

CLASSICS TO GO

# LEGENDS OF MA-UI

A DEMI GOD OF POLYNESIA AND  
OF HIS MOTHER HINA



W. D. WESTERVELT

# **Legends of Ma-Ui-A Demi**

**God of Polynesia and of his mother Hina**

**W. D. Westervelt**



**Hale-a-ka-la Crater, the House of the Sun.**

## PREFACE

Maui is a demi god whose name should probably be pronounced Ma-u-i, *i. e.*, Ma-oo-e. The meaning of the word is by no means clear. It may mean "to live," "to subsist." It may refer to beauty and strength, or it may have the idea of "the left hand" or "turning aside." The word is recognized as belonging to remote Polynesian antiquity.

MacDonald, a writer of the New Hebrides Islands, gives the derivation of the name Maui primarily from the Arabic word "Mohyi," which means "causing to live" or "life," applied sometimes to the gods and sometimes to chiefs as "preservers and sustainers" of their followers.

The Maui story probably contains a larger number of unique and ancient myths than that of any other legendary character in the mythology of any nation.

There are three centers for these legends, New Zealand in the south, Hawaii in the north, and the Tahitian group including the Hervey Islands in the east. In each of these groups of islands, separated by thousands of miles, there are the same legends, told in almost the same way, and with very little variation in names. The intermediate groups of islands of even as great importance as Tonga, Fiji or Samoa, possess the same legends in more or less of a fragmentary condition, as if the three centers had been settled first when the Polynesians were driven away from the Asiatic coasts by their enemies, the Malays. From these centers voyagers sailing away in search of adventures would carry fragments rather than complete legends. This is exactly what has been done and there are as a result a large number of hints of wonderful deeds. The really long legends

as told about the demi god Ma-u-i and his mother Hina number about twenty.

It is remarkable that these legends have kept their individuality. The Polynesians are not a very clannish people. For some centuries they have not been in the habit of frequently visiting each other. They have had no written language, and picture writing of any kind is exceedingly rare throughout Polynesia and yet in physical traits, national customs, domestic habits, and language, as well as in traditions and myths, the different inhabitants of the islands of Polynesia are as near of kin as the cousins of the United States and Great Britain.

The Maui legends form one of the strongest links in the mythological chain of evidence which binds the scattered inhabitants of the Pacific into one nation. An incomplete list aids in making clear the fact that groups of islands hundreds and even thousands of miles apart have been peopled centuries past by the same organic race. Either complete or fragmentary Maui legends are found in the single islands and island groups of Aneityum, Bowditch or Fakaofa, Efate, Fiji, Fotuna, Gilbert, Hawaii, Hervey, Huahine, Mangaia, Manihiki, Marquesas, Marshall, Nauru, New Hebrides, New Zealand, Samoa, Savage, Tahiti or Society, Tauna, Tokelau and Tonga.

S. Percy Smith of New Zealand in his book *Hawaiki* mentions a legend according to which Maui made a voyage after overcoming a sea monster, visiting the Tongas, the Tahitian group, Vai-i or Hawaii, and the Paumotu Islands. Then Maui went on to U-peru, which Mr. Smith says "may be Peru." It was said that Maui named some of the islands of the Hawaiian group, calling the island Maui "Maui-ui in remembrance of his efforts in lifting up the heavens." Hawaii was named Vai-i, and Lanai was called Ngangai—as if Maui had found the three most southerly islands of the group.

The Maui legends possess remarkable antiquity. Of course, it is impossible to give any definite historical date, but there can scarcely be any question of their origin among the ancestors of the Polynesians before they scattered over the Pacific ocean. They belong to the prehistoric Polynesians. The New Zealanders claim Maui as an ancestor of their most ancient tribes and sometimes class him among the most ancient of their gods, calling him "creator of land" and "creator of man." Tregear, in a paper before the New Zealand Institute, said that Maui was sometimes thought to be "the sun himself," "the solar fire," "the sun god," while his mother Hina was called "the moon goddess." The noted greenstone god of the Maoris of New Zealand, Potiki, may well be considered a representation of Maui-Tiki-Tiki, who was sometimes called Maui-po-tiki.

