

harbours for the largest class of vessels. It is governed by a King named Keru. There are about 1,800 inhabitants, of a light-copper complexion; intelligent, in so far that they readily acquire the mechanical arts, and naturally industrious and well-disposed, although to some extent demoralized by contact with the crews of whaling ships and bêche-de-mer fishers, of whom this has been a great place of resort. They reject missionary teaching, and abide by their ancient usage, which is a mild form of heathenism apparently; but they keep their ceremonies very secret, and do not permit strangers to penetrate into their sacred enclosures. An agent of the American Board of Missions, named Snow, has resided among them for somewhere about thirteen years, but I believe has made no progress whatever. Much of his ill success has no doubt been due to the antagonism of Europeans domesticated among the natives, who, disliking the prospect of any change in the normal condition of things, have done their best to influence the islanders against missionary innovations. This feeling on the part of cosmopolitan white sinners, throughout the whole Pacific, has done more to obstruct the progress of conversion than either native savagery or heathen superstition.

There are, nevertheless, some peculiarities in the character of the Strong Islanders, which render them capable of civilization in a higher degree than most Polynesians. They are a people who have degenerated from what must have been in some respects a much more prosperous and enlightened state than that in which we now find them. A great part of their land is covered with ruins of the most massive description, built upon a general plan such as could only have been conceived by men of power and intelligence, acquainted with mechanical appliances for raising enormous weights and transporting huge blocks of stone considerable distances both by land and water. These works, which strike even civilized men with astonishment, could only have been effected by the labour of thousands of men working in concert and under command, and they prove, from their aspect and the evident intention of some of them, that their builders must have had, at the time of their erection, some form of settled government and system of religion. Many of their customs seem derived from some ancient civilization, as the institution of kings, high chiefs, and common people; the peculiar laws which regulate the intercourse of these castes; and the fact that the nobles are considered a sort of sacred persons, and hold meetings by night in caverns or vaults, artificially constructed in the interior of some of the great ruinous buildings. These nobles associate by means of signs and speech not known to the people. When a distinguished person dies, they make a mummy of the body, and swathe it in coloured bandages. It is watched for a whole year, a fire being kept beside it, which is never allowed to go out. They keep records by means of wooden beads and knotted cords, which they carefully preserve, and refer to when they want to tell what happened in former years. In plan and construction their dwellings are far superior to that of other Polynesians, the timber being neatly squared. They have possessed from remote times the arts of pottery and weaving with the loom; and traditions they repeat of their ancestors point to the conclusion that they must have been a people exceedingly numerous and powerful.

The descendants of such a race cannot fail to retain within themselves the elements of progress, however obscured by ages of barbarism and by several generations of evil example of reprobate Europeans; for these islands, so remote and unvisited by English navigators as to be spoken of as almost new discoveries, were a rendezvous of the Spaniards on their way between Manila and the Main long before the days of Commodore Anson. Both upon Strong Island and Ascension, which is the next in extent at this end of the Carolines, are to be found, in the vaults and ditches of the great stone structures, cannon of an old pattern, and shot rusted out of shape. It was the fact of these relics, combined with the aspect of the immensely thick walls, which caused the officers of His Majesty's ship "Larne," following the opinion of M. Dumont D'Urville, to describe the works which they found at Ascension Island as the remains of a stronghold of Spanish buccaneers. I quote the words of D'Urville, as nearly as I remember them: "That the town which once stood upon this spot was not built by savages cannot be doubted, the style of the ruins giving strong proofs of civilization. Some of the stones measure eight or ten feet in length, are squared upon six sides, and have evidently been brought hither from some other country, there being no stone on the island similar to them. The whole place seems to have been a succession of fortified houses. It seems probable that at one time it was the stronghold of pirates, and it has been conjectured that it was built by the Spanish buccaneers two or three centuries ago." This is very erroneous. The stones are in many cases much larger than here described, in fact as large again. They are basaltic prisms quarried on the land itself in the interior, as I have seen. It would have taken all the labour of the Spanish pirates, from the days of Balboa till now, to build all the monstrous works of Strong Island, to say nothing of those that exist on Ascension and elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

*Strong Island* is very productive. Besides all the tropical vegetables of Polynesia and various kinds of palms, it is covered with valuable timber trees from the shore to the summits of the mountains. Some of this wood, of a species as yet little known to Europeans, is of the best quality for shipbuilding purposes, being perfectly straight and of the most convenient size, as well as being of great lengths: added to this, its durability is remarkable, and it cannot be attacked by the salt-water worm. For these reasons the contractors for the building of a dry-dock and wharves in Shanghai and other ports of China have obtained hence, and from the neighbouring island of Ascension, cargoes of piles which have given great satisfaction to the engineers engaged on those works. Strong Island is immensely valuable for its timber alone; but the land lies idle, for the natives do nothing more than is necessary to provide food, which, as it grows in a great measure spontaneously, is not a source of anxiety to them. They would in fact, scarcely perform any work whatever were it not from a desire to possess cotton print, ornaments, hardware, and tobacco. To obtain these articles they cure some bêche-de-mer, gather fungus and tortoise-shell, occasionally go to sea in whaling and other ships for short cruises, and now make dried cocoanut in considerable quantity. They are tolerably well supplied with axes and the like implements. As concerns their weapons,