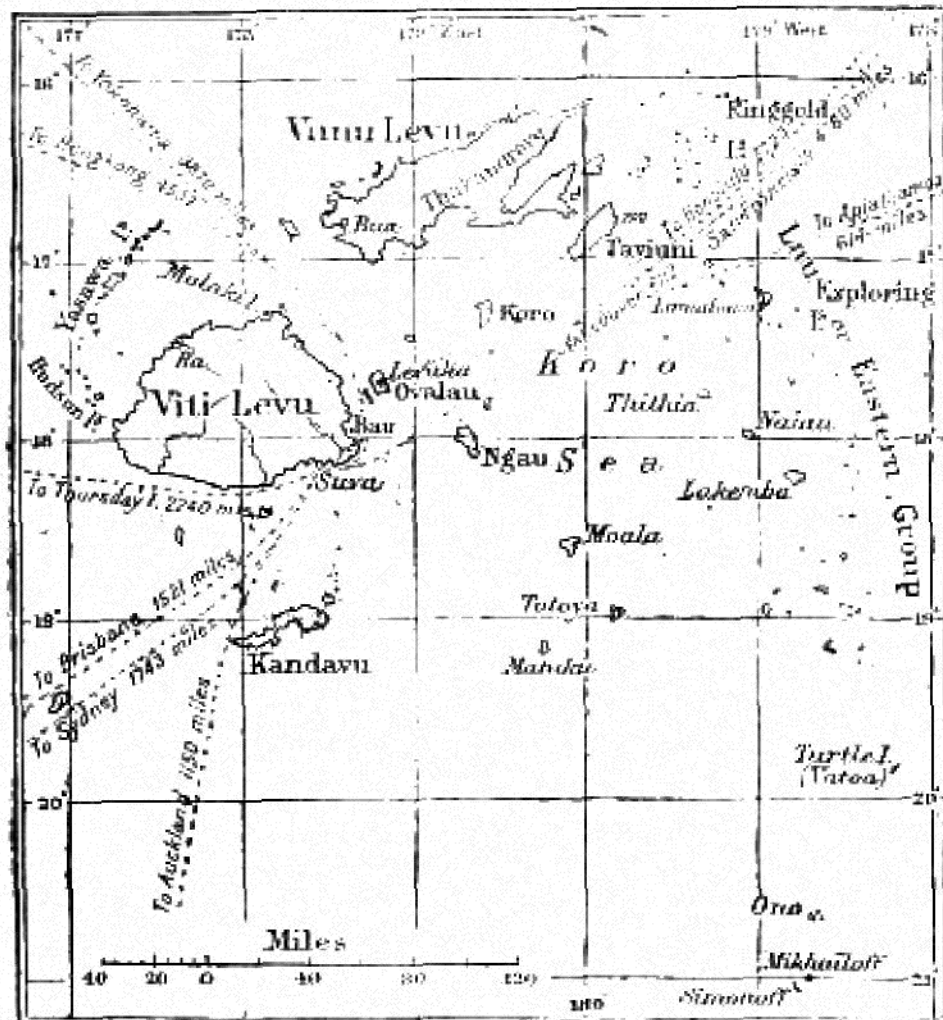


[NOTE: The account this chapter gives of the preamble to Cession reflects the opinions held in Britain in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Later historians have significantly revised the view of many of the issues. In particular, they interrogate more closely Smythe's report, which went against the opinions of the British navy based in New South Wales, and of the botanist Seemann, whose views were both far more favourably inclined toward annexation. Also, this chapter accepts the then-Foreign Office's highly critical view of Pritchard (coloured in no small part by his having a Samoan wife and family), and ignores his dismissal and subsequent trial (dealt with very well by Robson 1995). It also fails to discuss what a disaster his replacement March proved to be. For all that, this remains a worthwhile read. Rod Ewins, Apr. 2016]

## CHAPTER V

### THE STORY OF FIJI

**A Western Pacific Centre.**-The fact that the early Protestant missionaries entering the Pacific came by way of Cape Horn gave a prior importance to Tahiti as a centre of influence. The signal success of the missions there increased this importance and tended to perpetuate it long after the centre of gravity had shifted westward.



## 74 THE STORY OF FIJI

In point of position, however, the islands of Fiji, centred about 18 deg. S. and 178 deg. E., with their fine harbours and their fertile soil, were the natural axis of Polynesia and also for some decades at least, of Melanesia. This claim Fiji asserted very soon after the arrival of the Wesleyan missionaries in 1835. When the Australian colonies began to expand, the Fiji Islands were much frequented by whalers and traders, by escaped convicts and by free settlers, and they had become so much a subject of discussion by 1840 that Commodore Wilkes, USN, regarded their proper survey as one of the most important object of his voyage. Following his visit, too, the United States appointed a vice-consul in the group.

**How Christianity Came.**-The real impetus to Christianity in Fiji came, strangely enough, from the zealous arms of the converted Tongans. Pre-eminent amongst the Polynesians for their warlike qualities, the Tongan immigrants were appealed to by Thakombau to rescue him from his enemies. King George willingly responded, raised the siege, re-established the authority of the so-called "king" and peremptorily urged him to embrace the Christian religion with a proper enthusiasm.

The incursion was quite successful in respect to the propagation of the gospel, which henceforth prospered exceedingly amongst the Fijians. From a purely political point of view it only removed one of Thakombau's dangers to introduce another. Henceforth the overbearing Tongans themselves, under the supreme leadership of Maafu, who ranked as a co-equal chief with Thakombau, were the principal cause of his troubles.

Meanwhile, as regards the outside world, the importance of Fiji steadily grew. Traders, whalers, and planters-English, American, and German-settled on its beaches and frequented its nascent towns. Their interests grew and clashed and menaced those of the natives. Before annexation by Great Britain was already hinted at as the ultimate and only solution of outstanding problems. But British policy held out stubbornly against the most clamant demands for expansion.

