

Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands

[*This composite text of the lecture, from Paul Fatout's Mark Twain Speaking, is assembled mainly from contemporary newspaper accounts of MT's 1869-1870 tour of the northeast.*]

Ladies and gentlemen: The next lecture in this course will be delivered this evening, by Samuel L. Clemens, a gentleman whose high character and unimpeachable integrity are only equalled by his comeliness of person and grace of manner. And I am the man! I was obliged to excuse the chairman from introducing me, because he never compliments anybody and I knew I could do it just as well.

The Sandwich Islands will be the subject of my lecture--when I get to it--and I shall endeavor to tell the truth as nearly as a newspaper man can. If I embellish it with a little nonsense, that makes no difference; it won't mar the truth; it is only as the barnacle ornaments the oyster by sticking to it. That figure is original with me! I was born back from tidewater and don't know as the barnacle *does* stick to the oyster.

Unfortunately, the first object I ever saw in the Sandwich Islands was a repulsive one. It was a case of Oriental leprosy, of so dreadful a nature that I have never been able to get it out of my mind since. I don't intend that it shall give a disagreeable complexion to this lecture at all, but inasmuch as it was the first thing I saw in those islands, it naturally suggested itself when I proposed to talk about the islands. It is a very hard matter to get a disagreeable object out of one's memory. I discovered that a good while ago. When I made that funeral excursion in the *Quaker City* they showed me some very interesting objects in a cathedral, and I expected to recollect every one of them--but I didn't.

I forgot every one of them--except one--and that I remembered because it was unpleasant. It was a curious piece of ancient sculpture. They don't know where they got it nor how long they have had it. It is a stone figure of a man without any skin--a freshly skinned man showing every vein, artery and tissue. It was the heaviest thing, and yet there was something fascinating about it. It looked so natural; it looked as if it was in pain, and you know a freshly skinned man would naturally look that way. He would unless his attention was occupied with some other matter. It was a dreadful object, and I have been sorry many a time since that I ever saw that man. Sometimes I dream of him, sometimes he is standing by my bedpost, sometimes he is stretched between the sheets, touching me--the most uncomfortable bedfellow I ever had.

I can't get rid of unpleasant recollections. Once when I ran away from school I was afraid to go home at night, so I crawled through a window and laid down on a lounge in my father's office. The moon shed a ghastly light in the room, and presently I descried a long, dark mysterious shape on the floor. I wanted to go and touch it--but I didn't--I restrained myself--I didn't do it. I had a good deal of presence of mind--tried to go to sleep--kept thinking of it. By and by when the moonlight fell upon it, I saw that it was a dead man lying there with his white face turned up in the moonlight. I never was so sick in all my life. I never wanted to take a walk so bad! I went away from there. I didn't hurry--simply went out of the window--and took the sash along with me. I didn't need the sash, but it was handier to take it than to leave it. I wasn't scared, but I was a good deal agitated. I have never forgotten that man. He had fallen dead in the street and they brought him in there to try him, and they brought him in guilty, too.

But I am losing time; what I have been saying don't bear strictly on the Sandwich Islands, but one reminiscence leads to another, and I am obliged to bring myself down in this way, on account of that unpleasant thing that I first saw there. It is not safe to come to any

important matter in an entirely direct way. When a young gentleman is about to talk to a young lady about matrimony he don't go straight at it. He begins by talking about the weather. I have done that many a time.

My next remarks will refer to the Sandwich Islands. Now if an impression has gotten abroad in the land that the Sandwich Islands are in South America, that is the error I wish to attack; that is the error I wish to combat. To cut the matter short the Sandwich Isles are 2,000 miles southwest from San Francisco, but why they were put away out there in the middle of the Pacific, so far away from any place and in such an inconvenient locality, is no business of ours--it was the work of providence and is not open to question. The subject is a good deal like many others we should like to inquire into, such as, what mosquitoes were made for, etc., but under the circumstances we naturally feel a delicacy about doing it.

The islands are a dozen in number and their entire area is not greater I suppose than that of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined. They are of volcanic origin, of volcanic construction I should say. There is not a spoonful of legitimate dirt in the whole group, unless it has been imported. Eight of the islands are inhabited, and four of them are entirely girdled with a belt of mountains comprising the most productive sugar lands in the world. The sugar lands in Louisiana are considered rich, and yield from 500 to 1,700 pounds per acre. A two-hundred-acre crop of wheat in the States is worth twenty or thirty thousand dollars; a two-hundred-acre crop of sugar in these islands is worth two hundred thousand dollars. You could not do that in this country unless you planted it with stumps and reaped it in bonds. I could go on talking about the sugar interest all night--and I have a notion to do it. But I will spare you. It is very interesting to those who are interested in it, but I'll drop it now. You will find it all in the Patent Office reports, and I can recommend them as the most placid literature in the world.

