

THE LARGEST VOLCANO IN THE WORLD.

BY SARAH COAN.

On the largest of these islands, Hawaii—pronounced "Ha-y-e"—is the volcano, Kilauea, the largest volcano in the world.

We have seen it a great many times, and that you may see it as clearly as possible, you shall have a letter from the very spot. The letter reads:

"Here we are a large party of us, looking into Kilauea, which is nine miles in circumference, and a thousand feet below us—a pit about seven times as deep as Niagara Falls are high. We came to-day, on horseback, from Hilo, a ride of thirty miles. Hilo is a beautiful sea-shore village, the largest on the island of Hawaii, and from it all visitors to Kilauea make their start.

"The road over which we came is nothing but a bridle-path, and a very rough one at that, traversing miles and miles of old lava flows. We had almost ridden to the crater's brink before we discovered, in the dim twilight, the awful abyss.

"Before us is the immense pit which, in the day-time, shows only a floor of black lava, looking as smooth as satin; and miles away, rising out of this floor, are a few slender columns of smoke.

"At night, everything is changed; and you can't conceive of the lurid, demoniacal effect. Each slender column of smoke becomes a pillar of fire that rolls upward, throbbing as it moves, and spreads itself out above the crater like an immense canopy, all ablaze.

"Ships a hundred miles from land see the glow, and we here, on the precipice above, can read ordinary print by its lurid light.

"No wonder the natives worshipped the volcano. They thought it the home of a goddess, whom they named Pélé, and in times of unusual activity believed her to be very angry with them. Then they came in long processions from the sea-shore villages, bringing pigs, dogs, fowls, and sometimes human beings, for sacrifice. These they threw into the crater, to appease her wrath.

"A small berry, called the ohelo, grows on the banks of the pit, and of these the natives never dared to eat until Pélé had first had her share. Very polite, were they not? And if ever they forgot their manners, I daresay she gave them a shaking up by an earthquake, as a reminder.

"Sandal-wood and strawberries grow all about here—and fleas, too! wicked fleas, that bite voraciously, to keep themselves warm, I think; for here, so far from Pélé's hearth, it is cold, and we sit by a log fire of our own.

"The day after our arrival we went into the crater, starting immediately after an early break-

fast. There is but one entrance, a narrow ledge, formed by the gradual crumbling and falling in of the precipice. Along this ledge we slipped and scrambled, making the descent on foot—for no ridden animal had ever been able to descend the trail. Holding on to bushes and snags when the path was dangerously steep, we finally landed below on the black satin floor of lava.

"Satin! What had looked so smooth and tempting from a thousand feet above, turned out to be a surface more troubled and uneven than the ocean's in the most violent storm. And that tiny thread of smoke, towards which our faces were set, lay three miles distant—three miles that were worse than nine miles on an ordinary road.

"How we worked that passage! up hill and down hill, over hard, pointed lava that cut through our

of which you have here the picture taken 'from life.'

"It was so hot and suffocating on the brink of this lake that we cut eye-holes in our pocket-handkerchiefs and wore them as masks. Even then we had to run back every few moments for a breath of fresher air, though we were on the windward side of the lake. The gases on the leeward side would suffocate one instantly. Oh, the glory! This Hale-mau-mau, whose fire never goes out, is a huge lake of liquid lava, heaving with groans and thunderings that cannot be described. Around its edge, as you see in the picture, the red lava was spouting furiously. Now and then the centre of the lake cooled over, forming a thin crust of black lava, which, suddenly cracking in a hundred directions, let the blood-red fluid ooze up through the seams, looking like snakes.



THE LAKE OF FIRE.

shoes like knife-blades; over light, crumbled lava, into which we sank up to our knees, over hills of lava that were, themselves, covered with smaller hills; into ravines and over steam-cracks, some of which we could jump with the aid of our long poles, and some of which we had to find our way around; steam-cracks, whose depths we could not see, and into which we thrust our walking-sticks, drawing them out charred black or aflame; over lava so hot that we ran as rapidly and lightly as possible, to prevent our shoes being scorched. Three hours of this kind of work for three miles, and Hale-mau-mau, or 'House of Everlasting Fire,' lay spitting and moaning at our feet!

"A lake of boiling lava is what the column of smoke marked out to us,—a pit within a pit,—a lake of raging lava fifty feet below us,

"Look at the picture, imagine these enormous slabs of cooled lava slowly raising themselves on end, as if alive, and with a stately motion plunging beneath the sea of fire, with an indescribable roar.

"For three hours we gazed, spell-bound, though it seemed but a few moments: we were chained to the spot, as is every one else who visits Kilauea.

"The wind, as the jets rose in air, spun the molten drops of lava into fine threads, which the natives call Pélé's hair, and very like hair it is.

"All this time, under our feet were rumblings and explosions that made us start and run now and then, for fear of being blown up; coming back again after each fright, unwilling to leave the spot.

"Occasionally, the embankment of the lake cracked off and fell in,

being immediately devoured by the hungry flood. These ledges around Hale-mau-mau, are very dangerous to stand upon. A whole family came near losing their lives on one. A loud report beneath their feet and a sudden trembling of the crust made them run for life; and hardly had they jumped the fissure that separated the ledge on which they were standing from more solid footing—separated life from death—than crash went the ledge into the boiling lake.

"Sometimes the lake boils over like a pot of molasses, and then you can dip up the liquid lava with a long pole. You get quite a lump of it, and by quickly rolling it on the ground mold a cylinder the size of the end of the pole, and about six inches long. Or you can drop a coin into the lava to be imprisoned as it cools.

"A foreigner once imbedded a silver dollar in the hot lava, and gave the specimen to a native; but he immediately threw it on the ground, breaking the lava, of course, and liberating the dollar, which he pocketed exclaiming: 'Volcano plenty enough, but me not get dollar every day.'

"One of our party collected lava specimens from around Hale-mau-mau, and tied them up in her pocket-handkerchief. Imagine her astonishment on finding, later, they had burned through the linen, and one by one dropped out.

"Terrible as old Pélé is, she makes herself useful, and is an excellent cook. She keeps a great many ovens heated for the use of her guests, and no two at the same temperature, so that you may select one at any heat you wish. In these ovens (steam-cracks) she boils tea, coffee, and eggs, or cooks omelets and meats. You wrap the beef or chicken, or whatever meat you may wish to cook, in leaves, and lay it in the steam-crack. Soon it is thoroughly cooked, and deliciously, too.

"She also keeps a tub of warm water always ready for bathers.

"She doesn't mean to be laughed at, though, for doing this kind of work, and doing it in an original kind of way. After she has given you one or two sound shakings, which she generally does, you'll have great respect for the old lady, and feel quite like taking off your hat to her. With the shakings and thunderings under-foot, and now and then the opening of a long steam-crack, she keeps her visitors quite in awe of her powers, though she is probably several hundred years old.

"Not far from the little hut where we sleep, close to the precipice, is Pélé's great laboratory, where she makes sulphur. We wear our straw hats to the sulphur banks, and she bleaches them for us.

"Majestic old Pélé! Long may she live!"—St. Nicholas.