

back of these poor over-worked slaves' endurance. They refused any longer to work, and to get nothing for their labour. Angry words ensued—the only half-dead cannibal spirit arose within them—they killed the officer, cooked, and ate him. Being subsequently fearful for the consequences of their acts, they sent for the native teacher, and compelled him also to eat some of the 'bukola' (dead man), under pain of being served in a similar manner, if he refused. The teacher ate of the flesh, but took the earliest opportunity to escape from their hands, and made for the coast. Numbers of colonists have been for years predicting that sooner or later a similar event would happen; but they have been treated by Sir Arthur Gordon as alarmists. Now that murder has once occurred, it is expected that the natives will be very ready to repeat the operation, unless they are treated differently; and it behoves the Government at once to investigate the matter most carefully, and remove the grievance of the natives, otherwise the blood of any other victims will be on their heads."

The above story, told with a circumstantiality worthy of Defoe, is an illustration of the reckless manner in which Sir Arthur Gordon's native policy in Fiji is attacked. We learn, on unquestionable authority, that there is not one word of truth in this sensational narrative. No Government officer or any other person has been assailed, much less killed (to say nothing of being eaten), either at Nadrau or in any other part of Fiji. Officers of the Government have been in and out of Nadrau repeatedly, and speak of progress and contentment as usual. The place where the tragedy is said to have occurred is in the island of Viti Levu; but we learn that the reports from Levuka were the first any one in Viti Levu heard of the story, which has nevertheless been very widely circulated through the Australian and English press. The opponents of the system of native taxation which Sir Arthur Gordon originated, and which Governor Des Vœux is ably carrying out, profess to speak in the interest of the natives, but up to the present moment we have seen no evidence whatever of their authority to do this.

THE CHINESE IN CUBA.

OUR readers will remember the deplorable accounts of the condition of the Chinese in Cuba which we have published in past years. We have received from an authentic source the following interesting report, which shows that a great and beneficial change has taken place in the treatment of these people by their former taskmasters:—

“September 30th, 1881.

“Since the establishment of the Consulate-General in Havana caused the treaty stipulations to be carried into effect, the condi-

tion of the Chinese in Cuba has undergone a great change. This change can hardly be properly appreciated by persons not aware of the prejudices which existed there against the race, and which were sedulously fostered by those who were interested in keeping the immigrants in a position in which they could easily be made the victims of extortion.

“When the Consul-General arrived in Havana, he found there were three classes of Chinese in Cuba. One, a small number as compared with the entire Chinese population, had got free from their contracts, and amassed some little capital, and, having obtained the more or less disinterested protection of some leading white men, they were doing reasonably well and were seldom molested; though subject to any arbitrary measures that from time to time might be taken by municipal or other authorities, on the plea of “organizing the labour system.” These men obtained ‘Cédulas,’ or certificates of personal identity, without much difficulty. Some were treated as Spanish subjects; others, claiming to be immigrants from Hong Kong, enrolled themselves in the books of the English Consulate as British subjects; others, again, hailing from Macao as their port of embarkation in China, took out papers as Portuguese subjects, and thus, by one mode or other, endeavoured to conform themselves to the exigencies of the local laws, whilst securing a refuge and a defender in case of trouble or difficulty. This was one class.

“The second was a numerous class, standing on a different status, but perfectly helpless. It was composed of men who had finished their time, were unprovided with police documents, and unable to obtain them through want of means and ignorance of the steps to be taken. Others had lost the certificates of expiration of contract they had been fortunate enough to obtain; whilst many were unable to obtain these certificates, because the planters, their masters, wishing to keep them on as labourers, evaded the granting of any such document. These men, with the consciousness that they had a right to their freedom, earned by many years of labour, privations, and hardships, finding themselves helpless before the tyranny of the employés on the estates, and the subordinate representatives of public authority and law, and obliged by an inconsiderate determination of the Government to enter into fresh contracts against their will, and against all law and equity, formed a discontented, hopeless body, without anything to restrain them from sinking daily further and further into vice and misery.

“The third class was composed of men who were still under contract. These had to contend with ill-treatment in every form; insufficient nourishment; excessive labour and the violent prejudices of the whites who controlled them and the negroes who laboured with them. Their misery naturally made them runaways in many cases, and being unprovided with any papers, they immediately fell under the power of the inferior myrmidons of the police.

