

Pacific with this material alone, we can surely reasonably expect that Auckland will eventually secure to itself some share of a trade so profitable as this unquestionably is.

NO. IV.—TAHITI AND RAIATEA.

Although the Island of Tahiti is inexhaustibly fertile, it is not superior in that respect to Raiatea, another great island of the same group. There, walking up any of the central valleys, one sees the mountains clothed up to the very summits with plantains, feiis, and bananas, growing altogether wild, and so thickly that the valley bears the aspect of a golden forest. But it is merely a beautiful wilderness. There are no systematic industries, beyond a few small plantations of cotton and sugar cane, the property of sons of missionaries of European extraction. The island is not half populated, and the lives of the inhabitants are spent in idleness, intoxication, and occasional civil war. The people of the neighbouring island of Huahine vegetate under precisely the same conditions: vice, and an indolence from which they never awaken unless it be to quarrel among themselves or with the foreigners with whom they come into contact, is with them the rule of life. Many lamentations have been poured forth by persons interested in South Sea Missions concerning the evil influences of French domination over the Society islanders; but their premises are groundless, and their arguments unsound. The Tahitian race never could be rendered systematically industrious or truly enlightened; they were always, and still are, indolent, luxurious, superstitious, and incurably vicious. Although by nature gentle, amiable, generous, and intensely affectionate, they delivered themselves up *con amore* to the vilest forms of heathen superstition, in the practice of which they exhibited an amount of depravity almost unparalleled in the history of mankind. Their conversion to Christianity was—I will not say in every individual case, but certainly in the aggregate, either mere pretence, induced by the liberal bestowal of blue beads, tomahawks, cotton print, and the like valuables; or the exchange of one superstition for another, generated by reverence for the superior strength of the gods of those invincible strangers who wielded the lightning of the musket and the cannon. It needs that one should live intimately among them to know them well, and such as have done so are very well aware that they are still as grossly superstitious as they were a hundred years ago; in fact, if not in outward form, like the strange nations which the Assyrians transported to Samaria, “they fear the Lord, but still unto this day they do after the former manners,” and they love the memory (and still play the rôle) of the Areoi libertinism in which their forefathers were wont to dwell, though they have broken their idols and thrown down their stones of sacrifice. I have said they have no industry, but in their heathen days they practised a certain degree of it. They had all their own clothing to make, and very beautifully and ingeniously they made it from silky bark and fibres of trees. This was the work of women. The men laboured at the building of great canoes, wherein they made voyages round the Low Archipelago, the Austral Isles, and to Nukuhiva. Now, it is hard to persuade them to work at anything, unless it be some kind of occupation very easy, and speedily profitable to them, such as the gathering of oranges or fungus, or the making at times of a few barrels of lime-juice or cocoa-nut oil. Of course, all of them (except chiefs) work a little, but the amount of time spent in useful occupation is but a tithe of that consumed by them in idleness and debauchery. They never look poverty-stricken. The men are always well dressed in white shirts and “parieus” of figured cotton; the women in prints of elegant patterns, in the choice of which they display wonderfully good taste, and in the care of them the most fastidious cleanliness, being in this respect, in all that concerns their domestic habits, as superior to the common people of any nation of the earth with which we are acquainted, as they are remarkable for the entire absence of moral purity—a virtue which it would be as vain to look for among them as to expect to “gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles,” though one might surely look for better things if one were to believe all the twaddle which has been written about them. Every one who intimately knows the Tahitian people must candidly confess that all attempts to inculcate persistent industry have resulted in complete failure. They will not work any more than is sufficient to supply them with clothes and rum, which last they regard as a necessary of life; the food they require being produced spontaneously upon their fertile lands, or easily caught in their coral bays, costs them little trouble to obtain.

Consequently in the coming time, when Tahiti becomes (as it inevitably will become) a great centre of commercial activity, the labour required to conduct the plantations which will cover the whole available surface of the Society group, must be obtained from elsewhere, not exactly as is at present the case at Atimaona and Moorea, where Chinese coolies and Kingsmill savages have been imported in swarms, but a European race will establish themselves upon the land, who will perform their own labour chiefly with their own hands. They will not be the sickly sort of Papalangis whom one sees now generally throughout Polynesia on mission or trading stations, who have reduced themselves to a condition of chronic dyspepsia by persisting in European habits of food and living (ignoring the fact of their utter unsuitability to the dwellers in the torrid zone), or who kill their livers with alcohol, and then lay the blame on the climate, but men healthy, powerful, bronzed, and hardy, accustomed to paddle their own canoe, not afraid to look the blazing sun in the face, to plunge into the foam of a breaker, or make their way to land upon a surf-beaten shore. Such men as Jeff Strickland, of Aitutaki; William Masters, of Palmerston; Eli Jennings, of Quiros Isle; Harry Williams, of Manihiki; George Bicknell, of Fanning’s Island, and a very great proportion of the “beachcombers” who have scattered themselves over the face of the whole coral sea. These men are not emaciated, pale, liver-disordered, or enervated by the heat of the climate. They are stalwart, smart, and lively. They have strength to lift a kedge anchor, and to carry 200 cocoa-nuts upon their shoulders out of the forests in the heat of the day (and they do it). They climb trees like apes, and dive for shell-fish to feed their families. They wear no shoes, but go barefooted at all times on beaches of sharp gravel and reefs of prickly coral. They gather beche-de-mer or chop wood for whale ships all through the long tropic day. Some of these men have as many as twenty children—with huge frames and gipsy countenances. Their sons are like bronze statues, their daughters models of beauty and strength. Their intellect is of a low order, it is true, and their morals of a very lax description; but they may improve in these respects as they continue to multiply (as they are doing very rapidly), and they are well fitted to do the work of the