**Mr W. P. Pritchard Appointed Consul.**-In 1857 the Foreign Office nominated to the consulate at Fiji one who had been born and brought up in the Pacific, in just such an atmosphere as that of Fiji. W. T. Pritchard was the sort of the missionary-consul and erstwhile dictator who had fought it out so stoutly in Tahiti, first against the advent

of any European government, and afterwards against the French in favour of the British. What he found in Fiji was rather less primitive than the missionary domination which had ruled so long at Tahiti under the semblance of a native sovereignty.

Pritchard had not been long at his new post before he took alarm at the pressure of circumstances which seemed to insist on intervention by some European power. He was so impressed by evidence of aggression by one or another of the great powers that he left his post without permission and went straight to London to instigate the Government to action.

In explanation of this step<sup>1</sup> he said that the measures adopted by several foreign powers required immediate attention, and with a view to eventualities he had armed himself with a document purporting to be a voluntary cession of the island by the king. Thakombau's title, he contended, was unquestionable, having been acknowledged by the commanders of British, French, and American warship; while the French and American governments had concluded treaties with him. In point of fact, Thakombau appears to have been one of several co-equal district chiefs. The commander of an American warship, in demanding compensation for injuries suffered by American subjects, had assumed him to be the sovereign, in spite of his earnest disclaimers, and from that time he was regarded in Europe as the "King of Fiji."

**First Offer of Cession, 1858.**—Pritchard himself made a very strong case for the annexation of Fiji, placing in the forefront of his argument the fact that it lay on the direct route from Australia to Panama, and in foreign hands would menace very seriously the communications of British commerce.

The offer of cession,<sup>2</sup> which was signed by Thakornbau as "sovereign chief of Bau and its dependencies, Vunivalu of the armies of Fiji and Tui Viti," etc., set forth that—

"Whereas we, being duly, fully and formally recognised in our aforesaid state, rank and Sovereignty by Great Britain, France and the United States of America respectively, and having full and exclusive sovereignty and dominion in and over the islands and territories constituting, forming and being included in the group known as Fiji, or Viti, and being desirous to procure for our people and subjects a good and permanent form of government, whereby they shall enjoy and partake of the benefits, the prosperity and

<sup>1</sup> Pritchard to Colonial Office, 2nd February 1859 P.P. No. 2995

<sup>2</sup> P.P. 1862, No. 2995

the happiness which it is the duty and the right of all sovereigns to seek and to procure for their people and subjects," and being unable to protect them from the violence and oppression and tyranny of foreign powers "do hereby, for and in consideration of certain conditions, terms and engagements make over, transfer, and convey unto Victoria, by the grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the full sovereignty and domain in and over our aforesaid islands and territories."<sup>1</sup>

The chief conditions were that Thakombau should retain the title of Tui Viti and should remain at the head of the department of native affairs, though acting always under the guidance and by the advice of the representative of Great Britain: that England should pay the sum of 45,000 dollars in settlement of American claims against Fiji, receiving in return the fee simple of 200,000 acres of land. The cession purported to be made on behalf of the king himself, the chiefs and the people of Fiji, and was dated 12th October 1858. Thakombau signed with his mark in the presence of John S. Fordham (Wesleyan missionary), John Binnie (Wesleyan trainer), Robert S. Swanston (Hawaiian Consul), and William T. Pritchard (H.B.M. Consul). The document was endorsed as being recorded in the archives of the consulate (register No. 6, folio 14).

**Arguments for Annexation.**—Pritchard was not by any means breaking fresh ground at Downing Street. The annexation had already been urged on the Government, on grounds of state, of humanity, and of law and order. The Admiralty had already expressed the opinion that a calling station between Sydney and Panama was indispensable, and that a port of call at Fiji would only add 320 miles to the direct route from Sydney to Panama and 420 miles to that from Sydney to Vancouver.

"I have been much struck," wrote Admiral Washington, the hydrographer, "by the entire want by Great Britain of any advanced position in the Pacific Ocean. The Panama and Sydney mail communication is likely to be established: yet we have no island on which to place a coaling station and where we could ensure fresh supplies. It may hereafter be found very inconvenient that England should be shut out from any station in the Pacific and that an enemy should have possession of Tongatabu, where there is a good harbour within a few hundred miles of the direct track of our homeward-bound gold ships from Sydney and Melbourne.

<sup>1</sup> *A Mission to Viti*, by Berthold Seemann, 1862.

Neither force nor batteries would be necessary to hold the ground: a single cruising ship should suffice for all the wants of the islands. Coral reefs and the hearty goodwill of the natives would do the rest."

The Colonial Office was anxious to know whether the acquisition of Fiji would give England all the available harbours in that part of the Pacific. As to this there was the statement of Captain Loring, R.N, that the common belief in these seas was that they must soon fall into the hands of one of the great powers. The Foreign Office, for its part, was not aware that acceptance of the cession would violate any rights or claims belonging to other powers.

**A Mission of Investigation.**—From the economic point, of view the Manchester Cotton Supply Association favoured the acquisition of the group, on the strength or scientific statements that they were suitable for cotton growing—an opinion which was afterwards well borne out. The Legislative Council of New South Wales passed a resolution in favour of annexation, and to remove the financial obstacle a wealthy Australian landowner offered a cheque for the full amount of Thakombau's indebtedness to America.

The Colonial Office, however, was not enamoured of the proposal to extend its responsibilities, and decided to send out a commissioner to investigate the prospects of the country and the liabilities that would be involved in accepting its sovereignty.

**A New Offer of Cession, 1859**—Meanwhile Pritchard returned to his post somewhat rebuffed for his activity, but no less enthusiastic than before. At the end of 1859 there was still no sign of the Commissioner arriving in Fiji when another council of chiefs "representing all the districts of Fiji" was held. The deed of cession drawn up fourteen months earlier was unanimously ratified and renewed, and the chiefs begged Pritchard to urge its acceptance on the Government.

Thenceforward the council went very fast and very far, and in a few days had practically nominated Pritchard dictator of Fiji, in the sure and certain belief that eventually the queen would accept the cession. In view of his rather cold reception at the Foreign Office, the consul was courting trouble in the rash attitude he took up. His influence over the chiefs, we learn from later visitors, was certainty not less than that of his father over the chiefs of Tahiti. The nondescript white community of Fiji was seething with

intrigue. Pritchard did not hesitate to use his whole influence to promote what he thought to be the interests of Fiji and Great Britain; but he seems to have differed from his official superiors in believing those interests to be identical.

