

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 would be to replace the present officials—estimable gentlemen they are, too, mostly—by men who can use both head and hands to scatter the people in small holdings over their country and teach them to become crofters. It could be done, and the country would be then enriched by a native race possessing property, and the race itself, tasting the joy of possession, would strive further to acquire and have an incentive to live that is now denied to it.

About the poll-tax I observe,—

(a.) It is unjust. Polynesians and free Indians pay no special tax, why then the Fijians? Because, answers an official, the poll-tax is merely a fee paid to the British power for its protection, and the security it gives to the Fijians in possession of their country. But the Fijians, in the interests of the communal system and the allied poll-tax, are being gathered off their lands, and the areas vacated are let on easy terms to untaxed alien settlers of all and whatever kinds.

(b.) The Fijians now pay a very large amount through the Customhouse, why tax them specially? The Government not long ago announced that last year the total spendable income of the native race was over £70,000. We will add to that the amount of the poll-tax—say, £19,000—making the total income, in round numbers, £90,000. Out of that total income Government takes first the £19,000 in direct taxation, and as nearly all the remaining £70,000 is spent in articles paying duties varying from 12½ to 40 per cent., does it not appear that the Government dips its hand too deeply into the Fijian's purse?

(c.) The poll-tax hangs heavily on the people. In provinces where it is easily raised it is hateful to the Natives; in some provinces, such as Ra and parts of Vanua Levu, it is positively oppressive. Imagine inland districts preparing soil, planting maize, hoeing and weeding it, pulling the cobs, drying and shelling the corn, carrying it to the coast on their backs, bagging and shipping it there free of freight to the buyer for 2s. a bushel! It is mere waste of time and of human energy and a prostitution of industry. I have discussed the poll-tax with many officers of the Government. I remember none who could defend it on any higher ground than the necessity of obtaining a revenue. Viewed in the cold clear light of justice, it cannot be defended at all that the original owners of the soil shall be taxed to the extent of nearly 40 per cent. of their gross income, while others better able to pay are exempt from special taxation. But the Fiji Government finds itself in control of a race ignorant of economics, helpless to protect itself from extortion, and having no means of making its voice heard; and so this Government, arming itself with the necessary enactments, goes forth to spoil the people annually of £19,000 more than its just dues. The people are like some patient beast of burden who, dimly conscious that its load is too heavy, staggers along because it fears the crack of the driver's whip; the *Lawa ni Talaidredre o Lawa ni Vakatubu ca.*, &c. If the Fijians were more courageous, had their own newspapers, understood and could use the rights of public meeting, and could bring to bear on the Government the influences available to ourselves, poll-tax would not survive a year. But the Government needs the revenue, and so over-taxes the race that proves the easiest victim. How true is the trite observation that men do in a corporate capacity acts from which as individuals they would shrink with loathing. But the experience of mankind shows that there is something about the work of governing that proves strangely destructive of the sense of justice in those who take part in it. A statesman must not have too sensitive a conscience. The Fiji Government makes no mistakes in that direction.

3. The natives have been and are still compelled to do large amounts of free labour on roads and other public works, from which they personally derive very small benefit. The whole road from Nadroga to Viti Levu Bay was made by forced, unpaid, native labour. The road from Tavua to Suva, through the precipitous mountains of the interior, the road from Ba which junctions the Tavua Road at Nadarivatu, the road from Ba to Fort Carnarvon and through Navosa to Nadarivatu, the road from Viti Levu Bay that junctions the main road at Nubumakita, and many others too numerous to mention, were all, with few exceptions, made under compulsion by the natives, who got not a penny of remuneration and fed themselves into the bargain. And all this in addition to the poll-tax and Customs duties. The hand of the Government has been heavy indeed on the native population. Roads are desirable, but they should be paid for, not done for nothing, under compulsion, by one class of people already too heavily taxed.

4. For the maintenance of the communal system and the poll-tax the Fiji Government has woven about the natives a web of legislation that has been the grave of all liberty. Take *Lawa ni Talaidredre* and *Lawa ni Vakatubu ca.* In these two Ordinances alone the Government has forged for itself and its officials, English and native, most effective instruments, shall I say—of oppression. The Government did not mean to oppress, but it has oppressed, nevertheless. Both the above Ordinances were very dangerous weapons to place in the hands of native officials. During my residence in these islands I have been the indignant witness of many arbitrary and oppressive acts done by their means.