

This oil is often scented with aromatic herbs, to be employed by the natives in anointing the hair and body; it is also used for burning in lamps, and is exported in considerable quantities. The lamps, which are always kept burning in their houses at night, are made of the shell of a cocoa-nut. The wick is formed of wild cotton, and is kept upright in the centre of the bowl by two elastic strips of cocoa-nut leaf crossing each other at right angles.

Sugar is beginning to attract attention, and some attempts have also been made in the culture and preparation of indigo.

Making straw or chip hats is a favourite occupation among the women, whose former employment of making tapa has, as was stated in the preceding chapter, been much diminished by the introduction of European fashions.

I have also before referred to the abortive attempt of the missionaries to introduce machinery for the manufacture of cotton, which will be again mentioned in speaking of the island of Eimeo, where the experiment was made.

Before closing my remarks on Tahiti, I consider it my duty to say a few words in relation to the transgression of the local laws by many of the vessels which visit it, and some of which, I regret to be compelled to confess, bear the flag of the United States. I have particular reference to the license always allowed to the crews, and in which the masters and officers often themselves indulge, in making brothels of their ships. They also do not scruple to retail ardent spirits to the natives, although they well know that it is contrary to a law of the island, most strictly enforced on shore. Such conduct not unfrequently gives rise to difficulties very prejudicial to the interests of the owners; but it is still more disgraceful when considered in its destructive effect upon the people whose hospitality they are enjoying, and as a practice that they would not dare to indulge in, when in the ports of any civilized nation.

The influence of the example of these visitors upon the natives is demoralizing in the extreme, is calculated to retard their advancement in civilization, and throws countless difficulties and obstructions in the way of the laudable exertions of the missionaries.

Little idea can be formed by those who have not witnessed it, of the extent to which the practice of vending spirits is carried, not only at Tahiti, but throughout the Polynesian islands. I am satisfied, that if the owners of the vessels which indulge in it were aware of the traffic, and had a just sense of their own interest, they would interdict the sale of this pernicious article, and prohibit the carriage of it in their ships.