On three successive days in that historic council of December 1859 Pritchard (1) had the deed of cession ratified: (2) secured authority to hold consular courts: (3) had himself appointed head of the native government.<sup>1</sup> "The chiefs of Fiji in council assembled" he wrote to the Foreign Office, "have unanimously and urgently requested me to assume the management of their political and commercial affairs." He was diffident enough to say, however, that he must first consult the Foreign Office.

The "law" appointing the consul to his exalted position provided by Article I." that all transactions, communications and intercourse of every nature soever between Fiji and all foreign powers shall be conducted solely through and by William Thomas Pritchard, Esquire, H.B.M.'s consul for Fiji." Article II. was even more startling:

"That we hereby delegate, cede and make over to and vest in the said William Thomas Pritchard the full, unreserved entire and supreme right, authority and power to govern Fiji according to the broad and plain principles of justice and morality, and to make, enact and decree whatever and all laws, regulations and measures he may deem necessary, proper and expedient."

The chiefs were to be a mere advisory council under his presidency, and this system was to remain in force until the offer of cession was finally replied to.

**Consternation In London.**—Something akin to consternation took hold of the officials in London when they heard what had been happening. The Governor of New South Wales (Sir William Denison), had taken alarm when he found Pritchard advertising in the Australian papers to induce settlers to go to Fiji. He feared that if a white population was introduced it must inevitably lead to "a war of races." Like most of the Colonial Office officials, he was greatly impressed by what was then happening in New Zealand, and drew the deduction that as the Fijians were more numerous than the Maori and at the same time more concentrated, the hostilities which he predicted would be by that much the more bloody, and the task of maintaining white supremacy the more difficult

Denison's alarm was quickly communicated to the

<sup>1</sup> Pritchard to Foreign Office, 31st December 1859: P.P. No, 2995,

## 1860 A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Colonial Office, where it was feared that Pritchard might do something which could not be undone.

"It may not be easy to foretell," wrote Sir F. Rogers (afterwards Lord Blachford), "or to prevent the mischief which might ensue from the unauthorised action of H.M. Consul in such a matter."

Pritchard was roundly rebuked for taking steps which "might commit this country to a serious enterprise which he must well know ought to have been sanctioned by his superiors."

**Colonel Smythe's Investigation**—The wishes of the Colonial Office are not difficult to divine from the tenor of the commission communicated to Colonel W. J. Smythe, R.A. (23rd December 1859):

"Her Majesty's Government must continue to entrust the propagation of the gospel in the distant parts of the world, as their predecessors have entrusted it, to the piety and zeal of individuals. The hope of the conversion of a people to Christianity, however specious, must not be made a reason for increasing the British dominions. The question, therefore, whether or not the Fijis ought to be added to the numerous colonial possessions of this country must be determined by the same methods of ordinary expediency which direct the general national policy."<sup>1</sup>

Smythe proceeded to Fiji early in 1860. He found there, he said, permanent white settlers to the number of about 200, "composed chiefly of men who have left or run away from vessels visiting the islands. They do nothing to civilise or improve the natives: on the contrary they have in many instances fallen to a lower level. Whenever they can obtain spirits most of them drink to excess."

As for its strategic position, Smythe thought that the possession of Fiji in time of war would be an embarrassment rather than an advantage to the British Empire, which had no need of such a post in the Western Pacific.

**Native Government Suggested.**—The Commissioner thought that in view of the excellent progress that Christianity was making in Fiji, and of the experience of Hawaii and Tahiti, "it would seem that the resources of the Pacific Islands can be best developed and the welfare of their inhabitants secured, by a native government aided by the counsels of respectable Europeans." It would not be expedient, he thought, for Her Majesty's Government to accept the offered sovereignty, but for the purpose of

<sup>1</sup> P.P. 1862, No. 2995.

improving relations with the natives the consul should be endowed with magisterial powers and jurisdiction over offending British subjects.

Reinforced by the argument of the native war in which England was already engaged in New Zealand, the report of Colonel Smythe appeared to the Secretary of State (the Duke of Newcastle) "to establish conclusively the impolicy of appropriating the Fiji Islands. A large immediate expenditure, a possible native war at an early date, and possible disputes with other civilised countries were the deciding factors." <sup>1</sup>

On Smythe's suggestion it was decided to communicate the decision to the Fijians in such a manner as "to remove any painful feelings caused by the offer being declined." Accordingly, acting under instructions from the Governor of the mother colony (New South Wales), H.M.S. *Miranda* went to Fiji, and on 10th July 1862 Captain R. Jenkins had on board the leading chiefs, and with every mark of consideration and courtesy informed them of the decision of the British Government.

Thus for the time ended the proposed cession of 1858-60. It was a bitter disappointment to the better whites, amongst whom Commodore Seymour had found a general feeling in favour of annexation.

**Charters to the Whites.**—It was soon abundantly clear that the existing conditions could not last, and that some more efficient polity was required for the mixed community of natives and whites. There were many suggestions for a settled form of government, and in the following decade several attempts were made to set up constitutions suitable to the conditions.

In 1865 Thakombau granted a charter to the whites in the island of Ovalau; in 1867 and 1870 to those at Levuka, enabling them to make laws for their own government. Some of his co-equal chiefs did the same—at Bua and Thakandrove (*sic*). But the most successful of all these experiments was that of the Tongan chief Ma'afu, in the Lomaloma district. By adopting an excellent code of laws drawn up by Mr Swanston, he gave the whites security for life and property, and in return received a yearly revenue from them. The Lau confederation was a distinct triumph of administration.

