

The scenery at Papieti is remarkable; the background is filled up with a number of pinnacle-shaped mountains, jutting up in a great variety of forms; beneath, and directly in front of them, lies the semi-circular harbour, surrounded by the white cottages and churches of the village, embosomed in luxuriant foliage; these dwellings have a peaceful and home-like look, to the eye of an American. In front, the little coral island of Moto-utu forms an embellished foreground, and serves to break the regularity of the line of the harbour, while by concealing its extent, it gives it an air of greater magnitude than it in reality possesses. To my eye, this view combined within itself a perfect picture of Polynesian scenery, enhanced in beauty by the signs of civilization, among which was the national flag of Tahiti, waving from a fortress on Moto-utu.

The purpose of my visit to Papieti had originally been to go through the ceremony of receiving the great chiefs on board, when, according to custom, presents are made them; but before this was done, I determined that the business, which I had laid before the council, as stated in the preceding chapter, should be adjusted. This was done satisfactorily on the 22d, when they assented to all that had been asked of them. I am convinced that their conduct in this matter was dictated throughout by a sense of what is right, and am satisfied that if grievances do exist, it is only necessary to state them, when, if redress is within their power, it will be granted.

Agreeably to my invitation, Uata, who appeared as the representative of the queen, the two princesses, Ninito and Taii, and all the head chiefs, visited the ship, accompanied by the foreign consuls. The ship was dressed for the occasion with flags, and they were received with every mark of respect. Luncheon was prepared for them; and when they were all seated at it, it struck me that I had never seen such a collection of corpulent persons. Previous to eating, one of the oldest chiefs said grace. Their appetites were good; none of the food appeared to come amiss. They seemed heartily to enjoy themselves, and conducted themselves with a propriety that surprised us all. They were cautious in partaking of the wine which was set before them, and seemed evidently upon their good behaviour. This was the case with the high chiefs, who, to the number of about fifteen, had been invited; but, besides these, about an equal number of others contrived to get on board without invitation; the latter thrust themselves forward with eagerness to occupy places at the table, but were compelled to give place to those of higher rank. A second table was, however, prepared for them, at which they took their seats, and did ample justice to what was set before them.