

# THE SONG OF THE DYING LEPELERS.

By J. Ottavio Curwood.

## "Aloha to Ahii!"

On the morning of Sept. 11, 1899, this long shout of farewell rose from the wharves of Honolulu as Nua Ahii, the first Hawaiian to leave his island home in search of an education, slowly steamed out of the bay on board the American ship *Clifton*. Ahii is a young newspaper man, and came to enter the department of law at the university.

"You wish to hear of Mele and the Island of Gardner, of the leper's romance and the living hell on the Island of Molo-kai?"

"I was only interested in the case in a business way then, for I was working on it for weeks in a lawyer's office in Honolulu; but when the particulars



"ONLY THE GLITTERING FLASH OF A PIECE OF STEEL AND HIS MOANING CRY OF THE DYING OFFICER."

of the story got abroad, sanctified by the faith and glorious devotion of the lovers, it at once became the sacred love song of every youth and maiden from Kaula to Honolulu, and in Molo-kai it is chanted by the miserable lepers as they grovel in the burning sands of the seashore and die.

"Mele was the most beautiful maiden on the little island of Kaula, with a skin as fair as a dusky rose, and hair that always streamed down her back like tumbling athen masses of brown seaweed. But though Kapea, her lover, was plain and poor, she loved him with a passionate fervor that only death could dispel.

"For a long time Kapea had come up each evening around the edge of the bay to visit his sweetheart and sit with her out in the mellow light of the glorious moon that shed its effulgence down through the drooping palms and over the glistening sands of the seashore. Kapea had worked hard and long, and one night, when a little army of milky clouds were flocking the heavens as with an azure veil, he took Mele out in the moonlight and, putting his lips close to her pretty ear, whispered that he was coming to get her soon, and that he had saved enough to make them a little home on the island.

"Mele had laughed and kissed him, and then, putting her two tender arms about his neck, cried in her sweet joy.

"But one night Kapea did not come. It was a dark, cloudy night, and Mele had watched for him through the blackness until her eyes were strained and tired. Later still, two or three uniformed men stole quietly through the gardens, and now and then one of them would whisper a word, so significant, so fraught with subtle terror, so like the gloom of hell, that the others would shudder and curse softly to themselves.

"They had watched their victim for days; they had left no room for doubt in their cautious inquiry, and the next day an officer called at Mele's house and told her that she was doomed with the curse of leprosy, that she was tainted, and that she must meet her sad fate along with the others in the living hell of the island of Molo-kai."

"They gave her a few hours respite, and Mele saw her lover again, told him of the terrible affliction that had befallen her, and bade him take

heart, forget her and look elsewhere for a wife.

"Auee Kapea, Kapea, ku lei loha," she sobbed. "You will forget me—you will not always think of me away out there with the tainted ones, for my heart will soon break, Kapea, and I will lie down and die with the others. But I will love you as I die, Kapea."

"Kapea had not answered. He walked home that night with dark and gloomy forebodings wreathing in his heart, but there was a glittering hardness in his eyes that showed his passions were aroused and in action.

"Mele knew they were coming before the morrow, and she had dressed in white, with crimson roses clustered in her silken hair. She knew, too, that they always came in the dead of night, those terrible ones dressed in their ornate uniforms. She had fallen asleep in her chair, when they tapped softly on the door, and was only half awake when she opened it and let them in.

"Come, they whispered, gently. Come with us!"

"In horror the doomed leper retreated into the sickening darkness of the room. The inexorable uniforms followed slowly, with the stillness of death.

"Come! Come with us!" they repeated, softly. There are other people near, and they do not wish to awaken them.

"Mercy! Mercy! O, my God, have mercy!"

"Hardly had the piteous voice broken the death stillness of the night when a snarl like the angry cry of a wounded beast startled the officers, and a lithe form shot at the breast of the nearest uniform with a force that jarred the cottage.

## "Auee Kapea, Kapea!"

"Only the glittering flash of a piece of steel, and the moaning cry of the dying officer answered the girl, and Kapea was gone again, gone forever from the girl he loved.

