

## No. 2.

MEMORANDUM for the DELEGATES to the CONVENTION. By Hon. R. BECKWITH LEEFE.

REFERRING, first, to population, revenue, and commerce :—

By the latest accounts, the number of whites, or persons of European and American parentage, is about 2,500, and of natives (*i.e.* Fijians), 110,000; whilst the estimated revenue from all sources, except immigration, for 1883, is £90,675, and the expenditure, exclusive, again, of immigration, is £86,985.

The imports and exports were, for 1882, £492,846, and will this year reach much larger figures, the exports alone for 1884 being estimated at very nearly half a million.

Of this revenue of £90,000, the 110,000 natives are estimated to contribute £19,000; but, as for 1881, the estimate of £18,000 was only found to realize £14,000, there is no reason, more especially as the people are gradually becoming wearied of the imposition, to suppose that it will this year produce more, showing a *per caput* rate of 2s. 7d.\* whilst the 2,500 whites have directly or indirectly to contribute some £30 per head.

For this paltry sum of under 3s. each, the natives are, for the most part, kept pottering about their towns and Government plantations, when, if the restrictions were removed, and the innate right of man to sell his labour to the highest bidder respected, they could earn each in one week more than they now take twelve months to accomplish, under the injurious system of slavery which in Fiji disgraces the British flag. If you classify the population, and reckon the adult males only at 25,000, putting on one side entirely the women, who can and do earn half as much as the men, the realized tax only represents the ridiculous sum of 11s. 2d. which a man can easily earn in a month, and be housed and fed as well.

Of the sum of £30 per head contributed by the whites, not one penny is spent by or with the advice or consent of those who have to provide this enormous amount, representation of any kind being absolutely conspicuous by its absence in this Crown Colony of a very severe type indeed.

*Justice.*—If we turn to the administration of justice, we find the same utter disregard of what is usually considered and spoken of as the innate right of every Briton, for trial by jury is, in all mixed cases, prohibited by law; so that if one coolie murders another coolie, he has the privilege of trial by jury, both being British subjects; but if an Englishman murders a Fijian (the latter being a slave under the British flag, and not a British subject by the law of Fiji) he is not allowed a jury, and, as there is practically no appeal, although the Governor has the prerogative of mercy, an Englishman is liable to be hanged without appeal, without a jury, and possibly unjustly.

*Trade.*—The policy of the Government to a great extent paralyses trade, and by its irritating measures has greatly retarded the progress of the colony. As an instance of this, I will mention *bêche-de-mer*, the export of which was, in 1879, £2,500, and increasing, but in 1882 had dwindled to £716. The way this was brought about is a good illustration.

One of the Rokos, or native governors, was cast in the Supreme Court in a fine of £20 for undue interference with a white man, who, with a complete plant—boats, punts, divers, &c.—was doing good service in developing this industry. The Roko seized the whole. Immediately afterwards, the Governor called a Council, at which only two official and no nominee members were present, and passed through all its stages in one day, “The *Bêche-de-mer* Preservation Ordinance,” which most completely succeeded in ruining both the man and the industry, the country having as well to pay the fine, by prohibiting the fishing of the reefs, God’s blessings to all his creatures, without a license, which was in turn refused (in spite of the remonstrances of one of the unofficial members), as the reefs were required for the exclusive use of the natives, to enable them to make up their quota of taxation.

*Capital.*—There is at present invested in Fiji about £1,700,000 of Australian and £300,000 or £400,000 of English capital; but this is not nearly as productive as it would be, and the amount would be much greater, but for the unwise impediments thrown in the way of labour, both domestic and foreign. The Labour Ordinance passed last January is a good illustration of the extent of these restrictions, a copy of which, with regulations made under its authority, is appended hereto. How any man accustomed to consider a British subject a free man can come to any other conclusion than that these point to a condition of slavery, is incomprehensible.

I will now mention some of the Ordinances passed, which will give some slight idea of the high-handed manner in which the colony is governed.

First comes that known as the “Deportation Ordinance,” a repetition of which is recommended by Sir George W. Des Vœux in the event of the annexation of the Pacific Islands, which provides that the Governor may, if he believes any person to be disaffected to the Queen, order his removal from his home, by force if necessary, for not more than two years, under pain, on disobedience, of arrest and imprisonment.

Another, to prevent any person other than a resident being within a certain radius of the place where the annual meeting of chiefs, or “Bose vaka Tuvaga,” is held, during the continuance of such meeting, under divers pains and penalties.

The Native-labour Ordinance, which, amongst other enactments, provides that labourers are compelled to return home after their engagement terminates, under pain of fine and imprisonment, and any employer who fails to inform his employes of this law renders himself liable to a fine of £20, or imprisonment with hard labour for one month; and also that, if a labourer goes to work for, say, twelve months, he is compelled to remain in his town for an equal length of time after his engagement terminates, under a fine of £1, or three months’ imprisonment with hard labour. These are some of the laws which press heavily on the people, natives and whites alike; and I feel certain that were the former polled to-morrow they would, if freed from Government surveillance, vote almost to a man for any change which would emancipate them from the state of serfdom in which they are now kept.

\* This is not counting what they pay indirectly, by the consumption of dutiable goods, which is unascertainable, but which cannot be great.