

Northern Messenger

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In the Fiji Islands.

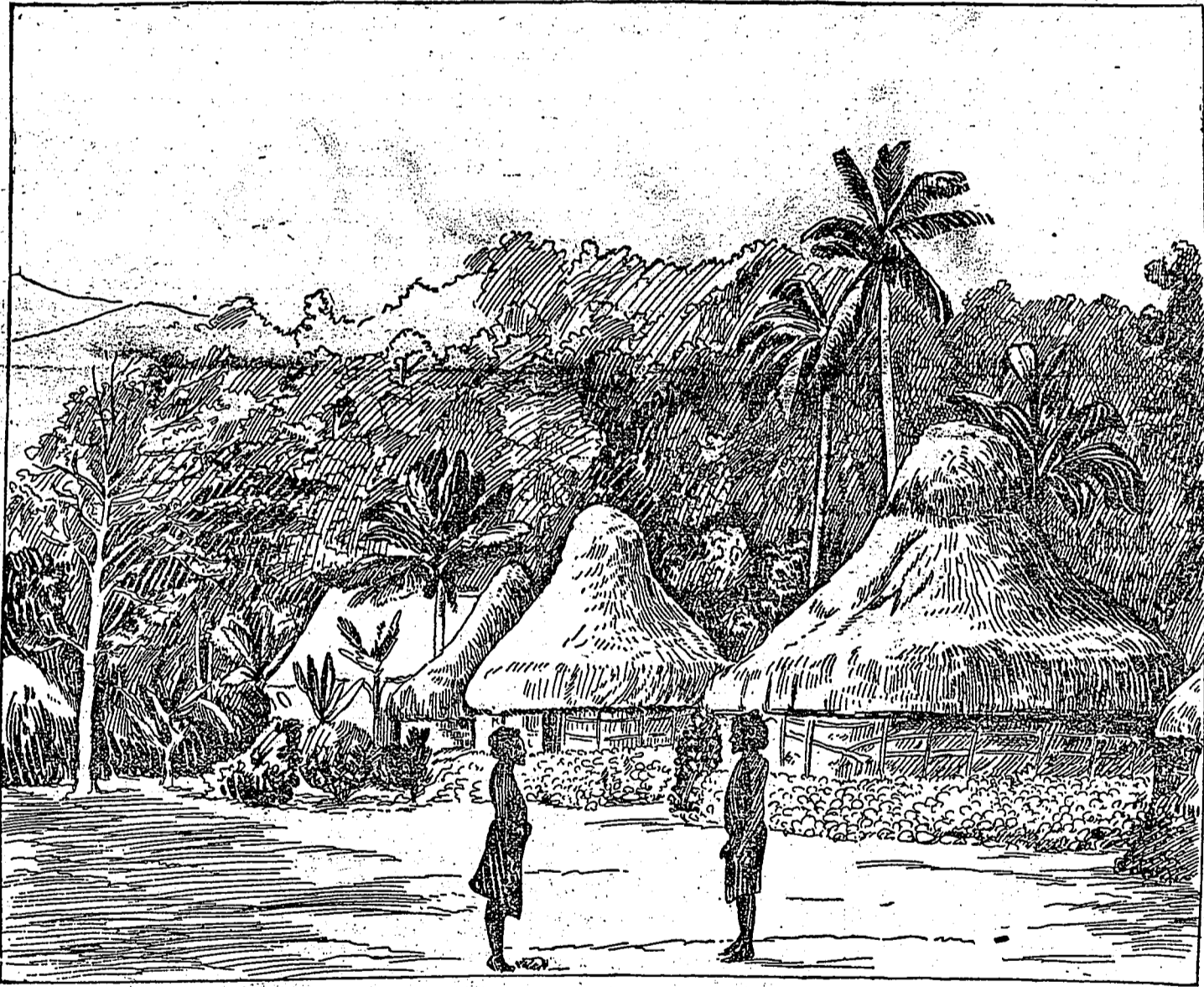
(John Telford, in 'Sunday at Home'.)

Fiji was annexed by England in 1874. The epidemic of measles which Thakomban's retinue brought back from Sydney after the annexation, swept away one-third of the people, and the population seems to be declining. Our task in Fiji is not easy, but the natives are being trained in self-government, and a great council of the chiefs meets the governor every year in May to consider all matters affecting the islands. Village councils assemble every month, to deal with springs, wells, and various local questions. A cluster of these villages form a district and their representatives meet on the first

at which produce will be received. Then it is arranged what articles each district will send. Sometimes a village grows its own tax produce with its ordinary crops; sometimes villages combine to grow their tax produce in one large plantation. The system as now worked has some disadvantages of its own, but it has yielded a considerable revenue, and has also stimulated industry and production. The hated poll tax has been abolished; a fair price has been secured for native produce.

The Fijian is not capable of prolonged labor like a European, but he is devoted to his garden. It would not be easy to find youth or man who has not his own plot under cultivation. An axe and knife are used for

partly through their own lack of foresight and economy, partly through the difficulty of securing laborers. The population does not increase. There is little doubt that two hundred years ago it was ten times as large as at present. Before 1874 it had been diminishing at the rate of five thousand a year. Then came the dreadful measles epidemic. Sanitary reform is needed, for many of the villages are rendered unhealthy by the deep ditches and stagnant water which surround them; and the dead have for generations been buried among the homesteads. Wise reforms are being gradually introduced, and it is hoped that this fine race may receive a new lease of national life through British rule.



A FIJIAN VILLAGE.

Tuesday in each month to regulate all matters that cannot be decided by the village councils. Grave cases are sent on to the higher provincial councils which are held twice a year. The chief of each district has to give an account of the villages under his jurisdiction. The sanitation, the record of births, deaths and marriages, the condition of the schools, all come under review here. Those who cultivate the soil pay some fixed proportion of their produce to the government. The amount of the tax which each province must raise is fixed by the Legislative Council, and a scale of prices is named

clearing purposes, with a stick for digging. In the spring, or planting season, a whole community will band together, tilling all the village gardens in turn. Sometimes the seed is also provided from the general store, the actual owner having only to furnish provisions for the day. Sugar, maize, fibre, fruit, pearl-shell, peanuts, and coffee find a market in Australia and New Zealand. Bananas and pineapples grow luxuriantly.

Annexation has proved an undoubted blessing to Fiji. There are, however, many difficult problems yet to be solved; The cotton and sugar planters have suffered heavily,

The outlook in Fiji is, therefore, not without its dangers and trials. But, whatever the future may be, English Christianity has reason to thank God for the triumphs won in this old haunt of cannibalism. The islands were once in a chronic state of war, and all prisoners were slain and eaten. Women were bound hand and foot and laid on the ground to serve as rollers for the heavy war-canoes of the chiefs. Others were buried alive clasping the post of the chief's new hut. One shudders to think of these days of terror. One man boasted that he had eaten parts of eight hundred and seven-