

REPORTS

ON THE

NAVIGATION, TRADE, AND SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE FIJI ISLANDS.

(Part Return to an Order, in continuation of Return presented 9th August, 1870.)

“That a Correspondence between the Superintendent of Auckland and the British Consul at Fiji, on the Trade and Social Condition of Fiji, as published in the Auckland *Provincial Gazette*, be printed.”

(Mr. Williamson.)

WELLINGTON.

—
1870.

REPORTS ON THE NAVIGATION, TRADE, AND CONDITION OF THE FIJI ISLANDS.

No. 1.

REPORT by JOHN B. THURSTON, H.M. Consul in Fiji and Tonga, for the Year 1866.

THE following Statement of the Tonnage and Shipping employed in the trade with Fiji during 1866 shows a slight increase on that of the preceding year:—

Estimated aggregate tonnage, 1865, 3,326; 1866, 4,024.

Number of ships employed—British, 1865, 23; 1866, 27. Foreign (Hamburgh), 1865, 3; 1866, 3.

QUANTITY and Value of Exports during 1866, compared with the two preceding Years.

ARTICLE.		1864.		1865.		1866.	
		Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.
			£		£		£
Cotton (clean)	cwts.	650	3,000	2,400	9,200	5,880	19,800
Cocoonut Oil	tons	600	13,200	500	11,000	450	9,000
Cocoa Fibre	cwts.	1,600	2,150	1,000	1,500	...	...
Beche-de-Mer	piculs	350	960	500	1,200	300	600
Tortoise Shell	lbs.	500	250	750	375	2,000	1,000
Wool	lbs.	6,100	240	10,120	400	8,396	320
Provisions, &c. ... ..	...	...	...	...	500	...	250
			£19,800		£24,175		£30,970

The quantities of imports cannot be accurately ascertained, on account of the irregular nature of the Island trade. The following is an approximate estimate of their value during 1866:—

	£	s.	d.
Manchester Goods	10,000	0	0
Ironmongery, Cutlery	7,000	0	0
Wine, Beer, Spirits	3,000	0	0
Ship Chandlery	1,500	0	0
Groceries, Provisions,	2,000	0	0
Wearing Apparel	500	0	0
Tobacco	500	0	0
Machinery, Agricultural Implements	700	0	0
	£25,200	0	0

At the commencement of the year the prospects of the white settlers in Fiji seemed most favourable. The success which had attended the cultivation of the cotton, the introduction of foreign labour, and the arrival of additional settlers with capital, induced us to form most sanguine hopes of the rapid advancement of Fiji.

On the 8th of January, however, a violent hurricane passed between the two larger islands of Fiji, lasting sixteen hours, and severely injuring the district in its course. The effects were confined within a space of sixty miles in breadth, outside of which no traces of its passage appeared. The cotton planters had hardly repaired the damages which their property had sustained from this visitation, when a second storm burst over the entire group, committing still greater devastation. The cocoa-nut and bread-fruit trees especially suffered. Two-thirds of the cotton trees were twisted out of the ground, and the most advanced plantations, on the banks of the river, were inundated and swept away. The yam and tara crops were destroyed, and many flourishing coffee plantations buried in the silt brought down by the floods. Such violent cyclones, it is well to know, are rare in Fiji, and one of equal force has not been felt here for twenty years. The cotton planters, men of small means, who had invested all in their plantations, were reduced to great distress; but seeing the necessity of rapid exertion to repair the evil, they began their labour anew, clearing the land and planting the seed afresh. A long drought, which generally in these latitudes follows such violent storms, has however somewhat checked the growth of the plants.

Had this year been as favourable as the preceding one, there was reason to expect that the exports from Fiji would have been four times the quantity of last year; but the destruction of the nut trees and cotton crops, and likewise the loss of many of the small craft which carry on the Island trade, gave a severe check to the progress and industry of the country, which it will take some time to recover from.

