

CORRESPONDENCE.

Written for this Paper.
JENSON'S TRAVELS.

LETTER NO. XXII.

Wednesday, August 7th. I started out from my lodgings in Suva, Fiji, for a morning walk along the bay, and the day being cool and pleasant I continued on past the Colonial prison and the Suva graveyard, the latter being situated about two miles north of the center of Suva, near the point where the Tamavua river puts into the bay. The stream looking so clear and beautiful, I yielded to the temptation of taking a bath, but found the water rather cold, which is no wonder, as this is Fijian winter. The Tamavua river is quite wide at its mouth, but is not very long. From that stream the Suva water works obtains its supply of water.

Through the courtesy of Henry Millen Esq, the superintendent of all the government prisons of the Fijian group, I was shown through the entire prison premises by the jailor, Mr. Fred Sabbin. The ground covers several acres, and there are at present 175 male and 9 female offenders incarcerated. Of the male convicts three are whites and one is a half cast; the rest are Fijians and coolies (natives of Hindostan and the East Indies.) Only eight are imprisoned for life; most of the others are in for short terms, and about half of them are sexual offenders—people who have been convicted of adultery and fornication against which offences there are very stringent laws. Formerly, when a man seduced his neighbor's wife or daughter, the husband or father of the woman thus wronged would watch for an opportunity to club the offender to death, this being the custom of the country; but since the English fairly got control of the government this custom has been abolished by law, and imprisonment, varying in length from one to twelve months, substituted in lieu thereof. Unfortunately this law is inoperative so far as the whites are concerned. Mr. Sabbin was of the opinion that white offenders, of which there undoubtedly are many, had succeeded so far in clearing themselves by paying certain amounts of money, as none of them had as yet been convicted or sent to jail for sexual crimes. The officers of the prison—there are at present a large number of native sub-officers, two of whom are women—sometimes have to resort to stringent measures in order to preserve peace in the household. Thus I was shown a regular flogging post to which offenders occasionally are bound, while their backs are being lashed with a three-forked prison thong. The number of lashes inflicted vary all the way from two to twenty and are administered by a powerful native guard while the victim is securely tied to the post by the wrists and ankles, his body leaning forward at an angle of about forty-five degrees. I only saw one prisoner in chains; he was a desperate Indian or coolie who tried to escape from the jail a short time ago. The great majority of the prisoners sleep in a roomy and well ventilated bunk-house, while the worst criminals are locked up at nights in separate cells, which are prepared in a small adjacent concrete building. The women prison-

ers occupy a small house by themselves; and the Europeans also occupy separate quarters. All able bodied prisoners have to work on the outside about eight hours a day. They are mostly employed in making roads and around working in the government buildings and in the harbor.

While strolling along in the neighborhood of the graveyard, I suddenly came upon a small party of natives armed with long sharp-bladed knives. For a moment all the horrors of cannibalism rushed to my mind; but as they simply smiled and shook their heads as I addressed them in English, and made no move toward seizing me, I soon breathed more freely and also discovered that their long knives were intended for cutting grass instead of human beings. As they could understand neither English or Danish, neither my very limited stock of Hawaiian words, and their sounds failing to make me either wiser or better, we parted with smiles all around, and after walking a short distance I sat down by the road side and read the following from Stanford's "Compendium of Geography and travel:"

The manners and morals of the Fijians are in many respects those of a civilized people; yet perhaps nowhere in the world has human life been so recklessly destroyed, or cannibalism been reduced to such a system as here. Human flesh was * * * the Fijian's greatest luxury, and not only enemies or slaves, but sometimes even wives, children and friends, were sacrificed to gratify it. At great feasts it was not uncommon to see twenty human bodies cooked at a time, and on the demand of a chief for long pig, which is their euphemism for a human body, his attendants would rush out and kill the first person they met, rather than fail to gratify him. No less horrible were the human sacrifices which attended most of their ceremonies. When a chief died, a whole hecatomb of wives and slaves had to be buried alive with him. When a chief's house was built, the hole for each post must have a slave to hold it up and be buried with it. When a great war canoe was to be launched, or to be brought home, it must be dragged to or from the water over living human beings tied between two pantan stems to serve as rollers. Stranger still and altogether incredible, were it not vouched for by independent testimony of the most satisfactory character, these people scrupled not to offer themselves to a horrible death to satisfy the demands of custom, or to avoid the finger of scorn. So firm was their belief in a future state, in which the actual condition of the dying person was perpetuated, that on the first symptoms of old age and weakness, parents with their own free consent were buried by their children. A missionary was actually invited by a young man to attend the funeral of his mother, who herself walked cheerfully to the grave and was there buried; while a young man who was unwell and not able to eat, was voluntarily buried alive, because, as he himself said, if he could not eat he should get thin and weak, and the girls would call him a skeleton and laugh at him. He was buried by his own father; and when he asked to be strangled first, he was scold-

ed and told to be quiet, and be buried like other people, and give them no more trouble; and he was buried accordingly.

Thursday, August 8th. I took a long walk along the beach and around the peninsula on which Suva is situated, visiting on my way the large and commodious native government building erected for the accommodation of those Fijians who are in the employ of the government. There are quite a number of these buildings and nearly all the male occupants have the title Buta (chief) prefixed to their names, some of them being members of the royal family. As most of them could speak English I had no trouble to introduce myself to some of the leading men who in turn introduced me to others. Thus I became acquainted with Kadavu Levu, a grandson of Cakobau (pronounced Teakombat) the former king of Fiji, and his two lady cousins, also grandchildren of the late king, who were there on a visit. The oldest of these girls, whose name is Letio (Lydia) Cakobau ranks as one of the prettiest women among the Fijians, she is nineteen years old and about to be married to a young chief at Bewa. Her sister, Teimumu Vuikaba, seventeen years old, is also a handsome woman for a Fijian. Both rank as princesses. Through the courtesy of Kadavu Levu, Mataitini, the doctor and other leading natives, I was taken into several houses and introduced to a number of families, who all seemed very comfortable and everything about their dwellings tidy and clean. Some of the houses are 40 feet long by 25 feet wide and very strongly built. The interior is all one room, but often as many as half a dozen doors opens to the outside. The floors are all covered with mats, and that part which constitutes the bed is generally raised a foot or so above the rest of the floor.

In my walk I passed a large gang of prisoners working on the road for which some were quarrying rock and others were packing these rocks on their heads from the quarry or end of tramway to such parts of the road as needed them. It was a strange sight to see this long string of almost naked men walking in single file with their heavy burdens; and it reminded me very much of the pictures I have seen representing the children of Israel in bondage in Egypt. Most of the prisoners were Indians, but there were also quite a number of Fijians.

Further on I came to an Indian village containing about two hundred families, who live in small, inconvenient and dirty huts. They are people who were brought in to the country as contract or indentured laborers, and who after serving their five years as such are trying to raise rice or do something for a living till another five years have passed, when they are entitled to a free passage back to India. I was told that most of them avail themselves of this opportunity, not being pleased enough with Fiji to make it their permanent home. Finding a young fellow who could talk a little English, I was piloted by him into several houses where I had an opportunity of studying for myself the interior arrangements of the houses of these unfortunate people. In going through the village I seemed to arouse considerable curiosity, as people were peeping out from almost every door; but I was not molested by anyone. I heard considerable boisterous language used in differ-