These islands were discovered some eighty or ninety years ago by Captain Cook, though another man came very near discovering them before, and he was diverted from his course by a manuscript found in a bottle. He wasn't the first man who has been diverted by suggestions got out of a bottle. When these islands were discovered the population was about 400,000, but the white man came and brought various complicated diseases, and education, and civilization, and all sorts of calamities, and consequently the population began to drop off with commendable activity. Forty years ago they were reduced to 200,000, and the educational and civilizing facilities being increased they dwindled down to 55,000, and it is proposed to send a few more missionaries and finish them. It isn't the education or civilization that has settled them; it is the imported diseases, and they have all got the consumption and other reliable distempers, and to speak figuratively, they are retiring from business pretty fast. When they pick up and leave we will take possession as lawful heirs.

There are about 3,000 white people in the islands; they are mostly Americans. In fact they are the kings of the Sandwich Islands; the monarchy is not much more than a mere name. These people stand as high in the scale of character as any people in the world, and some of them who were born and educated in those islands don't even know what vice is. A Kanaka or a native is nobody unless he has a princely income of \$75 annually, or a splendid estate worth \$100. The country is full of office-holders and office-seekers; there are plenty of such noble patriots. Of almost any party of three men, two would be office-holders and one an office-seeker. In a little island half the size of one of the wards of St. Louis, there are lots of noblemen, princes and men of high degree, with grand titles, holding big offices, receiving immense salaries--such as ministers of war, secretaries of the navy, secretaries of state and ministers of justice. They make a fine display of uniforms, and are very imposing at a funeral. That's the country for a petty hero to go to, he would soon have the conceit taken out of him. There are so many of them that a nobleman from any other country would be nobody. They only lionize their own people, and therefore they lionize everybody.

In color, the natives are a rich, dark brown--a sort of black and tan. A very pleasing tint. The tropical sun and the easy-going ways inherited from their ancestors, have made them rather idle, but they are not vicious at all, they are good people. The native women in the rural districts wear a loose, magnificent curtain calico garment, but the men don't. Upon great occasions the men wear an umbrella, or some little fancy article like that--further than this they have no inclination toward gorgeousness of attire.

In the old times the king was absolute, his person was sacred, and if even the shadow of a common Kanaka fell upon him the Kanaka had to die. There was no help for him. Whatever the king tabooed it was death to touch or speak of. After the king, came the high priests who sacrificed human victims; after them came the great feudal chiefs, and then the common Kanakas, who were the slaves of all, and wretchedly oppressed. Away down at the bottom of this pyramid were the women, the abject slaves of the whole party. They did all the work and were cruelly mistreated. It was death for a woman to sit at table with her husband, or to eat of the choice fruits of the islands at any time. They seemed to have had a sort of dim knowledge of what came of women eating fruit in the Garden of Eden and they didn't feel justified in taking any more chances. And it is wisdom--unquestionably it is wisdom. Adam wasn't strict enough. Eve broke the *taboo*, and hence comes all this trouble. Can't be too particular about fruit--with women.

They were a rusty set all round--those Kanakas. By and by the American missionaries came and they struck off the shackles from the whole race, breaking the power of the kings and chiefs. They set the common man free, elevated his wife to a position of equality, and gave a spot of land to each to hold forever. The missionaries taught the whole nation to read and write with facility, in the native tongue. I don't suppose there is today a single uneducated person above eight years of age in the Sandwich Islands. It is the best educated country in the world, I believe, not excepting portions of the United States. That has all been done by the American missionaries. And in a large degree it was paid for by the American Sunday school children with their pennies. We all took part in it. True, the system gave opportunities to bad boys. Many a bad boy acquired the habit of confiscating pennies of the missionary cause. But it is one of the proudest recollections of my life that I never did that--at least not more than once or twice. I know that I contributed. I have had nearly \$2 invested there for thirty years. But I don't mind it. I don't care for the money if it has been doing good. I don't say this in order to show off, but just mention it as a gentle, humanizing fact that may possibly have a benevolent and beneficent effect upon some members of this audience.