What sort of a haphazard community it was that dwelt on the beaches of Fiji is shown by the illuminating reports

<sup>1</sup> Colonial Office to Admiralty, 7th September 1861 : P.P. No, 2995.



of the commander of H.M.S. *Rosario* in 1869. The British consul, having no means of carrying out English law, had to rely on "the good sense of the European residents," which naturally did not carry him very far when their own interests were at stake. Land-grabbing and blackbirding were rife, and on some of the plantations gross atrocities were practised on the kanakas. In recent years, though, a number of gentlemen had come to the group with the idea of becoming planters, and the better disposed were becoming numerically strong enough "to make their voices heard in behalf of law and order above those of the usual class of lawless rowdies who congregate in these places where no flag is flying and imagine they can do just as they please with the natives." <sup>1</sup>

Fiji had become the headquarters of the traffic in kanakas, and month by month the position of the consul became increasingly difficult. He referred in his difficulties almost always to the Governor of New South Wales, as the mother colony, because he had been advised to (10 so by Lord Clarendon. Yet the Colonial Office scouted the idea that New South Wales had more responsibility in regard to the islands than any of the other colonics. It is probably the fact that being the mother colony, being the colony in most intimate touch with the trade of Fiji, and at the same time having no great interest in the kanaka traffic, New South Wales was regarded in England as the most reliable adviser on the subject.<sup>2</sup>

**The Labour Traffic.**—It was the abuses of the kanaka trade that influenced the Colonial Office more than anything in favour of annexing Fiji. Lord Belmore, the Governor of New South Wales, laid stress on the titter impossibility, of doing anything to suppress the traffic when the consul at Fiji, the natural centre and rendezvous of the traders, had inadequate powers over British subjects and could not even send offenders for trial in the courts of the nearest colony. There were conflicting interests even in Fiji. While the consul complained of lack of powers of control, the British planters complained that they were not granted recruiting licenses, and their plantations were stagnant for want of labour. They considered it a great hardship that while the British Navy interfered to ruin their prospects purely on account of "a few ruffians," the British Government declined to assume the whole responsibility for the government of

<sup>1</sup> P.P. No. 2995.

<sup>2</sup> P.P., C. 399. Clarendon to March, 3rd August j&69,1).2: Colonial Office to Foreign Office, oh January 1870, p. 59.

Fiji.<sup>1</sup> Smarting under this injustice, many of the British planters signed a petition asking the United States to annex the group.

**The State of Fiji.**—The first comprehensive report on Fiji by the new British consul, Edward March, was not nearly so depressing a picture as Lord Belmore and Captain Palmer, R.N., had given the British Government. He found that owing to the improvement in the recent class of immigrants the body of whites bore a good reputation, some having held commissions in the army and navy, some in the colonies as mayor, alderman, magistrates, and railway directors. Planters, tradespeople, squatters, and professional men, "in the absence of any recognised form of government, submit for consular adjudication all the disputes and claims arising amongst themselves. There are a few insolvent absconders and worthless adventurers, but as their antecedents are known they exercise but little influence in the community" (March to Clarendon, 17th December 1869).

Dr Litton Forbes<sup>2</sup> says that before 1871, when there was no recognised government, money was often advanced without security and a man's word was taken as his bond, and "very seldom indeed was the confidence thus reposed wilfully abused." But the great increase in the number of white settlers made this system impracticable and some form of government was absolutely necessary. Among the newcomers were some of the semi-criminal class escaping from the law in Australia, where "Gone to Fiji" bore the same significance in those days as "Gone to Texas" a few years earlier in America.

At the end of 1868 Europeans in Fiji held land computed in area at 235,000 acres; an additional 100,000 acres had been purchased during the year, and Thakombau had made a further large grant to the Melbourne Polynesian Company.

**Satisfaction in Downing Street.**—There was unfeigned pleasure in Downing Street at the rosy picture painted by March. Clarendon said that the state of things was "more hopeful and satisfactory than he had expected." He had suggested previously to some petitioners that they should themselves frame regulations for the control of the labour traffic and invite the assistance of the consul in enforcing them. And he was only too willing to believe that his advice was bearing fruit. In fact, he was so reassured that

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant R. B. Leek to Lord Belmore, 17th August 1869: C. 399.

<sup>2</sup> *Two Years in Fiji*, 1875.

he eagerly seized the excuse for withholding from March those magisterial powers which all advisers thought he should possess. The recognition extended to him by both white residents and chiefs appeared to be all that was required (Clarendon to March, 30th March 1870).

Before many months were over March was bitterly rueing the pleasant impression he had given. The planters complained of the hardship of his rules for regulating the labour traffic, and when he had had a year's experience he was sadly disillusioned. Constant threats of naval intervention were necessary to maintain the authority of his office, and these were diluted by the fact that for a whole year after his arrival no British ship of war at all visited Fiji. When the *Rosario* arrived he had a deplorable list of complaints to make—of acts of violence on the part of the natives, of the flogging of kanakas, of threats, disrespect and insubordination towards himself in his official capacity, of whites taking a hand in the factional disputes of the natives, of "Bully" Hayes, the notorious pirate, contumaciously sailing away out of his observation instead of waiting to be deported to Sydney for trial. In tearful terms March begged Commodore Stirling (14th October 1870) to "check by admonition or otherwise the proceedings of a certain class of British subjects whose interference in native affairs is likely to create troubles and dissensions."<sup>1</sup>

**Perplexity of the Naval Authorities.**—The commodore was not quite sure how far he should go in actively assisting consuls in the Pacific. The condition of things, according to the report of Captain Challis, R. N., was about as bad as it could be. There were now 2700 whites of all classes scattered about the group and coming into conflict with each other and the natives.

The commodore was glad to feel, at any rate, that in the event of native wars the whites were strong enough to look after themselves. The absence of disturbances showed that they were really well disposed and respectable, and if the consul had "proper authority and power" he could settle himself most of the troubles that were referred to the naval captains (Commodore Stirling to the Admiralty, 30th January 1871).

**Forces for Annexation.**—The forces at work in Fiji could not be stayed. By, its position it was becoming a nerve centre of the Pacific. It was a constant source of attraction for enterprising—and not always undesirable—

<sup>1</sup> P.P., C. 399, p. i&8.

young men from Australia, and it was a very strong centre of English influence.

