

1.—Trade and trading arrangements: Mr. Sterndale.

words, Pau-motu, signifying "a cloud of islands," and is very expressive, as most barbarous names are found to be when one is able to trace their original meaning.)

This extraordinary region of shoals and cays, commonly called the "Low (or Dangerous) Archipelago," extends over 16 degrees of longitude, and consists of four groups, containing altogether 78 islands or coral atolls, all with the exception of three having lagoon reefs, varying in size from a few miles to over 100 miles in circumference. These islands have long borne an evil name by reason of the intricacy of their navigation, the powerful and sometimes contrary currents which set between them, and the extreme ferocity of their inhabitants. This is now past; the various islets, shoals, and straits are now well known and defined—thanks to the researches of MM. Dele-marche and Chizoline, and the excellent charts of M. Vincedon Dumoulin. The numbers of the aborigines are very greatly reduced. Although the archipelago twenty years ago was immensely populous, emigration to the Society Islands, a love of roving (which is a ruling passion with these amphibious savages), disease (which has decimated them in a frightful manner), and the repeated raids of slave-ships from the Spanish Main, have brought down the population to less than 5,000, of which probably not more than one-fifth who inhabit the south-eastern portion of the archipelago are still in a state of primæval barbarism.

In former times these people were noted for their bravery, both in the navigation of the seas and in combats of all kinds; so much were they esteemed in this respect that Pomare the Great—as he was called from his conquests—always employed them as his guards, and the word Paumotu as applied to a man became synonymous with warrior, even as now when referring to a woman it constitutes a much less honourable distinction.

The natives of Paumotu have been long in demand as whalers. They are skilful boat-steerers, and to strike a fish none could surpass them in coolness and certainty. They are also, without exception, the best pearl-divers in the Pacific, or perhaps in the world. They go down without weights or nose-stoppers (as are used by the fishers of Manaar or Baldein), but just plunge overboard naked as they stand; and you can get them down to as deep as twenty-five fathoms to clear a chain, or do other work, if you give them sufficient inducement. They are brave, faithful, honest, and kind-hearted; the only objection which can be made to them is that they are disgustingly independent, demanding high wages for their work, and essentially rowdy, exhibiting an incurable predilection for rum and loose company.

Those Europeans who know them well, and are accustomed to their ways, feel safer in their society than in that of any other natives in the Pacific under circumstances of difficulty and danger, whether it be in storms at sea or in quarrels upon savage coasts; and far and wide as they are known—even from Rapa to Rotumah—to say that a man is a Paumotu amounts to the assurance that he is a good man either to work or fight, but who at the same time will demand of his employers good pay, good usage, and the free exercise of his natural instincts. As a natural consequence, with such a people missionary endeavours have not amounted to much; they are utterly intractable, except as regards conversion to the Catholic faith, which the majority of them now profess, and in which they exhibit much enthusiasm, in so far as being especially careful not to leave their homes, or to enter upon any adventure which may involve personal risk, without a stock of rosaries, scapularies, crucifixes, such as Carlyle describes as "spiritual block-and-tackle."

The chief seat of ecclesiastical authority in the Paumotu group has long been Manga Reva, or Gambier's Isles, where resides a Romish bishop and community of friars, &c. The pearl fishery at this place has been immensely profitable, and a very great quantity of those precious gems have passed into the possession of the priests since the first establishment of a mission there, more than forty years ago. There can be little doubt but that it was from here that the large pearl was obtained now in the possession of Her Majesty, and which her agent purchased of Messrs. Storr and Mortimer for £6,000. One of their employes had bought it of a Tahitian trader in Valparaiso, and the common impression among the islands is that it came from Gambier's. Out of the 78 islands of the Paumotus, 35 are known to contain pearl shell in their lagoons. I am about to show what great profits have been made out of those deposits within the last thirty years by Tahitian and Chilian traders, at a time when mother-of-pearl commanded a price in the market amounting to usually not more than one-fourth of that which rules at present. It is very commonly supposed that the pearl fisheries of the Paumotus are exhausted. I shall also be so far able to make apparent that such is not the case, as to justify my previous assertion that the islands of the Low Archipelago constitute a mine of wealth of which the commercial world has at the present moment but little cognizance.

No. VI.—THE LOW ARCHIPELAGO PEARL FISHERIES.

Of these isles, all with the exception of three are atolls, of that peculiar form of which the origin has so long been an enigma to geologists—that is to say, that they consist of coral belts, frequently not more than a mile wide or even less, of a circular, oval, or sometimes triangular form, enclosing in the majority of cases a central lagoon with an entrance on the side opposite to the direction of the prevailing trade wind. These passages are in some instances navigable for vessels of large tonnage; in others they consist of a mere depression in the surface of the reef sufficient to enable the natives to paddle their fishing canoes in and out of the lagoon at high tide. The lagoons themselves are generally shallow, though in some places they exhibit vast hollows with an apparent depth of 50 or more fathoms. Their appearance is most extraordinary and beautiful; the water, from the absence of the debris of streams or of any kind of alluvion (from the fact of the land being entirely composed of coral rock and gravel), exhibits so surprising a transparency that an object the size of a man's hand may in calm weather be distinctly seen at a depth of 10 fathoms. The aspect of the bottom is that of a wilderness of marine vegetation of the most wonderful forms and gorgeous colours, seeming in some places to be spread over the surface of sloping hills, in others to be growing out from the sides of tall pillars or towers pierced with vast caves, in which the refracted