These natives are very hospitable people indeed--very hospitable. If you want to stay a few days and nights in a native's cabin you can stay and welcome. They will do everything they possibly can to make you comfortable. They will feed you on baked dog, or poi, or raw fish, or raw salt pork, fricasseed cats--all the luxuries of the season. Everything the human heart can desire, they will set before you. Perhaps now, this isn't a captivating feast at first glance, but it is offered in all sincerity, and with the best motives in the world, and that makes any feast respectable whether it is palatable or not. But if you want to trade, that's quite another matter--that's business! And the Kanucker is ready for you. He is a born trader, and he will swindle you if he can. He will lie straight through, from the first word to the last. Not such lies as you and I tell, but gigantic lies, lies that awe you with their grandeur, lies that stun you with their imperial impossibility. He will sell you a molehill at the market price of a mountain, and will lie it up to an altitude that will make it cheap at the money. If he is caught, he slips out of it with an easy indifference that has an unmistakable charm about it.

One peculiarity of these Kanakas is that nearly every one of them has a dozen mothers--not natural ones--I haven't got down yet where I can make such a statement as that--but adopted mothers. They have a custom of calling any woman mother they take a liking to--no matter what her color or politics--and it is possible for one native to have a thousand mothers if his

affections are liberal and stretchy, and most of them are. This custom breeds some curious incidents. A California man went down there and opened a sugar plantation. One of his hands came and said he wanted to bury his mother. He gave him permission. Shortly after he came again with the same request. "I thought you buried her last week," said the gentleman. "This is another one," said the native. "All right," said the gentleman, "go and plant her." Within a month the man wanted to bury some more mothers. "Look here," said the planter, "I don't want to be hard on you in your affliction, but it appears to me that your stock of mothers holds out pretty well. It interferes with business, so clear out, and never come back until you have buried every mother you have in the world."

They are an odd sort of people, too. They can die whenever they want to. That's a fact. They don't mind dying any more than a jilted Frenchman does. When they take a notion to die they die, and it don't make any difference whether there is anything the matter with them or not, and they can't be persuaded out of it. When one of them makes up his mind to die, he just lays down and is just as certain to die as though he had all the doctors in the world hold of him. A gentleman in Hawaii asked his servant if he wouldn't like to die and have a big funeral. He said yes, and looked happy, and the next morning the overseer came and said, "That boy of yours laid down and died last night and said you were going to give him a fine funeral."

They are very fond of funerals. Big funerals are their main weakness. Fine grave clothes, fine funeral appointments, and a long procession are things they take a generous delight in. Years ago a Kanaka and his wife were condemned to be hanged for murder. They received the sentence with manifest satisfaction because it gave an opening for a funeral, you know. It makes but little difference to them whose it is; they would as soon attend their own funeral as anybody else's. This couple were of consequence, and had landed estates. They sold every foot of ground they had and laid it out in fine clothes to be hanged in. And the woman appeared on the scaffold in a white satin dress and slippers and feathers of gaudy ribbon, and the man was arrayed in a gorgeous vest, blue clawhammer coat and brass buttons, and white kid gloves. As the noose was adjusted around his neck, he blew his nose with a grand theatrical flourish, so as to show his embroidered white handkerchief. I never, never knew of a couple who enjoyed hanging more than they did.

They are very fond of dogs, these people--not the great Newfoundland or the stately mastiff, but a species of little mean, contemptible cur that a white man would condemn to death on general principles. There is nothing attractive about these dogs--there is not a handsome feature about them, unless it is their bushy tails. A friend of mine said if he had one of these dogs he would cut off the tail and throw the rest of the dog away. They feed this dog, pet him, take ever so much care of him, and then cook and eat him. I couldn't do that. I would rather go hungry for two days than devour an old personal friend in that way; but many a white citizen of those islands throws aside his prejudices and takes his dinner off one of those puppies--and after all it is only our cherished American sausage with the mystery removed.

A Kanaka will eat anything he can bite--a live fish, scales and all, which must be rather annoying to the fish, but the Kanaka doesn't mind that. It used to be said that the Kanakas were cannibals, but that was a slander. They didn't eat Captain Cook--or if they did, it was only for fun. There was one instance of cannibalism. A foreigner, from the South Pacific Islands, set up an office and did eat a good many Kanakas. He was a useful citizen, but had strong political prejudices and used to save up a good appetite for just before election, so that he could thin out the Democratic vote.

At this point in my lecture, in other cities, I usually illustrate cannibalism, but I am a stranger here and don't feel like taking liberties. Still, if any one in the audience will lend me an infant, I will illustrate the matter. But it is of no consequence--it don't matter. I know

children have become scarce and high, owing to the inattention they have received since the women's rights movement began. I will leave out that part of my program, though it is very neat and pleasant. Yet it is not necessary. I am not hungry.

