

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

real, and the narrative is so brisk and bright, that one is carried along without the slightest sense of fatigue. Mr. du Chaillu was received with kindness by all classes of people, in whatever part of the peninsula he travelled, and he saw every type of social life. His sketches of the farmers are particularly pleasing; and he found, we gladly notice, that in the most primitive of the people, as elsewhere, religious feeling was strong. In one remote valley, *æ.g.*, "To bring up their children in the fear of the Lord," we read, "is one of the chief aims of the parents:" at the parsonage, a lady showed "much interest in Missionary work." The pleasures of the rural population are simple; and in no part of the world is "sweet home" a more potent preservative for good.¹

We have only to add that these handsome volumes are well printed, in large clear type on good paper: the illustrations are numerous and charming: there is an admirable map.

Reviews.

At Home in Fiji. By C. F. GORDON CUMMING. William Blackwood & Sons. 1881.

WE have read this work with great interest. Few books of modern travel have afforded us more entire satisfaction. The authoress has had the advantage of nearly two years' residence among the people whose habits and character she describes, and has made good use of her time and materials. There is scarcely anything omitted in her narrative. The scenery, the vegetable and animal products of the country, the condition of the settlers and the natives, the labours of the Missionaries, and their results, are all minutely given, in a lively and graphic manner. It is with the last-mentioned subject (the most interesting of all to the Christian reader), that we shall chiefly concern ourselves, our space being somewhat limited. It is refreshing to find such a subject treated as the authoress treats it; for in reading modern books of travels, our feelings are too often hurt by covert sneers, either at religion in general, or at the work of Missions in particular. And even when the writer abstains from language of this sort, he too often treats the labours of Missionaries as a matter of quite subordinate interest. It seems to us, however, that it would be rather difficult for any author to do this who undertook to give a faithful description of the state of society in the Fiji

¹ The chapters which bring before us life among the Lapps are full of interest. We regret we have not space for quotations which we had marked. Mr. du Chaillu found the Lapps very kind-hearted; their life in summer, during which they have to follow the reindeer day and night, is a very hard one. They welcomed him everywhere, giving him freely of their best. The height of the men ranged from 4 ft. 5 in. to 5 ft. Every Laplander knows his own reindeer by a special mark on the ears. The famous Lapp "shoe-grass" is indispensable in the winter: dried, worn in the shoes, it has the peculiarity of retaining heat.

Islands. For the wonderful change which the Missionaries have effected in the habits of the natives, as well as the comparative smallness of the territories in which they labour, have brought the Mission Work into such prominence that it must force itself on the attention of the most careless observer, and might well extort praises, even from those who are prejudiced against Missions, as alas! too many of our countrymen are. Miss Gordon Cumming, however, belongs to neither of these classes; she is an accurate observer, and, we think, a candid judge. If she has any bias (and she does not *appear* to have), it is certainly not against Missions, and all who are interested in such work owe her a debt of gratitude for the noble manner in which she has spoken of the Missionary work in Fiji, and refuted the depreciatory statements which have been made from time to time respecting it. Fortunately, refutation is easy, for the reasons we have already stated. Facts speak for themselves, and force themselves on the notice of all who visit those parts; and even looking at the matter from a mere utilitarian point of view, any one must admit that the labours of those who have succeeded in transforming whole multitudes from reckless cannibals into decent and respectable members of society, have not been thrown away. Miss Cumming has certainly not shrunk from harrowing up our feelings by describing the abominable acts of cruelty, which were formerly of daily occurrence, and were perpetrated by those very persons who have since become gentle and humane, and devout worshippers of the true God and Saviour. But we cannot find fault with her for going into such horrible details, because her purpose in so doing evidently was to show forth more strikingly the marvellousness of that change which Christianity has wrought in the hearts and lives of those once degraded savages. However, we forbear to quote those parts of our work; we prefer to turn to the brighter side of the picture, which represents the Fijians (as many of them *now* are), *humanized*, and to a great extent *spiritualized*, by the influence of Christianity. In order to do full justice to the self-denying labours of the Missionaries and their efforts, it would be necessary to read all that Miss Cumming says on the subject; we can only extract a few passages from her work as specimens.

In speaking of the great révolution effected in the habits of the natives since the arrival of the first Missionaries, she observes:—

Strange, indeed, is the change which has come over these isles since first Messrs. Cargill and Cross, Wesleyan Missionaries, landed here in the year 1835, resolved, at the hazard of their lives, to bring the light of Christianity to these ferocious cannibals. Imagine the faith and courage of two white men, without any visible protection, landing in the midst of these bloodthirsty hordes, whose unknown language they had, in the first instance, to master, and day after day witnessing such scenes as chill one's blood even to hear about. Slow and disheartening was their labour for many years, yet so well has that little leaven worked, that with the exception of the Tholos, the wild highlanders, who still hold out in their own fortresses, the eighty inhabited isles have all abjured cannibalism, and other frightful customs and have Lotued—*i.e.*, embraced Christianity, in good earnest, as may well put to shame many more civilized nations. I often wish that some cavillers, who are for ever sneering at Christian Missions, could see something of their results in these isles. But first they have to recall the Fiji of ten years ago, when every man's hand was against his neighbour, &c. (vol. i. pp. 113, 114).