Whether these legends came to the people in their sojourn in India before they migrated to the Straits of Sunda is not certain; but it may well be assumed that these stories had taken firm root in the memories of the priests who transmitted the most important traditions from generation to generation, and that this must have been done before they were driven away from the Asiatic coasts by the Malays.

Several hints of Hindoo connection is found in the Maui legends. The Polynesians not only ascribed human attributes to all animal life with which they were acquainted, but also carried the idea of an alligator or dragon with them, wherever they went, as in the mo-o of the story Tuna-roa.

The Polynesians also had the idea of a double soul inhabiting the body. This is carried out in the ghost legends more fully than in the Maui stories, and yet "the spirit separate from the spirit which never forsakes man" according to Polynesian ideas, was a part of the Maui birth legends. This spirit, which can be separated or charmed

away from the body by incantations was called the "hau." When Maui's father performed the religious ceremonies over him which would protect him and cause him to be successful, he forgot a part of his incantation to the "hau," therefore Maui lost his protection from death when he sought immortality for himself and all mankind.

How much these things aid in proving a Hindoo or rather Indian origin for the Polynesians is uncertain, but at least they are of interest along the lines of race origin.

The Maui group of legends is preëminently peculiar. They are not only different from the myths of other nations, but they are unique in the character of the actions recorded. Maui's deeds rank in a higher class than most of the mighty efforts of the demi gods of other nations and races, and are usually of more utility. Hercules accomplished nothing to compare with "lifting the sky," "snaring the sun," "fishing for islands," "finding fire in his grandmother's finger nails," or "learning from birds how to make fire by rubbing dry sticks," or "getting a magic bone" from the jaw of an ancestor who was half dead, that is dead on one side and therefore could well afford to let the bone on that side go for the benefit of a descendant. The Maui legends are full of helpful imaginations, which are distinctly Polynesian.

The phrase "Maui of the Malo" is used among the Hawaiians in connection with the name Maui a Kalana, "Maui the son of Akalana." It may be well to note the origin of the name. It was said that Hina usually sent her retainers to gather sea moss for her, but one morning she went down to the sea by herself. There she found a beautiful red malo, which she wrapped around her as a pa-u or skirt. When she showed it to Akalana, her husband, he spoke of it as a gift of the gods, thinking that it meant the gift of Mana or spiritual power to their child when he should be born. In this way the

Hawaiians explain the superior talent and miraculous ability of Maui which placed him above his brothers.

These stories were originally printed as magazine articles, chiefly in the Paradise of the Pacific, Honolulu; therefore there are sometimes repetitions which it seemed best to leave, even when reprinted in the present form.



# I.

## MAUI'S HOME

"Akalana was the man;  
Hina-a-ke-ahi was the wife;  
Maui First was born;  
Then Maui-waena;  
Maui Kiikii was born;  
Then Maui of the malo."

—Queen Liliuokalani's Family Chant.

Four brothers, each bearing the name of Maui, belong to Hawaiian legend. They accomplished little as a family, except on special occasions when the youngest of the household awakened his brothers by some unexpected trick which drew them into unwonted action. The legends of Hawaii, Tonga, Tahiti, New Zealand and the Hervey group make this youngest Maui "the discoverer of fire" or "the ensnarer of the sun" or "the fisherman who pulls up islands" or "the man endowed with magic," or "Maui with spirit power." The legends vary somewhat, of course, but not as much as might be expected when the thousands of miles between various groups of islands are taken into consideration.

Maui was one of the Polynesian demi-gods. His parents belonged to the family of supernatural beings. He himself was possessed of supernatural powers and was supposed to make use of all manner of enchantments. In New Zealand antiquity a Maui was said to have assisted other gods in the creation of man. Nevertheless Maui was very human. He lived in thatched houses, had wives and children, and was

scolded by the women for not properly supporting his household.