Well, that foreign cannibal after a while got tired of Kanakas--as most anybody would--and thought he would like to try white man with onions. So he captured and devoured a tough old whaleship captain, but it was the worst thing he ever did. Of course, he could no more digest that old whaler than a keg of nails. There is no telling how much he suffered, with this sin on his conscience and the whaler on his stomach. He lingered for a few days and then died. Now I don't believe this story myself, and have only told it for its moral. You don't appear to see the moral; but I know there is a moral in it, because I have told it thirty or forty times, and never got a moral out of it yet!

With all these excellent and hospitable ways these Kanakers have some cruel instincts. They will put a live chicken in the fire just to see it hop about. In the olden times they used to be cruel to themselves. They used to tear their hair and burn their flesh, shave their heads, knock out an eye or a couple of front teeth, when a great person or a king died--just to testify to their sorrow, and if their grief was so sore that they couldn't possibly bear it, they would go out and scalp their neighbor, or burn his house down. It was an excellent custom, too, for it gave every one a good opportunity to square up old grudges. Pity we didn't have it here! They would also kill an infant now and then--bury him alive sometimes; but the missionaries have annihilated infanticide--for my part I can't see why.

The ladies of the Sandwich Islands have a great many pleasant customs which I don't know but we might practice with profit here. The women all ride like men. I wish to introduce that reform in this country. Our ladies ought, by all means to ride like men, these sidesaddles are so dangerous. When women meet each other in the road, they run and kiss and hug each other, and they don't blackguard each other behind each other's backs. I would like to introduce that reform, also. I don't suppose our ladies do it. But they might. But I believe I am getting on dangerous ground. I won't pursue that any further.

These people do nearly everything wrong end first. They buckle the saddle on the right side which is the wrong side; they mount a horse from the wrong side; they turn out on the wrong side to let you go by; they use the same word to say "good-by" and "good morning"; they use "yes" when they mean "no"; the women smoke more than the men do; when they beckon to you to come toward them they always motion in the opposite direction; the only native bird that has handsome feathers has only two, and they are under its wings instead of on top of its head; frequently a native cat has a tail only two inches long and has got a knot tied in the end of it; the native duck lives on the dry tops of mountains 5,000 feet high; the natives always stew chickens instead of baking them; they dance at funerals and sing a dismal heartbroken dirge when they are happy; and with atrocious perverseness they wash your shirts with a club and iron them with a brickbat. In their playing of the noble American game of "seven-up," that's a game, well, I'll explain that by and by. Some of you, perhaps, know all about it, and the rest must guess--but, in their playing of that really noble and intellectual game the dealer deals to his right instead of to his left, and what is insufferably worse--the ten always takes the ace! Now, such abject ignorance as that is reprehensible, and, for one, I am glad the missionaries have gone there.

Now, you see what kind of voters you will have if you take those islands away from these people as we are pretty sure to do some day. They will do everything wrong end first. They will make a deal of trouble here too. Instead of fostering and encouraging a judicious system of railway speculation, and all that sort of thing, they will elect the most incorruptible men to Congress. Yes, they will turn everything upside down.

In Honolulu they are the most easy-going people in the world. Some of our people are not acquainted with their customs. They started a gas company once, and put the gas at \$13 a thousand feet. They only took in \$16 the first month. They all went to bed at dark. They are an excellent people. I speak earnestly. They do not even know the name of some of the vices in this country. A lady called on a doctor. She wanted something for general debility. He ordered her to drink porter. She called him again. The porter had done her no good. He asked her how much porter she had taken. She said a tablespoonful in a tumbler of water. I wish we could import such blessed ignorance into this country. They don't do much drinking there. When they have paid the tax for importing the liquor they have got nothing left to purchase the liquor with. They are very innocent and drink anything that is liquid--kerosene, turpentine, hair oil. In one town, on a Fourth of July, an entire community got drunk on a barrel of Mrs. Winslow's soothing syrup.

The chief glory of the Sandwich Islands is their great volcano. The volcano of Kee-law-ay-oh is 17,000 feet in diameter, and from 700 to 800 feet deep. Vesuvius is nowhere. It is the largest volcano in the world; shoots up flames tremendously high. You witness a scene of unrivaled sublimity, and witness the most astonishing sights. When the volcano of Kee-law-ay-oh broke through a few years ago, lava flowed out of it for twenty days and twenty nights, and made a stream forty miles in length, till it reached the sea, tearing up forests in its awful fiery path, swallowing up huts, destroying all vegetation, rioting through shady dells and sinuous canyons. Amidst this carnival of destruction, majestic columns of smoke ascended and formed a cloudy murky pall overhead. Sheets of green, blue, lambent flames were shot upward, and pierced the vast gloom, making all sublimely grand.

