

## FOREIGN MISSIONS.

The following interesting sketch of the Island of Erromanga is published in the *Record* of the P. C. of the Lower Provinces.

LETTER FROM REV MR. MACNAIR.

ERROMANGA, August, 1867.

To the Secretary of Free College Missionary Society, Glasgow.

When I had the pleasure of addressing your Society in December, 1865, I forget whether I then promised to write occasionally from this sunny clime or not. Be that as it may, I shall now take for granted that such a communication will not be much out of place; and if I only succeed in expressing myself clearly, cannot be otherwise, I think, than interesting to you. I shall also, with your pleasure, take for granted that you have hitherto paid little attention to this group of islands as a mission field, and that, therefore, you will not be offended if I should attempt to give you an account *ab initio*.

## THE FIELD ITSELF

Consists of forty or more islands, twelve or fourteen of which may be conveniently compared with the larger of our old Hebrides, such as Bute, Arran, Islay, Jura, Mull, Skye and Lewis, from between 15 and 20 South Lat., and from between 165 and 170 East Long.—in other words 1500 miles N. E. of Sydney, or 1200 miles almost direct north of Auckland, New Zealand. No one at present can tell the exact population of these islands. It may, however, be estimated at 100,000.

## THE CLIMATE

Cannot be very cold. If you, therefore, consider the vast amount of vegetation which is constantly decaying as well as constantly growing in the valleys referred to, you will readily come to the conclusion that they must be capital generations of fever and ague, and so they are. But in addition, there are many swamps or marshes, which are also prolific sources of the same malady. These swamps are formed by allowing fine springs, which issue forth at the foot of the mountains, to spread themselves over level land. The natives prize the swamps very highly for the purpose of growing *taro*. But this will lead us to speak of

## THE FRUITS AND FOOD.

The *taro* resembles our home rhubarb. There are two kinds one of which grows in dry land, the other in the marsh, covered with water. The root is large, something like a Swedish turnip, but much tenderer, and more mealy and satisfying than even potatoes.

The *yam* resembles peas or vines, and has to be supported after the same fashion; but the root, on the other hand grows to a great size, sometimes six feet in length, and twelve or fifteen inches in circumference. It is more like our potatoe in taste and colour than the *taro*.

The *banana* grows in great abundance and in great variety. The leaf of the banana is very large as well as very fine. The fruit grows in bunches, from the stem of the tree. A tree has only one bunch, but a single bunch may contain 100 bananas, which, in form and taste are something like a very ripe pear.

The *bread-fruit* is exceedingly pretty, both in color and form. I am not aware that we have any fruit at home like it, either in shape, color or taste. The natives and most foreigners prize it very highly, as they also do the banana; for my own part, however, I cannot say that I am too fond of either. The bread-fruit is as large as a good sized turnip, or nearly as large as one's head. The tree itself grows to a large size, so that they occasionally make canoes out of the trunk. It is a handsome tree, somewhat resembling our ash.

The *cocoa-nut palm* is a remarkable tree, a study in itself. It would require a long letter to do it justice. It is to the natives what the reindeer is to the Laplander. From its straight stem they can build their houses, and thatch them with its feathery leaves; of the fibrous network protecting its young branches, they can make clothes; its nut supplies them with drink, food, oil, material to make their fish nets, and *cinct* to tie their thatch and fences. It is one of the commonest and tallest trees in this region. These valuable nuts, in tens of thousands, are allowed year by year to drop and decay. The natives sell them to the traders at the rate of half-a-dozen for a tobacco pipe. There are many other nut, as well as apple, bearing trees, but the fruit of them is not very much appreciated by Europeans, however highly esteemed by the natives.

The *sugar cane* grows most luxuriously. You may see the savage carrying his dinner over his shoulder in the shape of a stalk twelve or fifteen feet long, and as thick as your arm; and when he takes it in his head to commence the operation of chewing, or rather tearing, he does so at such a rate, and after such a manner, as to cause any one who has had the misfortune to have the toothache to envy the freshness and firmness of his *incisors*, as well as the strength and power of his gums and his jaw-bones.

The *pepper*, *indigo*, *arrowroot*, *castor oil plants*, &c., grow spontaneously. *Pine apples*, *oranges* and *cotton* have been introduced, and they all flourish exceedingly. Mr. Inglis, one of the older missionaries, planted a few orange seeds about twelve years ago, and now he has, to speak after native fashion, as many oranges as would fill the quadrangle of your college. At all events I wish one-half of your number were present to help us to consume them, for Mr. Inglis' injunction is not to spare the oranges but to spare ourselves.