

the island; but when the seeds of foreign epidemics are sown in this virgin soil, the crop of mortality springs up at once, and the growth is both rank and rapid—it sets all human power at defiance. This island has been awfully scourged by these epidemics. Its fine harbour has brought foreign ships, and these have brought all kinds of foreign diseases; and each disease has added more or fewer to the bills of mortality. It is now thirty-eight years since the first ship held communication with the shores of Aneiteum. Up till that time there is no tradition, that I know of, of any epidemic having ever visited the island; the natives were living in a normal condition; a long experience had taught them the rude outlines of the laws of health and the causes of disease, as applied to their circumstances. The island was populous, and the most of the available land under cultivation. The population could not be less than 12,000; some have thought that it might be 20,000. Between the time the island was first visited by foreign vessels and the introduction of Christianity by the location of teachers, in 1841, a fearful epidemic swept over the island, and carried off at least one third of the population. Between the location of the teachers and the settlement of missionaries, in 1848, another epidemic, equally severe, passed over the island. How these epidemics originated we know not, but as there were none before the white men visited these islands, the probability is they were imported. In 1861 the measles were brought by trading vessels, and a third of the population again perished. It would be wrong in every case to attach blame to those who convey these diseases. It may be done ignorantly, or it may be done thoughtlessly; although it is said, that in the case of the measles there was something like a cool, deliberate attempt made to extend the disease.

One thing seems almost certain, that nothing but Christianity, speedily introduced and embraced, can save the inhabitants of these islands from complete extermination, if it be not already too late; between the epidemics and the slavers they appear like a doomed race. An unscrupulous commerce, backed by large capital, ready for every speculation that promises to pay well, reckless of all consequences, and aiming only at present gains, has got fairly the start of Christianity in this group. We came late into the field, few, feeble, and faintly supported, and have to compete against fearful odds. It is easy to destroy, but it is difficult to preserve and save. It is easy to introduce a foreign epidemic, but it is no easy matter to check its virulence and subdue its power. It is easier to carry a thousand natives into captivity, than to bring a hundred to the knowledge and be-

lief of the Gospel. It is true, commerce is not an unmixed evil—and among the traders there are honourable men, who wish well to the natives,—but the general effect is that the natives are melting away. Almost every mission has had its special trials. French Popery has tried some severely; civil war has tried others; apostacy, outbreaks of wickedness, and a return to heathenism, have tried others. We have happily been free from all these. We have been threatened again and again with French power and Popery, but have as yet been mercifully preserved from both. We have enjoyed unbroken peace; and although we have waifs and strays, occasional outbreaks of depravity, and hopes blighted in converts of high promise, yet our trials in these respects are only such as are common to all missionaries under ordinary circumstances. Our great trial has been the mortality of the natives, arising chiefly from these repeated epidemics. Whether a remnant may struggle through and yet re-people the island, or whether the whole race will die out, seems doubtful. Within the last seven years the population of Aneiteum has been reduced one-half. These epidemics not only cut off large numbers at once, but they operate injuriously for years after. They disorganize society, and retard the increase of population; and they cause so much of the land to be thrown out of cultivation that *malaria* is far more extensively generated, and the ordinary diseases of the island become much more frequent and virulent. We had just about recovered from the measles, and the births were equal to the deaths, when the epidemic of last year came upon us; and we had not recovered from that when the whooping-cough appeared.

It may appear strange that, in an island like Aneiteum, where the influence of Christianity is so fully recognized, and where all the prominent cruelties of heathenism have disappeared, that, even, in ordinary years, the people should be so rapidly melting away. But when the case is fully examined; when we take into account the disproportion of the sexes left by heathenism—four males for every three females;—these repeated and fatal epidemics, and all the dangers of a transition state of society, from isolation and the lowest barbarism, to a comparatively extensive intercourse with the civilized world, with its evils as well as its benefits, a change, in many cases too rapid and too great to be safe, even if it were at all for the better, is produced.

But we must accept of the field as we find it; we cannot ignore or set aside these evils. Commerce, such as it is, has taken possession of this group, and of these seas, and will keep possession, in one form or another;