

The Wanderers

Somewhere far across the sea lies Hawa-iki, that wonderful Motherland where the sun's rays glow from early dawn to sudden night. Nobody knows now where that old land is, nobody has ever found it again, but its far-strewn sons and daughters still tell of its remembered glories, its radiant sunshine, its flowers and butterflies, its white-topped mountains and its mighty streams. Some think it may have been India, while others say it must have been some age-old continent which has since sunk and now lies buried under the Pacific Ocean.

The brave people of that old Motherland were ready for adventure. When wars and famine drove them out from their ancient homes, they said, "Let us set out across the sea that we may find new homes in which to live."

They sailed across tropical seas to the islands of the Pacific, some now and some again, setting up their homes where the cocoa-nut and bread-fruit grow. There they lived their island lives, swimming, diving, fishing, boating; sometimes making long voyages in their carved canoes far out into the great unknown seas. One voyager returned with tidings of a new land seen far to the south, with white-topped mountain peaks such as had shone in Hawa-iki. "Let us go to that land. These islands are already overfull," said some.

They prepared for the voyage. They built three great canoes, so long and wide that hundreds of people could sit in them. They curved them high at the prow, and ornamented them with beautiful carving. They loaded them with food and water and everything necessary for a long voyage. Then those who were departing bade farewell to friends and sailed across wide, lonely seas to look for that new land.

Ngatoro the magician was there. He resolved to put a stop to all quarrelling. With a mighty spell he raised a storm so fierce that the voyagers cried out in fear. Chanting more loudly still, he drew a terrible whirlpool from the depths of the sea. It rose in front of the canoes. The people shrieked.

"Save us, Ngatoro!" they begged. "We quarrel no more."

Changing his spell, Ngatoro quietened the storm. The wind dropped, waves and whirlpool fell away, the canoes went on their quiet course. The thankful people, remembering their lesson, quarrelled no more throughout the voyage. After many weeks they saw a long white cloud that seemed to hang across the meeting-place of sea and sky. All day they drew nearer to it. Next day they saw it plainly — the new land. At the welcome sight weary eyes brightened with relief. "Ao-tea-roa," the voyagers called it — "Land-of-the-Long-White-Cloud."

As they drew near the fairness of the land came into view. Mountains reared their snow-wreathed heads above the cloud; from them green forests ran down to the sea. Here and there the gleam of mountain torrents showed between the green, or clusters of crimson flowers glowed beneath the sun. The people cast off their red necklaces and ornaments. "In this new land we can pluck gems from the trees," they said, gazing at the crimson rata flowers.



They sprang on shore. With joy they found that this new land was rich in food and water. They settled, built houses, and planted the sweet potatoes they had brought with them. They fished, speared birds, and hunted the moa. Ngatoro the magician said: "I go to travel through the new country, enriching it and making it safe for my people."

He went. At his magic word hills were levelled, marshes were dried and made firm for walking. Stamping on the ground, he brought forth springs of water wherever they were needed. He travelled through the forests, placing guardian fairies everywhere. He said: "I go to climb yonder mountain. Fast till my return, that my magic power may be sustained."

He climbed and climbed. When he was hidden from their sight among the clouds, the people forgot his words and ate. At once his magic power left him. Crawling painfully where he should be striding lightly, he reached at last the top, only to sink exhausted in the snow.



He was freezing in the bitter cold, yet he had no strength to help himself. "I perish," he said, unless the Fire-god send me help." He called, and the Fire-god sent help; from the mountain-top fire spouted, flowing over one side. Ngatoro, warming himself, gathered strength to finish his work and descend to his people. When they heard how their carelessness had nearly cost their beloved magician his life, the people were sorry. They promised never again to forget his words.

"The fire on the mountain will remind you," he said. The fire still burns, sometimes far down, sometimes at the top. Men call that mountain a volcano. The voyagers stayed on in their new land. When the last of them had gone to his long rest there were thousands of their children left. These lived and loved and died, as men and women have always done, and their children took their places. So five hundred years have passed. The new land has become old, and the story of the great voyage a tale of long ago.