The movement in favour of British sovereignty was irresistible, but the two departments of state put their head together to withhold all countenance from it. The Colonial Office proposed to admonish the Australian governors that "schemes of this kind should receive no encouragement or authority from H.M. Government," and the Foreign Office strongly exhorted March to abstain from taking any part in internal dissensions, or encouraging the tendency on the part of the settlers to extend their trade into the interior, and to treat the islands in the light of a colonial possession of the British Crown (Clarendon to March, 19th March 1869).<sup>1</sup>

The Polynesian Company was formed at Melbourne in 1868 to take over the unpaid claim of the United States against Fiji, in return for a grant from Thakombau of 200,000 acres of land as proposed in the offer of cession. Thurston at once protested against such a charter being granted, and Commodore Lambert informed the promoters that he considered it improper for British subjects to propose such an agreement to the ruler of a country without the knowledge or sanction of the British consul. Sir John Manners-Sutton, the Governor of Victoria, interposed that he was not aware that any law had been infringed, and that his Government at any rate had no power "to prevent any commercial enterprise, however wild or illusory, which was not at variance with the law." The legal basis of the commodore's veto is not dear, but the same principle will appear later asserted by a much higher constitutional authority, the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific.

**Rumoured American Intervention.**—While things were in this state of chaos advantage was taken by some of the settlers to present the petition to the American vice-consul begging the United States to declare a protectorate over Fiji. Recovering as it was from the civil war, the republic was not in a state to consider schemes of oversea expansion, but the vice-consul received the petition in terms of optimism far beyond his warrant, remarking that he would hail the consummation of the project as the solution in likely to conduce to the moral and material welfare of Fiji.

The threat of American intervention did not disturb the Colonial Office in the least. It informed Lord Clarendon that—the United States proposal notwithstanding—it did

<sup>1</sup> P.P., C. 4222.

not think it advisable for Great Britain to undertake the responsibility of governing the islands.

Then came the official announcement from America that it had no intention whatever of declaring a protectorate.<sup>1</sup> This was only one of many plans discussed by the white settlers. Another was a republic.

**The Charter of 1870.**—Thakombau's charter to the whites to form a municipal government at Levuka was dated 21st November 1870, and was signed as "King of the Bau Dominions." It ran:—

"Whereas it has been represented to me that in consequence of the large number of European settlers at Levuka, which number is rapidly increasing, for the sake of sanitary and other improvements for the public good it would be advisable to confer some special powers on the European community settled at Levuka,"

therefore he authorised them "to elect annually seven house or landholders, by ballot or otherwise, to form a body corporate to frame and pass such by-laws, municipal and other regulations as may be deemed necessary and expedient for the public good, and also to pass, levy, sue for and recover such rates, taxes, and other imposts as may be necessary for carrying on such corporation and any improvements by them deemed advisable." It was distinctly provided that no regulations could be lawful that were "antagonistic or contradictory to the spirit of the present constitution or any future amendments."

This excited further anxiety in Australia and gave a new impetus to the demand for annexation. Whether such a community could have any international standing was doubtful. Sir James Martin, Attorney-General for New South Wales, advised that its right to enforce obedience could not be maintained. "Foreign nations," he said, "would not admit the coercive power of such a government over their subjects, unless there was that amount of fairness, force, and certainty which generally characterise the administration of affairs in civilised communities."

Throughout 1870 Australia was clamouring for annexation, and the historian Dr J. D. Lang led the demand that the colony should take its own measures. The Colonial Office had no difficulty in showing that the definition of boundaries on which he relied had been revoked many years earlier.

**The Colonial Conference.**—In the middle of the year an

<sup>1</sup> 1871, No. 435, p. 20.

intercolonial conference was held at Melbourne. It was solved unanimously that for geographical reasons, for commercial reasons, and because British subjects were establishing themselves in Fiji, the islands should be annexed.

The reply of the colonial Office (Kimberley to Governor of Victoria, 16th March 1871) enunciated clearly the policy which was later restated by both Carnarvon and Derby to the confusion of the colonies:

"It would be impossible for this country to undertake the responsibility of the government of the islands without a sufficient force to support its authority, and Her Majesty's Government are not prepared to station a military force for this purpose in the Fijis. On these grounds Her Majesty's Government cannot depart from their former decision. It is not very clear what is intended by the proposal that Her Majesty should extend her protection over the Fijis, but if by this is meant something short of direct annexation it seems to Her Majesty's Government even more open to objection, as while it would not diminish the responsibility this country would incur, it would weaken and embarrass the exercise of British authority, and would be certain, after a period more or less productive of uncertainty and possible discord, to end in annexation under circumstances less favourable than the present."<sup>1</sup>

**A Constitutional Argument.**—The protest of New South Wales only induced Kimberley to express his views a little more brusquely:—

"H.M. Government must decline to admit that because a certain number of British subjects, proceeding for the most part from the Australian colonies, having established themselves in the Fijis, the Imperial Government is called upon to extend British Sovereignty to these islands in order to relieve such persons and property from the risk which they may incur. So long as this newly constituted government exercise actual authority you should deal with it as a *de facto* government so far as concerns districts which may acknowledge its rule; but H.M. Government are not prepared to give any opinion as to the propriety of formally recognising it without much fuller information as to its character and prospects."

Argument on this point lasted for about two years. New South Wales held that as foreign policy was entirely the province of the Imperial Government, a colonial government could not recognise the Government of Fiji until Downing Street had done so (Belmore to Kimberley, with minute of N.S.W. Government, 11th January 1872). The Imperial

<sup>1</sup> P.P. 1873, No. 124.

Government insisted on its point, and Alfred Stephens, the Colonial Minister for Lands and Works, remarked rather facetiously of the opposition in Fiji: "It must strike anyone as a strange thing that these gentlemen who were, and are, quite prepared to recognise as valid the surrender to Great Britain by Thakombau and his chiefs of the sovereignty of the Fijian territory, yet deny the capacity or the power of the same king and chiefs to establish a government of their own."

**Thakombau's Ministry.**—According to the commissioners who investigated the matter later, the whites seem not to have known how to go about setting up a government, and they combined with a Mr Woods and a Mr Burt to get Thakornbau recognised as king of Fiji, and under his authority to form a ministry consisting of two native chiefs, two principal merchants, Mr Sagar, Mr Woods, and Mr Burt.