The advent of fresh settlers has, however, done much in inspiring those whose resolution sank with their fortunes. There are likewise less difficulties than heretofore attending the sale of lands; and the great obstacle to progress—want of labour in sufficient quantity—is being gradually overcome by the introduction of native labour from the surrounding islands. With increased capital has come a more careful system of cultivation, the introduction of a better description of food for the labourers.

and likewise the assistance of steam power in ginning, cleaning, and pressing the cotton. The Brazilian seed has been superseded by the Sea Island and Egyptian, as these are found to produce more rapidly and more profitably. The Sea Island being a low-growing plant, the crop is readily picked by women and children; the trees are planted 1,000 to the acre, occupying each a space of 6 feet 6 inches square; each tree produces on an average one pound of clean cotton annually. A Native labourer can attend to three acres, and his wages, with the cost of his food, &c., amounts to about £6 sterling per annum. The high price which cotton fetches at present cannot be considered a fair estimate for the future; but considering from the current prices before the war in the United States, the profits to the planters from Sea Island cotton cannot fall below £40, and from Egyptian £25 per acre.

The floods in the year destroyed many of the coffee plantations in Fiji. As few were over two years' growth, this mischief is soon remedied. Coffee planters from Ceylon, who have visited these Islands during the present year, speak in high terms of Fiji and Tonga as coffee-producing countries. For the present, however, cotton, the poor man's crop, which yields a return in four months from the sowing, engages the attention of our settlers; and although many, foreseeing the great advantages to be derived, have also turned their attention to coffee, which gives no crop before the third year, it has not yet received the consideration which its importance merits.

The fertility of the soil in Fiji, and the general salubrity of its climate, continue to attract many settlers from the Australian and New Zealand Colonies. Many are accompanied by their wives and families; and there is every reason to believe that they will occupy without opposition the lands which they have purchased.

The white population at the present time in Fiji amounts to about 400 souls, 31 of whom are women, and 53 children under twelve years of age.

The prosperity of this country is secured whenever the cotton yield is sufficiently great to warrant a direct trade with Europe, which point we may, at the present rate of increase, arrive at in about two years' time.

The exports at present all go to Sydney, paying a freight of 70s. per ton; and the high additional charge for brokerage, wharfage, storage, &c., shears away at least 30 per cent. of the planter's profits.

The poverty of the planters has hitherto placed them at the mercy of the Sydney traders, forcing them to depend on the latter for their trade goods necessary for carrying on their work; and also to sell their produce at the price which their creditors choose to offer.

Auckland, in New Zealand, is naturally the depot for the South Sea Island trade; it is one-third of the distance nearer to Fiji than Sydney is. As the prevailing winds are fair, both for going and returning, merchandise from Europe can be landed there and at the same prices, in about the same time as at Sydney, and the return voyage is much shorter; in addition to which, the mail by the new route of Panama will give the latest quotations of the English markets, and allow the Island traders to make their arrangements accordingly. It is much to be hoped that during the coming year the merchants of Auckland will endeavour to secure for their port the increasing trade of the South Sea Islands.

The want of roads has not as yet, made itself felt in Fiji; the settlers find good land in sufficient quantities on the sea coast or on the banks of navigable streams, and the great number of these latter have materially assisted in developing the natural resources and increasing the trade of the country. As the Islands are for the most part of volcanic origin, intersected in all directions by irregular mountain masses, the expense attending road-making would hardly have been brought within the means at the disposal of the inhabitants. Fortunately the rivers of Fiji will suffice for all purposes of trade and internal communication for some years to come. The interior of Fiji is now sufficiently well known—many parties having crossed the land during the last two years. The South-eastern third of the Island is thickly timbered, very fertile, and, from its exposure to the trade winds, subject to continual rains. This district is bounded by the crests of the highest mountains in the interior, about 5,000 feet high, wooded to the summits on the windward slopes. Outside this district the country is composed of clay hills, covered with coarse reeds, lemon-grass, and patches of the ironwood. As there are no forests to retain the soil in its place, the heavy tropical rains have washed it into the valleys, and cut deep fissures in the marly clay, and rendering the mountainous districts of the North-west useless, except as grazing grounds for cattle. The valleys, however, are exceedingly fertile, and the finest samples of tobacco and sugar are produced there.

The population is very scanty in the interior of Fiji, but traces of ruined villages and abandoned cultivation everywhere abound. There can be but little doubt that this desolation is entirely due to the ferocious character of their tribal wars, in which the victors were satisfied with nothing short of the complete extermination of their vanquished foes.

