

CHAPTER VI.

VITI OR FEEJEE ISLANDS.

I. GENERAL FEATURES.

THE Feejee Islands occupy an area of forty thousand square miles, on either side of the meridian of 180° , and between the latitudes 16° and 20° S. The surface of land is not far from seven thousand square miles. The group might be very appropriately termed an archipelago. Rarely in any part of the globe are such numbers of islands clustered together, and no region can exceed it in dangerous navigation. In this thickly dotted area, ten or a dozen islands might at any time be counted from the ship's deck, and often a much larger number was in sight. They are of all forms and dimensions, from rugged basaltic mountains one to five thousand feet in height, to the coral islet whose sandy surface barely emerges from the ocean's waves; and among and around them, coral reefs are innumerable. Nearly every island has its shores extended by wide coral platforms, and very many are inclosed by irregular barrier reefs, often stretching out for miles in long projecting points. Moreover, the many isolated reefs that low tide brings in view, and others a fathom or two below the surface, multiply greatly the dangers of navigation. A clear sky and a good look-out are required to enable the navigator to thread his way safely through many portions of this coral labyrinth.

There are about one hundred and fifty islands in the archipelago; or, if we include the isolated rocks which stand as outworks around the larger bodies of land, and every humble coral islet overgrown with a thicket of mangrove bushes, the number would be nearly doubled. Viti Lebu and Vanua Lebu, the two largest of the