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J. J. JARVES, Editor.

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## THE POLYNESIAN.

SATURDAY, AUG. 29, 1840.

### GLEANINGS FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTE BOOK.—HAWAII No. 6.

Wednesday, 3.—Having engaged a new set of men, we left Hilo at noon in company with Rev. Mr. Lyman, to explore the site of the recent eruption. This company were hired with the stipulation that they should find their own food; a practice we recommend to all who wish to travel expeditiously and without annoyance. The distinction between *meum* and *tuum* was never more palpably manifested than in this instance. The whole amount of food which our three men took with them for as many days, would not have sufficed one of our former gang more than one day, and throughout the excursion, we had as much reason to be satisfied with these men, as we had to be dissatisfied with the others. Higher praise than this could not be awarded them.

After retracing our steps on the road to the volcano for ten miles, we diverged to the south east, upon what is called the middle Puna road. The night was passed in a small hut, a short distance farther on. Early next morning we continued our route over a country much broken up by lava streams, covered with a light soil, and a scanty forest of stunted ohia's, which species bore no fruit. At twelve o'clock, when about twenty-five miles from Hilo, we came upon the first traces of the devastations of the burning lava. The grass was killed and vegetation all blasted. Continuing our walk for a mile through a wood filled with smoke, and smelling strongly of sulphur, and in which all signs of life were destroyed, and the trees crisped and blackened by heat, we struck suddenly upon the great stream of lava, which had caused all this destruction. Its course was to the north east, having forced its way through a dense forest, burning and destroying all before it.

It had cooled so suddenly upon its surface as to leave the charred limbs of trees, unconsumed, though smoking freely. They

were thickly strewed for many miles, and formed an almost impenetrable chevaux de frise. They lay mostly around the holes which their trunks had formed, when the liquid mass consolidated about them; all beneath the surface of course being entirely consumed, and leaving no traces except a few ashes. The lava was swollen up in cones, and forged, split into deep chasms, and twisted and cracked into every variety of shape, resulting probably from its suddenly cooling and contracting. The crevices were lined with the most beautiful and delicate forms of salt and sulphur, of all the hues of the rainbow. Fresh specimens were continually consolidating from the strong gasses which every where jetted out. They effloresced upon exposure to the atmosphere. From every aperture, steam, smoke, and sulphurous vapors issued, so dense and strong, that while it required the greatest caution to avoid their suffocating currents, they prevented us from seeing distinctly any distance. The surface was still so hot as to be painful to the feet, while in many places beneath us, the gurgling, crackling sound of the still flowing lava, gave warning that all was not quiet within. The crust being puffed up by bubbles of air, and extremely brittle, frequently gave way beneath us without the slightest warning, precipitating us some feet before we found solid footing.

We had supposed that we should reach the stream, somewhere about its source, but we found ourselves at most not more than midway from the shore. Mile upon mile of the same dismal prospect of jagged lava, flame and smoke could be traced inland, and after an hour's exploring where we were, we found ourselves too much exhausted by the intense heat and fatiguing clambering, to attempt to follow the stream up. Besides, it was far from being prudent, in its present state. The Thermometer, three feet above the lava, rose to 152°, and in the clefts it was too hot to try it. We estimated its width where we first struck upon it, at upwards of a mile. The lava every where appeared to be of uniform character and presenting the same appearance; being full of glittering crystals of pyroxine and olivine.

Turning back, we gained the edge of the woods, and then followed the stream towards the ocean in a northerly direction, where it gradually widened until it spread several miles, forming a sea of huge, black, solidified waves. On its sides, it frequently forced its way under ground, by galleries, throwing up the soil in rugged hills, from ten to fifteen feet high, then issuing to the surface again at a considerable distance from its ingress. As we approached the sea, volcanic sand showed itself in greater quantities, covering the soil and trees to the distance of half a mile from the stream. The spiral branches of the Pandanus were loaded with it, and near the ocean it formed beds of several feet in thickness, making smooth walking where formerly it was rough in the extreme. This sand is of the same substance as the lava, and was probably formed when the stream reached the water, by the great concussion and reaction of the two opposite forces. The lava cooling suddenly, shivered like glass into millions of small particles, which the strong trade wind drove back upon the country.

After skirting the stream for several miles, we turned to the left, and at five o'clock, P. M., arrived at the sea, at a very romantic

spot, called Waiakakuila. A chief's house, the deserted, situate in a fine grove of cocoa nut, hala, and hau trees, afforded us good accommodations for the night. The surf broke upon a precipice but a few rods distant, and near was a spring which flowing into a basin formed by the rocks, forming an excellent bathing place.