"Owau no, Mele! I will save you," came a strong voice back through the night. "Listen for the song of the lovers off the island of Molo-kai."

"The next day Mele was taken with a few other condemned ones to the island, and the case of the murderer, Kapea, was placed in the hands of certain lawyers and officials at Honolulu.

"Do you know of the island of Molo-kai, the scourge of hell, the place



"SHE WOULD SIT CLOSE BESIDE THE CLIFFS AND GAZE LONGINGLY OVER THE OCEAN."

where man once sets his foot he is lost forever? It is 30 miles from Honolulu, one of nature's prisons that has been utilized by man. On one side the Pele mountains rise in sheer precipitous straight from the sea for 1,000 feet, and on the other the waves break over the encircling reefs with a noise of thunder that startles the sea-birds. Once there, forgotten forever! Doomed to their horrible fate, banished from the

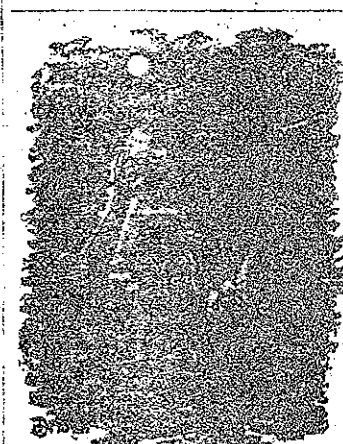
country they love, the wretched leper wander up and down the cliffs, search longingly over the tumbling blue ocean and lie down where the cool breeze fans their cheeks, to grovel, sob and die.

"Our people show their love, their devotion to fellow-man there!" Ahii's eyes glistened. "Each year scores of priests and other Christians go to the island of lepers to work among them for a few weeks, and perish. They realize the fate before them, but they seize the opportunity to serve their God, their dying brother, and their glory in it. Aloha! Aloha! Aloha!"

"For two long weeks did the beautiful Mele languish in the feverish prison of burning sand and sunlight. At evening she would stroll along the pebbly beach and bathe in the little wavelets that washed softly along the shore. When the moon rose higher, and the reefs glistened white and chilly in the light, she would sit close beside the cliffs and gaze longingly over the ocean, and sing the sweet love songs that she and Kapea had learned together back under the dear old palms of Kaula.

"One night she sang the song of the lovers, and all the dying lepers in Molo-kai raised themselves and listened.

"But after a time Mele could not even sing, but would sit like a stone



"WITH A CRY OF JOY THE GIRL STAGGERED OUT INTO THE SEA, DEEPER AND DEEPER."

half buried in the sand and watch the queer lights of the moon as they flashed and scintillated like a hundred million little tongues of fire out on the tumbling billows of the ocean. Then one night she caught the soft, sweet words of the song of the lovers floating over the bay, and remembered the parting words to Kapea.

"Nearer and nearer came the song, until the strained eyes of the girl imagined they described a ship, and in it her loved one.

"Kapea! Kapea!" she called.

"The song ceased, and the last words floated away and over the cliffs in one long, last, tender appeal.

"Kapea! Kapea!" again called the girl, walking steadily out into the water of the bay until it reached her arm-pits.

"A loud shout answered her cry. It was caught up again and again far up the bay, two or three vivid flashes cut the air, and the reports of firearms were caught up in a thousand rumbling echoes back in the cliffs.

"Owau no, Mele! Quick! Quick! I have come back for you!"

"With a cry of joy the girl staggered out into the sea, deeper and deeper, until at last the beautiful head sank beneath the waves, appeared once more, then disappeared forever.

"A few days later Kapea was brought to Honolulu by the police. He had been captured by the patrolmen who guarded the lepers' hell in Molo-kai. I have given you the story as it is heard in the islands of Kaula and Hawaii today. Kapea was convicted and hung for the murder of the officer, and at the time I was in the office of the lawyer who handled the case at Honolulu."