

wonderful when we remember that it is, with the exception of that portion which prevails in the Archipelago, an oral language.

The languages of Polynesia were only spoken languages, and the language of Madagascar was, until within the last forty years, an unwritten language. The Portuguese, by whom the island was discovered, and its other early visitors, found no hieroglyphics, picture-writing, or other kind of record among its inhabitants; and subsequent intercourse has furnished no evidence of the knowledge of letters ever having existed amongst the native population. It is true that long before Europeans had passed round the Cape of Good Hope, Moors and Arabs had visited Madagascar for purposes of commerce, and had settled in small numbers on several parts of the coast. These Arabs, and other traders, brought with them their own written language, which they used in their mercantile transactions with the people. They probably attempted also to teach it to some of the natives; but it was only the language of the strangers that was written, and its use appears to have been confined to the localities in which they temporarily resided. No vestiges remain of the oral language of these traders, beyond a few terms connected chiefly with divination, astrology, and other usages of Arabic origin. The introduction of letters early in the present century, their rapidly extended use among the people, the formation of grammars exhibiting the peculiarity of the several parts of speech, do not seem to have produced any change in the language as used by the people themselves; and the language of Madagascar appears to retain at the present time all the distinctive qualities by which it was characterised when brought by the first settlers to the country, excepting so far as it may have been modified by themselves. The few new words which foreign objects have rendered necessary have been so altered, in order to adapt them to native use, as to leave but little resemblance to their original forms.

This language exhibits a singular instance, paradoxical as it may appear, of a people in a comparatively low grade of civilisation, possessing and using a language copious, precise, and in some respects highly philosophical. And this circumstance naturally suggests deeply interesting inquiries, not only in reference