

III.—*The Fiji Islands.* By M. BENSUSAN.

Read, April 14, 1862.

THIS group of islands is the finest in the South Seas. Distant about 1800 miles from Sydney and 2200 from Melbourne, they extend from 15° 30' to 20° 30' south latitude, and from 177° east to 178° west longitude. The group contains 180 reef-bound islands, 80 only of which are inhabited. Together they cover an area of about 40,000 square miles.

They were discovered by the Dutch navigator Abel Jansen Tasman in 1643, and were subsequently visited by Captain Cook and by Captain Bligh in 1792; they were surveyed by Commodore Wilkes, of the United States Exploring Expedition, in the years 1839-40-41-42-43. Commodore Wilkes published a most interesting narrative of the expedition, and likewise a large and minute chart of the group, which I believe to be the best of the day.* Captain Denham since then examined the group in H.M.S. *Herald*, and published a chart of the Archipelago.

The population has been estimated by some at 300,000; by Commodore Wilkes at 133,000; and by others at 200,000; which last estimate I believe to be most correct.

It is certainly a difficult matter to arrive at even an approximate census in such a country: firstly, because very few Europeans penetrate into the mountains to form their own idea of the population; and secondly, because the natives' ideas of calculation are very limited, for if you inquire of a native how many people live on such a mountain, he will be sure to say an immense number; but it is impossible to learn from his description whether he means one hundred or two thousand.

In 1804 a number of convicts having escaped from New South Wales, twenty-seven of them settled here. Engaging in warfare for and against certain native chiefs, these men, through strife and excesses, soon decreased in numbers. In 1806 the group was visited by trading-vessels, for the purpose of procuring *bêche-de-mer* and sandal-wood for the China markets; and in 1809 the brig *Eliza* was wrecked on the Nairi reef, and a Swede of the name of Savage, passenger in her, saved a portion of her cargo, consisting of muskets and gunpowder, and taught the natives the use of fire-arms. This made him very popular, universally feared, and respected. Prior to this event the only Fijian weapons were clubs and spears, and these they were in the habit of using both cowardly and cruelly. Even to this day every man carries a club, stuck in

* Admiral J. Erskine visited these islands in the years 1849-50, and published his Journal in 1853.—ED.

his scanty apparel, in the daytime ; and when he abandons himself to repose, his first care is safely to deposit his weapon so that it is ready to his hand.

“So beautiful,” says Commodore Wilkes, “was the appearance of the islands, that I could scarcely bring my mind to the realizing sense of the well-known fact that they were the abode of a savage, ferocious, and treacherous race of cannibals.”

At the east end of the group the Asiatic peculiarities prevail, dying away as we go westward, and giving place to an African, though not negro type.

Until lately a strict observance of their brutal custom to slaughter all shipwrecked or distressed foreigners who may have been cast on their inhospitable shores, has tended to maintain intact the aboriginal race.

The people at the east end of the group are much finer built than those to the westward ; the former possessing a mixture of Tongese blood in their veins, and being in some cases really handsome, somewhat resembling the natives of New Zealand.

In the year 1840 only one of the escaped convicts who had settled there, an Irishman of the name of Paddy Connor, survived. He was fighting-man for the King of Rewa ; and his influence among the natives was so great, that all his desires, some of which were of the most inhuman kind, were gratified : the King of Rewa always avenging, and often in the most cruel way, any real or fancied wrongs done to this man.

Viti Levu is the largest and most populous island in the group : it is 87 miles long by 57 miles broad, possesses a copper-mine, noticed and placed in Capt. Denham's chart, plenty of marshy land suitable for growing rice, and very fine timber. The British Government forwarded instructions to Consul Pritchard, about the middle of the year 1860, to explore the interior of this island.

Vanna Levu is the name of the other large island, which is 100 miles long by 25 miles broad, and supposed to contain about 20,000 heathens. There are in it mountains rising 4000 to 5000 feet above the level of the sea.

