

"Fruits of all descriptions are to be procured in sufficient quantities to refresh a large ship's company, but meat and vegetables are very scarce, pigs and poultry being the only animal food. The inhabitants are supposed to be less than 500 in number, and are said to be fast decreasing; this may be attributed to the prevailing custom of polygamy, as well as to continual warfare, which exists between the tribes inhabiting the two principal valleys.

"The French have practically given up all control over the natives, whose only intercourse with foreigners is confined to the crews of the few whalers that occasionally call for supplies. They are to all appearance in the same primitive state they were described to be in 100 years ago; for, though some have Polynesian Bibles and all profess Christianity, they still practise the same heathenish rites and entertain the same superstitions as formerly, whilst cannibalism yet exists in connection with prisoners of war.

"The men, who are of ordinary stature, with good features, are rendered hideous by tattooing; the women are fairer than the men, and pleasant-looking, as they are only tattooed on the face, with a few blue marks on the lips. The only apparent difference between what we saw and read in early accounts was the conduct of the women, all of whom wore a becoming robe of tappa or native cloth, and were very modest in demeanour, whatever their morals may be."

San Christina Island was sighted on June 10. The "Topaze" remained here two days, without experiencing any difficulty from the swell or squalls from the mountains. There is no doubt, however, that a heavy swell sets in from the S.W.

The landing-place, constructed by the French authorities at considerable expense, was washed away, and there were other marks of destruction by the waves. It was also reported that vessels had been driven to sea by the force of the violent gusts down the valley, and altogether the bay has such a bad character that whalers seldom visit it, although it is believed to be the only place where it would be advisable for ships to anchor.

The formation of the island, with its steep shore on the east and numerous valleys on the west sides, closely resembles Magdalena Island, and the facilities for watering and obtaining supplies are about the same. There are wild cattle on the mountains, but difficult to get at, and still more difficult to carry away when shot. The inhabitants of this island are far inferior in appearance and manner to those of Magdalena Island; they do not number more than 300, and from disease and other causes are fast decreasing.

The French had a considerable settlement here some few years since, but they have now entirely abandoned it, and fort, house, and gardens have fallen into a state of decay.

Dominica Island.—Whilst the "Topaze" remained in Resolution Bay, Commodore Powell proceeded to Dominica Island with two boats. After skirting the shore around Tava Bay without being able to land, the boats made for a small round island (not marked on the charts) at the entrance of Taogon Bay, and, passing to the eastward of it, a small land-locked harbour was discovered, known to the French as Traitor's Bay, where the landing is good, and water can be obtained with great facility. Ships of 1,000 tons could here refit with great security.

The French have no settlement on Dominica, but there are two or three priests on the island, one of whom stated that they had entirely failed in making converts, and that in his opinion there was not a native Christian. He also described the inhabitants as being inveterate cannibals, always at war with each other, much addicted to drunkenness and other bad habits. The priests had succeeded in cultivating cotton, and had lately sold their produce for £2,000.

The island has some well-watered, beautiful valleys, and was described as being extremely rich, and well suited for coffee, sugar, and other tropical productions. It was extremely difficult to arrive at any correct estimate of the number of inhabitants, but they are said to amount to about 1,500 and decreasing. The men are tall and able-bodied, but the women are depraved and ill-looking.

Nouka-Hwa or Marchand Island.—The "Topaze" left San Christina Island on the 12th June, and sighted Cape Martin, Nouka-Hwa, at daylight the following morning. The French have reduced their establishment here to a resident, four soldiers, and a captain of the port, who also acts as pilot. The French authorities insist upon vessels taking the pilot, although he cannot possibly be of any service, as the only difficulties to contend with are baffling winds. The payment amounts to 200 francs going in, and the same sum going out; and this charge has effectually kept out whalers that formerly were accustomed to frequent the bay.

The island of Nouka-Hwa offers great resources for cultivation, for its valleys are broad, well watered, and possess rich soil. Tropical fruits abound, as in the other islands; but the guava, recently introduced, is fast overrunning the land, and destroying the bread-fruit and many other valuable trees.

In 1864-65 the small-pox raged here with great virulence, and carried off all but a few hundreds of the natives; in the Happar and Taipi Valleys, where the population numbered nearly 2,000, only about 150 are left. These valleys have been purchased by an English Land Company, but as yet no steps have been taken to people or cultivate them.

NEW CALEDONIA AND LOYALTY ISLANDS.

New Caledonia belongs to the French. It lies about 720 miles E.N.E. of the coast of Queensland in Australia, in lat. 20° to 22° 30' S., long. 164° to 167° E. It is about 200 miles in length, 30 miles in breadth, and has a population estimated at 60,000. It is of volcanic origin, is traversed in the direction of its length, from north-west to south-east, by a range of mountains, which in some cases reach the height of about 8,000 feet, and is surrounded by sandbanks and coral reefs. There are secure harbours at Port Balade and Port St. Vincent, the former on the north-east, the latter on the south-west part of the island. In the valleys the soil is fruitful, producing the cocoa-nut, banana, mango, bread-fruit, &c. The sugar-cane is cultivated, and the vine grows wild. The coasts support considerable tracts of forest, but the mountains are barren. The inhabitants, who resemble the Papuan race, consist of different tribes, some of which are cannibals. New Caledonia was discovered by Captain Cook in 1774. In 1854 the French took official possession of it, and it is now comprised under the same government with Otaheite and the Marquesas Isles.

THE LOYALTY ISLANDS

may be considered as part of the New Caledonia group, running parallel with the trend of that island, at a distance of 50 to 60 miles. They consist of three principal islands, Maré, Lifu, Uea; between the former two are five smaller islets.

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