

# THE POLYNESIAN.

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J. J. JARVES, Editor.

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## ISLAND OF ASCENSION.

The following account of the Island of Ascension, was drawn up by Mr. Campbell, who visited it in the Cutter Lambton, from Sydney, and is the result of his observations on the island and its inhabitants, taken from the Colonist newspaper.

(Continued.)

The dress of the males consists of a petticoat, or as they call it a caul, prepared from the young leaf of the cocoa nut tree, before it is expanded. It is sometimes dyed red, but more generally it is of the natural straw color, with a handsome band of surprisingly fine texture woven in a loom. This is worn round the middle, the caul reaching to the middle of the thigh. When exposed to the sun, one of these is put round the shoulders, and a wreath of flowers round the head, their long black hair hanging in graceful ringlets round the neck; sparkling jet black eyes, and teeth of ivory, complete a figure, both dignified and pleasing. The dress of the females is less elegant, consisting of a piece of prepared bark, about a yard and a half long, and half a yard broad, which is wrapped close round the body, having the appearance of coarse flannel.

Their language, when spoken by themselves, is harmonious, but as many words end in consonants, when spoken by Europeans it is harsh and unpleasant. They are honorable in their attachments, fearless and courageous in war, before going to which they consult their priest, who having performed some incantations, and invoked the favor of the Honney, (the name of the principal god,) tells them whether they are likely to be successful. They fight with savage ferocity, and seldom yield until cut to pieces. In their last war a man was shot, and pierced with spears, till his bowels protruded through; not being able to stand, he sat down, using every mode of defiance, and lashed the water into foam all round him to prevent his enemy being a witness of his end. Even when undergoing the most harsh operations, which are often neces-

sary to extract the poisoned spears, they hold it dishonorable to utter a groan. He that has the greatest number of scars being entitled to most honor, and the favor of the fair—he that is a coward in the field being not only despised but discarded. Their weapons are the spear and sling. The former is not very neat; on the point is fastened the bone of the bill-fish, which is always poisoned. They are not, however, so expert in the use of the spear as the natives of New South Wales. With the sling they throw round stones larger than an apple with great precision.

Naturally active, they are not devoid of intelligence, and are capable of high improvement, moral and intellectual. Although they recognise a creating and superintending power, they say that their God cannot be the same as the God of the white man, (for whose attainments they have the highest respect,) who so far surpasses them in knowledge; whose understanding is so superior to theirs, and who can do so many wonderful things. They will sometimes add, when they get serious on the subject, that their fathers have told them that good men will come to their island at some future period to teach and instruct them, adding, but I may not live to see it. They have been told of the improvement of the natives of the Sandwich and other islands, at which they are much surprised. One solitary individual of their number, who had been there, and is now returned, having been farther than any of them from his native shore, thinks himself entitled to be called a white man, or roach. "Me no black man." "Me go Hawaii." They likewise say, (though they have no idea of the distance of England,) how great that king must be, where all the people are chiefs—the white man never work; (the ships that visit their island from time to time, having generally black men to do every thing in the shape of drudgery work.) They appear happy, and like the natives of most islands in the Pacific, who having no care for the present, are alike indifferent as to the future. Nature, all bountiful nature, supplying every want with little exertion to themselves; while at the same time, a certain superstitious dread of the anger of supposed deities imparts to their character a degree of listlessness. Some will not eat fowls—others will not eat pigeons, because they suppose the spirit of some departed relative may have assumed that shape.

The island contains a population of from five to six thousand inhabitants, comprising four tribes, viz. Metaeline, Whannica Pietack, Whannica Porte, and Kittie—the two first and last have each a superior chief, named Ishiepow or Nana Morigii, who is sometimes called king, possessing absolute power; those who follow in rank and succeed him are Whagii\* and Naniken,† with several inferior chiefs who never rise higher in rank; the chief-ship is not hereditary, nor do the sons of the highest possess any authority at the demise of the father, unless it should happen that their mother was a chief woman, (as they are called,) but their laws do not permit one chief to marry the daugh-

\* Probably the Egi of the Friendly Islands.—Ed. Col.