The island of Ovalau measures 8 miles from north to south, and 7 miles broad : it possesses a fine harbour on the eastern side, called Levuka, which is quite equal to an artificial dock. Vessels can always procure wood and water there, and the highest part of the island is about 2000 feet above the level of the sea. It has always been the favourite residence of the whites, and must continue to be so from its peculiarly central position with regard to the remainder of the group. Though it is not a productive island, the east side being all barren rock and the natives being more indolent than they are in other parts of the Archipelago, nevertheless there is a resident missionary and schoolmaster, an English, American,

and Hawaiian Consul, and a number of good mechanics. To illustrate the partiality that white men have for residing in Levuka, I can only say that the whole town has been destroyed by fire on various occasions, and has always been rebuilt on the same spot. There are two never-failing streams, having their source in the mountains, and nothing can exceed the calm beauty of many of the spots irrigated by these rivulets: magnificent drooping willows overhang the water, and convert the meandering stream into a luxurious bathing-place, sheltered, cool, and most conducive to health. H.B.M. Consul, William Thomas Pritchard, endeavoured to form a township at the south-east end of the island of Ovalau, and styled it Port Kinnaird, in compliment to the Hon. Arthur Kinnaird, who is reported to take great interest in the development of the resources of the Fijian Archipelago; but the access to and egress from this port and settlement are so difficult for ships, whether large or small, that no captain will ever take a vessel there unless compelled. Bureta, which is the native name of the land adjoining Port Kinnaird, must necessarily be disagreeable and very unhealthy, being entirely deprived of the trade-wind by its geographical position, and infested with mosquitoes. Port Kinnaird was formerly the residence of some white men, but was abandoned on account of its unfavourable position.

Moturiki is a very fine though small island: it is partly joined by a reef to Ovalau.

Wakaia, the island so favourably noticed by Commodore Wilkes, is owned by an American gentleman of the medical profession, now acting as United States Consul. This island is the residence of many of the half-castes, and is well stocked with pigs, cattle, poultry, rabbits, and various descriptions of game.

The valleys of Somu-Somu are well adapted to agricultural purposes, and the island of Kantavu abounds in very beautiful furniture timber. The remainder of the islands, except Bau, the capital, are unimportant. Bau is the residence of King Thakambau, his wives, children, and other members of the royal family. Thakambau, or, as he is often called, the Vanivalo, meaning the General, is a man about the middle height, copper-coloured, and about fifty years of age. He is highly intelligent, and fond of the society of white men: he has a large and handsome family, the younger branches of which he is desirous of having educated in Europe.

Lakemba is the largest island in the eastern part of the group, and is the headquarters of the Wesleyan missionaries. This mission was established about the year 1835, and the progress it has made is almost incredible.

Considering the proximity of the islands to the equator, they are neither hot nor sickly—the fierceness of the sun's heat being tempered by the cool breezes from the wide surface of the ocean. The

mean temperature of the group is about 80°, and 87° in the summer months; the extremes are 60° and 120°. One of the principal diseases is called dthoke: it has somewhat the appearance of small-pox, though far more disfiguring and formidable; it causes the body to break out in large ulcers, and is accompanied with rheumatic pains in the bones. It usually attacks children, and lasts from nine months to three years, frequently proving fatal. My slight pathological knowledge and my close study of the subject lead me to think that it arises from poor living, too much vegetable diet, and exposure to damp. Rheumatism is prevalent, and a species of elephantiasis, which, however, invariably leaves the patient with a change of air and climate. Cases of dysentery, pulmonary complaints, fevers, and ophthalmia, are very rare; and such Europeans as live temperately usually enjoy very good health.

I will now proceed to examine the character of the people, together with their barbarous habits and customs; and I fear that the result must leave with you, as it has with me, a most unfavourable opinion of the Fijians. In the first place, they are addicted to thieving, and, with all their ferocity, are very great cowards. They tell falsehoods, even when the truth would better answer their purpose: a man that is expert at mendacity is looked upon as a very accomplished individual. Covetousness, which is a great incentive to vice, is a strong feature in the Fijian character: the more one gives them, the more they want. In the year 1849 the former king of Somu-Somu wished to collect the people into the town in which he was residing, for the purpose of having them all under his eye; and the person ordered to communicate his desire was instructed to baze everybody who refused to obey the royal commands.

