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**A visit to the South Seas, in the United States' ship Vincennes, during
the years 1829 and 1830**

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Letter XXVII.

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LETTER XXVII.

DANCE IN THE VALLEY OF THE HAPAS.

Excursion to the Valley of Hapa.—Dress and Appearance of two Warriors.—Character of the Scenery.—View from the Mountains.—Scene of the Dance.—Dress and Beauty of the Nukuhivans.—Use of Cosmetics.—The Tahua, or Dancing Ground.—The Dancers and their Dresses.—Passion of the Natives for these Exhibitions.—Licentiousness of the Hea-then.

Bay of Taiohae, at Nukuhiva,
July 29th, 1829.

AFTER one of the most fatiguing excursions I have ever made, not excepting even the descent into the volcano of Hawaii, I take my pen at eight o'clock, dear H——, to note the scenes of the day before they lose their freshness in the observations of another.

You may be surprised to hear that the whole is connected with a dance. The immediate vicinity of the bay in which we are is so destitute, from the spoliations and consequences of the late war, of every thing peculiarly interesting in the heathenism of the people, that on hearing of an intended exhibition of the kind in the interior, a party from the ship to witness it was readily formed. I joined the company not only for the sake of the *opera*, but also on account of the facilities which would be presented by it for gaining a knowledge of the country and the true state of the people. Our number was made up of Lieutenant Magruder, Mr. Buchanan, Doctor

Wessels, Midshipmen Bissell, Taylor, Irving, and myself, with John Anthony, a protégé of the captain, several of the crew as attendants, and Morrison for a guide.

We left the ship between nine and ten o'clock, with a promise of being spared the showers which had fallen so abundantly the preceding morning; in which we were not disappointed, the whole day having been beautifully clear, though at times oppressively warm. Our trip began by ascending one of the smooth, sloping hills of grass, whose softness and bright gleamings in the sun, as seen from the bay, throw an air of civilization over the boldness of the surrounding scenery. The path, leading along its summit for a half or three quarters of a mile, afforded delightful views; on the one hand of the harbour and its headlands and the rich groves upon the beach and up the valley, and on the other of the numerous glens, cascades, and insulated peaks and cliffs of the mountains in the interior.

On turning an abrupt point near the farther declivity of the hill a mile inland, two warriors in full battle-dress, on their way to the Vincennes, came suddenly upon us; both men of the noblest stature, every limb in its muscular proportions, presenting a model for the skill of a statuary. Their dress, in every respect alike, was singularly striking and imposing, especially that of the head, which instantly attracted the admiration of the whole party. It consisted of a crescent, three or four inches broad at its greatest breadth, fixed uprightly in front, the lower edge following the line of the hair on the forehead,

and the points terminating at each temple immediately above the ears. A neat border, the eighth of an inch wide, ran round the edges in a herring-bone pattern of alternate black and white, while the middle was entirely filled with the small, scarlet berries of the *abrus precatorius*, fastened upon the material of which it was constructed by a gum which exudes from the bread-fruit tree. The crescent formed the front of a cap fitting closely to the head behind, and the foundation in which the heavy plumage surmounting it is fixed. This plumage consisted of the long, black, and burnished tail-feathers of the cock, the finest I ever saw, those in the centre being more than two feet in length. They were arranged behind the front-piece as closely as possible, and in such a manner as to form the shape of a deeply pointed chapeau, placed crosswise on the head, the feathers in the centre standing perpendicularly, and becoming more and more vertical till the lowest at the edges drooped deeply over the shoulders. The ends, falling from the highest point above the forehead one over another in a regularly defined curve on either side, played in the air with the gracefulness of an ostrich plume, and imparted to the whole an appearance of richness and taste we had not been led to expect from any of the decorations of the country previously seen.

In their ears, and entirely concealing them, they wore ornaments of light wood whitened with pipe clay. They are perfectly flat in front, something in the shape of the natural ear, but much larger, and are fastened by running a long projection on the

hind part through slits made in the ears for receiving such ornaments. Strings of whale's teeth hung around their necks, and frizzled bunches of human hair were tied around their wrists and ancles; their loins also being girt with thick tufts of the same over large maros of white tapa. Short mantles of white cloth tied in a knot on the chest, and floating gracefully in the wind from their shoulders, with long spears, completed the costume.

I scarce remember to have been more suddenly or deeply impressed by any sight than that of these figures, as they first burst on the view. Their lofty head-dresses, gleaming like helmets in the brightness of the sun, and tossing proudly in the wind with the motion of their bold gait, their naked and brawny limbs, and various savage trappings, converted them for the moment into seeming giants. The most hideously painted, and powerfully equipped North American Indian would fail, I think, in a comparison with one of these as the majestic and fearful warrior.

