

The standpoint from which I wish to discuss the question is that of a person whose only reason for being in Fiji at all is the welfare of the natives, and who views Federation not as it may affect the commercial interests of the European population, but as it bears on the condition and prospects of the Fijians themselves.

What would be the effect of Federation on them? To answer this question it is necessary to ask another: Has the present Crown Colony Government proved so successful in its relation to the natives that it ought to be perpetuated? Let us review the situation.

For several reasons Fiji is an interesting country to the student of political economy. Nowhere else is afforded the opportunity of watching an experiment in governing such as we witness here; and there is nothing so valuable as practical experiments in estimating the work of theories. For that reason I have watched carefully the progress of government in this country. I have never been one of those whose chief recreation lies in abuse of the Government, and who are by long habit unable to distinguish between good and bad. It has been my aim to judge calmly and dispassionately, and to view affairs from the point of those who are responsible for the administration of the Government. The following are the results of my observations:—

1. The Fiji Government has committed itself to the maintenance of the communal system. When the cession of the group took place a sort of communal system was found in existence. It would, perhaps, be more correct to say that it was a despotism in which the chiefs were the tyrants. They held sole possession of the lives and property of the population, while the mass of the people were communal in complete subservience to the chiefs. It seemed easy for the new Government to extend and crystallize this system. It was much easier than to face the problem of emancipating the people from its thralldom, and so grew up a code of Ordinances whose effect has been to give the chance communism of the old Fiji all the force of law in the new. I assume for the sake of brevity that my readers are sufficiently informed concerning the present communal system to obviate the necessity of my entering into greater detail. To this system the Fiji Government is committed, and to all appearance irrevocably committed. I venture to say that the perpetuation of the communal system has been a great mistake.

Those who know natives well, know that what they most lack, and what, if they are ever to be true men, they must somehow acquire, are the qualities of mind and soul that are expressed in our word "character." But character is just what the natives have not. We who work for and among them know too painfully how deficient in all manly qualities they are. Courage, honour, firmness, perseverance, pure ambition, truthfulness, unselfishness—these and kindred qualities are all too rare. Let me say here that the natives are not generally hypocrites as many thoughtlessly say; they mean well, but being deficient in character they are weak and the victims of circumstances. They do mentally and morally what many others, not only natives, do temporarily—live from hand to mouth; and so are mere opportunists, whose conduct under the ordinary circumstances of life may never be foretold.

But environment has everything to do with growth of character. Place any number of men in situations requiring certain qualities of mind, and the axiom will be verified that occasions produce the men to deal with them; and vital objection to socialism is that it obliterates individuality, and communism is only another name for socialism. Herd men together like sheep, take away from them all incentive and ambition, impose on them a legal code that stops all outlet for individual effort, stifle all expressions of individual opinion, and the result most assuredly will be the annihilation of all character and the production of a placid race of mental and moral invertebrates.

This has been the result of the communal system developed and perpetuated by the Fiji Government. The policy of the Wesleyan Mission in its synods and church courts has been to promote individualism among the natives. Freedom of discussion, room for the exercise of judgment, and a share in the legislation and administration of ecclesiastical affairs—these have always been conceded. The policy of the Government has been, and is now more than ever, the direct opposite to this. The Councils are a mere matter of form, and are dominated by officials; and the will of the people gives place always to the personal will of the Governor. Freedom of discussion and the expression of private opinion are effectively checked by such laws as that of *Vakaturubucca*, an Ordinance wide enough to catch even the most wary. In such environment a nation of men cannot be formed. It is not being formed in Fiji.

2. The communal system is bound up with the maintenance of the poll-tax. I do the Government no wrong when I say the natives are governed principally in the interests of that tax. When I read the report of the Commission on the decrease of the native population, I was struck with the use of the argument that it was desirable to preserve the native race because its extinction meant a serious loss of revenue to the Government. We are witnessing just now a new departure in the operations of the Provincial Inspectors. I have good reason for saying that the work of those Inspectors is regulated to suit the exigencies of the poll-tax. If an Inspector whose mind rises a bit above fitting up ditches and erecting bamboo fences suggests any radical measure for the improvement of the natives, he is met by the objection that his proposal might interfere with the collection of the poll-tax. And what do we see, therefore? That the people are being brought in off the land and huddled together in villages of area so limited that conversation in one house may be overheard in the next, and the inhabitants are not able to keep a domestic animal—not even a militant rooster and his attendant hens. Villages are removed from fertile valleys and placed on the roadsides; a village at all roomy is contracted, and all to make the people more easily get-at-able in the interests chiefly of the poll-tax. For the same reason the natives are bound to their villages most of the year, and it has come to pass that, though we have in Fiji upwards of thirty-five thousand able-bodied men, traders and planters needing a few weeks or days of casual labour frequently cannot obtain a man. In travelling through the interior of Viti Levu I have been painfully impressed by the lovely fertile lands all desolate of people, while the owners are compelled to congregate in small villages, and it has more than once been forced on my mind that the true policy