Thakambau, who has been formerly a most desperate cannibal, is the sovereign chief of Bau, and the most powerful chief in the group at the present day. He is not acknowledged at the east end of the group, and his authority is not so great as it formerly was. A few years since he would go to an island with ten or twenty tuns of empty casks, call the inhabitants together, and desire them to make sufficient cocoanut-oil to fill those casks within a stipulated time, intimating that if disobeyed the casks should be filled with the heads of all those who had failed to execute his commands; but, thanks to missionary labours, such tyranny no longer exists.

These people possess a root, highly prized all over the South Seas, called kava (*Piper methisticum*), of which they make a narcotic drink, called yangona. The process of manufacture of this is curious and original: it is masticated by young girls, spit out into a large bowl, and then mixed with water. After being squeezed and strained it is ready for use, and tastes very much like a mixture of Turkey rhubarb and soapsuds. They are in the habit of drinking

toasts and sentiments, as we do with wine, and one of their favourite ones is a *long pig*; by which they mean, may they soon have a cooked human being to eat. They likewise have innumerable brutal practices. Women are strangled with their own consent when their husbands die, thereby desiring to demonstrate to their late husbands' friends and relations their sincere affection for the departed; in short, they live and die like martyrs. Old men and women are often buried alive by their own children, from the idea they entertain that they are perfectly useless when old, and that their spirits are dead if their bodies be alive. Mr. Williams, one of the missionaries, relates a curious illustration of this practice. Mr. Hunt was called upon one day by a young man, requesting he would pray for the spirit of his mother, who was dead. On inquiry, the young man told him that his brothers and himself were going to bury her. Mr. Hunt accompanied the young man, telling him he would follow in the funeral procession and do as he desired him, supposing, of course, that the corpse would be brought along; but on meeting the procession, the young man said to him that this was the funeral, and pointed to his mother, who was walking along with them. Mr. Hunt naturally expressed his surprise to the young man, and inquired how he could deceive him by saying that his mother was dead: in reply to which he said he had made her death-feast and was now going to bury her, as she was very old; that his brothers and himself considered she had lived long enough, and that it was time to bury her; that she had given her consent to the proceeding. He added that it was from pure love for his mother that he had acted thus. Mr. Hunt did all in his power to prevent such a horrible crime; but the only reply he could obtain to his entreaties was, that she was his mother and he her child, and that they had a right to do what mutually pleased them. On reaching the grave, when all, including children, grandchildren, relations, and friends, took an affectionate leave of her, a rope was put round her neck by her own sons, who strangled her, after which she was put into the grave with the usual ceremonies. When a man, woman, or child is ill with a lingering disease, the unfortunate victim is strangled by his or her relatives. I heard of a man who ran a spear through his leg on the death of his child, I presume to make him feel the loss. It is a common practice to lop off one of their fingers on the death of a relative; and on the death of the former king of Somu-Somu, 100 little fingers were amputated, fastened to reeds and stuck in the thatch of the king's house, as a mark of respect. Self-immolation is by no means rare, they believing that as they leave this world so they remain ever after; that is to say, that by terminating their lives in youth, they will remain young in the land of spirits.

Cannibalism is one of their institutions; it still forms one of their

pursuits (out of sight of white men), and is regarded by the mass as a refinement. This is a subject of such a revolting nature and such painful interest, that, until recently, there were many who refused to believe in its existence in modern times; but such incredulity has been forced to yield to indisputable and repeated evidence. Late in the year 1851, fifty bodies were cooked and eaten at one time at Namena. The various ways in which these atrocities have been committed are really too disgusting to be related. Whatever may have been the original cause of that abominable practice in Fiji, whether famine or superstition, there is not the slightest excuse for its continuance at the present time. Food of every kind abounds (with the exception of butchers' meat), and the spontaneous supply of it is undoubtedly sufficient to feed ten times the number of inhabitants. The relation of their cannibal atrocities would be sufficient to make one's hair stand on end. They, however, have been daily diminishing since the settlement of the Wesleyan missionaries, and we may hope that they will be totally discontinued in the course of a short time. Thus far we find that the Fijians are notorious for lying, thieving, murder, and cannibalism. I shall add one more crime to the list which I do not find mentioned by any author—that of incendiarism. When a native owes a grudge to a white man, that is his system of revenge.

