

The reign of prosperity that will in time be inaugurated is now inconceivable: many islands now unprofitable and almost unknown will acquire a value greater than that of some of the West Indies, forasmuch as they are suited to the cultivation of every valuable tropical product, with an advantage which the Indies do not possess, and which is not to be found in any other tropical region of the world. That advantage is that of a climate beyond every other conducive to health and longevity, a perpetual summer of so delightful a temperature that working-men of Europe or the Australias may there devote themselves to a life of pleasant and profitable labour without inconvenience or detriment to their constitutions. In proof of this the traveller may see at any time in the Navigators and other islands, within a few degrees of the equator, Englishmen from Australia and New Zealand felling timber in forests and stripping it into planks in sawpits without sheds or roofs to protect them from the sunshine. They do not complain of the heat, and they seldom suffer from sickness, not being more liable to it there than elsewhere. Had the islands of the Caribbean Sea possessed these conditions they would have formed—at least a hundred years ago—a congeries of prosperous States, peopled by communities of happy, independent, hard-working Europeans, instead of being regarded, from their insufferable sultriness and the deadly miasma carried from the neighbouring continent, as the “graves of white men.” The yearly-increasing difficulty of obtaining coloured labour in most of the suitable localities of the torrid zone, and the consequent great expense, preclude the possibility in those regions of forming profitable plantations on a small scale, and so act as an insuperable barrier to the speculator of limited capital.

In the Pacific Islands this hindrance to individual enterprise does not exist. There a family or small company of determined practical working white men can perform all their labours with their own hands and by the introduction of animals; and, should their extended operations necessitate the engagement of hired help, they can readily obtain the assistance of Polynesian natives at a rate of wages which, while just and sufficient to the barbarian, leaves a fair margin of profit to those who employ them.

Settlements of this kind will soon be distributed over hundreds of islands which will become even more productive than at present, and will supply yearly cargoes to a very great number of vessels. The demand for goods of European or colonial manufacture will increase immensely; and it will be a fatal mistake if Auckland should longer hesitate to be first in the field, and secure to itself the largest share of this profitable trade, to which, from its geographical position, it has the greatest natural right.

Already the Australians have “pegged out” their claim in Fiji. The once cannibal realm of Cakobau resounds with the stroke of the woodman’s axe, the puffing of steam-engines, and the sound of mills. The smoke of the brick-kiln rises quietly in the same atmosphere but lately defiled by the oven of the man-eater. The shipwright plies his mallet in the midst of the grove where his brethren have fallen under the maul of the ogre. Such appears to be the appointed course of human events; and those who would profit by the changes which Anglo-Saxon civilization is working in Polynesia should seek to participate quickly in the commercial advantages which this transition state presents. They who take part in the first rush to a new diggings are always admitted to possess a double chance of success as compared with those who follow in their footsteps; and on this depends, in a great measure, the position which Auckland must take in relation to the approaching future of Polynesian commerce.

No. I.

Twenty years ago, the multitudinous islands of the Pacific were almost as little known to the people of Europe as those of the West Indies were to the geographers of the sixteenth century. The greater part of the information then obtainable concerning them was derived from narratives of missionary enterprise, or from the journals of commanders of vessels of war—in either case written by men destitute of commercial or industrial experience. Even up to the present time the most erroneous opinions have continued to prevail with respect to the character and customs of the barbarians of Polynesia and the climate and resources of the lands which they inhabit. These remarks will, however, scarcely apply to the Society Islands, which have long been a French military colony; to Hawaii, which, in fact, if not in name, may be deemed an American possession; or the Fijis, which, from the learned labours of Dr. Seemann and Colonel Smythe, and the recent enterprise of Australian commercial adventurers, have become, in a measure, well known to us all. Around the first of these, to wit, the great Island of Tahiti and its tributaries, history has thrown a halo of romance. With what intense delight have most of us in our young days pored over the quaint accounts of Captains Wallis and Cook of what they witnessed among those then unknown barbarians! These accounts were so truthful, as far as the evidence of their own eyesight was concerned, but so erroneous in other respects, as written by men lacking all practical experience of savage usage or habits of thought. It was by reason of this ignorance that the great navigator bestowed the name of the “Friendly” Islanders upon those who had determined his death, which, though he then escaped it by an accident, ultimately overtook him at the hands of the Hawaiians through his own fatal obstinacy, the result of overmuch good-nature and want of conception of the motives and disposition of the people with whom he had to deal. Great Captain Cook! Do any of us, as colonists of New Zealand, ever truly recognize how immense were the researches of this man, and how stupendous their results? And to have been cut off, as he was, in the very bloom of his glory, sharing the same strange fatality which seems to have followed almost all the fathers of navigation in the Pacific! Thus Balboa, who first discovered its existence (and, having dragged, with incredible labour, the timbers of his vessel across the mountains of Darien, was the first to sail upon its waters), fell under the headsman’s axe. He was executed at Acla, on a charge of treason against the King of Spain. Perhaps it was a punishment upon him in consequence of his having, without any ceremony, upon first reaching the Pacific shore, taken possession of the entire South Sea on behalf of His Holiness the Pope. A picture of this ceremony is still to be seen in the Church of