



Legends of Ma-ui: A Demi God of Polynesia, and of His Mother Hina

W. D. Westervelt

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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.

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