

This last is known by the name of Kilauea, or Kirauea, and is, perhaps, the most wonderful volcanic crater in the world.

The following description of it is borrowed from the pages of the Rev. W. Ellis :—*

The approach to the mountain is over a tract of lava, which resembles in appearance an inland sea surrounded by distant mountains. Once it has certainly been in a fluid state, but apparently it has undergone a sudden petrification, or been converted into a glassy stone, while its agitated billows were rolling to and fro. Not only are the large swells and hollows distinctly marked, but in many places the surface of these billows is covered by a smaller ripple, like that observed on the surface of the sea at the springing up of a breeze, or the passing currents of air which produce what the sailors call a cat's-paw.

After journeying for some hours across this lava-plain, the crater of Kilauea suddenly bursts upon the view. Mr. Ellis and his companion expected to have seen a mountain with a broad base and rough, indented sides, composed of loose slags or hardened streams of lava, and whose summit would have presented a rugged wall of scoria, forming the rim of a mighty caldron. But, instead of this, they found themselves on the edge of a steep precipice, with a vast plain before them, 15 or 16 miles in circumference, and sunk from 200 to 400 feet below its original level. The surface of this plain was uneven, and strewn with huge stones and volcanic rocks ; and in its centre was the great crater, at the distance of a mile and a half from the place where they were standing. They walked on to the north end of the ridge, where, the precipice being less steep, a descent to the plain below seemed practicable. But with all their care they did not gain the bottom without several falls and slight bruises. After walking some distance over the sunken plain, which in several places sounded hollow under the feet, they at length arrived on the edge of the greater crater, where their eyes rested on a sublime and even appalling spectacle.

Immediately in front yawned an immense crescent-shaped gulf, about two miles long from north-east to south-west, nearly a mile in width, and apparently 800 feet in depth. Lava covered the bottom, and the south-western and northern parts were one immense flood of burning matter, in a state of terrific ebullition, rolling to and fro its "fiery surges" and flaming billows. Fifty-one conical islands, of varied form and magnitude, containing as many craters, rise either round the edge or from the surface of the burning lake : twenty-two of those constantly emitted columns of gray smoke or pyramids of brilliant flame ; and several of these simultaneously vomited from their ignited mouths streams of lava, which rolled in blazing torrents down their black furrowed flanks into the boiling mass below.

From the existence of these conical craters Mr. Ellis concluded that the boiling caldron of lava before him was not the focus of the volcano, but comparatively shallow, and that the basin containing it was separated by a stratum of solid matter from the great volcanic abyss, which incessantly poured out its molten contents

* [Rev. W. Ellis, "Polynesian Researches."]