The time of his sojourn among men is very indefinite. In Hawaiian genealogies Maui and his brothers were placed among the descendants of Ulu and "the sons of Kii," and Maui was one of the ancestors of Kamehameha, the first king of the united Hawaiian Islands. This would place him in the seventh or eighth century of the Christian Era. But it is more probable that Maui belongs to the mist-land of time. His mischievous pranks with the various gods would make him another Mercury living in any age from the creation to the beginning of the Christian era.

The Hervey Island legends state that Maui's father was "the supporter of the heavens" and his mother "the guardian of the road to the invisible world."

In the Hawaiian chant, Akalana was the name of his father. In other groups this was the name by which his mother was known. Kanaloa, the god, is sometimes known as the father of Maui. In Hawaii Hina was his mother. Elsewhere Ina, or Hina, was the grandmother, from whom he secured fire.

The Hervey Island legends say that four mighty ones lived in the old world from which their ancestors came. This old world bore the name Ava-iki, which is the same as Hawa-ii, or Hawaii. The four gods were Mauike, Ra, Ru, and Bua-Taranga.

It is interesting to trace the connection of these four names with Polynesian mythology. Mauike is the same as the demi-god of New Zealand, Mafuika. On other islands the name is spelled Mauika, Mafuika, Mafuia, Mafuie, and Mahuika. Ra, the sun god of Egypt, is the same as Ra in New Zealand and La (sun) in Hawaii. Ru, the supporter of the heavens, is probably the Ku of Hawaii, and the Tu of New Zealand and

other islands, one of the greatest of the gods worshiped by the ancient Hawaiians. The fourth mighty one from Ava-ika was a woman, Bua-taranga, who guarded the path to the underworld. Talanga in Samoa, and Akalana in Hawaii were the same as Taranga. Pua-kalana (the Kalana flower) would probably be the same in Hawaiian as Bua-taranga in the language of the Society Islands.

