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THE NEW HEBRIDES.

The geographical position of the New Hebrides is important. To the south-west lie New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands; beyond these is the mainland of Australia, the nearest point of which is 1200 miles distant. Nine hundred miles south of the group lies New Zealand, while to the east are other British possessions, the Fijis; not far distant from which are situated the Navigators, or Samoa, a group of islands about which much controversy has arisen between Great Britain and Germany. Further east still is the Tabitian Archipelago, situated half-way between the New Hebrides and Panama. It is no wonder, then, that much excitement should arise in diplomatic circles when it was suddenly announced that the French flag had been hoisted in these islands. We therefore give some Views of the New Hebrides, from sketches by Mr. J. H. Kerry-Nicholls, who is well acquainted with the isles of the Pacific, as he is with New Zealand.

The New Hebrides are a group of islands situated between latitude 13 deg. 16 min. and 20 deg. 15 min. south, and from longitude 166 deg. 40 min. to 170 deg. 20 min. east, stretching about 400 miles N.N.W. and S.S.E. The more important islands are Aneiteum, Tanna, Erromanga, Sandwich, Api, Mallicolo, and Espiritu Santo. Three men are concerned in the discovery of the New Hebrides. Ferdinando de Quiros, early in the seventeenth century, was sent by the Spanish Government to make explorations in the Pacific. In April, 1606, he sighted land, which he fondly imagined was a continent as large as Europe, Asia Minor, and the Mediterranean islands all put together. To this newly discovered world Quiros gave the name of Espiritu Santo, and, without waiting to find out the full extent of his new possession, hurried back to inform the King of Spain of his discovery. His Majesty, however, did not take quite so sanguine a view of the matter as the navigator, and poor Quiros, instead of returning to take possession of the newly-discovered continent at the head of a rich and influential company, was obliged to stay at home, where he died at last in obscurity. Bougainville, the great French navigator, in 1768, dispelled the idea of Espiritu Santo being a continent; and Captain Cook, a few years later, proved it to be an island by sailing round its shores.

The first missionary visit to the New Hebrides was paid by John Williams in 1839, and though he was murdered at Erromanga soon afterwards, the missionaries did not abandon the work they had so nobly begun. During the last thirty-six years, the Presbyterian Churches of Australasia have employed thirty European missionaries to carry on the work of evangelisation. Of these five have been murdered and five others died. Upon these missions £150,000 has been expended; and even now the Presbyterians are providing £6000 per annum to carry on the work. But, notwithstanding the large amount of interest displayed in social as well as spiritual matters, the missionaries find it difficult to raise the islanders very high in the scale of civilisation. They still prefer basking in the sun to hard work, and living in huts to houses. But what the missionaries have done is to impress the natives with an opinion favourable to England, and declare the existence of a God to heathens formerly destitute of religion.

The islands of Aneiteum, Tanna, and Sandwich form the southern group of the New Hebrides, and, thanks to missionary enterprise, are fairly well explored. The natives are dark in colour and of moderate stature, although here and there one finds robust and muscular men, with woolly hair like the Africans. They are warlike, but a little friendly confidence will often allay their natural feelings of distrust. The behaviour of Europeans, however, has not been altogether of a nature fitted to gain the affection of the inhabitants, and the labour traffic, which was carried on in order to supply the plantations of Queensland and Fiji, has done a great deal to prevent a state of good feeling existing between the natives and the whites. The New Hebrideans are naturally cannibals, but the missionaries who for years past have been labouring to convert them to Christianity, have, on many islands, succeeded in getting them to abandon human for animal food. The climate of the New Hebrides is not so bad as that of New Guinea, while the soil is fertile and the vegetation luxuriant, a fact perhaps owing to the volcanic nature of the group. Figs, yams, bananas, sago, arrowroot, and, of course, coconuts, are the chief productions, and these are used by the natives as articles of barter for beads, axes, and warlike weapons, and dynamite, whenever they can be obtained. The islands are mountainous. In Tanna there is a volcano, where eruptions, violent and frequent, take place every five or six minutes. As in the North Island of New Zealand, hot springs abound, some of which are utilised for the purpose of boiling potatoes and scalding pigs, while others are just warm enough to make a pleasant bath. Hurricanes, though not frequent, are severe, blowing sometimes with great violence in January and February. In Aneiteum, the south-west island, they have continued six days, and have done great damage.

