

TAVIUNI.

The following contribution from "a correspondent" appears in the *Fiji Times*:—

So much has been said and written of and about this Fijian Paradise that it would seem superfluous to attempt to supplement the reports already so circulated in its praise. I may, however, be permitted to contribute my mite towards elucidating the present position of its agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing enterprise, the growing importance of which is calculated to impart a beneficial influence over the whole society. I was first landed at Wairiki, and met with every civility and hospitality by Mr. John McKissack and his aimiable better half, who kindly entertained me in that spirit of homely generosity which dispels all feelings of hesitation. The land in the neighbourhood of Wairiki, chiefly flats and gentle slopes, appears to contain the ingredients requisite for the nourishment to perfection of sugar, coffee, corn, tobacco and coconuts. The Messrs. McKissack have planted a large number of nuts, and the young ones look healthy and are strong. Cotton has been entirely abandoned, and the firm has lately sold their engine to the Messrs. Maitland, Brothers, for the more encouraging business of sugar-making. Tobacco, however, is receiving considerable attention at Wairiki, and a quantity has been manufactured by the Messrs. McKissack, who have pressed it into boxes, in the orthodox style, for sale ; and it is to be hoped that the enterprise will prove sufficiently encouraging to induce more extensive operations. In storekeeping the old story obtains at Wairiki—dull times, scarcity of money, and a decreasing demand for everything beyond absolute necessities. Still nature's face is gay, and appears determined either spontaneously or by the aid of cultivation, to yield in profusion natural productions or the coveted crops of civilised life; thus the bounties of nature overwhelm man's attempts to apply them for his own use. He growls and is poor amidst peace and plenty.

Passing the fine level locality occupied by the native town of Wairiki, the residence, on a gentle rise, of the French missionaries stands in bold relief, and presents to the eye a pretty view, surrounded as it is by luxuriant foliage and enclosed by a substantial stone fence. In the town stands a white building on raised ground, looking very neat and clean, and this is, I was told, the Wesleyan chapel, which has apparently fallen into disuse partly for the want of a parson, partly from the apathy of the Protestant residents, but chiefly from the absence of the spiritual vitality which seems to have received so serious a check among that Fijians, by the late visitation of measles. However, there are, it would seem, still a few faithful among the faithless and it is to be hoped that a pastor will soon be appointed for Taviuni whose presence will soon induce a special revival. As Somo Somo was approached, the country became more stony and rugged, presenting the appearance peculiar to volcanic neighbourhoods, until the locality of Mr. Macpherson's hotel was reached. There the face of the country is more pleasant, the land appears to be more prolific, and is watered by a large creek maintaining a clean flowing stream all the year round. At Mr. Macpherson's, I found a very comfortable cleanly lodging, and a table well provided with wholesome and inviting articles of food, properly cooked and served ; in short, I met with comfort and convenience, combined with moderate charges and civility. By the kindness of Mr. Peters, I proceeded in his boat to Matee, the plantation of Mr.

Peckham, North Taviuni, and, at that gentleman's invitation spent two days very pleasantly, inspecting the extensive buildings, drying houses, and complete appliances for making copra on a large scale and with utmost economy and dispatch. The whole establishment is replete with conveniences and altogether unique. Mr. Peckham has a large number of cocoanut trees on the plantations, and a great many more planted. He also buys a great many nuts, and thus is enabled to make an extraordinary quantity of copra at a minimum cost. The entire work is managed by the proprietor, assisted by Mr. Lowe, who discharges the duties of bookkeeper and managing clerk.

The land from Somo Somo to Nai Seli Seli, the residence of Mr. Gustavus Peterson, is a continuous succession of fertile flats, gullies, and ridges, gradually rising from the sea shore, and presenting a delightful landscape, studded with substantial dwellings and neat homesteads, conspicuous among which are those of Mr. Mason, J.P., and Mr. Peterson. At Nai Seli Seli I viewed the new vessel, intended to be schooner-rigged, built by Mr. Gustavus Peterson. The hull is nearly finished, the cabin is ingeniously contrived, and the inside work is all of ornamental native woods, which look very pretty, and will be still prettier when varnished or polished so as to raise or bring out the grain to advantage; the hull is built of Fijian hardwood, is copper-fastened throughout, and I have heard competent judges say that it is a faithfully-built vessel, that the workmanship is good, and that the model is unexceptionable. The caulking and coppering have yet to be done. Mr. Peterson has the sheathing ready, but he is waiting for a purchaser to enable him to complete the vessel and float it. The dimensions are—Keel, 50 feet; overall, 65 feet; depth of hold, 7 feet; beam, 14 feet 6 inches.

