

During a recent journey through the interior of Viti Levu I met an old man under police escort, on his way to Suva gaol. Happening to know him and also his family, I inquired the reason of his imprisonment. It was *Vakatubu ca* on two grounds. First, as town chief he opposed the appropriation of a piece of ground for tax purposes (poll-tax again) for the reason that it was required for planting food. Secondly, he opposed the removal of his village and the union of its people with another village. In this case one Provincial Inspector ordered the breadfruit-trees in the village to be cut down, and when that was done another Inspector decided to remove the village altogether. The old man opposed this, was charged with *Vakatubu ca*, and is now putting in six months for his courage. I met him on the way. He suffers from a complaint that makes walking a real torture, and this old man was sent staggering over the mountains from Rakiraki to Suva although he could have been sent round by steamer for 10s. To my thinking he has done nothing at all worthy of punishment. But that is where I think the Fiji Government has involved itself in a course that makes tyranny a necessity. To perpetuate communism and maintain the poll-tax *Lawa ni Talaidredre* and *Lawa ni Vakatubu ca* are essential, and it follows that conduct for which we applaud our Pym, our Hampdens, our Cobdens, and our Wilberforces become an indictable offence in Fiji. If Gladstone had been a Fijian, instead of his country sending him back to Parliament with an overwhelming following for denouncing the Government's cynical apathy over Bulgarian atrocities we should have seen him in a prisoners' procession in the streets of Suva, with hair cropped close and wearing a *sulu* plentifully besprinkled with broad arrows.

The Fiji Government has deprived the natives of all liberty. They pay about 40 per cent. of their gross income to the Treasury in addition to unpaid labour, they have no franchise and no representation. Their councils are under Government tutelage—one man, and one only, holds them in his hand, and when it happens that the hand is metallic and unsympathetic the natives are to be pitied. In Fiji a young man who feels the village boundaries to be too strait for him, and has aspirations and ambitions to attain to something above the rank of a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water, is met at the outset by an inflexible communal system that holds him in relentless grip. He would be a carpenter or a blacksmith, he would possess his own cottage and live on the fruits of his own labour, or he would seek for education and become in time the teacher of his fellows, but the commune says: "No, I need you to help meet my obligation; if you go, who will work for poll-tax? Who make roads? The employments you desire and the freedom they imply are not for you, but for Europeans, Indians, Polynesians, &c.; you must banish all thought of them. This little village is your world, stray beyond it at your peril; do not call yourself a man. Helot is your name, because men are free and you are bound. You may fret against the barriers, but my system must go on." And so Fijian young men may not choose their path in life nor avail themselves of opportunities that occur to them of learning trades. They may be broken in the process, but the communal system must be maintained.

5. The Fiji Government has made itself an object of hatred and dread to the natives. It rules by fear. Its foolish anxiety to regulate every detail of native life has led to the multiplication of ordinances that hedge the native round like the spikes in Regulus's barrel. The most law-abiding and well-meaning native can scarcely hope to pass through life without making frequent appearances before Magistrates to answer charges that in other countries would not be thought offences. It would be interesting to see a table for one year of punishments inflicted for offences against the Ordinances that uphold the communal and tax system. The present Governor wrote in a well-remembered message of the sheaves of Ordinances he found in Fiji. It cannot be said, however, that the burden of these sheaves has been made any lighter by the appointment of Inspectors, whose mere word, backed by *Lawa ni Talaidredre*, becomes a law; who, knowing nothing of, or caring less for, the customs and feelings of the people, ride rough-shod over them, and who, being foolishly elated by the absolute power bestowed upon them, make occasions to use it.

The Government of the natives has become a mere tyranny (I use this word in its original sense), and the greatest discontent is felt in a large part of the country. But this discontent is most voiceless; *Lawa ni Vakatubu ca* compels it to be dumb. If the test of successful Government is found in the wealth and happiness it places within reach of its subjects, the Fiji Government has miserably failed.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the natives of this country have found the present form of government anything but a blessing, and that the Government itself has been a huge and ghastly failure. The Government has not gone the right way to raise up a race of characterful people; it has rather succeeded in reducing all to one helpless level, and though the new inspectorships will give us clean villages, I am of opinion that they have got hold of the "wrong end of the stick," and that the true redemptive policy would be to break up the tribal and communal system; place the people, under efficient directorship, back on the land; help them to acquire useful animals and property; and, instead of bringing in Indians to fill our vacant areas, teach our own natives to become settlers. That would be a policy worthy of an enlightened Government, and in the end it would make the Fijians worth more to the Treasury than they are now.

Now, let us look at the attitude of the New Zealand Government to the Maoris.

In the past New Zealand made its own mistakes in dealing with its aboriginal population, and for that it has paid the price. It has also learned wisdom from its mistakes, and no one can now charge that colony with unfairness towards the Maoris.

- (1.) The Maoris have parliamentary representation.
- (2.) They have the franchise.
- (3.) They pay no poll-tax, but their equitable share of other imports.