The natives are indifferent to volcanic terrors. During the progress of an eruption they ate, drank, bought, sold, planted, builded, apparently indifferent to the roar of consuming forests, the startling detonations, the hissing of escaping steam, the rending of the earth, the shivering and melting of gigantic rocks, the raging and dashing of the fiery waves, the bellowings and unearthly mutterings coming up from a burning deep. They went carelessly on, amid the rain of ashes, sand, and fiery scintillations, gazing vacantly at the ever-varying appearance of the atmosphere, murky, black, livid, blazing, the sudden rising of lofty pillars of flame, the upward curling of ten thousand columns of smoke, and their majestic roll in dense and lurid clouds. All these moving phenomena were regarded by them as the fall of a shower or the running of a brook; while to others they were as the tokens of a burning world, the departing heavens, and a coming judge. There! I'm glad I've got that volcano off my mind.

I once knew a great, tall gawky country editor, near Sacramento, to whom I sent an ode on the sea, starting it with "The long, green swell of the Pacific." The country editor sent back a letter and stated I couldn't fool him, and he didn't want any base insinuations from me. He knew who I meant when I wrote the "long, green swell of the Pacific."

There is one thing characteristic of the tropics that a stranger must have, whether he likes it or not, and that is the boo-hoo fever. Its symptoms are nausea of the stomach, severe headache, backache and bellyache, and a general utter indifference whether school keeps or not. You can't be a full citizen of the Sandwich Islands unless you have had the boo-hoo fever. You will never forget it. I remember a little boy who had it once there. A New Yorker asked him if he was afraid to die. He said, "No; I am not afraid to die of anything, except the boo-hoo fever."

The climate of these islands is delightful, it is beautiful. In Honolulu the thermometer stands at about 80 or 82 degrees pretty much all the year round--don't change more than 12 degrees in twelve months. In the sugar districts the thermometer stands at 70 and does not change at all. Any kind of thermometer will do--one without any quicksilver is just as good. Eighty degrees by the seashore, and 70 degrees farther inland, and 60 degrees as you ascend the

slope of the mountain, and as you go higher 50 degrees, 40, 30, and ever decreasing in temperature, till you get to the top, where it's so cold that you can't speak the truth. I know, for I've been there! The climate is wonderfully healthy, for white people in particular, so healthy that white people venture on the most reckless imprudence. They get up too early: you can see them as early as half-past seven in the morning, and they attend to all their business, and keep it up till sundown. It don't hurt 'em, don't kill 'em, and yet it ought to do so. I have seen it so hot in California that greenbacks went up to 142 in the shade.

These Sandwichers believe in a superstition that the biggest liars in the world have got to visit the islands some time before they die. They believe that because it is a fact--you misunderstand--I mean that when liars get there they stay there. They have several specimens they boast of. They treasure up their little perfections, and they allude to them as if the man was inspired--from below. They had a man among them named Morgan. He never allowed anyone to tell a bigger lie than himself, and he always told the last one too. When someone was telling about the natural bridge in Virginia, he said he knew all about it, as his father had helped to build it. Someone was bragging of a wonderful horse he had. Morgan told them of one he had once. While out riding one day a thundershower came on and chased him for eighteen miles, and never caught him. Not a single drop of rain dropped onto his horse, but his dog was swimming behind the wagon the whole of the way.

Once, when the subject of mean men was being discussed, Morgan told them of an incorporated company of mean men. They hired a poor fellow to blast rock for them. He drilled a hole four feet deep, put in the powder, and began to tamp it down around the fuse. I know all about tamping, as I have worked in a mine myself. The crowbar struck a spark and caused a premature explosion and that man and his crowbar shot up into the air, and he went higher and higher, till he didn't look bigger than a boy, and he kept on going higher and higher, until he didn't look bigger than a dog, and he kept on going higher and higher, until he didn't look bigger than a bee, and then he went out of sight; and presently he came in sight again, looking no bigger than a bee, and he came further and further, until he was as big as a dog, and further and further and further, until he was as big as a boy, and he came further and further, until he assumed the full size and shape of a man, and he came down and fell right into the same old spot and went to tamping again. And would you believe it--concluded Morgan--although that poor fellow was not gone more than fifteen minutes, yet that mean company docked him for loss of time.

The land that I have tried to tell you about lies out there in the midst of the watery wilderness, in the very heart of the almost soilless solitudes of the Pacific. It is a dreamy, beautiful, charming land. I wish I could make you comprehend how beautiful it is. It is a land that seems ever so vague and fairy-like when one reads about it in books, peopled with a gentle, indolent, careless race.

It is Sunday land. The land of indolence and dreams, where the air is drowsy and things tend to repose and peace, and to emancipation from the labor, and turmoil, and weariness, and anxiety of life.