“The object and ambition of these two latter classes was to obtain, in some way or other, ‘Cédulas’ of some kind, which should render them, if not wholly, at any rate to some extent, less subject to extortion and arrest. Many unscrupulous persons derived large profits from a traffic in these documents, as much as a hundred dollars (20*l.*) in gold, and in some instances more, having been paid for one.

“The unfortunate men who were unprovided with papers were liable to be arrested at any moment, and sent to Government depôts, there to wait until they were claimed as runaways, or they consented to enter into new contracts. In the meanwhile, they were made to labour on public works, practically without any pay, for the trifling amount of a few cents which was nominally allowed them was kept from them so long that after many months and even years had passed, the majority considered themselves fortunate if they could finally realize a fourth of their hard-earned wages, and many are still claiming payment of wages long due. Many were incarcerated in these depôts for many years without having committed any offence or being accused of anything, and without any hope of release.

“When the Consul-General arrived in Havana, he found large numbers of Chinese thus confined in the different depôts throughout the island, and he immediately set to work to mend their miserable situation. After several months’ exertions, he succeeded in obtaining from the Governor-General a decree, dated the 20th August, 1880, releasing all these sufferers, and declaring that no more Chinese should be sent to the depôts. The decree also directed that if unprovided with papers they were to be furnished with ‘Cédulas,’ and all pending proceedings against them under former regulations annulled. Furthermore, the decree provided that although Chinese subjects under contracts at the time were bound to fulfil the same, still they were entitled to their ‘Cédulas,’ and henceforth could only be compelled to complete their contracts by ordinary suit for breach of contract in a court of law; and that in future they should, in all respects, receive the same treatment as the subjects of the most favoured nation, as stipulated in the Treaty. This decree issued by the Government in a liberal spirit and notwithstanding much interested opposition, has been the starting-point for a new order of things. Those freed from the depôts have, nearly all, found work and have been improving their position with the patient industry of their race. Those under contract have, in many cases, been able to compound with their masters for the still unexpired time on an advantageous basis, many of the masters coming to the Consulate to effect a settlement of these questions whenever there was any difficulty about the time or terms. Very few, comparatively, now remain bound, and in a short time all will be free, as the terms of even the latest contracts are nearly expired.

“The many persons who made it their business to *exploiter* the

Chinese, have lost their control over them and are pretty well beaten off; and those who still remain are fain to nibble at the fruits of Chinese industry and economy, instead of devouring them almost entirely as they once did. When a man is now found without papers, instead of being marched off at once for an indefinite time to a place worse than a prison, he is treated in a reasonable manner, and generally placed at the disposal of the Consulate-General for identification and that he may be provided with proper documents and set free. The legal position of the Chinese is now on the same footing as that of any other foreigner, and the former is not slow in profiting by this change and in making the most of his new opportunities. Several Chinese are rapidly acquiring a competence, and, some, even wealth; and with their improved means they are making friends and creating interests in sympathy with their own.

“Of course a prejudice nursed and fostered by unscrupulous persons with sordid motives during more than a quarter of a century cannot be eradicated at once, but the contempt which was affected towards the whole race is no longer shown, and it is now only directed against individuals who may, by some personal act, have become obnoxious to some person or class of persons. Orderly, well-behaved Chinese can now get along in business with only the usual trade rivalry to contend with, and are gradually attaining to equality in ordinary social life, with no further restrictions than those arising in any country from marked difference of race and ideas, and from imperfect knowledge of the language of the country, such as most foreigners suffer from anywhere, and from the adverse circumstance that so many of these men have but lately, so to speak, filled menial situations in the society in which they are now taking a different position.

“Putting aside the status held in the best society in Cuba by the representatives of the Imperial (Chinese) Government, which is certainly as high as that of the official representatives of any other nation, without exception, the common class of Chinese labourers could hardly get such a satisfactory standing among the English-speaking races as they now enjoy among the Spaniards. Time and their own good conduct must do the rest. One of the best signs of their improved position is that many of them are resuming their national costume.

“Before concluding, I should tell you that the credit of having done so much for the Chinese in Cuba is entirely due to Mr. Chun Shen Yin, the Chinese Consul at Matanzas.”

THE CHINESE IN PERU.

A CORRESPONDENT, whose letter is dated October 25th, says:—

“I am glad to be able to tell you that, thanks no doubt in great measure to your humane advocacy of the cause of the per-

"THE CHINESE IN CUBA." Annual Report of the British & Foreign Aborigines' Protection Society, no. 12, 1 Dec. 1881, pp. 440+. Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CC1903215357/NCUK?u=slv&sid=bookmark-NCUK. Accessed 31 Mar. 2023.