

As they approached the island, three double canoes were seen coming towards the ship, but with great caution; the mizzen-topsail was backed to allow them to come up, which they did, singing and shouting, making many gestures, and waving pieces of matting. A white flag was waved in return, and various articles exhibited to induce them to come alongside, which they at last did; but no inducement could prevail on them to come on board.

The canoes were all double, made of pieces of wood sewed together like those of Samoa, and were ornamented in like manner with white ovula-shells. The blades of their paddles also resembled those of the Samoans, being oblong and slender. The colour and features of these people showed that they belonged to the Polynesian race, and it was observed there was little or no difference between their appearance and that of the Samoans, to which dialect their language was allied. A Samoan who was on board the Peacock could partially understand them, but not unfrequently was entirely at a loss; Mr. Hale, however, was enabled to comprehend many of the words. It appeared that their refusal to come on board proceeded from the singular apprehension that the ship would be lifted out of the water, and taken up to the sky, from which they believed she had descended. Some few of them got as far up as the gangway, one of whom had an ulcerated arm, which he desired might be cured.

In each canoe there were ten men, who wore the maro, which was braided like matting. On their head was a piece, made in some cases of matting, in others of tortoise-shell, and occasionally this ornament resembled an eye-shade, or the front of a cap, to protect the face from the sun; their hair was cut short, and was the same in character as that of the Polynesians; they wore necklaces of shells, and small pieces of sponge, and wreaths of pandanus-leaves around the neck. Only one of those in the canoes seemed to be a person of note: in his shade were stuck several of the tail-feathers of the tropic-bird. A plane-iron and some blue beads were seen in their possession: this, with their knowledge of trade and desire of carrying it on, proved that they had before had intercourse with ships. They exhibited great expertness in showing off their various articles to view, and were very eager to sell in order to obtain our articles.

They had matting, nets, fish-hooks of bone, wooden boxes, paddles, and miniature canoes. Whilst the bartering was going on, the ship fired a great gun, for the base by sound, with the tender. This created much consternation, and they all scrambled into their canoes under strong excitement, making a prodigious clamour, seized their paddles, and pulled for the island, in great trepidation.