As yet there is no inducement for the traders to increase their intercourse with the interior of Fiji. The natives possess nothing of commercial value. No oil is made there, as cocoanut trees are only found fringing the coast. Cotton-planting has not yet occupied their attention. Cattle may, in the course of time, prove profitable, as large herds could be pastured on the grassy hills to the West. Few, however, of the white settlers are inclined to embark in any untried speculation, more especially while cotton-planting proves so profitable, requires so small an outlay, and is attended with comparatively little risk. It is, however, much to be regretted that no form of civilized government exists in Fiji—every attempt to introduce such having failed, through the indifference of the people and the faithlessness of the chiefs. No improvement in this respect can be hoped for during the lifetime of the present rulers, who, although professing Christianity, adopt nothing from the whites but their vices.

As the settlers are now making every exertion to extend the cultivation of cotton, it is earnestly to be hoped that their increasing industry may not be cheated, and the country retained in wanton opposition by barbarism on the part of the native chiefs.

Whenever the community increases sufficiently in wealth and members, its influence will, undoubtedly, be felt in the general management of the country. Until this takes place, they must be dependent for protection on the representatives of their different Governments, assisted by the ships of war which from time to time visit these Islands.

No. 2.

REPORT by JOHN B. THURSTON, H.M. Consul in Fiji and Tonga, for the Year 1867.

THERE has been a slight decrease in the aggregate tonnage of shipping visiting the Ports of Levuka and Rewa, during the past year.

This can be partly accounted for by the withdrawal of one or two ships from the trade, and to their being replaced by vessels of less capacity, but better adapted to insular navigation.

The trade of this group is at present carried on by British vessels, sailing from ports in the adjoining colonies.

The following statement shows the number of ships and gross tonnage entered, compared with last year :—

	1866.	1867.
British ships entered	27	24
Foreign	3	1
Gross tonnage	4,024	3,797

During the past year three small vessels have been built, measuring respectively 30, 40, 45 tons.

The number of small craft, belonging chiefly to British residents, occupied in Island traffic, amount at the present time to 18, measuring in the aggregate about 350 tons.

As the cultivation of cotton and other products, now engaging the attention of the settlers, progresses, it will be necessary to build or purchase other small vessels, for the purpose of collecting the various articles from outlying districts, where it would not be safe or expedient for a large ship to proceed.

There is a prospect of an enterprising Sydney firm despatching a ship direct from this port to London or Liverpool, during the coming year. Not having a recognized Government at Fiji, there are no port charges, dues, or imposts of any nature.

The navigation of the group is open with safety from April until December, during which time the South-east trade winds prevail. From January until April, the winds are variable, frequently blowing with great violence from the north and north-west, attended with heavy rains.

Commerce.

The following comparative table will indicate the progress this group has made during the past year :—

ARTICLE.		1865.		1866.		1867.	
		Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.
Cotton	...	2,400	£ 9,200	5,880	£ 19,800	7,586	£ 34,004
Cocoonut Oil	...	500	11,000	450	9,000	150	3,260
Beche-de-Mer	...	500	1,200	300	600	880	1,600
Wool	...	10,120	400	8,396	320	469	134
Tortoise Shell	...	750	375	2,000	1,000	1,700	812
Coir	...	50	1,500	Nil.	...	Nil.	...
Figs, Fruit, &c.	...	...	500	...	250	...	150
			£24,175		£30,970		£39,960

In addition to the above return are cash remittances, the amount of which cannot be estimated.

The imports do not exceed, so far as I can ascertain, the estimate formed for the year 1866.

However, during the past year, many of the immigrants from the adjoining Colonies are of a class possessing some means, and have imported a considerable amount of trade and barter on their own account.

The total value of imports may approximate,—

By Traders	£26,000
By Settlers	3,000
	£29,000

The satisfactory increase in the value of exports, is owing to the success attending the cultivation of cotton. It will be observed by referring to the foregoing table, that cocoonut oil, formerly the principal export, has in quantity fallen short of what might have been expected. This, however, can be explained.

Cotton.

The expense in shipping cotton to the Colonies is excessive, and has a depressing effect upon the planter, which can only be removed by direct communication with England. This effected, I venture to predict that Fiji will rapidly rise to a position of commercial importance. At the present time, freight upon cotton to Sydney is from ¾d. to 1d. per lb., which is about the same rate charged for conveying thence to England.

