



Figure 4: 'Overflow of the new lake of fire: in the crater of Kilaulea', an illustration almost certainly by the author, in Constance Gordon Cumming's *Fire fountains*, published in 1883 by William Blackwood & Sons, London, facing page 242 (v. 2). *ATL Picture ref.: B-K 29.*

She does, however, gather herself together and sets off on 29 October to visit the edge of the crater. Almost ten pages about the 'scene of dreary desolation' is taken up with description of the lava, its forms and colours and shapes evoked for the reader in an array of peculiarly Victorian imagery: coils of rope, tresses of silken hair, the slag of ironworks, nests of snakes, huge silver seals, the monsters of the Crystal Palace, and a velvet curtain in an artist's studio. Meaghan Morris has commented on the morbidity of travel description, 'a vast descriptive regime for destroying (and for Baudrillard replacing) reality'²⁶ and Gordon Cumming's superabundant descriptive detail moving through its procession of manufactured images seems designed to replace the landscape of lava with the features of industrialised Britain. When she finally reaches the edge of Hale-mau-mau, the lake of fire (according to William Ellis in 1823 'one vast flood of burning matter'), Gordon Cumming's text resorts to capitals: 'THERE WAS NONE'. The space of her disappointment is intensified by a link with another act of insufficient witnessing: 'To all appearance we might have been standing on Highland crags looking down through the mists on some dark tarn.'

Feeling 'aggrieved and defrauded', Gordon Cumming and her party begin their descent and pause to watch a 'blowing cone' which begins to roar as they approach it. Three days later a new lake of fire has formed in the crater and Gordon Cumming