

WAIHIO: THE NORTHERN POLAR CONTINENT.

The country of Waiho is best described as a deep, oval valley, surrounded for two-thirds of its circumference by high mountains, and for the remaining third by low hills. I should judge the valley to be over a hundred miles across its shortest diameter, and from 150 to 200 at its longest. The chain in the center, from which the pillar of fire rises, must be at least thirty miles across and is nearly circular. How to give a right idea of this marvel I know not. It is impossible to approach nearer than two or three miles of the opening at any point on account of the intense heat that radiates a constant and steady heat, although the light is variable. This heat has tradition that many years ago, molten billows rose to the top of the opening and overflowed at several points, causing death and desolation, and the remains of ancient lava in several ravines confirm this tradition. The chain seems to me a vast crater, or opening into the central fires of the earth, which is never closed. It is Symmes's Hole, except that Capt. Symmes supposed it to be an immense opening where the water flowed into and through the earth. While here in fact heat and electricity flow out. The electricity is manifest by the shocks it gives, as well as by its flashes, the shocks increasing in intensity as one approaches the opening, but could nowhere see anything but the black jagged rocks and the rising flame, or radiated light, for it is not actual flame. The appearance is as if it were the opening of an immense furnace. It is not like any volcano I have seen, for it throws out nothing but light, heat and electricity, and there is no noise besides the crackling of the electricity as it reaches the cold upper air. As I sit watching it with profound interest, I much regret the want of that scientific knowledge that would enable me better to comprehend and describe this tenth wonder of the world.

The climate and productions of Waiho are peculiar, as may be supposed from its situation and circumstances, so unlike those of any other known country. The difference between summer and winter is but slight. The sun makes the long day of summer somewhat lighter than that of winter, but I doubt if a thermometer would show much difference of temperature. The average heat, as I feel it, in the inhabited belt, about half way between the mountains and the great chasm, is like that of winter in the tropics. The vegetation ranges from tropical to arctic, according to distance from the central fire, and the heat of the soil comes quite as much from beneath as from the air. Vegetation, however, is diminutive, ranging nowhere to more than a fourth of the height of the same trees and shrubs in the temperate and torrid zones, and the foliage and fruit are remarkably dry and hard. This is no doubt caused by the constant heat and the want of rain, for it never rains, and snow falls only upon the mountains and their foothills. The only water of the valleys comes in little brooks from the melting snow on the mountain sides, and it is along the valleys watered by these brooks that the trees and shrubs grow, which furnish food for the people. There is also a species of pine, or spruce, growing near the mountains, in the gorges, which are very highly-flavored and nutritious nuts, and the supply of these is inexhaustible. Most of the trees in the lower part of the valley are in perpetual flower and fruit, and nowhere else have I found the flowers so generally or so delightfully fragrant. Even the dry intervals between the brooks, where there is no appearance of moisture, are thickly covered with a flowering moss, which sends forth a most delicate and exhilarating odor as it is crushed underfoot. It is upon this moss that the people sleep, and no couch could be softer or sweeter. There is a constant and gentle breeze from the mountains toward the central chasm, which occasionally, but not often, is unpleasantly cool. The clouds come up over the mountains and sometimes over the outer edge of the valley, but the current of heated air drives them back, and there is always clear sky over the center of the valley. The fruits of the country I will describe when I know them better. I have at length learned to satisfy my appetite with them. Indeed I repeated my feast of duck but three or four times, partly because of the horror and repugnance it excited in my neighbors, but more because my appetite gradually diminished and my taste changed, so that I now prefer the vegetable food of the country, and do not require more than four or five times as much as one of these human birds around me. I am growing thin, too, and white and spectral, no doubt, yet with no feeling of illness, and though my muscular strength is less, my vivacity and enjoyment of life are never greater, except when thoughts of Gertrude and home make me wretched. But I cannot hope to rejoin my friends in this world, and I feel myself as widely separated from them as if I were already in the land of spirits.

MARRIAGE TO A WAIHO BEAUTY.

It is now the winter of 1862, as I compute time. It is seven years since I last wrote in this journal, though I have recorded in that time some odd fragments of experience and observation. The whole period, as I look back upon it, is almost a blank. There is one portion of it I wish I could make wholly so. I have described elsewhere the ideas and habits of the Waihos as to marriage. I regret to say that, though I do not approve their custom, I have not been faithful to Gertrude. One of the most beautiful of the golden-haired girls around me offered herself to me, as my bride, about three summers ago. I do not believe I should ever have made the first advances to anyone of the Waiho women, but when I saw how truly the little Momen (so she was called) loved me, the sense of my homelessness and desolation, and the thought that I was as utterly lost to Gertrude as if dead, conspired with awakened passion to beguile me, and I yielded. I felt too that marriage with so frail and spiritual a creature could be little more than a play, and I called her my doll wife. But her love was fatal to her, as I ought to have foreseen that it would be, and I now sit half my time, repenting, at the grave which holds my sweet Momen and her unborn child. God forgive me! I am

sure I did not deliberately wrong her, and I came truly and tenderly to love and cherish her after our marriage. Since her death I feel that I must escape from this country or die. I grow so desperate at times that I think I will embark upon the boat that brought me here, which I have carefully preserved, and risk the perils of arctic ice and cold for the small chance of being driven by wind and tide to some part of the world whence I can again reach my beloved Elbe and my home.

(To be continued.)

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