The foreign residents of Levuka were assembled in Thakombau's presence, and a speech purporting to be from the throne was read announcing the nomination of the ministry and its intention to govern under a constitution. The principle of the constitution was that the chiefs should continue to govern their own people, while the whites should win the confidence of the world by showing that they were capable of governing themselves.

A parliament was duly elected and sat in 1872 and 1873. It soon developed strong partisan tendencies and killed itself by the celebrated Act of July 1872, under which natives refusing to pay the poll-tax could be sentenced to hard labour on the plantations of the whites. Mr Layard and Commodore Goodenough were of opinion that this Act and the regulation by which prisoners of war also could be hired out to the planters constituted in practice a system of slavery and a violation of the Imperial Kidnapping Act. Things were somewhat improved when Thurston took office in the Ministry, but Woods remained Prime Minister. The commissioners regretted that the consul was not fitted either "by his knowledge of the islands or by a legitimate influence with the chiefs to direct the course of affairs."

**A Consul's Dilemma.**—March was between the devil and the deep sea. In some cases he recognised the *de facto* government; in others, from personal antipathy to its members, he would not. The commodore thought in 1872

<sup>1</sup> G. A. Woods was formerly Colonial Surveyor in New Zealand, and was at the time fixing sites for lighthouses in Fiji. S. Burt, formerly of Sydney, was Thakombau's commercial agent.

that the Government was acting in good faith; that it was absurd not to recognise it when it exercised so much authority; and still worse to impede it by an obstructive policy. Yet this was the course March adopted.

When an ex-postal official claimed against him for salary March declined to plead in a Fijian court, and suffered judgment by default. He was soon complaining of intimidation by planters and night attacks, and had to appeal to the better disposed persons to guard the consulate against the infuriated "owner" of an imported boy who had repaired thither for sanctuary. The Government admitted his right to control the native labour traffic, but when he refused to pass for the plantations some kanakas who had been forcibly kidnapped the Minister for Native Affairs, himself the consignee of the vessel that brought them, passed them in the name of the Fijian Government. When March had committed a supposed blackbirder for trial in Sydney and handed him over to the Government for custody, he was released on his own recognisances and escaped. Refugees were abducted from the consulate premises by Government agents who watched from tree-tops for their chance to pounce. Bit by bit the authority of the consul slipped away from him. Under his nose the Mayor of Levuka "bought" seven natives in direct defiance of the consular regulations which had been sanctioned by Downing Street and by practice. When he detained the schooner *Nukulau* on suspicion of blackbirding she put him out of court by becoming a Fijian craft in the course of a single night. The sudden assumption of the same nationality by 2000 erstwhile British subjects greatly disconcerted the consul.

All these troubles, which are faithfully recorded in March's despatches to Lord Granville and in the letters of the commodore, were looked into by the latter on the spot. Captain Douglas, R.N., secured an apology from the Fijian Government, and, contrary to his personal convictions, obtained for him personal immunity for arrest, "because I deemed it would be eminently prejudicial to British interests and to the respect H.M.'s subjects should entertain for their consul were I to allow him to be arrested."

But what was to be expected of March? He was unduly touchy and sensitive, and had no faculty for co-operation. He told Granville in February 1872 that the members of the Government were men of no account, and were actuated by personal motives rather than the public good, that "its authority has no solid foundation and will most probably



end in social dislocation and turbulence." It was a great shock to him to hear that Granville had decided to acknowledge the *de facto* government, and he never conformed to the change.

**Elements of Disruption.**—The planters of Fiji have had many champions and detractors. The evidence goes to show that on the whole they treated their kanakas well and humanely, and the regulations for their protection were largely prompted by the planters themselves. To speak of them as slave owners, says Dr Litton Forbes, is a cruel injustice. "On the opening day of the first parliament the Constitution Act was read aloud. One paragraph in it enacted that no man could be a slave on Fijian soil. Anyone who heard the ringing cheer with which the house, composed mostly of planters, greeted this statement will not readily believe that such men are either slave dealers or slave owners."

Nevertheless the constitution inaugurated by Thakombau in June 1871 went too far. And it contained two elements of failure. In the first place it arrogated for Thakombau, who was only one of several equal territorial chiefs, the title of "king" and the prerogative of legislating for the whole group. Secondly, it proposed to govern whites as well as natives, which was palpably impossible except by consent of the whites. The fact that Thakombau was a mere figurehead, and that his government was composed almost entirely of whites, did not rob the proposal of any of its impropriety.

**Resistance by Whites.**—As early as March 1872, long before the obnoxious Poll-tax Act was passed, the British Subjects Mutual Protection Society and the Volunteer Corps were in existence at Levuka as a direct counterblast to the *de facto* government. At this time Captain J. Moresby, R.N., and Lord Normanby, the Governor of New South Wales, were referring to "the friendly government" of Fiji, and the sheriff of the Fijian courts was "courteously complying" with the demand of a British captain to surrender the person of a blackbirder who had been arrested by the "friendly government."

In March 1873, when the Government sent troops to punish a native murderer of a white family in the Ba district, H.M.S. *Dido* sailed to the spot to prevent a rupture between the troops and the white planters. Thakombau's charter clearly did not provide the requisite sanction for

<sup>1</sup> *Two Years in Fiji*, by Dr L Forbes, 1875.

governing the country. The Cabinet was soon governing independent of Parliament, and in August 1873, foreseeing the inevitable collapse of the experiment, Kimberley commissioned Commodore J. Goodenough, R.N., and Mr Edgar L. Layard, the new consul for Fiji and Tonga, to make a report on the position.

**The Goodenough Commission.**— The report of the commissioners,<sup>1</sup> signed on H.M.S. *Pearl* at Levuka in April 1874, showed that four courses were open to the British Government. It might follow the advice it had received over and over again and confer magisterial powers on the consul. It might recognise the existing government. It might establish a British protectorate. It might assume complete sovereignty.

The Colonial Office itself had expressed a preference for a protectorate, but this the commissioners dismissed at once owing to the strong objections of the British residents. A native government which would be tolerable to natives and whites alike was impossible, since there was no paramount chief as in Tonga or Hawaii. The aggrandisement of the consul's office, although possible, would really amount to a protectorate of an undefined and inconvenient character. Believing that they had seen responsible government at work, neither whites nor natives wanted it, and the commissioners had no hesitation in saying that what the majority did want was Colonial Office government as a Crown colony. This would defend the interests of the natives against pressure by the whites, and would get over the difficulty arising from the disinclination of the busy planters to devote their time to parliamentary work.

