

The Isle of Mystery.

BY K. E. LEEFE.

IN lat. 12, S., long. 176, E., you will find marked on the atlas a tiny spot with a little mark in the centre that resembles a palm, but do not imagine for one instant it is the only palm, for Rotuma is one of the most fertile and beautiful little isles in the Pacific. From its many hill tops down to the glistening white beaches it is one mass of palms and great tropical trees. Viewing the island from the sea it looks like an emerald set with pearls in the midst of a wonderful sapphire. This is, of course, on a fine day; in stormy weather from the same position it looks like the phantom isle of Fata Morgana, round which the wild waves vent their fury; unable to swallow the isle in their anger they dash against the reef which forms an amulet round it. The number of graves of curious structure is the first thing that strikes the eye after walking up from the white sandy beach at Oinafa Anchorage, where the breath is taken away for an instant by the beauty of the flowers, trees and birds, and the air is laden with fragrance of orange blossom. It is Utopia indeed. As you emerge from the palms to gain the road there is a cemetery on the left on a little rise. Over many graves tiny houses are built of queer shapes; on others huge black stones are placed to keep in the evil spirits; others, again, are constructed of slabs of limestone, with strange signs written on them almost masonic in character. Before you reach the British Residency which is in Noatau, the next district, you pass three or four cemeteries. While enchanted with all you see and hear,

a feeling of intense sadness steals over your spirit. The natives will tell you, when round their kava bowls at night, how there once lived on this island a white man, who came from the Great White Queen to protect them from their enemies. He was dearly loved by these children of nature, and with good cause; had he not lived and died for them? He was their Commissioner, Father and Doctor, and his heart was in his work, and last but not least, he loved them, and felt for them in their joys and sorrows. As Kipling says:

I have eaten your bread and salt,
I have drunk your water and wine,
The deaths ye died I have watched beside,
And the lives ye led were mine.

Or Hood:

O'er all there hung a shadow and a fear:
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said as plain as whisper in the ear
The place is haunted.

The Residency is built close to the sea on a slight rise, and is hidden from view on three sides by the giant hifau trees, only the front is clear. Often the captains of the schooners and barques trading to the island have expressed gratitude to the Residency lamp, which shed its tiny ray far out to sea. A stone wall closed in the Residency and Court-house. At the back is a dense bush extending some miles.

It was evening, and on the verandah of the Residency sat two men in deck-chairs. One, a slightly-built man in white duck clothes and a blue cummerbund, sat with his legs resting on the back of an adjacent chair, enjoying a cigar, with his coffee cup on a table be-