

and missionaries during the last two years, and is still professedly Alaigaheni, as they say when they renounce heathenism and have a desire to embrace Christianity. He has proved a very true and faithful friend to us since our arrival, and is anxious that we should soon speak their dialect, as he says he wants to know something about the word of God."

The island of Tanna, upon which Mr. M. and his brethren commenced operations, seemingly under such favourable circumstances, is described as "a lovely island, by far the richest and most beautiful of all the islands of the Southern division of the New Hebrides." It is about thirty miles in length and from nine to twelve in breadth. Says Mr. Murray, "the island presents a very interesting appearance. It is mountainous, but the mountains being rather low and round or table topped, and covered with dense forests to their summits, it appears soft and beautiful rather than grand and imposing. The most striking natural object on the island is a volcano, which has been in a state of constant activity from the days of Cook, and no one knows how long before, to the present time." It is amazingly fertile, producing all the usual productions of Eastern Polynesia in great abundance.

The inhabitants are regarded as a bold energetic race, and superior to those on the neighbouring islands. Hence the Polynesian missionaries have long been anxious for their conversion to Christianity, not only that they might enjoy its blessings, but also in the expectation of their being useful agents in extending the gospel to the neighbouring islands. But at present they are a most fierce and savage people. Wars are constant among them. Recently one of their chiefs, who had returned from Aneiteum, having reported among other things that there was no war there, he was derided as endeavouring to impose upon them a story too incredible to be believed. "When" they asked, "was ever such a thing to be heard of as a country living without war?" His other statements they could credit, but that could not be true. They are moreover, inveterate cannibals, and sunk in all the abominations of the most debased Heathen tribes.

The first attempt made to introduce the gospel was by Mr. Williams, who placed native teachers on it on the 19th November, 1839, the day before he fell. But disease proved so fatal among them, that they accomplished little, and indeed their fate seemed to have excited prejudices against christianity. In 1842, Messrs. Nisbet and Turner commenced missionary operations on the island with encouraging prospects, but in January following after about six months residence, during which they encountered much suffering and many perils, they were glad to make their escape to Samoa, with the native evangelists. Some favourable impressions, however, seem to have been made by their labours, and there have always since been some on the island desiring christian instruction. Several attempts had afterward been made to open up the island for missionary labour, by means of natives of other islands, and when Mr. Matheson landed, it seemed as if the time to favour dark Tanna had at length come.

Mr. Matheson though in a delicate state of health entered upon his labours with great earnestness. In a letter written some time after, he gave the following summary of his first six months' labour.

"During the first month of our residence upon Tana, my time was wholly occupied with manual labour about the house and premises. After that we began to apply ourselves as closely as possible to the acquisition of the language, which is the first thing demanding attention after you have a house in which to live. We soon succeeded in gathering up a sufficient number of phrases to enable us to converse a little with the natives in their own language. Early in January we opened a morning school at our station, which I superintended, and another at a village called Anuakanka, about a mile distant, which was conducted by Talip, one of the Aneiteum teachers. As might be naturally expected, the attendance at each of the schools was but small and very irregular for several weeks. Their conduct however while in school was much better than we could have expected, considering that they know nothing of the nature of a school—had never before seen a letter, and and could not perceive any temporal advantage that might be gained by attending the school. One of our chiefs named Viavia, who lives quite near us, attended regularly, and soon mastered the alphabet, which he considered a great achievement. He ap-