An examination of their religious system is attended with considerable difficulty: their traditional mythology is dark, vague, and perplexing. Nevertheless an idea of the Deity is familiar to the Fijian, and the existence of an invisible, superhuman power, controlling all earthly things, is fully recognized by him. Idolatry, in the strict sense of the term, seems never to have been known, for they make no attempt to furnish material representations of their gods, as is done in the Solomon group, to worship the heavenly bodies, the elements, or any natural objects: nevertheless they reverence certain stones as shrines of their gods, and regard certain clubs with superstitious respect. Nearly every town or village has one or more Bures or Temples; no pains being spared for their erection and finish. The Bure is a very useful place; it is the council-chamber, and small parties of strangers are often entertained in it. Though built expressly for the purposes of religion, it is less devoted to them than to any others. It is generally in these temples that their priests pretend to become inspired, though occasionally they do the same in private houses, and even in the open air. These priests are mere fortune-tellers, invariably pretending to be inspired by their mythological gods to enable them to foretell the result of a war, or the accomplishment of a marriage. When anybody consults them, he places a whale's

tooth (an article highly prized in Fiji, and formerly a sort of currency) and a dish of scented oil before the priest: the latter then anoints himself with the same, and on receiving the tooth, regards it with deep and serious attention; he then becomes absorbed in thought, and all eyes watch him with unblinking steadiness. In a few minutes he trembles; slight distortions are seen on his face, and twitching movements in his limbs: these increase to a violent muscular action, until his whole frame is convulsed, and the man shivers as if he were in a fit of ague. In some instances this is accompanied with murmurs and sobs. The priest is then thought to be possessed by his god, and all his words and actions are considered as no longer his own, but those of the deity who has entered into him. While giving the answer to any question put to him, his eyes stand out and roll as if he were in a frenzy; his voice is unnatural, his face pale, his lips livid, his breathing depressed, and his entire appearance like that of a furious madman. Perspiration runs from every pore, tears start from his eyes, and it really needs a person of very strong nerve to be an eye-witness to such a perfect piece of acting without feeling some emotion.

The Fijian language belongs to the Malay or Polynesian type, and, according to Mr. Williams, there are fifteen different dialects; though some bear resemblance to each other, there are many of them very different. I believe most of the missionaries are acquainted with a great many of them, as they have already translated the Scriptures into four different ones:—Bau, Rewa, Somu-Somu, and Lakemba.

The Fijian language is admitted to be the richest of any in the South Seas. A Fijian Dictionary and Grammar have been published by the Wesleyan Missionary Press, by the late much lamented Dr. David Hazlewood:—Good morning, *si yandra*; good night, *sa mothe*; one, *ndua*; two, *erua*; three, *dolu*; four, *vaa*; five, *lima*; six, *onu*; seven, *vitu*; eight, *valu*; nine, *eva*; ten, *teene*; one hundred, *ndua ndrau*; one thousand, *ndua undolu*.

Most of the words in Polynesian languages are in one or two syllables.

As the wealth of countries depends on the amount of value of what they export, it will be essentially necessary to commence by referring to what they do export, and then point out *how* those exports could be increased. By my calculation 150 to 200 tuns per annum of cocoanut-oil is exported from Fiji; and before proceeding any further I will explain the different processes of manufacture. They take about fifty nuts in Fiji to make a gallon of oil, as the substance is scraped out of the shell and then boiled, by which process all the liquid evaporates except the oil. In the islands more to the eastward the substance