Australia has frequently pointed out to the Imperial authorities how contrary to colonial interests it would be were the French allowed to contravene the understanding of 1878, and take possession of the New Hebrides. The missionaries, too, have petitioned her Majesty, at various times, to make some better provision than at present exists for the maintenance of native independence. Already the French possessions in the Pacific are many, and any arrangement by which the New Hebrides should fall into the hands of France is to be deprecated, not only from a colonial but also from an Imperial point of view. The Australian colonists are naturally anxious lest this valuable group of islands should be used for the same service as the neighbouring island of New Caledonia, which became a French possession in 1854, and has since that time served the purpose of a convict settlement for the French Government. The trade with the New Hebrides is chiefly transacted through Australia, but much of the produce comes eventually to England. The French, German, and American merchants are now obtaining a hold on the Western Pacific markets; but as Auckland, Dunedin, Brisbane, Sydney, Hobart, and Melbourne are naturally the commercial ports, the colonists are well able to hold their own in this respect.

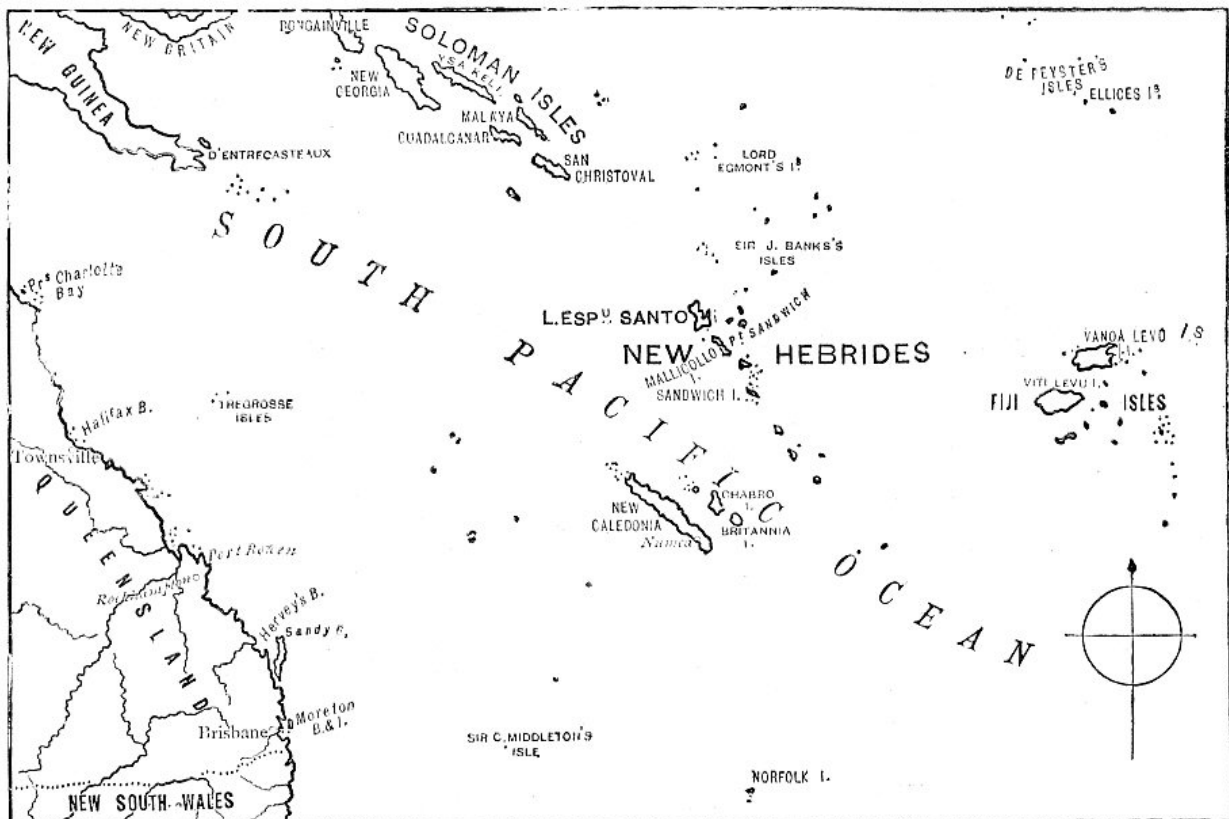
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4 Native of Mallicolo - 6 Woman of Tanna, the lobe of her ear distended to 4 in. length
7 Native of Espiritu Santo (hill tribe) in dancing costume -- 9 Dancing costume: Espiritu Santo hill tribe

