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No. II.

The Sandwich Islands.*

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.—Isaiah 9 : 2.

THE Sandwich Islands were so named by Captain Cook, who discovered the group in 1778. This distinguished navigator was received by all classes of the people with demonstrations of astonishment and delight. Offerings and prayers were presented to him by the native priests in one of the temples near the bay in which his vessels anchored and on the shore of which he was murdered on the night of the 13th February, 1799. The islands, ten in number, are called by the inhabitants the *Hawaiian Islands*, from the largest of the group. They are situated about 2500 miles due west from Mexico, and are distant from Japan 3,400 miles, thus occupying a central position on the great ocean highways that connect America with China and Australia. The four largest and most important islands are Hawaii, Maui, Oahu, and Kauai. The circumference of Hawaii is about 300 miles, and that of Oahu about 100. They are all of volcanic origin. Snow-capped mountains rise to a height of nearly 14,000 feet. On the east side of Hawaii, at an altitude of 4000 feet above the sea, is the largest volcano that has yet been discovered. It is in a state of ceaseless activity, the crater being literally a lake of fire, nine miles in circumference, bordered with perpendicular walls of lava 1060 feet deep. The climate is remarkably healthy, and the natives, considered physically, are among the finest races in the Pacific.

Sixty years ago there was not a solitary native christian in these Islands. The people lived in the lowest condition of heathen barbarism. The accounts of their moral debasement seen almost incredible. Marriage and family ties were unknown. It was common for children, as soon as they were born to be given away by their parents or to be buried alive; and when fathers or mothers became aged and infirm, it was not uncommon for their children, in order to rid themselves of the burden, to cast them down a precipice, or to bury them alive. Human sacrifices formed a part of the religion of the natives. But the most intolerable part of the religious system was the *tabu*, which made certain days, places, persons, and things sacred, and death was the penalty for its violation. The Islands were full of idols of hideous and disgusting appearance. "At the present time these same Islands are found under an independent and constitutional government, with a native sovereign at its head, and a government as confessedly cognizant of God's law and the Gospel as any one of the governments of Christian Europe, and, what is more, with a Christian community of self governed, self-supporting churches, embracing as large a proportion of the people, and as really entitled to the Christian name, as the churches of the most favoured Christian countries." How this great change has been effected we shall now endeavour very briefly to state, if not in the precise words of the author whose name we have already quoted, at least with the acknowledgment that to him we are entirely indebted for the information submitted.

THE AGENCY, which by the blessing of God has proved so successful, was the American Board of Foreign Missions, composed, at the time here referred to, of representatives from the various evangelical churches in the United States, and which, up to the time of the Union of the Old and New-school Presbyterian Churches, was chiefly supported by the Con-

* History of the Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Sandwich Islands: by Rufus Anderson, D. D., LL. D., late Secretary of the Board. Boston, 1874.