

Into the question of Federation and Annexation I do not propose to enter; for, whatever may be my opinion upon so important a topic after twenty years of official experience in the Western Pacific, it is foreign to the subject now occupying my attention.

The questions for consideration, after perusal of the Petition, are:—

Would Her Majesty's native subjects (who, for the purpose of acquiring adequate protection against influences they had already learned to dread, ceded the sovereignty of the islands to the Queen) be likely to benefit either by inclusion with a federate Australia, or by annexation to one of the Australian Colonies? No one, I think, who is competent to give an opinion upon the question would fail to answer in the negative. Any such scheme would result in the rapid destruction of the whole race, which Her Majesty's Government is bound by every impulse of honour and humanity to save from such a fate. The Fijian, at no great length of time, would be demoralized; the native polity of Government, and the social organization of the people, would be broken up before any other controlling power or influence could be created; and the Fijian would die off before the in-coming European settler, with his Indian or Chinese coolies, as surely as the Maori in the south and the Hawaiian in the north are dying now.

The petitioners speak of "due regard being paid to the preservation of all existing rights and privileges of the native races inhabiting this Colony:" but do they profess to ignore the fact that the existence of such rights and privileges as those to which they refer constitutes the difficulty and impossibility of acceding to their desires? Are the petitioners not aware that, apart from the question of sovereignty and protection, the position of Her Majesty's Government to the Fijians is, in every sense, tutorial; that, from the foundation of the Colony, it has been determined and repeatedly announced, that an effort would be made to open a new page in our colonial history; that for once a Colonial Government would endeavour to save a native race alive. The fact that the numbers of natives in this Colony is to that of Europeans as fifty is to one, renders it simply impossible that the rights and privileges of the former could be intrusted to the dangers and changes of party government. Nor do the natives desire it. It would of course be absurd to say that any native in the Colony is capable of understanding the bearings so important a question as a change of government both in fact and form involves; but it may be safely said that they are contented as they are, and will remain so if left alone by meddling Europeans; and, for anything else, it may be added, that the Power to which the Fijians in 1874 confided their fate must think and act for them.

As bearing upon the welfare of the natives—to which the Colonial Government has contributed, if not altogether brought about—upon their ability to purchase so large a proportion of the imports as they undoubtedly do purchase; upon their advance in civilization and progress in the management of their own local affairs—the establishment of peace and order throughout the islands may be regarded as the first cause. During the last eight years, they have raised, for the purposes of taxation, produce to the value, in Levuka, of £138,000. The value of boats and small vessels they have bought in the same period, superseding the old canoes, cannot have been less than £25,000.* When it is remembered that a few years back hardly any but the highest Chiefs, and few of these, owned a boat, the magnitude of the change may be appreciated. In the one district where sugar can be grown to advantage, a large mill being established there, the natives have grown 10,103 tons of sugar-cane in two years, worth £5,000; and as other mills go up, other native communities will follow suit. In short, while much has been left undone that ought to have been done, the advance of the Fijian in material prosperity has been immense.

Referring now for a moment to the legislation of the past, it may be said that, as regards the ordinary enactments having reference to or bearing upon the relations of Europeans, *inter se*, little or no exception has been taken. The friction, if it may be so termed, between Government and colonists is confined to laws governing the relations between the colonists and individuals or communities of the native race, such, for instance, as the Indian, Fijian, and Polynesian Labour Laws, and the regulations thereunder—laws regarding contracts with natives, cattle-trespass, and so on. It is upon such subjects as these, all intimately associated with the rights, happiness, and very existence of Her Majesty's native subjects, that Her Majesty's European subjects enter into conflict with the Government; and it is unnecessary to say that, unless Her Majesty's Government is prepared to abandon the duty of protecting these rights, it must maintain the power to govern.

It may be gathered from these observations that, so far as they go at present, I am of opinion the complaints of the petitioners are made without any reasonable cause. That discontent exists, notwithstanding the undoubtedly rapid progress of the Colony, cannot be denied; but, considering the questions which, upon the foundation of this Colony, required settlement, and having regard to the strong passions which the settlement of these questions necessarily aroused (I refer more especially to land claims), it would be very extraordinary if the hand of every man was not against the Government. In spite, however, of the conclusions to be drawn from this petition, it is not so; and I know, from the personal information of leading colonists, that there is a large and influential section of the European community wholly opposed to its purport and object.

It would conduce very much to the general contentment of this Colony, if the question of the relations of Her Majesty's Government towards the Queen's native subjects in this Colony were authoritatively set at rest, and that it were announced that between the Colonial Government and the natives no interference whatever, not even of the slightest character, would be allowed.

As an instance of the mischievous interference which barely stops short of actual activity, the following letter, appearing in the *Fiji Times* on the 7th instant (annexed), may be cited. For causes appearing to it necessary, the Government recently appointed a well-known and very able Chief to be Roko (or Chief Native Executive Officer) in the Province of Lomai Viti. An intrigue against this officer immediately began, and at one moment appeared not unlikely to lead to serious embarrass-

*£15,000 has been spent through Native Office since 1879; but there are almost as many vessels bought outside the office as through it.