nor was the sea running mountains high, for the hurricane kept it down. Indeed during those fierce hours no sea was visible, for the whole surface was caught up and carried furiously into the air, like snow-drift on the prairies, sibilant, relentless. There was profound quiet on deck, the little life which existed being concentrated near the bow, where the captain was either lashed to the foremast, or in shelter in the pilot-house. Never a soul appeared on deck, the force of the hurricane being such that for

four hours any man would have been carried off his feet. Through the swift strange evening our hopes rested on the engine, and amidst the uproar and din, and drifting spray, and shocks of pitiless seas, there was a sublime repose in the spectacle of the huge walking beams, alternately rising and falling, slowly, calmly, regularly, as if the Nevada were on a holiday trip within the Golden Gate. At eight in the evening we could hear each other speak, and a little later, through the great masses of hissing drift we discerned black water. At nine Captain Blethen appeared, smoking a cigar with nonchalance, and told us that the hurricane had nearly boxed the compass, and had been the most severe he had known for seventeen years. This grand old man, nearly the oldest captain in the Pac

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