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MAP SHOWING THE POSITION OF THE NEW HEBRIDES.

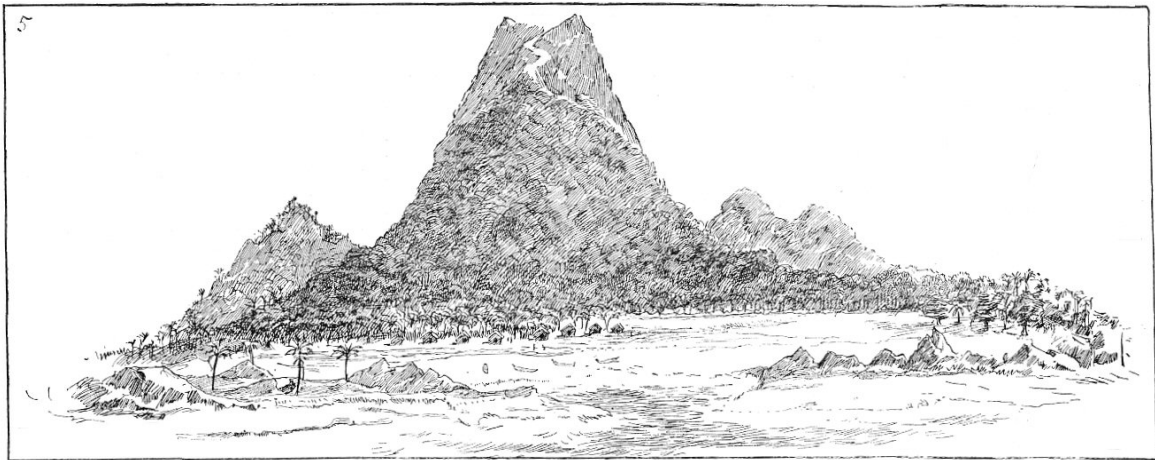
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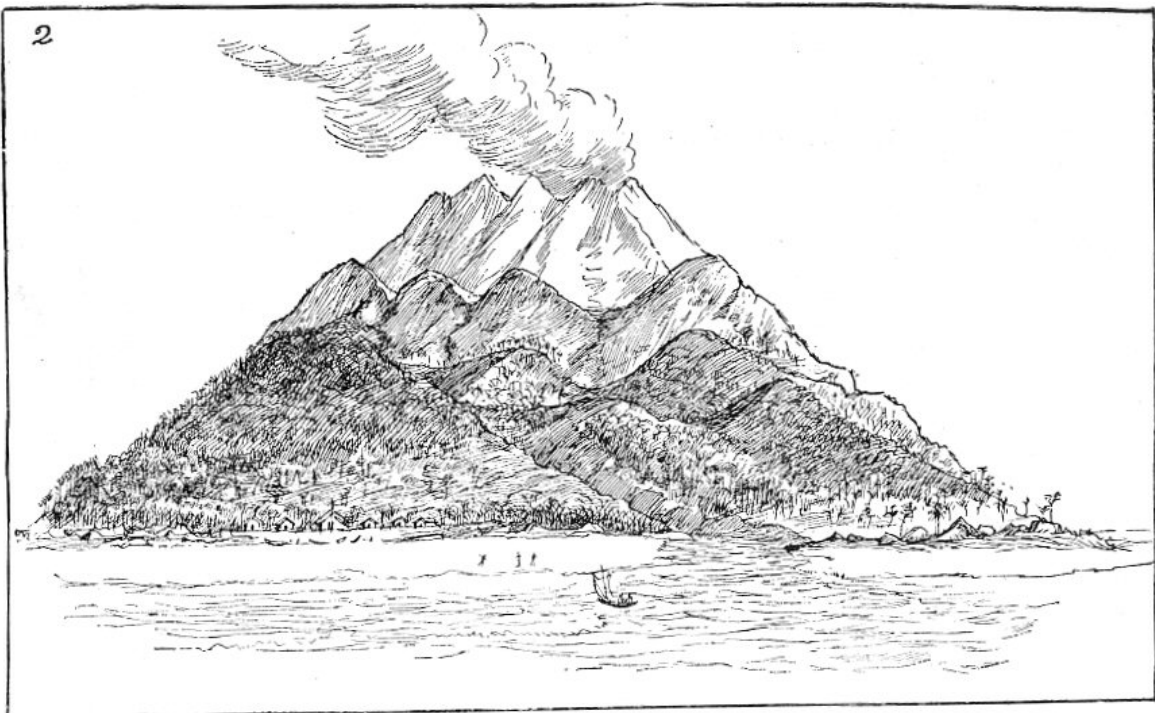