A belief has gone extensively abroad among this tribe, the Teiis, that we shall certainly join them in their war with the Tapiis; and the instant they descried our party, regarding us as irresistible allies, they rushed forward, with shouts of exultation and joy, exclaiming, in tones of heartfelt triumph, as they went rapidly through the actions of an onset, throwing themselves in every wild and threatening attitude, scowling, with looks of deadly fierceness and revenge, and brandishing their spears in the air, as if ready to pierce an enemy to the heart, "*Tapii!*

Tapii! te make i te Tapii!" "*The Tapiis, the Tapiis! Death to the Tapiis!*"—after which, bursting into loud laughter, and informing us that the dance to which we were going had already commenced, they hurried gaily on towards the beach.

Descending here into a large valley, branching eastward from the principal one fronting the bay, our walk for the two succeeding miles was of a character totally different from that over the uncovered hill, being so completely overshadowed by heavy groves of the bread-fruit, cocoa-nut, and other large trees, as scarcely to allow of an occasional peep at the sky. The habitations of the people were thickly scattered around, and in general are larger and more neat than those of the farmers and fishermen at the Sandwich Islands. They were all of the construction already described. The elevated platforms of stone on which they stand impart to them no little of an air of cleanliness and comfort, and doubtless contribute to the health of the inhabitants, by protecting them from the dampness of the ground. Most of the inmates were away, either at the sea-side or the dance; but such as were at home greeted us, on every side, with salutations of cordiality and kindness.

At the end of three miles the character of our path again changed, becoming a dank, closely embowered, and solitary way, along the course of a torrent, which had long been heard rumbling among the rocks, as it plunged its passage to the shore. The sweet singing of birds also, concealed in the thickets around, enlivened this part of the walk and imparted new hilarity to our spirits. Crossing the

water we once more emerged from the shade of the forest, and not long after, coming to another mountain stream, found ourselves at the foot of a high, precipitous, and unwooded hill, half a mile in length. It was one of the sharp spurs of mountain jutting down from the top of the range inclosing the valley of Taiohae, and marking, on this side, the boundaries of its tribe. Few staircases are at a greater angle of steepness; and but for the holes worn into the path by the steps of the islanders, a constant zizgag course, and the assistance in pulling ourselves up, afforded by the long grass and twigs within reach, it would have been almost impossible for us to have gained the top.

So closely under the lee of the mountain as to be cut off from every breath of air, with the sun pouring on us in scorching rays, I never before was so much exhausted by any effort I ever made. The strength and resolution of several of the gentlemen were almost overcome; and one, near fainting, threw himself against the precipice, in utter despair of proceeding farther, till a native following, took him upon his back and carried him to the summit. Had not our vigour been previously kept up by the refreshment of cocoa-nut water, supplied to us abundantly, for the trifling compensation of a little tobacco, the whole distance from the beach, we should scarcely have surmounted this "hill of difficulty," but have relinquished our purpose, though now within a couple of miles of its achievement.

Yet it was to the top of this mountain, and by this same path, that the islanders, in 1814, transported

a long nine-pounder, given to them by Commodore Porter, to prosecute their war with the adjoining tribe of Hapa. It is almost incredible that a gun of such weight could have been raised up the face of a precipice like this, without the animal force of horses or oxen, or the intervention of some overbalancing mechanical power: yet such is the unquestionable fact.

The bird's eye view from the summit, of the whole valley and bay, of the Vincennes at anchor, reduced in the perspective to the dimensions of a gunboat, the dim outline of Uapou far in the south, with the vast expanse of the ocean, mingling almost imperceptibly with the sky, presented a true blending of the beautiful and the sublime. Here, too, we met and hailed with pleasure the fresh trade-wind from the east, to cool and invigorate us for the remaining part of our journey. On gaining the height, we at once entered the territories of the Hapas. A level spot on our right, some half mile in extent, covered only with grass, was pointed out to us as the scene of Commodore Porter's first skirmish with the natives of this tribe. From the farther end of it we overlooked the narrow head of an inland valley belonging to them, that in which the exhibition to which we were hastening was taking place, and still farther beyond, in the east, at a distance of four or five miles, the country and habitations of the Tapiis, the race so much the subject of talk among the rest of the people, and apparently so greatly the object of their dread.

