

Island, a few degrees east of the Navigator Group: they were lying two hundred yards inside of the line of breakers. The island is uninhabited, and the origin of the stones is doubtful; they may have been brought there by roots of trees, or perhaps by some canoe.

Fragments of pumice and resin are transported by the waves to many of the islands in the Central Pacific. We were informed at the Gilbert Islands that the pumice was gathered from the shores by women and pounded up to fertilize the soil of their taro patches; and that it is common for a woman to pick up a peck a day.

Where this pumice comes from is not ascertained. It is probably drifted from the westward, and perhaps from volcanic islands of the Ladrões or Philippines. In addition, volcanic ashes are sometimes distributed over these islands, through the atmosphere. In this manner the soil of the Tonga Islands has been improved, and in some places it has even received a reddish colour. This group has its own active volcano to supply the ashes, and the volcanic group of the new Hebrides is not far distant to the south-west.

Notwithstanding all the products and all the attractions of a coral island, even in its best condition it is but a miserable place for human development, physical, mental or moral. There is poetry in every feature, but the natives find this a poor substitute for the bread-fruit and yams of more favoured lands. The cocoanut and pandanus are, in general, the only products of the vegetable kingdom afforded for their sustenance, and fish, shell-fish, and crabs from the reefs their only animal food. Scanty too is the supply; and infanticide is resorted to in self-defence, where but a few years would otherwise overstock the half a dozen square miles of which their little world consists—a world without rivers, without hills, in the midst of salt water, with the most elevated point but ten to twenty feet above high tide, and no part more than three hundred yards from the ocean.

In the more isolated coral islands, the language of the natives indicates their poverty as well as the limited productions and unvarying features of the land. All words like those for