

I.—The Islands
generally:
Mr. Sterndale.

years ago with his family, in a vessel which he chartered for the purpose. Some of his near relatives who accompanied him took to themselves Rarotongan wives. The islanders of Rarotonga regard Auckland as the centre of civilization, and its people, represented by Captain Daldy and Paora Tuhaere, as their protectors and best friends. About the year 1864 they made a formal application to Her Majesty's Government, in the shape of a letter addressed to the then Governor of New Zealand, signed by the King and his chiefs of Awarua, Ngatangia, and Arorangi, which represent the whole people of Rarotonga, praying to be taken under the protection of Her Majesty, or to be made subjects of Great Britain. The same feeling continues. Of course we know that this very sensible and rational desire to become a part of the British Empire has arisen mainly from English missionary teaching; but it has been partly the result of the experience of very many of the islanders, who, having shipped as seamen on board colonial vessels, have visited Auckland, Sydney, and even the Australian gold mines; and partly of fear of France, in consequence of the terrible (and, to speak justly, exaggerated) tales which have been circulated among the islands of the oppressions of their military system and cruel treatment of their labourers, or slaves, as it has become usual to call them, upon the plantations of "*La Terre Eugénie*." Unfortunately, no notice was taken of the petition of the Rarotongans; but the same desire animates them now, and no doubt can exist in the minds of all true friends of these islanders but that their annexation by some British colony would be to them the commencement of a new era of prosperity.

The other islands of the Hervey group, Atiu Maukè and Mitiaro, are from ten to twenty miles in circumference; they are of upheaved coral, with fertile soil. There are altogether about 1,000 inhabitants of a like disposition to those of Rarotonga. The islands are not much visited. Their products are cotton, coffee, cocoanut oil, fungus, Tomano wood, tobacco, and dried bananas. These islands, especially Maukè, bear great quantities of splendid ironwood; it is obtainable in long lengths, from twenty to forty feet and even more, and from a foot to three feet in diameter. The value of this timber I believe to be very great at this time, when heavy and hard wood is so much in request for the timbers of armour-plated ships, for slides of heavy ordnance, and similar purposes. Some of this wood is so extremely heavy that the interior portions weigh within a fraction of two ounces to the cubic inch.

Hervey Island is without permanent inhabitants; an aged American beachcomber resides upon it with his half-bred children. It is a large atoll, densely covered with cocoanut trees, and consists of two *cays* divided by a lagoon. It is very productive: I have seen 400 nuts on one cocoanut tree at this place. It is much frequented by turtle, and yields a great deal of bêche-de-mer. The King of Aitutaki (so called, though there is really no king there but the English missionary) professes to claim it, but he has no right to it whatever. It used to be inhabited in Cook's days, and since, but about forty years ago the last of the inhabitants disappeared; they had fought among themselves till all were killed but a remnant, and they died of disease introduced by Europeans.

Upon most of the isles of the Hervey group, especially Mangaia and Rarotonga, many of the vegetables of Europe are found, from the mildness of the climate, growing side by side with those of the tropics. They have been introduced by the missionaries and by friendly traders. Potatoes grow well on the high lands; barley, maize, millet, and American beans grow to perfection. The thermometer ranges about 80° in the warmest season. Europeans enjoy robust health; there is no indigenous disease.

Of all the lands of the Pacific suitable for British colonization, none present more favourable conditions than those of the Hervey and Austral Isles. In presence of the increasing interest of commercial men which is now being directed to the South Pacific, and the rapid decay of the aborigines, the period at which they shall pass into the possession of Europeans has simply become a question of time.

All the islands of the Gilbert (or Kingsmill) group are of the same distinctive character: low atolls, having generally interior lagoons, with or without entrances for shipping. There are fifteen islands in all. Tapetua, or Drummond's Island, which lies almost on the equator, is a fair example of the rest. The interior lagoon is seventy miles in length, and has two entrances for ships. A few years ago this island was immensely populous, but the number of the inhabitants has been greatly reduced by their incessant intoxication from fermented cocoanut toddy, contagious disease introduced by whale-fishers, and by the visits of labour ships from Tahiti, Fiji, and Samoa. They now number about 3,000. As concerns this labour system, the rights or wrongs of which have lately provoked so much bitter discussion, I can say for the natives of the Kingsmills, and of Tapetua in particular, knowing them intimately as I do, that the greatest benefit, under existing circumstances, which their fellow-men can bestow upon them, is to take them to the cotton- and sugar-planting lands, even supposing them never again to be returned to their native island. I am not alluding to a labour traffic such as that conducted by the "Carl," which was a series of atrocious piracies, directed by a madman and carried out by villains who did evil for the very love of it, but to a system of engagement for short terms, under just and humane regulations, like those of the Germans in Samoa, of which the results are most beneficial to the Kingsmill islanders, and will be to their posterity, if they do not disappear off the face of the earth before they come to maturity, as they are very likely to do if left to themselves. Chronic intoxication, venereal disease, and a habit of carrying deadly weapons and using them on slight occasion, will bring them to an end in a very few years, unless some determined and judicious Europeans, backed by the authority of a civilized State, interfere to save them from themselves. It must be remembered that these Kingsmill islanders, barbarous as they were before they made the acquaintance of Europeans, lived in a condition of respectability as compared with the state in which we now find them. Though savage, they were at least sober, and they had a sort of law, or customs having the force of law: now, except among some of the cannibal tribes of the Louisiade, it would be difficult to conceive a more perfect pandemonium than most of the Kingsmill Isles present. The inhabitants are incessantly drunk and perpetually fighting, and their combats are no child's-play. I have counted upon one