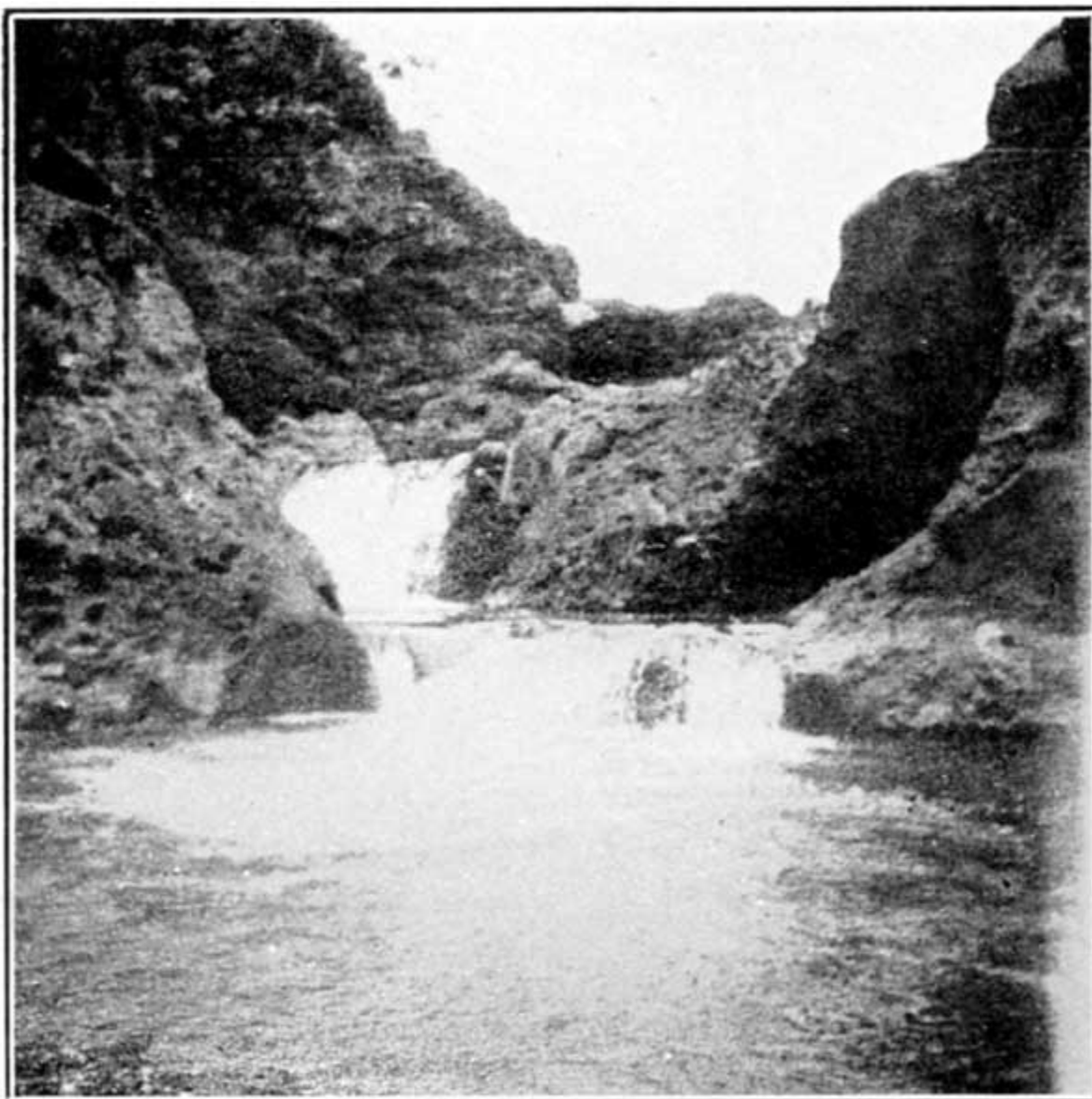
Ru, the supporter of the Heavens, married Bua-taranga, the guardian of the lower world. Their one child was Maui. The legends of Raro-Tonga state that Maui's father and mother were the children of Tangaroa (Kanaloa in Hawaiian), the great god worshiped throughout Polynesia. There were three Maui brothers and one sister, Ina-ika (Ina, the fish).

The New Zealand legends relate the incidents of the babyhood of Maui.

Maui was prematurely born, and his mother, not caring to be troubled with him, cut off a lock of her hair, tied it around him and cast him into the sea. In this way the name came to him, Maui-Tiki-Tiki, or "Maui formed in the topknot." The waters bore him safely. The jelly fish enwrapped and mothered him. The god of the seas cared for and protected him. He was carried to the god's house and hung up in the roof that he might feel the warm air of the fire, and be cherished into life. When he was old enough, he came to his relations while they were all gathered in the great House of Assembly, dancing and making merry. Little Maui crept in and sat down behind his brothers. Soon his mother called the children and found a strange child, who proved that he was her son, and was taken in as one of the family. Some of the brothers were jealous, but the eldest addressed the others as follows:

"Never mind; let him be our dear brother. In the days of peace remember the proverb, 'When you are on friendly

terms, settle your disputes in a friendly way; when you are at war, you must redress your injuries by violence.' It is better for us, brothers, to be kind to other people. These are the ways by which men gain influence—by laboring for abundance of food to feed others, by collecting property to give to others, and by similar means by which you promote the good of others."



**Rugged Lava of Wailuku River.**

Thus, according to the New Zealand story related by Sir George Grey, Maui was received in his home.

Maui's home was placed by some of the Hawaiian myths at Kauiki, a foothill of the great extinct crater Haleakala, on the Island of Maui. It was here he lived when the sky was raised to its present position. Here was located the famous fort around which many battles were fought during the years immediately preceding the coming of Captain Cook. This fort was held by warriors of the Island of Hawaii a number of years. It was from this home that Maui was supposed to have journeyed when he climbed Mt. Haleakala to ensnare the sun.

