

THE CENTENARY OF KAMEHAMEHA THE GREAT

Just a hundred years ago, at 2 o'clock in the morning of May 8, 1819, there passed out of life the greatest of the chiefs of Hawaii "from chaos until now," — the man who by dint of forty years' valor in war, patience in waiting, and skill in statecraft, made out of a weltering anarchy of contending *alii* the Hawaiian monarchy which, largely through his own influence extended beyond his decease, held together through three-quarters of a century of weaker rule.

America has become in these last years the heir to Kamehameha's kingdom; it is well that she should be also the guardian of his fame. It need be in no condescending spirit, for there will never be another like the first Kamehameha. Partly because the old days of mingled savagery and chivalry in Hawaii, when *la haute noblesse* fought like the demigods of Homer, are gone forever; partly also, alas, because the race itself is a vanishing one, weakened by the inrush of the white man's vices, since the day that Cook burst through the veil of protective isolation, and hustled along the way of the strenuous life which has been as fatal as the wars of old.

Kamehameha's statue still stands before the Legislative Building in Honolulu, a building once more euphoniously entitled Aliiolani Hale, but my own mind travels back rapidly over a space of thirty years as I think of the stalwart native whom the artist chose as his model for the figure of bronze. His name was Kaopuiki, and I have more than once made the voyage with him by whaleboat from Lahaina to the island of Lanai or *vice versa*. On days when the surf was high and the passage into the lagoon dangerous, it was a sight to see Kaopuiki stand erect in the bow of the boat, motionlessly awaiting the proper second at which to give the signal to the rowers. It was then I seemed to see Kamehameha himself as he had been in the flesh. Nay, more, I seemed then to glimpse the spirit which watched and waited and commanded the circumstances of his age till the last great battle had been won at the Nunanu Pali and the Eight Islands entered upon the period of prosperous unity.

It would take far too long to give any sketch, even in outline, of the life of the great Pacific chieftain, but I may be permitted to draw attention to the outstanding events, and then to say something briefly of those qualities which made him great in peace as well as in war, in defeat as well as in victory, in constructive work even more than overcoming almost unexampled difficulties.

Somewhere between 1736 and 1740, probably nearer the former than the latter date, in the month of Ikuiwa, or November, a great storm was raging on the Kohala coast in the island of Hawaii. Out of the heart of that storm, like the babe Arthur borne to the feet of Merlin, came the child who was to bear through life the name of Kamehameha, "the lonely one." Like Arthur, too, his parentage was the subject of scandal and dispute, most taking him for the son of Keoua, while others were disposed to regard him as the child of that grim old savage, Kahekili, *moi* (or king) of Maui. Certainly the latter took uncommon interest in the child's fate, sending two high chiefs from Maui to act as nurses or guardians. Yet this interest was consistent with a life-long antagonism, for Kahekili fought the schemes of Kamehameha till the "black *kapa* covered him" in death. So the boy, inured to the harsher sports and the warrior's training, grew up to take a part in the inter-island and other civil campaigns, and had early experience of the challenges and risks of destiny. There was for many years little prospect that either he or any other chief would become supreme monarch of the archipelago, and Kamehameha himself had more than the usual share of defeats and rebuffs. Into these contests, monotonous, bitter and even sordid, came the startling incidents connected with the arrival and stay of Captain Cook, terminating in the murder at Kealakekua Bay in 1779. Kamehameha was in no wise responsible for the tragedy, but, during 1778 and 1779, he got out of his acquaintance with the English navigator much that was useful for the future.

Then, with the departure of the ships, came the resumption of civil war, and after the death of Kalaniopuu, Kamehameha was prominent enough to attract the predictions of the prophets and the allegiance of some of the strongest of the chiefs. These latter forced the chief from his retirement at Halawa to head an insurrection against Kiwalao, who had succeeded his father Kalaniopuu as *moi* of Hawaii. However, the death of Kiwalao only complicated the situation, since it turned the civil duel into a bitter triangular conflict between Kamehameha, Keoua and Keawemauhili. Even while this struggle was raging uncertainly, there were also wars with Kahekili in Maui, in which the latter was aided by the forces of Oahu and Kauai. Certainly, nothing at this date looked less likely than that Kamehameha would emerge at last victorious over all his foes. Yet in time his patience no less than his valor found its vindication. As guardian of the famous war-god, Kaili, "the lonely one" gained a terrible prestige. Presently, too, he succeeded in acquiring at least a chip of the no less dreaded poison goddess of Molokai. Then came the episode when

the forces of his rival Keoua, marching across the lava plains near Kilauea, were slain by the fumes of the volcano; from that moment it was blazed far and wide that Pele, the volcano goddess, was on the side of Kamehameha. Not less potent for his fortunes was his matrimonial alliance with the high chieftess Keopuolani of the line of the dead King Kiwalao. Marriage to the fickle and versatile Kaahumanu had already brought him excitement as well as fame; the marriage to Keopuolani allied him to the bluest blood in the archipelago. To these elements of fortune we must add the employment of the kidnapped English sailors, Young and Davis, whose services as gunners, shipbuilders and counsellors demand the heartiest recognition. Nor should one be silent with respect to the influence of Vancouver, who on his three visits to the islands gave Kamehameha counsel, which, it is true, he did not always follow, but was nevertheless of the highest value.