Finally it was suggested—and here we have the genesis of the High Commission of the Western Pacific—that the Governor of Fiji should have jurisdiction over the persons and acts of British subjects in the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands, or all the Western Pacific islands not under French sovereignty, and should control the labour traffic.

"We beg to assure your Lordship," the report ended, "that we can see no prospect for these islands should Her Majesty's Government decline to accept the offer of cession but ruin to the English planters and confusion in the native government. As a Crown colony we think Fiji would certainly become a prosperous settlement."

If Thakombau should die there would be a struggle for

<sup>1</sup> P.P., C. 1011.

power, the commissioners thought, which the whites could not bring to a peaceful issue without the intervention of a man-of-war. Privately Commodore Goodenough said he looked upon annexation as a positive duty. England had interfered so much in Fijian affairs that the natives looked to her for support, and if it were withheld there would be a collapse of government, repudiation of debt, and ruin to many industrious people. From the political point of view Fiji would be a most valuable central station in Polynesia—undoubtedly the best position that could be found.<sup>1</sup>

**The Sovereignty Accepted.**—To the report was attached a new offer of cession drawn up on the advice of Thurston, and dated 21st March 1874. The unequivocal nature of the recommendations did not at all commend itself to Carnarvon, but within three months of the day on which it was signed the Government had decided to act on it. Carnarvon makes it clear that he would have welcomed some loophole of escape, and the Government very properly held it right to decline accepting on the conditions which were attached to Thakombau's offer. But he recommended the Queen to accept the sovereignty without conditions, the chiefs trusting to the generosity and justice of the British Government.<sup>2</sup>

Carnarvon complained that the commissioners had gone “beyond what had been expected of them in expressing themselves strongly in favour of annexation,” and for that reason the Government desired to place any further action in the hands of the Governor of New South Wales, “as not being committed to any view and so able to act firmly and independently.” He was ordered to proceed to Fiji with sole authority to act (Carnarvon to Sir H. M. Robinson, 15th July 1874).<sup>2</sup>

**The Sovereignty Proclaimed.**—In the event the British flag was hoisted in Fiji within six months of the day on which the report was signed on H.M.S. *Pearl*. For two days Thakombau and his chiefs considered in council at Levuka what Sir Hercules Robinson had to say, and on 28th September they informed him that they had decided “to give Fiji unreservedly to the Queen of Britain that she may rule us justly and affectionately, and that we may live in peace and prosperity.” Two days later the deed of cession was signed at Nasova. Recognising that Thakombau was only one of several chiefs and not a sovereign, Sir Hercules interviewed the others in their respective districts, and

<sup>1</sup> Memoir of Commodore J.G. Goodenough, R. N., 1878.

<sup>2</sup> P.P., C. 1114.

## 92 THE STORY OF FIJI

finally, when all had signified their adhesion to the deed, British sovereignty was proclaimed on 10th October 1874

Robinson assumed the provisional governorship and appointed Layard vice-president of his executive council. A few days later he issued a proclamation adopting the Queensland Act, 31 Vict, No. 47, as the law of Fiji on Polynesian labour. The limits of the proclamation of the colony were 15 deg. S. to 22 deg. S., and 177 deg. W. to 175 deg. E., thus including the whole of the Fiji group proper, with the Turtle Islands, Simonoff, Mikhailoff, and Ono to the south-east.

**The Crown Colony.**—Sir Arthur Gordon (afterwards Lord Stanmore) was appointed first Governor of Fiji, and his administration, particularly of native affairs, was distinctly successful. Adopting the spirit of the offer of cession, he deferred to the opinion of Thakombau in native affairs and as far as possible governed through the existing tribal machinery.

The Colonial Office was not at all pleased with the understanding Robinson arrived at with the "king" as regards his civil list, and Carnarvon asked Gordon to consider seriously whether the proposed allowances could not be reduced. Gordon took the very proper view that the subject could not be reopened "without a most distinct moral breach of faith, if not a formal and technical one."

This was not the last of Carnarvon's endeavours to save money on the establishments of the new colony. Shortly afterwards he withdrew the mail subsidy, and Gordon found himself cut off altogether from the outside world—another graceless act which showed how grudgingly the sovereignty had been assumed. There was an unedifying correspondence before the calling of the mail steamers from the American ports to Australia and New Zealand was resumed.

Gordon's success was so marked that when it was proposed to transfer him as governor to the more important post in New Zealand, the Colonial Office intended to retain him to administer the native affairs of Fiji and also as High Commissioner. His successor (Sir G. W. Des Voeux) strongly objected to a step which would make him merely a lieutenant-governor, subject to the veto of a senior stationed 2000 miles distant, and eventually he was appointed full governor and deputy to the High Commissioner.

**The Search for Labour.**—The labour difficulties which had troubled the planters before the annexation were even more intense under the new régime. The supply from the

islands of the Western Pacific had fallen off, partly owing to the rapid diminution of the population, and partly to delays in returning time-expired kanakas; and Gordon demanded that Fiji should be permitted to follow the example of Mauritius and the West Indies and introduce coolies from India.

Carnarvon readily approved, and the system was inaugurated in May 1879 which has continued almost without interruption since. Native Fijians being very much averse to labour, the sugar industry must have perished but for the importation of Hindu coolies, who have formed a new and most important element in the economy of the colony. The following table is expressive:-

	Fijian	Hindu
1881	114,9748	588
1911	87,096	40,286

Though the climate is healthy for the tropics, the European population has increased very slowly. The Hindus are the only element of the population that has made a robust expansion. At the (late of the annexation the chief items of export were copra, cotton, and maize. Cotton fell away from 1882 and to-day is practically unknown amongst the exports, but the export of sugar, copra, and fruit has increased enormously.

Fiji is one of the most prosperous of the Crown colonies. The regular demand in Australia and New Zealand for the cane sugar of the group, and its position on the steam lanes between America and Australasia brought an excellent service of steamers in all directions, and the Pacific cable, with more recent wireless stations, has supplemented the communications.