scraped out of the shell is put into a canoe moored close to the beach, and left to rot in the sun, which takes about ten days. In some places they make a gallon of oil from fifteen nuts, and in others they require more than fifty; partly owing to the quality of the nut, and partly from the ingenuity of the natives in the process of manufacture. With hydraulic presses of course much more oil is obtained, though a great deal depends on the soil and position of the trees, which should be grown on a sandy soil, as close to the sea as possible, and exposed to the sun and sea air. The nuts that grow inland are very small and poor, the trees bearing only half the quantity of those on the coast. The prime of life of a cocoa-nut tree is from ten to forty years. About 50 tons of *bêche-de-mer*, which is a smoke-dried sea-slug taken off the reefs, has of late been annually exported, though 600 tons have frequently been shipped direct to Manilla in twelve months. It is highly prized in China for making soup, and is considered by the Chinese a great delicacy. The consumption of this *bêche-de-mer* has considerably fallen off of late years in China, in consequence of a substitute called the mutton-fish having been shipped in large quantities from California to China at a much lower cost.

About 2000 lbs. weight of tortoise-shell is annually obtained in the group. About 100 tons of pearl-shell could be annually obtained if natives of neighbouring islands were introduced to dive for the purpose. Some very valuable pearls have likewise been found. Spars have lately been shipped, and the wood is valuable and very beautiful for furniture-making. With regard to the growth of cotton—that being the all-absorbing topic of the day—I find in Baines's 'History of Cotton Manufacture' the following observations, which appear to me remarkably applicable to the Fijis:—“The plant flourishes most, and produces cotton of the very finest quality, on the sea-coast. The most valuable cotton known is the Sea Island, and is so valuable only because it is grown in close proximity to the sea.” I take for granted that everybody is aware of the fact that cotton has been successfully sown, grown, and gathered, in this archipelago. Indigo, tobacco, tea, coffee, sugar, and rice, could all be cultivated with facility, so far as the climate and soil go; but the real stop to all such enterprise is the actual want of native labour—the natives will positively not work. People inquire why they will not work. My answer is, because they have no wants. The spontaneous supply of food far exceeds their wants. They make their own scanty dresses, build their own houses, their own canoes; make their own mats to lie upon, their own cooking-utensils of pottery; and they are independent of the white man, though they fear him, and respect his ingenuity.

Printed cottons, hardware, groceries, spirits of the lowest quality,

and many other articles, which are unsaleable elsewhere, are shipped thence for barter. A good many people are engaged in trade there, but there is plenty of room for more. Of late, people have purchased land for sheep-farming. For agriculture the Fijians surpass all the natives of Western Polynesia: they grow varieties of yams, and occasionally two crops a year. Their ordinary yams weigh from 6 to 12 lbs., and extraordinary ones from 30 to 100 lbs. Sugar-cane grows well, and ripens in about fourteen months: the canes girt from 3 to 7 inches, and the leaves are used for thatching. There are some fine orange-groves in the vicinity of Rewa, and some small cargoes have been shipped thence to New Zealand. They build fine large double-canoes, some 100 feet long by 25 feet beam, and 60 feet mast. These are singularly different from every other description of naval architecture, as the sails are made the shape of a kite—that is to say, large at the top and narrow at the bottom. These sails are made of matting, and are sewn together with large sail-needles made of the shin-bones of men. Their mats, fans, baskets, and pottery are worth noticing. The arts of wig-making and hair-dressing are most ingenious; and when a chief's hair is dressed for an occasion, almost every hair of his head is separately curled, the operation usually occupying many hours. The women generally wear their hair cut close. About five pounds' worth of merchandise will pay for building a good native house, water-tight, cool in summer, and warm in winter. The cost of living is very trifling. The duties of the Fijian chiefs allow them much leisure time, as their only occupations are feasting and fighting. They have generally two or three attendants about their persons, who feed them, make and light their cigars, made out of native-grown tobacco, which is very good, and rolled in dried banana-leaves. An attendant priest and a number of wives complete the retinue of Fijian royalty. The dignity of a Fijian chief used to be estimated by the number of his wives, varying from ten to a hundred. Most of them are now Christianized, and live ostensibly with only one. Rank is hereditary, descending through the female: an arrangement customary nearly all over the South Seas.

It is by foreign commerce and capital that the resources of these islands must be developed, and a sufficient degree of material prosperity attained.