† Probably the ariki of New Zealand.—Ib.

ter of another—hence, a chief-ship descends through the female line, and one chief succeeds another in rank; Ishiepow, Whagii, Naniken, &c., being titles of rank, and not the names of the individuals—their common names never being mentioned so soon as they succeed to the office of chieftainship. So sacred are their common names held, or so deeply are they buried in oblivion, that no native will tell what has been the former name of his chief. The inferior chiefs succeed each other in their respective rank, but can never become Naniken, &c. *All canoes passing the residence of a chief, must lower their sail, and no one can pass a chief in his canoe without doing the same, or stop paddling till permitted to pass on; they are jealous of honor—and always ready to resent any indignity offered.*

To each village a large house is attached, in the upper part of which their war canoes are kept. These are from forty to fifty feet long, and about two feet deep, formed from the hollow trunk of a tree, exhibiting their most fanciful workmanship, and variously adorned, according to the taste of the party for whose use it is constructed. All the various fastenings of the outrigger, &c., being made with party colored twine, disposed in the most intricate manner—neat and uniform; to which some devote their whole attention. In the lower part of this house the food for all the inhabitants of the village is cooked in common; it is then brought to the residence of the chief, who having pronounced a blessing of a few words over it—takes sufficient for the demands of his own family, and distributes what remains to the different families of the settlement; but should the chief be absent at the time it is brought, no one, not even the members of his own family, dare touch any part thereof till his return. They devote certain seasons to particular purposes, such as building canoes, houses, &c., when the former are finished, they are brought either to the first or second chief, who gives them to those who are in want of them, receiving some present in return. From their construction, and the immense size of the sail they carry, these canoes sail amazingly fast, but require great care in the management, being easily upset; the natives, however, are very expert in managing them, and keep the outrigger always to windward, shifting the sail from end to end when they have occasion to beat to windward. Notwithstanding their vessels cost them so much labor and time in constructing them, a handsome canoe and sail may be purchased for a few heads of tobacco. When engaged in building their houses, the chiefs often assist in person. These are neat and comfortable; the walls being constructed entirely of small bamboo, and are raised two or three feet from the ground on a solid platform of stone, built without cement; the interior might answer the description of a bird cage; the various beams and uprights being fastened, (like the canoes,) with party colored twine made from the bark of the cocoa nut. The floor, composed of bamboo, is as soft as a carpet; though they do not cook any thing in their houses, a square place is left in the centre of the floor, where they generally have a fire, round which may often be seen the old and infirm, and torpid and helpless beings, without fingers and toes. They sleep on

mats, which are called loatch, and have a blanket made of bark interwoven with a soft fibrous filament, the same as that of the women; they are fond of an English blanket, and would sacrifice every thing to possess one that is dyed red. The diseases common to the island are chiefly cutaneous lepra, in the various forms of scaly and tubercular, which prevail to a great extent, and women often expire in giving birth to their progeny. Europeans are afflicted with hepatitis, and seem to be obnoxious to lepra vulgaris. Syphilis is an exotic.

The natives do not allow hair to grow on any part of the body but the head, of which they are very proud, allowing it to grow long, and bestowing much care on its preservation. It is generally black, but they often curl it; and it is never cut till the death of some relative, when it is the only mark of mourning they assume, and they often regret the loss of the hair more than that of the individual. Both sexes are tattooed from about three inches above the pubes to the ankle in front, and from a little under the haunch behind, as well as on the back of the hand and fore arm. This operation is always performed by females.

So far as I could learn, they have no religious ceremonies; they however say when it thunders, that Nan Iabba (the atua of the islands) is angry, on which occasions they are wont to prepare cava for him. The only ceremony of marriage, is that the house being built and the parties having washed themselves, anoint their persons all over with scented cocoa nut oil, then besmear themselves with tumeric when they retire to their new habitation. Although plurality of wives is allowed, conjugal fidelity is respected, and the male party infringing on the rights is punished by the spear of the husband. One chief at the time of my visit had nine wives, and another in prospect, but as the damsel would not allow herself to be tattooed, he would not take her home till she had submitted to this indispensable requisite; the last rib he had taken was said to be the 'Venus', of the Island, of her he was so jealous that he kept her in a cage, permitting no one on pain of being speared through, to see the beauty in the trap. It is not considered of any consequence how many liaisons the fair elect may have had before marriage, and should these have been with a white man, they are considered the best recommendation to a husband. To be continued.

*General Nature of Water Spouts.*—The water-spout is a strongly agitated mass of air, which moves over the surface of the earth, and revolves on an axis, of which one extremity is on the earth and the other in a cloud. From this cloud a continuation proceeds downward, which forms the upper portion of the water spout; while the lower portion, besides air, consists sometimes of water, sometimes of solid portions, according as the water spout passes over land or over water. Some have separated water spouts over the land and over the water from each other, but this creates confusion, for water spouts have been observed which were formed over water and advance over land; and vice versa we have accounts of water spouts which were formed over land, and afterwards were suspended over the surface of water. They have also been seen cutting right across a river, and then continuing their course over the land; or crossing straight over an island, and then proceeding over the sea.—Silliman's J.