From this height we began to descend, over gentle

declivities of thin grass, towards the place of our search, without any object of particular attraction till within half a mile of it. At that distance we crossed a fine stream, just above a broad cascade of fifteen or twenty feet, and followed its foaming bed through successive groves of the bread-fruit and cocoa-nut, interspersed with cottages and plantations; while the monotonous and dull sounds of the drums and music of the dance first swelled upon the ear. These, as they became more and more distinct, measuring a near approach, quickened our step to a march more and more rapid; till a throng of natives, in gay dress, having caught sight of our party, were seen hurrying towards us, with shouts of welcome that assured us of our arrival. The whole scene, as we came in among them, and threw a hasty glance around, transported us at once to the times of Cook and the first navigators of these seas, when the discovery of the existence and habits of a people so novel struck them with a surprise and charm amounting almost to fascination.

The grove is one which the Muses themselves might covet. Noble and majestic trees cluster widely round the Tahua or dancing ground, on the margin of the mountain torrent. Their lofty tops so thickly interlace each other above, as completely to embower the whole glen; and the rays of the torrid sun, beneath which we had been walking, instead of striking us with a scorching glare, fell in such rich and grateful mellowness on the groupes below, as to seem but the moonlight of a fairy land: an illusion which the sound of water, as if spout-

ing from a hundred cool fountains, the half clad figures, flowing drapery, and sportive manners of the throng, had little tendency to break.

The assembly consisted of several hundred persons of both sexes, in all the display of dress which their condition allows. The warriors in battle array, and the dancers in their fanciful costumes, were the most conspicuous objects; while the appearance of all, especially that of the females, evidenced great attention in the preparations of the toilette. In justice to the Hapas, I must say, that in many instances they exhibited proofs of gracefulness and taste, in the arrangement of their head-dresses and mantles, that would have gained them credit in more polished circles of fashion than are known in their sea-girt isles.

White appears to be the favourite hue, especially for decorations of the head. Their turbans are of various shapes; the most common consists of a piece of native cloth, of the size of an ordinary pocket-handkerchief, bound closely to the head, having the ends twisted into a large knot immediately in front or on one side over the temple. The ends of others are longer, and formed into large puffs or cockades on the top or sides. In some there is an opening on the crown for the hair, which, tied closely to the head, then hangs down in ringlets in the neck and shoulders. Some wear fillets or bandeaus only, either with or without bows or hanging ends, and many leave their black tresses entirely unconfined and flowing carelessly over their mantles.

The pau, or native petticoat, is much less worn

here than at the Sandwich Islands; and often the only dress of the females is the large kehei or mantle in which the Hawaiians wrap themselves in the coolness of the evening or morning. Here this is unfastened, except as gathered round the figure in thick folds by the hands, over both shoulders or under one arm, leaving the other uncovered. When it becomes deranged, the grasp is let go, and the whole readjusted, though often at a sacrifice of every appearance of delicacy.

Till now I had begun to doubt, from all I had seen at the sea-side, whether the natives of this groupe are so decidedly a finer race and handsomer looking people than the Society and Sandwich Islanders, as they are generally accredited to be. But, judging from those seen on this occasion, I am fully persuaded they are, particularly in the female sex. Many of those present were exceedingly beautiful, and two or three so strikingly like some of the most distinguished beauties in our own country I ever met, that the first glance brought them to my recollection. Their eyes have a rich brilliancy, softened by long glossy eye-lashes that can scarce be surpassed, which, with a regularity and whiteness of teeth unrivalled, add greatly to the impression of features of a more European mould than most uncivilized people I have seen. In complexion many of them are very fair, scarce, if any, darker than a clear brunette, admitting even in some cases of a distinct mantling of colour in the cheek and lips, while in figure they are small and delicately formed, with arms and hands that would bear comparison

with any in the drawing-rooms of the most polished noblesse.

The general lighter complexion observable in this company, in comparison with most met upon the beach at Taiohae, is attributable to the greater moisture of the atmosphere in the mountains, and to the deep shades in which most of their habitations are located. But the uncommon fairness of many of the females is the result of an artificial process, followed by an almost entire seclusion from the sun. The juice of a small indigenous vine called *papa*, possesses the quality of whitening the skin; and such as are peculiarly desirous of fair complexions, wash their whole persons every morning in a preparation of this, and wrapping themselves closely in their garments, keep within doors most of the day. When they do go out, they always make use of the large and spreading leaf of the palmetto for an umbrella. They usually bathe in the evening, and do not resort to the cosmetic again till morning.