I returned in Mr. Peckham's boat to Somo Somo, and as my passage from there to Vuna Point was chiefly by night with a fair wind I had but little opportunity of viewing the country along that coast, where it is said there is excellent land, improving in quality as the Point is approached.

We anchored off Vuna Point about 4 a.m., and after breakfast landed opposite to Eugenie, the residence of Mr. Marshal Moore. My first impression was that the place was a low flat, uncultivated tract of country, utterly opposed to the glowing accounts I have been accustomed to hear of the locality, and I wondered where all the cotton which formerly did so much to enhance the value of land had been grown on Taviuni, and where all the corn is grown which still maintains the supremacy of Vuna. But walking along the beach a few hundred yards in search of a bathing place, I passed the once celebrated plantation residence of Holmhurst. Proceeding a quarter of a mile further, I reached a neat residence, erected apparently on a common, outside a stone fence marking the boundary of Holmhurst. I found this to be Ardmore, the plantation of Mr. James McConnell, and that the iron building a short distance from the house was the store and post-office. Accordingly I went to see if there were any letters for me, and met with the proprietor's brother, who obligingly opened the store, and turned over the letters to find that there were none for me. I retraced my steps, and after taking a dip in a brackish creek, the only one at Vuna, made for the hotel kept by Mr. Carlton, and had the pleasure soon afterwards to meet Mr. Charles Jones, representing at Holmhurst the proprietor of that valuable property, Mr. Dill of Sydney. By the invitation of Mr. Jones, I visited the plantation and was much gratified with the splendid order of this place. There are fifteen acres of imported Bourbon sugarcane (purple, yellow and ribband), and from three to five months old, looking very strong and healthy; there are also some fifty acres under maize,

and about 200 acres of South Sea Island cotton, which promise a large yield if the season will only admit of it being picked in due time. The whole is carefully attended to, being kept very clean, and intersected by roads at convenient distances. This valuable property (1000 acres) is subdivided by substantial stone fences, neatly built ; there are two grass paddocks of ten and twenty-five acres, upon which seventy-five sheep, forty-two head of short-horned cattle, and three horses keep themselves rolling fat. The cattle and sheep have breed, size, and weight to recommend them, and the horses have breed and bone enough to make them really useful for saddle or harness. Altogether, the plantation, crops, and the stock are incomparably the finest I have seen on Taviuni ; and Mr. Jones, who evidently does not believe in keeping more cats than can catch mice, has effected very considerable improvements with comparatively few hands. The plantation is a credit to him, and an example for others.

The climate of Taviuni is proverbially moist, and perhaps happily so, because its most productive land is composed of loose alluvial soil, which absorbs and drains readily, there being no stiff subsoil to check the too rapid filtration; and this accounts for the absence of surface streams. Taviuni is undoubtedly well adapted for sugar-cane or any other crop not injuriously affected, like cotton, by the frequent showers essential to the noted productiveness of the land. The sugar-cane on Holmhurst is said to be rich in saccharine matter, and Mr. Jones, I understand, contemplates the erection of a sugar-mill. He has lately bought an engine to supplement the steam power already on the ground ; and if the manufacture of sugar be entered upon at Holmhurst, under the practical superintendence of Mr. Jones, there can, I think, be no doubt of its success.

From Vuna I rode a distance of eight miles, over a cleared bush road, to Selia Levu, and saw the sugar mills of Messrs. Maitland and Co., and that of Messrs. Hartman and Co. They were both extensive establishments, almost ready for work. I was informed that Messrs. Maitland and Co.'s aim will be crushing during the present month; but the other works are not complete. The former company are pushing the work forward very energetically under the management of Mr. Cowley ; they recently bought Messrs. McKissap's steam engine, and have it fixed in the works to supplement a still more powerful one, making together about 20-horse power. The Messrs. Hartmann and Co. have one 25-horse power engine, and have expended in all some £16,000, whilst the Messrs. Maitland and Co., with all the delay and expense occasioned by mistakes at first, have, it is stated, not exceeded £10,000, and one half of that was spent though the mismanagement of those who undertook the erection of the machinery. However, everything looks encouraging now. Mr. Hunter has about two hundred and fifty acres of cane which will soon be for the mill, and the Messrs. Maitland and Co. have about one hundred acres of their own with more under way, so there is no fear of the works being stopped for want of cane.

Mr. J.V. Tarte, I am told, has it in contemplation to erect very extensive sugar machinery at Vatu Were, Taviuni, and it would seem that this enterprising gentleman is prepared to expend a large sum in the attempt. Already Mr. Tarte has made a commencement by the construction of what is termed the Vuna Point Railway, which means a built tramway about half a mile in length from the beach through the centre of his plantation.

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