8 Village in the island of Espiritu Santo

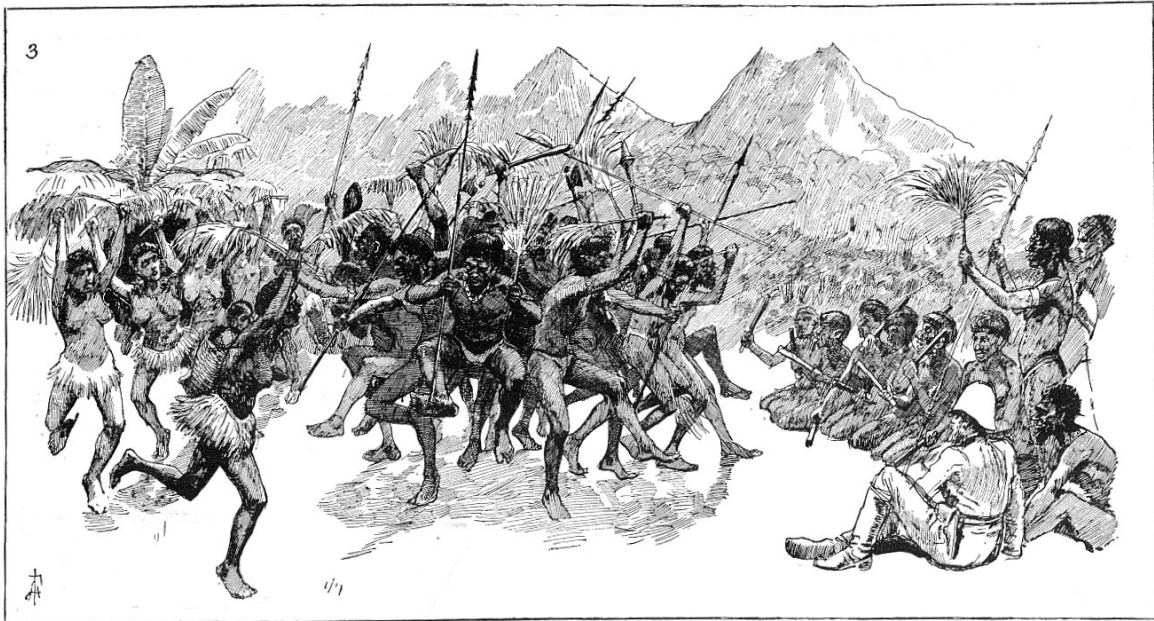
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5 Mota, cone of an extinct volcano, 1350 ft. high



2 Island of Ambrym, an active volcano, 3500 ft. high



3 Native dance by moonlight, Island of Tanna; Chief waving spear and palm-branch to direct the dancers.



1 Woman of Tanna and woman of Espiritu Santo