On the approach of a festival, the arrival of a ship, or any occasion of public interest, they plunge into the stream, and washing off the greenish hues of the *papa*, anoint themselves carefully with cocoa-nut oil and put on their best apparel. Many add to the oil the juice of the turmeric, of a pale yellow, or a mixture from the burnt root, which is a bright orange, thus imparting, as they imagine, new beauty to the skin, but which is anything but inviting to a civilized eye. Many in the crowds on this occasion were thus adorned; some so completely saturated with oil as to be dripping like Naiads just emerged from their foun-

tains, while others were stained with turmeric till they appeared like living masses of saffron.

There are those among the men, a species of dandy I presume, who imitate the females in the use of the juice of the papa, and in avoiding all exposure to the sun ; but do it at the sacrifice of the privileges of the tabu. They are indeed chiefly of the number already under its restrictions, as singers and dancers at the public exhibitions.

The arrival of our party could scarce fail interrupting the songs and dance a few moments, and for a time there was no little confusion and uproar ; but after being received and welcomed by the chiefs, and placed in seats of honour and of good observation beside them, they were quickly renewed.

This *Tahua*, or theatre, is a structure altogether superior to that visited by us yesterday, and so massive and well built as to be capable of enduring for ages. It is a regular oblong square, about sixty feet in length and forty broad. The outer wall consists of immense stones, or slabs of rock, three feet high, and many of them four or six feet long, joined closely together and hewn with a regularity and neatness truly astonishing, in view of the rude implements by which it must have been accomplished. On a level with the top of this outer wall, a pavement of large flat stones, several feet in width, extends entirely round, forming seats for the chiefs, warriors, and other persons of distinction, and singers performing the recitatives and choruses accompanying the dance. Within this, and some inches lower, is another pavement still wider, having large flat topped stones fixed

in it at regular intervals of six or eight feet, used as seats by the beaters on the drums, and other rude instruments of music, and immediately within this again, an unpaved area, some twenty feet long by twelve broad, constituting the stage on which the dancers exhibit their skill.

The performers in the part we witnessed, were a young chief eighteen or twenty years old at one end of the area, and two boys of eight or ten at the corners of the other. The music, if such it can be called, was that of four drums on each side of the inner pavement, and the voices and loud clapping of hands of about one hundred and fifty singers, seated on the upper platform with the chiefs and warriors. The drums were small, not more than two feet and a half in height and ten or twelve inches in diameter, formed from the trunk of a kou tree, (*cordia*,) hollowed to the thickness of an inch nearly two thirds of the length from the top. They were excavated at the bottom also, leaving a partition between the two with a small hole in the centre. The heads were of shark skin, laced on with flat sennit of the cocoa-nut fibre, in a manner similar to that in which they are tightened in common drums with us. They stand upright on the ground before the performer, and are beaten with the hand only, in rapid strokes of the fingers joined together, while the ball rests on the edge. Around the bottom long oval holes are cut vertically, to cause an increase of sound.

The dance commenced by a slow beating on the drums, followed by graceful movements of the hands, arms, and feet of the dancers in a similar time, but

increasing quickly with the rapidity of the beat, to a display of great activity. The singers joined in upon the first motions of the dancers, these last also taking a part, sometimes in solos, and sometimes in duet, followed by responses from the orchestra or grand choruses by the whole.

The principal dancer was uncommonly handsome, both in face and figure, of great roundness of limb, and though not large, admirably proportioned. The use of the papa and seclusion from the sun had rendered him almost as fair as any one of our number, making his whole style more that of an Adonis than of an Apollo.

His dress was little calculated for ornament. It consisted of a large quantity of white human hair, worn high and much frizzled around his head, of heavy bunches of the same material, but black, about the wrist and ancles, and of a profuse quantity of white cloth around the loins as a maro. That of the boys was more striking and fanciful. One wore on his head the feathered helmet and other decorations of the ear and neck of a warrior, the cap and plumage being of a height equal to all the rest of his figure. Above his girdle, was a full sash of white cloth, tied in a large bow with long ends in front, and from it four white cords of platted tapa, two behind and two before, descended to the knee, each terminating in monstrous tassels of black hair, fastened to flat circular pieces of wood, whitened with pipe clay. His waist, wrists, and ancles were also hung with the same, and in either hand he held a small tuft of white.

The head-dress of the other was a bandeau of white cloth in a thick roll over the forehead, and above this a wreath of black feathers, surmounted by a high ornament of white tapa gathered into folds at the frontlet, and spreading above into a large cockade in the shape of a peacock's tail, the whole having an airy and tasteful appearance. His necklace was composed of alternate bunches of a brightly shining aromatic vine and the flower of the cape jessamine, while his maro of the purest white, arranged in neat folds, was intertwined with garlands of the same.

