

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE SPRING OF ARVA WAI--REMARKABLE MONUMENTAL REMAINS--SOME IDEAS WITH REGARD TO THE HISTORY OF THE PI-PIS FOUND IN THE VALLEY

ALMOST every country has its medicinal springs famed for their healing virtues. The Cheltenham of Typee is embosomed in the deepest solitude, and but seldom receives a visitor. It is situated remote from any dwelling, a little way up the mountain, near the head of the valley; and you approach it by a pathway shaded by the most beautiful foliage, and adorned with a thousand fragrant plants. The mineral waters of Arva Wai* ooze forth from the crevices of a rock, and gliding down its mossy side, fall at last, in many clustering drops, into a natural basin of stone fringed round with grass and dewy-looking little violet-coloured flowers, as fresh and beautiful as the perpetual moisture they enjoy can make them.

*I presume this might be translated into 'Strong Waters'. Arva is the name bestowed upon a root the properties of which are both inebriating and medicinal. 'Wai' is the Marquesan word for water.

The water is held in high estimation by the islanders, some of whom consider it an agreeable as well as a medicinal beverage; they bring it from the mountain in their calabashes, and store it away beneath heaps

of leaves in some shady nook near the house. Old Marheyo had a great love for the waters of the spring. Every now and then he lugged off to the mountain a great round demijohn of a calabash, and, panting with his exertions, brought it back filled with his darling fluid.

The water tasted like a solution of a dozen disagreeable things, and was sufficiently nauseous to have made the fortune of the proprietor, had the spa been situated in the midst of any civilized community.

As I am no chemist, I cannot give a scientific analysis of the water. All I know about the matter is, that one day Marheyo in my presence poured out the last drop from his huge calabash, and I observed at the bottom of the vessel a small quantity of gravelly sediment very much resembling our common sand. Whether this is always found in the water, and gives it its peculiar flavour and virtues, or whether its presence was merely incidental, I was not able to ascertain.

One day in returning from this spring by a circuitous path, I came upon a scene which reminded me of Stonehenge and the architectural labours of the Druids.

At the base of one of the mountains, and surrounded on all sides by dense groves, a series of vast terraces of stone rises, step by step, for a considerable distance up the hill side. These terraces cannot be less than one hundred yards in length and twenty in width. Their magnitude, however, is less striking than the immense size of the blocks

composing them. Some of the stones, of an oblong shape, are from ten to fifteen feet in length, and five or six feet thick. Their sides are quite smooth, but though square, and of pretty regular formation, they bear no mark of the chisel. They are laid together without cement, and here and there show gaps between. The topmost terrace and the lower one are somewhat peculiar in their construction. They have both a quadrangular depression in the centre, leaving the rest of the terrace elevated several feet above it. In the intervals of the stones immense trees have taken root, and their broad boughs stretching far over, and interlacing together, support a canopy almost impenetrable to the sun. Overgrowing the greater part of them, and climbing from one to another, is a wilderness of vines, in whose sinewy embrace many of the stones lie half-hidden, while in some places a thick growth of bushes entirely covers them. There is a wild pathway which obliquely crosses two of these terraces; and so profound is the shade, so dense the vegetation, that a stranger to the place might pass along it without being aware of their existence.

These structures bear every indication of a very high antiquity and Kory-Kory, who was my authority in all matters of scientific research, gave me to understand that they were coeval with the creation of the world; that the great gods themselves were the builders; and that they would endure until time shall be no more.

Kory-Kory's prompt explanation and his attributing the work to a divine origin, at once convinced me that neither he nor the rest of his

country-men knew anything about them.

As I gazed upon this monument, doubtless the work of an extinct and forgotten race, thus buried in the green nook of an island at the ends of the earth, the existence of which was yesterday unknown, a stronger feeling of awe came over me than if I had stood musing at the mighty base of the Pyramid of Cheops. There are no inscriptions, no sculpture, no clue, by which to conjecture its history; nothing but the dumb stones. How many generations of the majestic trees which overshadow them have grown and flourished and decayed since first they were erected!

These remains naturally suggest many interesting reflections. They establish the great age of the island, an opinion which the builders of theories concerning, the creation of the various groups in the South Seas are not always inclined to admit. For my own part, I think it just as probable that human beings were living in the valleys of the Marquesas three thousand years ago as that they were inhabiting the land of Egypt. The origin of the island of Nukuheva cannot be imputed to the coral insect; for indefatigable as that wonderful creature is, it would be hardly muscular enough to pile rocks one upon the other more than three thousand feet above the level of the sea. That the land may have been thrown up by a submarine volcano is as possible as anything else. No one can make an affidavit to the contrary, and therefore I still say nothing against the supposition: indeed, were geologists to assert that the whole continent of America had in like manner been formed by the simultaneous explosion of a train of Etnas laid under the water all the

way from the North Pole to the parallel of Cape Horn, I am the last man in the world to contradict them.

I have already mentioned that the dwellings of the islanders were almost invariably built upon massive stone foundations, which they call pi-pis. The dimensions of these, however, as well as of the stones composing them, are comparatively small: but there are other and larger erections of a similar description comprising the 'morais', or burying grounds, and festival-places, in nearly all the valleys of the island. Some of these piles are so extensive, and so great a degree of labour and skill must have been requisite in constructing them, that I can scarcely believe they were built by the ancestors of the present inhabitants. If indeed they were, the race has sadly deteriorated in their knowledge of the mechanic arts. To say nothing of their habitual indolence, by what contrivance within the reach of so simple a people could such enormous masses have been moved or fixed in their places? and how could they with their rude implements have chiselled and hammered them into shape?

All of these larger pi-pis--like that of the Hoolah Hoolah ground in the Typee valley--bore incontestible marks of great age; and I am disposed to believe that their erection may be ascribed to the same race of men who were the builders of the still more ancient remains I have just described.

According to Kory-Kory's account, the pi-pi upon which stands the Hoolah Hoolah ground was built a great many moons ago, under the direction of

Monoo, a great chief and warrior, and, as it would appear, master-mason among the Typees. It was erected for the express purpose to which it is at present devoted, in the incredibly short period of one sun; and was dedicated to the immortal wooden idols by a grand festival, which lasted ten days and nights.

Among the smaller pi-pis, upon which stand the dwelling-houses of the natives, I never observed any which intimated a recent erection. There are in every part of the valley a great many of these massive stone foundations which have no houses upon them. This is vastly convenient, for whenever an enterprising islander chooses to emigrate a few hundred yards from the place where he was born, all he has to do in order to establish himself in some new locality, is to select one of the many unappropriated pi-pis, and without further ceremony pitch his bamboo tent upon it.