So gradually the obstacles in his upward climb gave way, until the struggle narrowed itself to the war between Kamehameha, lord of Hawaii and Kalanikapule, lord of Oahu and Maui. It was in the spring of 1795 that the "Great Armada" of the Hawaiian *alii* reached Oahu from Maui, and then up the Nunanu Valley the host of veterans marched till they encountered the troops of Kalanikapule at the Pali. The battle was decisive, and when the terrible carnage of that April day ceased it was clear that the last outposts of opposition had been conquered and that henceforth Kamehameha might replace the sword by the scepter.

The years from 1795 to 1819 were, however, no less strenuous and remarkable than those which preceded. Time would fail to tell of all that the conqueror achieved, of his administration of the conquered districts, of the creation and collection of the taxes, of the choice of men for governors and administrators of varying degree, of the repairing of the ravages of war by the making of fish-ponds and taro-patches, of the many settlements of disputes between foreign sailors and the natives, of the resistance to the aggressions of the Russians, of the diplomacy by means of which the island of Kauai was finally incorporated into the Union, and the like.

Kamehameha had already foreseen, in Vancouver's time, the difficulty of preserving his kingdom permanently from embroilments with foreign powers, and had for this reason been ready to accept the protectorate of Great Britain. But he never flinched from the responsibilities his conquest had imposed upon him, and after Vancouver's time he made no overtures to the foreigner.

Now and then there drifted to his realm rumors of the new

religion which had been introduced into Tahiti, and Kamehameha was conscious that sooner or later the teachers which the white men had promised would reach Hawaii. But for himself he willed to be a devotee to the last of the old gods, and right well he served these bloody deities with human sacrifices and other cruel rites.

Yet as king, he was by no means lacking in humanity and magnanimity, and many a story might be told of unexpected gleams of kindness. Such is that of the Puna fishermen who in an early raid had beaten the Hawaiian chief into insensibility with their paddles. Years after, in the days of his power, these bold defenders of the coast were brought before the king, expecting nothing short of death. But not only did Kamehameha pardon them; he even proclaimed himself the sinner through his unjust raid and forbade such in the future by Mamalahoe, "the law of the splintered paddle."

One should remember, too, in the light of the subsequent history of the Hawaiian kings, how, when the "firewater" of the white man began its devastating course, Kamehameha came for a time under its baneful influence. But he soon perceived the "*facilis descensus*" which was threatened, braced himself to heed the expostulations of his friends, and emerged victor from this battle, as from so many others.

And now on this May morning, a hundred years ago, the "Napoleon of the Pacific" lay dying. Let me condense an account of his death given in an Hawaiian paper, the *Moololo Hawaii*, of 1838:

"The illness of Kamehameha became so great that the native doctors could not cure him. Then said the priest, 'It is best to build a house for your god, that you may recover.' The chief, sustaining the advice of the priest, built a sacred house for his god Kukailimoku, and a *kapu* took place at evening. The people, apprehending that the priest and chiefs were urging Kamehameha to have men sacrificed to his god for his recovery, were seen to fly, through fear of death, and remained in their hiding places till the *tabu* was over. Probably the king did not assent to the proposition, but was heard to say, 'men are *tabu* to the king—alluding to his son. . . . In the evening the feeble king was borne from his sleeping house to the front house and took a mouthful of *poi* and a little water. The chiefs asked him for his final charge. . . . He made an effort and said, 'Proceed only according to my policy until —' Not able to finish his sentence, he embraced the neck of the foreigner and drew him down for a kiss. . . . In an hour or two he was borne again, partially, into the front house, while most of his body remained in his sleeping house. He was once more replaced, and about two o'clock (May 8, 1819) he expired."

After Kamehameha's death consternation prevailed in the land. There was for a time "red ruin and the breaking up of laws." Many were the debates as to what should be done with the body. Some chiefs proposed to eat him — that is, that they might gain his spirit. But the widow Kaahumanu replied, "The spirit is gone, the body which remains belongs to the new king." Eventually the bones were hidden in a valley in Hawaii by his friend Hoapili, and "no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day." The *unhipili*, or bundle of bones, which represents Kamehameha I in the Honolulu Mausoleum has little claim to be considered genuine. Yet Kamehameha has not altogether vanished from the land he united and governed. Some have asserted to me that his spirit is still occasionally visible. Did they not see the gigantic ghost riding at the head of a cavalcade of ghosts in such and such a valley? But in reality the spirit survived here and there. In 1827 Mr. Ellis entered the house of a chief at Halawa who showed with pride his polished spears, twenty feet in length, and remarked that "Kamehameha always required every man to keep his weapons in order so as to be ready for war at the shortest notice." Alas, the successors of Kamehameha were not worthy of the founder of the line. A story tells that sometime after the death of the king a man from the southern part of Kona retired to rest as usual, but in the middle of the night was conducted by a spirit into the world of the dead, where he saw the old monarch. Kamehameha asked how affairs were prospering in Hawaii and made inquiries as to his son Liholiho. Then he requested the man to return and deliver some important messages. He promised much blessing to the land if these messages were safely delivered, but threatened misfortune as the penalty for neglect. The man came back, but delayed the fulfillment of his errand till he had dressed a hog. Before, however, he could take the food he had prepared he was dead.

Alas, something like this has been the story of Hawaii. The ruin of the race has been largely due to forgetfulness of the spirit of the first Kamehameha.

Great indeed has been the debt of the islands to foreign civilization. Who can estimate the blessing which has come through the purging of the land of the old savageries? Yet the new day misses something which belongs to the manhood of the old warriors, and it ill beseems the present to forget the man who by his patience and his courage made possible the union of the islands and who for a critical quarter of a century governed them with a wisdom which unfortunately none of his successors could emulate.

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