A mile to the east of us, at Nanawale, the lava had entered the sea, and was throwing up steam and smoke so furiously, that it had every appearance of a new crater. Hastening to it, we found it presented the same appearance as above, except that it had overflowed the old line of coast, and pushed itself fifteen hundred feet or more into the sea, forming three bold promontories, or crater shaped hills, parallel to each other, and a few hundred feet apart. Between these the lava flowed a short distance beyond. These hills were formed of scoria, sand and ashes, precipitous towards the sea, and sloping gradually inland. Fumes of steam were issuing from their summits, which were from two hundred to three hundred feet high. Towards the sea, their sides were still so hot as to form vapor at every wash of the waves. Between them, the sulphurous gasses were so powerful as to occasion immediate nausea and giddiness on approaching them, unless to the windward. In a few places the old rock, whitened and split by heat, appeared through the new, and in one place a solitary Pandanus, scorched and burnt, still stood upright, overlooking the scene of desolation around. Two beaches of volcanic sand, forming excellent landing places, were thrown up, where previously there was nothing but the bold rock. The longer is on the north of the hills, and about one hundred yards in length; the other lies at the farther extremity of the lava, and is but a few rods long. Neither will probably be permanent. The width of the stream here, is not far from two thousand feet.

From the loftiest of the hills, an excellent view of the course of the stream can be obtained. Its widenings, and windings can be traced inland for a great distance. At sunset, with its dark surface, and broad descending stream, covered with wood and smoke, and broken or turned aside at times, leaving small spots of land untouched and overgrown with now lifeless trees, it forcibly recalled to my mind the Mississippi at its rising in spring. It looked like a vast river, rapidly moving towards its mouth, bearing on its bosom the wrecks of vegetation, while the smoke was not at all dissimilar to fog. As the sun went down it threw a dim glare over the whole, which added much to the effect. Night surprised us while still engaged amid the "thousand and one" wonders around, and compelled us to hasten to our lodging place. But not until we had secured specimens of all the varieties of lava, which however did not differ from those we had observed every where else on the stream. The tints and forms of some of the salts encrusting the hollows of the rocks, were exceedingly minute and beautiful, closely resembling the flowers of some of the most delicate species of mosses. It was impossible to preserve them, for upon exposure to the air, they dissolved like snow, leaving a yellow, red or green precipitate behind. Being unacquainted with this branch of science, the most we could do was to preserve the debris, for the benefit of those who might wish to analyze it hereafter.

The preceding description represents the

condition of the lava at the period of our visit. For the following facts, relative to its outbreak and succeeding history, we are mainly indebted to Mr. Castle, an intelligent mechanic residing at Hilo, who at its first appearance, hastened to the spot, and was enabled accurately to observe its progress. Several days before the eruption, smoke was seen by the natives rising from the direction where the lava afterwards burst out, but it was attributed to brush on fire. At two o'clock, on Sunday, the last day of May, a bright light was seen from Hilo towards the south, which spread with great rapidity, and increased to such an intensity that it was immediately attributed to a volcanic eruption. This the reports of the natives soon confirmed. It was judged to be thirty miles distant, and at night such was the brilliancy of the light, that the finest print could be easily read at that distance. This noon-tide brightness, converting night into day, continued for two weeks, and is represented by eye-witnesses, to have been a spectacle of unsurpassed sublimity. It was like the glare of a firmament on fire, and was seen for upwards of a hundred miles at sea. It also rose and spread itself above the lofty mountain peaks, so as to be distinctly visible on the leeward side of the island, where the wind drove the smoke in dense and massy clouds.

The lava continued flowing towards the sea, which it reached on Thursday, four days from its first egress. At times it would rush forward with a velocity of four to five miles per hour, but for a short distance only, then become very sluggish, and move heavily and slowly on. Its general movement was in immense semi-circular masses, owing to its great consistency. These would roll on, gradually accumulating, until the mass had become too heavy to hold itself together, while the exterior was partially cooled and solidified; then bursting, the liquified interior flowing out would join a new stream, and thus aid in forming another. By these accelerated progressive movements, the wave-like ridges were formed, which are every where observable on the older currents. At times, it forced its way under the circumjacent soil, presenting the singular appearance of earth, rocks and trees in motion like the swell of the ocean. Mr. C. was standing near the stream and watching its progress, when the land beneath him began to rise, and in a few minutes he was ten feet above his companions, who were but a short distance from him. He had barely time to leave this dangerous situation when the earth opened, and lava gushed out. The color of the whole stream was of the deepest crimson. On the windward side its heat was not so powerful, but that persons could approach and plunge sticks into the fiery mass, and draw forth specimens. So great was its viscosity, that large rocks were seen floating down the current, like cork upon water. In one night the stream spread from a few rods to half a mile in width.

The spectacle when this burning mass reached the sea, must have been awful and sublime in the highest degree. The conflict between the two antagonist powers, fire and water, was on a scale which the eye of man but seldom witnesses. The heavens were lit up in one intense blaze, while streams of fire like lightning glanced about in every direction. Ashes and sand were thrown to a great height into the air, and descended for miles distant in showers of fiery spray. Vol-