The expenses on this article, for ginning, packing, freight, and brokerage, now consigned to England, via Sydney, amount to 4½d. per lb.

The varieties of cotton cultivated in Fiji are three in number, viz., Kidney, Egyptian, and Sea Island: for the two former an average of 9d. and 10d. per lb. has been obtained at this port; and for the latter, 1s. per lb.

To the present time no definite report has been made by the cotton brokers regarding the quality of Fijian cotton.

Private advices speak highly of them, and place their value, according to variety, from 1s. 3d. to 3s. 6d. per lb.

Oil.

The value of exports has been greatly reduced, by the small amount of oil made, compared with former years. Two years ago, these Islands suffered from a violent hurricane, from the effects of which the cocoanut trees have not recovered. Intelligent natives state, the trees require at least three years to regain their vigour after these severe storms.

Beche-de-Mer.

The Beche de Mer fisheries have been extended during the past year, particularly upon the Mathuata coast, situated upon the north side of Vanua Levu. The increase of value of export under this head has been large, and provided the exertions used to keep the petty chiefs from quarrelling are successful, will no doubt augment. The fish is sold here at per picul—140 lbs.—and at an average price of 36s. per picul. The market prices of this article fluctuate very much, being sometimes as high as 40s. per picul and as low as 24s. during consecutive months. It is shipped to Sydney, and thence to China.

Wool.

This article, as an export, is becoming less every year. Sheep-farming has hitherto resulted in disappointment to its promoters, the flocks being carried off by some disease for which the owners are unable to account. Notwithstanding the want of success hitherto attending this pursuit, large tracts of land have lately been bought by some sheep-farmers from New Zealand, who intend importing their flocks next May.

The following return will show the increase of a small flock of ewes, the increasing weight of fleece, and the gross weight of the clip during three years:—

Year.	Number of Sheep.	Station.	Weight of Fleece.	Weight of Clip.
			lbs.	lbs.
1863	440	Nanau	2,625	1,150
1864	559	Island	2,826	1,580
1865	530	Viti Levu	3,400	1,800

Tortoise Shell.

Tortoise shell is plentiful. The amount exported might be increased threefold if the Fijians were at all industrious. The value of this article has fallen greatly. A few years since it was worth 20s. per lb., now it brings in the Colonial markets 9s.

Pigs, Timber, Fruit, &c.

Very little has been exported under this head, owing to the influx of settlers during the year past. Everything the Native producer could raise in the way of food, either animal or vegetable, has scarcely sufficed to meet their requirements.

For the same reason no timber has been exported, the whole being used here for the numerous additions and improvements to the houses of the settlers. Some fruit has been exported, also maize; the latter grows very finely, and is consumed chiefly by the servants and labourers on the various plantations.

The coming year will no doubt see these Islands advance steadily in the path of prosperity. Large sums of money have lately been invested by men possessing the means to enter extensively into agricultural pursuits. A company is in the course of formation for the purpose of cultivating sugar in the Island of Taviuni, the soil of which is peculiar in richness and fertility. From the high opinion competent judges entertain of the sugar-cane now grown by the Natives, no doubt can be entertained of the success that will attend the undertaking.

Agriculture.

Under this head it is satisfactory to report some improvement. In cotton more care is now taken in the selection of seed, in the preparation of the ground, and cultivating the plant. The best season for planting cotton is from September to January. The months of July and August are generally dry, enabling the planter to uproot and burn off the weeds upon his land, and to prepare it for the genial rains of September and October. In dry months the sun is likely to strike through the soil and so injure the roots of the young plants, thus producing the disease known as "shore skin." This retards the growth of the tree. If heavy rains fall soon after planting, the seed is very liable to rot in the ground; so in many cases, owing to unpropitious weather, infinite trouble must be endured before the planter can obtain a stand of cotton. The plant appears about four days after sowing, and under favourable circumstances grows rapidly.

