

IX.—Navigator
Islands.

Mr. Seed's Visit. SIR,—

MR. SEED'S VISIT TO THE GROUP.

Customhouse, Wellington, 13th February, 1872.

I have the honour to state that, in obedience to your instructions, I left Auckland on the evening of the 30th December last, by the mail steamer "Nevada," for the Navigator Islands, and reached that group at three a.m. on the 6th ultimo. The steamer, without anchoring, stopped off the eastern end of Tutuila, and sent a boat on shore to land me at Pango-Pango Harbour. It was dark when we left the steamer, but daylight dawned just as the boat approached the shore at the native settlement at the head of the harbour. The natives, on hearing us, turned out in considerable numbers, and rushed into the water to drag the boat on shore and to assist us in landing. Very soon afterwards the sun rose, and revealed to us the full beauties of the tropical scenery by which we were surrounded. Coconut palms, bread-fruit, bananas, oranges, limes, native chestnuts, and other trees covered the small flat on which the native village stood, and extended close down to the beach. Dotted about here and there in the shade of these trees were the natives' houses, and a little distance in rear of the village the ground rose rather abruptly towards the high, bush-covered hills that surrounded the harbour.

I had been led to believe that the language of the natives was very similar to that of the New Zealanders; and I was disappointed at finding that, though a dialect of the same Polynesian language, it was so different that I was unable to carry on conversation with them. This was the more perplexing, as the resident missionary, the Rev. Mr. Powell, to whom I had letters of introduction, was absent, and had been so for several months. Fortunately one or two of the natives spoke a little English, and came to my assistance. They conveyed me to the house of the chief, Maunga, who welcomed me most courteously, and requested me to take up my quarters with him. I at once accepted his offer, hoping that I should soon find some European settler who would be able to assist me in getting about the islands. My anxiety on this head was soon relieved by the arrival in the course of the morning of a white settler of the name of Hunkin, who, it appears, had boarded the "Nevada" outside, and had been urged by Captain Blethen to communicate with me as soon as possible, with a view of facilitating my movements. Mr. Hunkin offered to assist me in any way he could, and I gladly availed myself of his services. He informed me that he had been a settler on the Navigators for the last thirty-five years, and had acted as British Vice-Consul for a considerable part of that time. I am indebted to him for much of the information I acquired, especially respecting the natives, with whose customs and traditions he is acknowledged to be better acquainted than any other European in the group. In the afternoon I accompanied him to his place at Tafuna, a few miles to the westward of Pango-Pango, where I stayed for the night, and on the following day started for Leone, the principal town of Tutuila, where I was detained for a week waiting for a fair wind to Upolu, the next island to the westward, on which there is the port of Apia, where most of the European settlers reside. Early on the 15th January I left Tutuila by a whaleboat, and reached Apia on the following morning. The distance from Tutuila to the eastern end of Upolu is thirty-six miles, thence to Apia is about twenty miles farther. The British, American, and German Consuls reside at Apia, as it is the centre of trade, and altogether the most important place at present in the whole group. Immediately after my arrival I placed myself in communication with Mr. Williams, the British Consul, who showed me every attention in his power, and supplied me with much valuable information. I called on the American Consul and on the German Consul, both of whom courteously furnished me with every information on various points. Mr. Weber, the German Consul, is the representative of the large mercantile firm of Messrs. Goddefroy and Sons, of Hamburg, who for many years past have had in their hands almost the whole trade of the group. I was unable to procure exact returns of this trade, but that it must be very large is shown conclusively by the fact that from ten to twelve large ships are despatched each year from Apia with full cargoes. These cargoes, however, are not composed exclusively of local produce. Messrs. Goddefroy have trading stations in other parts of the Pacific, and employ small vessels to bring the produce to Apia for shipment. Some of the large vessels occasionally leave Apia and fill up for Europe at ports in the adjacent groups. They have always, throughout the year, one or two large vessels loading for home, and have four brigs trading to Sydney, and five or six small vessels of from 40 to 140 tons trading regularly between Apia and the Solomon Islands, Friendly Islands, Savage Islands, Peru Island, and other islands in the Pacific, where their agents are stationed. The produce brought by these vessels is bêche-de-mer, cocoanut oil, and cobra, which is shipped direct to Hamburg. Whilst I was at Apia they had five or six square-rigged vessels lying in port.

I expected to have been able to return from Upolu by one of the small trading schooners, but found that there was no probability of one going to Tutuila for a considerable time. I therefore determined to return by the whaleboat by which I came, and accordingly left Apia on the evening of the 19th January, reached Ulotonga (at the eastern end of Upolu) by daylight next morning, and about 11 o'clock started for Tutuila with a light leading wind, which died away before we were half-way across, and caused us to make a long and tedious passage. We landed at a harbour called Masefau, on the northern side of Tutuila, and the following day proceeded to the small island of Aunu'u, where, by arrangement with Captain Blethen, I was to wait for the steamer. As I was detained at Aunu'u nine days, I took the opportunity of paying a second visit to Pango-Pango Harbour, and had the pleasure of meeting the Rev. Mr. Powell, who had returned to his station a few days previously. He treated me with great kindness, and supplied me with much interesting information.

The "Nevada" arrived off Aunu'u on the night of the 30th January, and I returned by her to New Zealand, reaching Auckland on the 17th instant.

Having referred to the various localities I visited, I now proceed to give a general description of the whole group, and to remark upon such points as appear to me to be specially interesting.