And yet most of the Hawaiian legends place Maui's home by the rugged black lava beds of the Wailuku river near Hilo on the island Hawaii. Here he lived when he found the way to make fire by rubbing sticks together, and when he killed Kuna, the great eel, and performed other feats of valor. He was supposed to cultivate the land on the north side of the river. His mother, usually known as Hina, had her home in a lava cave under the beautiful Rainbow Falls, one of the fine scenic attractions of Hilo. An ancient demigod, wishing to destroy this home, threw a great mass of lava across the stream below the falls. The rising water was fast filling the cave.

Hina called loudly to her powerful son Maui. He came quickly and found that a large and strong ridge of lava lay across the stream. One end rested against a small hill. Maui struck the rock on the other side of the hill and thus broke a new pathway for the river. The water swiftly flowed away and the cave remained as the home of the Maui family.

According to the King Kalakaua family legend, translated by Queen Liliuokalani, Maui and his brothers also made this place their home. Here he aroused the anger of two uncles,

his mother's brothers, who were called "Tall Post" and "Short Post," because they guarded the entrance to a cave in which the Maui family probably had its home.

"They fought hard with Maui, and were thrown, and red water flowed freely from Maui's forehead. This was the first shower by Maui." Perhaps some family discipline followed this knocking down of door posts, for it is said:

"They fetched the sacred Awa bush,  
Then came the second shower by Maui;  
The third shower was when the elbow of Awa was broken;  
The fourth shower came with the sacred bamboo."

Maui's mother, so says a New Zealand legend, had her home in the under-world as well as with her children. Maui determined to find the hidden dwelling place. His mother would meet the children in the evening and lie down to sleep with them and then disappear with the first appearance of dawn. Maui remained awake one night, and when all were asleep, arose quietly and stopped up every crevice by which a ray of light could enter. The morning came and the sun mounted up—far up in the sky. At last his mother leaped up and tore away the things which shut out the light.

"Oh, dear; oh, dear! She saw the sun high in the heavens; so she hurried away, crying at the thought of having been so badly treated by her own children."

Maui watched her as she pulled up a tuft of grass and disappeared in the earth, pulling the grass back to its place.

Thus Maui found the path to the under-world. Soon he transformed himself into a pigeon and flew down, through the cave, until he saw a party of people under a sacred tree, like those growing in the ancient first Hawaii. He flew to the tree and threw down berries upon the people. They threw

back stones. At last he permitted a stone from his father to strike him, and he fell to the ground. "They ran to catch him, but lo! the pigeon had turned into a man."

Then his father "took him to the water to be baptized" (possibly a modern addition to the legend). Prayers were offered and ceremonies passed through. But the prayers were incomplete and Maui's father knew that the gods would be angry and cause Maui's death, and all because in the hurried baptism a part of the prayers had been left unsaid. Then Maui returned to the upper world and lived again with his brothers.

Maui commenced his mischievous life early, for Hervey Islanders say that one day the children were playing a game dearly loved by Polynesians—hide-and-seek. Here a sister enters into the game and hides little Maui under a pile of dry sticks. His brothers could not find him, and the sister told them where to look. The sticks were carefully handled, but the child could not be found. He had shrunk himself so small that he was like an insect under some sticks and leaves. Thus early he began to use enchantments.

Maui's home, at the best, was only a sorry affair. Gods and demigods lived in caves and small grass houses. The thatch rapidly rotted and required continual renewal. In a very short time the heavy rains beat through the decaying roof. The home was without windows or doors, save as low openings in the ends or sides allowed entrance to those willing to crawl through. Off on one side would be the rude shelter, in the shadow of which Hina pounded the bark of certain trees into wood pulp and then into strips of thin, soft wood-paper, which bore the name of "Tapa cloth." This cloth Hina prepared for the clothing of Maui and his brothers. Tapa cloth was often treated to a coat of cocoa-nut, or candle-nut oil, making it somewhat waterproof and also more durable.