The dance ceased at the end of twenty or thirty minutes, and a company of young females, forty or fifty in number, seated on an adjoining and elevated platform, began singing, in the dull and monotonous repetitions of the same intonations of voice characterizing all their songs, accompanied by a loud and simultaneous clapping of the hands, brought together in a manner to produce a very peculiar sound. An inquiry into the meaning of this, made us acquainted with the occasion of the present celebration.

The learning of a new set of songs had been enjoined some months previous on these girls, and they were placed under certain restrictions of the tabu till it should be accomplished. This had now been done, and the dance was held in commemoration of it. It was only of a common kind, and not of sufficient interest to attract the great multitude that often assemble, as we are told, at some of the more distinguished.

These exhibitions are known by the general name of *koika*. They are celebrated on a great variety of

occasions, but the most noted are those which take place at the ingathering of the bread-fruit harvests, and at a ratification of peace, when two or more tribes have been at war. Such is the passion of the people for the amusement, that to enjoy it they not only make the longest and most fatiguing journeys from all parts of an island, carrying their food and suffering the greatest inconvenience, but not unfrequently hazard their lives by voyages in their wretched boats to other islands; besides being exposed, while there, to murder, in the conflicts which almost invariably arise among parties from different tribes, at their close, and in which all are obliged on one side or the other to take part.

The singers by profession called *kaioi* are the poets and composers, as well as performers of the songs sung on these occasions. The subjects are various, often furnished by some passing event, such as the arrival of a ship or any less novel incident; and not unfrequently, like ballads in our own country, the songs become extensively fashionable and popular and are sung in private by all classes. In almost every instance, language and allusions of the most objectionable character, as is the case every day in their ordinary conversation, are introduced, and many are abominable almost beyond belief.

I was too much occupied with my pencil to pay very particular attention to the words now repeated; and from previous knowledge on this subject, was well satisfied to remain ignorant of them. Before they had concluded, the throng around became so annoying in their rudeness, and every appearance

indicated such a disposition to utter licentiousness, that the charm at first felt from the novelty and wild beauty of the scene was speedily broken; and accompanied by one or two others, and soon followed by all the party, I began gladly to retrace my way to the ship.

A principal object, on my part, in making the excursion was to see pure heathenism, heathenism as it is before one ray of Christian light has beamed upon its darkness, that I might, from the observation of my own eyes, testify to its true character: and that object has been, I can assure you, dear H——, most fully answered. Before the grossness of one half that was forced upon me had passed in view, I was compelled in the thoughts of my very soul to exclaim, "Stop, it is enough!" but I had gone beyond the point of escape, and the whole truth in its abominable details was riveted upon me.

There was less of licentiousness in the dance than I had expected; but in a hundred things else there were such open outrages on all decency, that I hurried away in a horror of disgust, with a heart too much humbled for the race to which I belong, and too much depressed at the depravity and guilt of man, to think or feel upon any other subject. At first, I could scarce find spirits to interchange a word with my companions, but hastened on before, or fell far behind, that the oppression within me might escape their notice.

So completely was I prostrated, that for the first time in my life I believe, not in a spirit of rebellion I trust, but with a feeling of deep anguish I looked

to heaven and exclaimed, "Oh! why, why was sin ever permitted to enter a world otherwise so fair! Why has it been allowed to mar the highest glory of man, till in all countries and among all classes, it in too many instances degrades him to the level of the brute!"——Thou, O God, knowest, for with Thee is all wisdom, and blessed be Thy name, with Thee too are all goodness and all truth, and "justice and judgement are ever the habitations of Thy throne!"

LETTER XXVIII.

FORM OF GOVERNMENT, AND CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS DISTINCTIONS.

Title and Power of the Chiefs.—Form of Government.—Title and Power of the Warriors.—Religious Distinctions.—The Atuas and Tauas.—Their Practice as Physicians.—The Tahunas and their Duties.—Offerings in Sacrifice.—Sacred Songs and Traditions.—Various Ceremonies.—Drums and Clapping of Hands.—The Uns and their Service.—Landed Proprietors and Servants.

Bay of Taiohae, at Nukuhiva,
July 30th, 1829.

CAPTAIN Finch and a party of officers left the ship early this morning for a visit by water to a valley called Taioa, four or five miles to the leeward of this port. The first division of our crew, forty in number, are also on shore on liberty, but the day being very wet and showery, with strong puffs of wind from the mountains, I shall myself remain on board ship to "*hana paa*," as the natives say, or "*make fast*" some information respecting this