

of the Marquesans; traits in which they surpass all the other Polynesians, and which have hitherto rendered every attempt to civilize them unavailing.

The influence of the political state of the islanders upon their character, will be exhibited in treating of the various governments of Polynesia.

RELIGION—THE TABU.

It is not intended to give here a complete account, or even a general outline of the institutions and customs of the Oceanic islanders; only those will be mentioned which seem peculiar to the different races, and which serve to distinguish them from one another. Under this head must be ranked the institution of the *tabu*, which seems to be confined to the Polynesian race, except in those instances where it has been borrowed from them by some of the neighbouring tribes. The word *tabu*, or *tapu*, is used, like most words of this language, either as a noun, an adjective, or a verb. It may be defined as a law, or restriction, which derives its sanction from religion. The latter particular constitutes the only singularity of the system. Many of the tabus, or social regulations, are, no doubt, strange enough,—but not more so than we find among most savage and many civilized nations. It is the circumstance that these regulations, so multifarious and minute, are observed not merely as laws but as religious ordinances, and that their transgression is considered a sin as well as a crime, that gives to the institution its remarkable character. We are not altogether without examples of similar laws in our own code. Those which relate to disturbances of the Sabbath, and to the sanctity of the marriage tie, are instances of the force which human enactments derive from the precepts of religion. Nor are the Polynesians the only people who have been governed by such regulations. The laws of Moses, emanating from a divine authority, have drawn from that source a vitality which has preserved them in full vigour to this day. Among the Jews it is tabu to eat certain kinds of meat, or to offer in sacrifice any thing that has a blemish,—or to touch certain animals termed unclean, &c. The Mahometan code, the work of an earthly lawgiver, derives from its supposed divine origin a force superior to that of any ordinary laws;—to those who submit to its injunctions it is tabu to eat pork and drink wine,—or to omit certain ablutions,—or to take food during a certain month from sunrise to sunset, &c. The institu-