Sea Island cotton is generally planted in rows 6 feet by 6 feet, but some planters are drilling, as in America, the rows being 5 feet and the plants 30 inches apart. This variety grows much faster and arrives at maturity sooner than any other. I have observed the first blossoms upon a tree one month after planting; at the end of the second month the blossoms fell and the bolls appeared; at the end of the third month the bolls reached maturity, and the cotton was ready for gathering. The most experienced growers estimate each healthy tree will produce annually five pounds weight of seed cotton. There are three crops of this variety during the year; the first in January or February, the second in May or June, the third in September or October. The vicissitudes of the seasons, however, will forward or retard the ripening of the crop by a month. In ginning, this cotton loses two-thirds of its gross weight; 300 lbs. of seed cotton producing 100 lbs. of clean. Assuming that each tree would produce three pounds of seed cotton—one pound of clean fibre—one shilling, and that an acre of land planted 6 feet by 6 feet, carries 1,031 trees, the gross value annually per acre would be £51 11s.

The demand for Sea Island cotton is limited; but the diminished production of this variety in America, owing to the disorganization of labour, will probably afford the Fijian planter an opportunity of selling all he can produce at a remunerative figure for some time to come.

The Kidney and Egyptian cotton is of much larger growth, requiring to be planted 12 feet by 12 feet. It is sown in the same months as the Sea Island. The picking season is in July. A second and lighter crop can be gathered in December. The average yield of this cotton is 1,200 lbs. per acre, yielding about 350 lbs. of clean fibre, the value of which, in Fiji, is about £15 sterling.

All varieties of cotton in Fiji are perennial.

The number of bales leaving Fiji during the present season will be 2,500, of which 90 will be Sea Island; thus the remainder, say 2,400, will consist of the less valuable varieties, Egyptian, &c., &c.

A bale of cotton weighs 350 lbs., which stated as above is the produce of an acre.

I estimate the land at present in cultivation by Europeans as follows:—

Acres in cotton—Number of bales of 350 lbs.	...	...	...	2,400
Acres in cotton, coffee, corn, beans, yams, and vegetables generally,	...	...	...	800
one-third	...	...	...	1,500
Acres cleared and in course of cultivation	...	...	...	4,700
Total in cultivation	...	...	...	160,000
Estimated area of land held by Europeans	...	...	...	155,300

The cultivation is carried on by labourers obtained from the neighbouring Islands. The implements used are large knives and hoes. Like all Polynesian races, these people prefer sitting to standing whilst at any occupation, therefore they cannot be induced to work with hoes or spades, unless they be perfect toys. Nevertheless a fair amount of work is done, provided they are judiciously managed, well fed and cared for.

The expense in cultivating land in Fiji, is the same as stated in the report of 1866.

Three years back there were only two cotton gins, and windmill in all Fiji; at the present date there are about thirty gins, and five steam engines.

For short-stapled cottons the saw-gins are preferred, and for the longer, "knife-gins."

In the import of agricultural implements there is also an increase, several ploughs, harrows, and cultivators being now in use; for the working of which and for breeding purposes, seven horses and thirty-five head of cattle have been imported within the last few months.

Population.

The white population is steadily increasing. The following statement shows the number of residents subject to civilized authority:—

	British.	British Half-castes.	Total British.	American.	American Half-castes.	Total American.	Various Nationalities.
Men ...	252	85	337	31	23	54	40
Women ...	45	63	108	1	21	22	1
Children ...	114	90	204	6	57	63	2
Total ...	411	238	649	38	101	139	43

The Native population of Fiji may be roughly estimated at 100,000; they are, however, rapidly decreasing.

I have received the following authentic information of the births and deaths at three towns during the past year. The first town is situated upon the Island of Ovalau, which contains the principal port of the group, and is the residence of the greater portion of the white people. The second is at Sosi, a division of Bau, at which place only a mission family resides permanently, but Europeans call there daily. The third is Ba, upon the north-west coast of Viti Levu, where no Europeans reside and visitors are rare:—

Town.	Died.	Born.	Of which Died.
Tai ...	41	7	7
Sosi ...	27	7	4
Ba ...	60	Nil.	Nil.

A very few years ago the Island of Ovalau could send out 3,000 fighting men, now it could only muster 500 by including the lads and old men. This is not a solitary example, the ruined and deserted villages throughout the country bear testimony to the disappearance of the race.

JOHN B. THURSTON,

Port Levuka, Fiji,
December 31st, 1867.

H.M. Ag. Consul in Fiji and Tonga.

