

the neighbourhood of the Tropic of Capricorn to 27° south. They consist of five islands—Rapa, Raiivavai, Tubuai, Rurutu, and Rimatara. They average from fifteen to twenty-five miles in circuit each, Rapa being the largest, and they contain altogether about 3,000 inhabitants, who seem as though dying out since the introduction of European habits of clothing and living, which have evidently exercised a pernicious influence upon their constitutions. Forty years ago these islands were very populous; in a few years they must be uninhabited unless people be introduced from elsewhere.

I.—The Islands
generally:
Mr. Sterndale.

The climate of these isles is most delightful, as, though bordering on the tropic, the thermometer does not show more than from 75° to 80° during the greatest heat of the whole year. For nine months of the year the wind blows from the south-east, and from the westward for the remainder. They are all volcanic, consisting chiefly of ashes, decomposed tufas, and vegetable mould; consequently they are wonderfully fertile. Rapa (which is the most barren) is a very productive island; and Tubuai, which is called the best, is spoken of even in Tahiti as “the garden of the South Sea.” I do not know whether the French profess to include any of the Austral Isles under their protectorate excepting Rapa, which was taken possession of by the vessel of war “*Latouche Treville*” in 1867, in consequence of the Panama Mail Company having selected it as a coaling-station, for which purpose its very fine harbour was used until that service was discontinued.

All the natives of the Austral group profess the Protestant religion. They are inoffensive, hospitable, and intelligent; they can all, I believe, read and write, and display an extravagant affection for the English, all their teachers having been trained in English mission schools. They were proselytes of the famous John Williams. They dislike the French beyond measure—a prejudice no doubt due to their sectarian training. But their islands could be purchased—as far as the will of the islanders is concerned—by English capitalists for a comparatively trifling amount; and it is possible that the French might not desire to interfere with any such arrangement, as they do not derive any revenue from the Austral Isles, neither have they much connection with them, excepting that a few small schooners from Tahiti trade there occasionally for hogs and goats, which are there in great plenty. These islands, if systematically cultivated, would produce great quantities of cotton, coffee, sugar, indigo, &c., and would constitute for Englishmen one of the most profitable investments in the Pacific.

Hervey or Cook's Group consists of seven islands, all but one (Hervey Island, or Manuai) inhabited by a well-disposed and highly intelligent people, now greatly reduced in numbers by mortality, apparently caused by the adoption of European habits of clothing and living. They can all read and write, and are Protestants; and they practise many useful industries, as the cultivation of coffee, cotton, arrowroot, and other products. The largest islands are Mangaia and Rarotonga, each of them being about thirty miles in circumference. The former is about 700 feet at its highest point, and is of volcanic origin. There are over 1,000 inhabitants (reduced from 4,000 in 1848). They are industrious, hospitable, and respectable in every way. They make a considerable quantity of cocoanut oil, arrowroot, tobacco, &c. They have an English missionary residing among them.

Aitutaki resembles Mangaia, but is not more than half the size, although it supports somewhere about a like number of inhabitants. It is very fertile, but the people are indolent in comparison to their neighbours, and do not produce much of anything, although their island yields abundance. Nevertheless, they manage to contribute largely to the funds of the London Missionary Society—it is reported, usually £200 per annum. Most of their time appears to be spent in attending school, so they all can read and write, and it is said that some of them are so well acquainted with the Bible as to have it nearly by heart. On the whole, they compare unfavourably with the rest of the Hervey Islanders, which may in some degree be attributed to the monotony of their existence, their laws not permitting any of them to leave their own island without special permission, which is seldom accorded. An English missionary lives among them, and exercises supreme power.

Rarotonga is a magnificent island, resembling in aspect Ropoa, in the Marquesas. It is about 3,000 feet high, and is clothed to the very tops of the mountains with splendid vegetation. It has abundant streams, considerable tracts of sloping land, and rich alluvial valleys. There are two small harbours, not secure at all times, but sufficiently so for the most part of the year. A steam-vessel might make use of them at any time. The population of this island is about 3,000; they are governed by a Queen. They are in an advanced state of civilization; one sees nothing like it in the South Pacific, not even in Tonga; and as far as concerns sobriety, decency, and quiet behaviour, they are superior to the Sandwich Islanders. Their villages are all laid out in streets; their houses are of stone and lime; they have furniture; they dress nicely in European fabrics; they are all well-fed, happy, and prosperous. Their laws are just, and well administered; they fear God, and deal hospitably and honestly by all who visit them. There is no superstition, no barbarism, no want or discontent among them. If they have a weakness, it is a fondness for intoxicating drink; but their dissipation is of a mild form, and seldom goes further than the imbibing of several pints of beer, which they manufacture from the juice of oranges and squashed-up China bananas. They are industrious, and cultivate the ground assiduously when assured of a market for their produce. They also practise all manner of handicrafts; among them are good carpenters, smiths, sailmakers, stonemasons, &c. They plant cotton and coffee, and export great quantities of oranges. Besides the agent of the London Missionary Society, there are several Europeans resident upon Rarotonga, who are married to native wives; also half-castes (as they are called) from Auckland, domesticated in the same manner. They have stores, plantations, cotton-gins, and several small vessels trading round the Hervey group, and running to Tahiti and Auckland with their produce.

All the sympathies of the Rarotongans are English. They have had frequent communication with New Zealand. Paora Tuhaere, the loyal and intelligent chief of Hauraki, visited them a few