**The System of Government.**—Fiji is the single example in the Pacific of semi-representative Crown colony government. The executive consist of six official and two unofficial members: and the Legislative Council of ten official members and six elected members, as well as two natives. Education is free and is encouraged, but like other Pacific Islands Fiji shows a baneful example of an idle native race.

An agitation for fuller representation on behalf of both whites and natives came to a head in 1900. The Fiji Federal League, the main organ of the agitation, demanded confederation with New Zealand. The movement was always of rather doubtful origin, but it undoubtedly had some inspiration in the jealousies of Australia and New

## 94 THE STORY OF FIJI

Zealand regarding the Pacific Islands. The grievances of the whites were precisely the same as were represented to the Intercolonial Convention at Sydney fifteen years earlier.<sup>1</sup> Proposals to absorb certain of the groups were being widely discussed in New Zealand, and they were referred to before the Royal Commission on Federation in that colony, which reported in May 1901.<sup>2</sup> In the session of 1900 the New Zealand House of Representatives passed a formal resolution for submission to the Crown, praying that Fiji be relieved of the disabilities of a Crown colony and incorporated with New Zealand.

For some months a battle royal was waged across the waters of the Pacific. The Governor of Fiji (Sir G. T. M. O'Brien) stepped down into the arena in defence of existing conditions, and incurred a severe rap over the knuckles from Chamberlain for his criticisms of native policy in New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> In June 1901 he adopted the unhappy expedient, to quash the agitation at the Fiji end, of passing a "peace and good order" ordinance, threatening with imprisonment any person who should attempt to induce any Fijian to try to subvert the existing form of government. Again he fell foul of the Colonial office and was ordered to revoke the ordinance. Soon afterwards O'Brien was recalled.

After his departure the question died down, and it seems almost to have been forgotten by the time the Colonial Conference met in 1902. When he was on the point of leaving London Seddon wrote to Chamberlain drawing his attention to the fact that the resolutions of the New Zealand Parliament had not been replied to. The matter of giving better representations to Europeans was then referred to the new governor (Sir H. Jackson),<sup>4</sup> and a concession was made to the whites a few months later.

**Fiji Today.**—The islands to the eastward and south eastward of Fiji having been absorbed into other systems—into French possessions or the enlarged boundaries of New Zealand—Fiji no longer occupies the central position she

1. P.P. N.Z. 1900, A 3b.

2. *Ibid*, 1901, A4.

3. Speaking at the opening of the Wainibokasi Hospital, the governor said to a gathering largely composed of natives: "It has always been the same in every country under the kind of government that there is in New Zealand—the white men have always taken the land from the coloured owners. It has been so in New Zealand, where the land once all belonged to the coloured people. Who owns that land now? The white people have got nearly the whole of it." P.P. N.Z. 1901, A3a

4. 111.11. N.Z. 1903, A1,A2.

formerly held as regards the Western Pacific. The centre of gravity has moved westward. Consequently it is unlikely that the headquarters of the High Commissioner, who nominally governs the British Line Islands and the Solomons, and is head of the British side of the New Hebrides condominium, will remain there. The commercial position of Fiji is, however, well assured.

**A Quaint Outlier.**—Rotuma (12 deg. 30 S., 177 deg. 10' E.) is a strange example of a savage offshoot from the Polynesian navigators of old. The Rotumans are Polynesians with marked Japanese characteristics. Having given hospitality to the apostles of two religions, they were periodically afflicted by religious wars. The opposing sides, says Romilly, were always on guard against each other: all amusements had been stopped. The place was so dull that all the young men were leaving.<sup>1</sup> There was no hope for these remote islanders until Queen Victoria, after more than a year's consideration, agreed to annex the place.

The annexation took place in 1881, and Rotuma became an appendage of Fiji. But owing to its distance it was given a separate government under a commissioner, whose court takes the place of the supreme court of Fiji. Rotuma has a population of more than and its chief export is copra.

Sir John Thurston.—John Bates Thurston was born in England in 1836, and after serving as an officer on an Indian liner he became a farmer at Namoi, New South Wales. In 1862 he was employed for a time under the government of that colony, and then went on a botanising expedition in the Western Pacific. In 1864 he was wrecked on one of the islands of Samoa, and before being rescued in 1866 he had acquired a wide knowledge of the native language and customs. On being taken to Fiji he obtained a post in the British consulate, and in 1869 he was for a while acting consul. "Shortly afterwards his remarkable influence with the natives became manifest. Fiji had one of those quaint imitations of a parliamentary constitution which are still found in some of the Pacific Islands. Such a constitution is not always a success, and in 1872 that of Fiji went to pieces. In May 1872 the king (Thakombau) saw that there was only one chance of safety, and called in Thurston to be Chief Secretary and Minister for Foreign Affairs. This led immediately in 1874 to the transfer of the islands to Great Britain, which had only a few years previously refused to

<sup>1</sup> Letters and Memoirs of H.H. Romilly, 1893.

## 96 THE STORY OF FIJI

accept them. The negotiations were conducted through Thurston, and on the accomplishment of the cession he became Colonial Secretary and Auditor-General of the new Crown colony." In 1877 the High Commission for the Western Pacific was created, and in 1879 Thurston became secretary to the High Commissioner. The following year he was Acting-Governor of Fiji, and at the end of the year went on a special mission to the Friendly islands to negotiate a treaty. In 1882 he was appointed Deputy Governor of Fiji, and in November 1883 Consul -General for the Western Pacific. "He established his reputation both with the natives and the Europeans by the judgment and wisdom with which he treated the former, and the firmness with which he upheld the dignity of British jurisdiction. So great was his reputation with the natives that in 1883, when the great Fijian chief was dying, he installed Thurston as chief of all the Fijians." In 1885 he went to England as British Commissioner to the Anglo-German Commission, and the following year returned to Fiji in the capacity of lieutenant-governor. In 1886 he became Governor and High Commissioner of the Western Pacific. In 1895 he visited England in broken health, and, returning to Fiji in 1896, died the following year (*Dict. Nat. Biography*).

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