

They are unquestionably a people of good intellectual endowments. Perhaps no savages have ever shown such a capacity and such a disposition for improvement. Indeed, it is easy to see that before they were visited by whites they had attained a grade of civilization nearly as high as their circumstances would permit. A few thousand people, crowded together in a small island, without metals, with no large animals for labour or transportation, and no neighbours from whom they can by commerce supply their deficiencies, must find their progress beyond a certain point barred by insurmountable obstacles; and this point there is good reason to believe that the Polynesians had nearly reached long before their intercourse with foreigners commenced. They are, however, more remarkable for quickness of apprehension, and the readiness with which they acquire mechanical arts, than for their powers of reasoning. A sustained application soon wearies them; and the levity of their disposition influences their intellectual efforts, as well as their passions and feelings. Their taste and ingenuity appear to advantage in the carving of their canoes and weapons, in their tattooing, and the colouring of their cloths and mats. Their idols, which are made after an established pattern, and intended merely to inspire fear, give no proper idea of their abilities in this respect. Their poetical compositions show that they are not deficient in imagination,—though, in this respect, they appear, strangely enough, to be inferior to their savage neighbours of the Feejee Group.

A disposition for enterprise and bold adventure characterizes all the Polynesian tribes. They are a race of navigators, and often undertake long voyages in vessels in which our own sailors would hesitate to cross a harbour. Their insular situation will not alone account for this disposition. The inhabitants of the Melanesian islands, in circumstances precisely similar, are remarkable for their unwillingness to wander from their homes. Captain Cook found that the natives of Erromango, one of the New Hebrides, had apparently no knowledge of Sandwich Land, the next island to the north, distant about sixty miles. On the contrary, not only is a constant communication kept up among the different islands of each group of Polynesia, but perilous voyages of many days between different groups are frequent. The natives may be said to be cosmopolites by natural feeling. Accordingly, no sooner do ships make their appearance in the Pacific than we find the islanders eager to engage on board of them, for no purpose but to gratify their roving disposition, and their desire of seeing foreign countries. And it is a remarkable fact, that on most