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FISH STORIES AND SUPERSTITIONS

TRANSLATED BY M. K. NAKUINA

The following narration of the different fishes here given is told and largely believed in by native fishermen. All may not agree as to particulars in this version, but the main features are well known and vary but little. Some of these stories are termed mythical, in others the truth is never questioned, and together they have a deep hold on the Hawaiian mind. Further and confirmatory information may be obtained from fishermen and others, and by visiting the market the varieties here mentioned may be seen almost daily.

In the olden time certain varieties of fish were tabooed and could not be caught at all times, being subject to the kapu of Ku-ula, the fish god, who propagated the finny tribes of Hawaiian waters. While deep sea fishing was more general, that in the shallow sea, or along shore, was subject to the restrictions of the konohiki of the land, and aliis, both as to certain kinds and periods. The sign of the shallow sea kapu was the placing of branches of the hau tree all along the shore. The people seeing this token of the kapu respected it, and any violation thereof in ancient times was said to be punishable by death.

While this kapu prevailed the people resorted to the deep sea stations for their food supply. With the removal of the hau branches, indicating that the kapu was lifted, the people fished as they desired, subject only to the makahiki taboo days of the priest or ali, when no canoes were allowed to go out upon the water.

The first fish caught by a fisherman, or any one else, was marked and dedicated to Ku-ula. After this offering was made, Ku-ula's right therein being thus recognized, they were free from further oblations so far as that particular variety of fish was concerned. All fishermen, from Hawai to Niihau, observed this custom religiously. When the fishermen caught a large supply, whether by the net, hook, or shell, but one of a kind, as just stated, was reserved as an offering to Ku-ula; the remainder was then free to the people.

DEIFIED FISH SUPERSTITION

Some of the varieties of fish we now eat were deified and prayed to by the people of the olden time, and even some Hawaiians of to-day labor under like superstition with regard to sharks, eels, oopus, and some others. They are afraid to eat or touch these lest they suffer in consequence; and this belief has been perpetuated, handed down from parents to children, even to the present day. The writer was one of those brought up to this belief, and only lately has eaten the kapu fish of his ancestors without fearing a penalty therefor.

STORY OF THE ANAE-HOLO

The anae-holo is a species of mullet unlike the shallow water, or pond, variety; and the following
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story of its habit is well known to any kupa (native born) of Oahu.

The home of the anae-holo is at Honouliuli, Pearl Harbor, at a place called Ihuopalaai. They make periodical journeys around to the opposite side of the island, starting from Puuola and going to windward, passing successively Kumumanu, Kalihi, Kou, Kalia, Waikiki, Kaalawai and so on, around to the Koolau side, ending at Laie, and then returning by the same course to their starting-point. This fish is not caught at Waianae, Kaena, Waialua, Waimea, or Kahuku because it does not run that way, though these places are well supplied with other kinds. The reason given for this is as follows:

Ihuopalaai had a Ku-ula, and this fish god supplied anaes. Ihuopalaai's sister took a husband and went and lived with him at Laie, Koolauloa. In course of time a day came when there was no fish to be had. In her distress and desire for some she betook herself of her brother, so she sent her husband to Honouliuli to ask Ihuopalaai for a supply, saying: "Go to Ihuopalaai, my brother, and ask him for fish. If he offers you dried fish, refuse it by all means;—do not take it, because the distance is so long that you would not be able to carry enough to last us for any length of time."

When her husband arrived at Honouliuli he went to Ihuopalaai and asked him for fish. His brother-in-law gave him several large bundles of dried fish, one of which he could not very well lift, let alone carry a distance. This offer was refused and reply given according to instruction. Ihuopalaai sat thinking for some time and then told him to return home, saying: "You take the road on the Kona side of the island; do not sit, stay, nor sleep on the way till you reach your own house."

The man started as directed, and Ihuopalaai asked Ku-ula to send fish for his sister, and while the man was journeying homeward as directed a school of fish was following in the sea, within the breakers. He did not obey fully the words of Ihuopalaai, for he became so tired that he sat down on the way; but he noticed that whenever he did so the fish rested too. The people seeing the school of fish went and caught some of them. Of course, not knowing that this was his supply, he did not realize that the people were taking his fish. Reaching home, he met his wife and told her he had brought no fish, but had seen many all the way, and pointed out to her the school of anae-holo which was then resting abreast of their house. She told him it was their supply, sent by Ihuopalaai, his brother-in-law. They fished, and got all they desired, whereupon the remainder returned by the same way till they reached Honouliuli where Ihuopalaai was living. Ever afterward this variety of fish has come and gone the same way every year to this day, commencing some time in October and ending in March or April.

Expectant mothers are not allowed to eat of the anae-holo, nor the aholehole, fearing dire consequences to the child, hence they never touch them till after the eventful day. Nor are these fish ever given to children till they are able to pick and eat them of their own accord.
MYTH OF THE HILU

The hilu is said to have once possessed a human form, but by some strange event its body was changed to that of a fish. No knowledge of its ancestry or place of origin is given, but the story is as follows:

Hilu-ula and Hilu-ulii were born twins, one a male and the other a female. They had human form, but with power to assume that of the fish now known as hilu. The two children grew up together and in due time when Hilu-ulii, the sister, was grown up, she left her brother and parents without saying a word and went into the sea, and, assuming her fish form, set out on a journey, eventually reaching Heeia, Koolaupoko. During the time of her journey she increased the numbers of the hilu so that by the time they came close to Heeia there was so large a school that the sea was red with them. When the people of Heeia and Kaneohe saw this, they paddled out in their canoes to discover that it was a fish they had never seen nor heard of before. Returning to the shore for nets, they surrounded the school and drew in so many that they were not able to care for them in their canoes. The fishes multiplied so rapidly that when the first school was surrounded and dragged ashore, another one appeared, and so on, till the people were surfeited. Yet the fish stayed in the locality, circling around. The people ate of them in all styles known to Hawaiians; raw, lawaumed, salted, and broiled over a fire of coals.

While the Koolau people were thus fishing and feasting, Hilu-ula, the brother, arrived among them in his human form; and when he saw the hilu-ulii broiling over the coal fire he recognized the fish form of his sister. This so angered him that he assumed the form of a whirlwind and entered every house where they had hilu and blew the fish all back into the sea. Since then the hilu-ulii has dark scales, and is well known all over the islands.

THE HOU, OR SNOARING FISH

The hou lives in shallow water. When fishing with torches on a quiet, still night, if one gets close to where it is sleeping it will be heard to snore as if it were a human being. This is a small, beautifully colored fish. Certain sharks also, sleeping in shallow water, can be heard at times indulging in the same habit.

There are many kinds of fish known to these islands, and other stories connected with them, which, if gathered together, would make an interesting collection of yarns as "fishy" as any country can produce.

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