Then follows a graphic account of the horrors which were formerly perpetrated, and which we shall, no doubt, be readily excused for not transcribing. After this, a description is given of the religious condition of the Fiji converts. Miss Cumming informs us that there are nine hundred Wesleyan Churches in Fiji, at every one of which the frequent services are crowded by devout congregations. Indeed, the earnest spirit which

these people exhibit, both in their private and public devotions, might well put many an Englishman to the blush. Miss G. Cumming, however, expresses some doubt to how far they would be able to bear long contact with the ordinary run of whites—a fear which is only too well founded.

Indeed, she remarks, in another part of her work, that wherever the whites are found in great abundance the character of the natives proportionably deteriorates. Perhaps their influence and example is in some respects more injurious to them than that of their heathen countrymen; but unfortunately the Fiji islands are not a solitary instance of this fact. It is much to be deplored, and very humbling for us to think of, that the influence of our countryman over savage nations is generally for evil. There are (Miss Cumming tells us) a number of whites in different parts of the Fiji islands, and these generally do their best to depreciate the work of the Missions, declaring that the Christianity of the natives in these isles is merely nominal, adopted as a matter of expediency, and that half the people are still heathen at heart. But such language, coming as it does from people who are themselves devoid of all religion, is of little value. No doubt, the Fijians, like other heathen converts, cannot at once wash off all the taint of those evil habits in which they formerly lived, nor can we suppose that even one-half of those who have embraced Christianity are truly converted characters; but, for all that, we know that where there is much smoke there must be some fire, and we have no doubt that many have been virtually impressed with the truths of the Gospel; and at all events the change which has been wrought in the national character since the introduction of Christianity, is a proof that it has exercised a moral influence over the hearts of many, even where it has not yet led them to a full knowledge of its privileges, and of the power of salvation through Christ. At least, this is a step in the right direction.

Of the reality of devotional feeling among the converts Miss Cumming entertains no doubt. After describing the hearty and earnest manner in which they pray and sing, she says:—

Nor is there the slightest reason for thinking that this is merely an outward show of devotion; everything in their daily life tends to prove its reality. The first sound which greets your ears in the morning, and the last at night, is the sound of family worship in every house in the village. I am positively assured that the presence of the white missionary makes no appreciable difference in the congregations, and that the churches are just as crowded when there is a only a native teacher to lead the simple worship (vol. i. p. 149).

She remarks also on their exceeding honesty. "Daily," she says, "our goods are exposed on Sundays, when for several hours not a creature remains in the house where we happen to be staying, which is left with every door wide open, and all our things lying about;" and yet she never lost the value of a pin's head. Their generosity also it seems is most remarkable. They give freely of such things as they possess, both to those among themselves who have need, and also for the spread of the Christian cause, which is the more creditable to them as their means are but small. Indeed, the mode of living in Fiji, both among the natives and settlers, is anything but luxurious. What we generally consider as necessaries of life, such as butcher's meat, poultry, eggs, &c., are very difficult to procure. Judging from this, and also from the amount of stipend which the missionaries receive, of which Miss Cumming gives us a detailed statement in vol. i. pp. 287, 288, 289, it will be seen that unless they have private means, their circumstances are more straitened than many suppose. We will quote her own words:—

You may judge from these particulars (referring to the statement above alluded to), that a missionary's income is not on that excessively luxurious scale which you might suppose from reading the comments made by many travellers, who have been hospitably entertained at mission stations, for whom even the fatted calf has not been spared, and who, seeing the air of comfort and neatness prevailing around, have failed to give proper due to the careful and excellent housekeeping which could produce such admirable results with smaller means than are squandered on many a slatternly and slovenly household. Many make this comfort the text for a discourse on the superiority of the Roman missions, on the self-denial and ascetic lives of their priests, quite forgetting that in teaching such races as these, one of the most important objects is to give them the example of a happy, loving home, bright with all the pleasant influences of civilized life (vol. i. p. 290).

These remarks are very just, and ought to show us the necessity of carefulness when we judge of matters with which we are only partially acquainted. We are apt to draw false conclusions respecting facts relative to nations or individuals which are based upon a superficial view of certain delusive appearances. Travellers often return home with very mistaken impressions respecting the countries they visit, and propagate errors, not from any deliberate intention to deceive, but from rashness in forming their conclusions, or from prejudice. And they do not consider that by so doing they may sometimes wrong their neighbour, as in the present case. And certainly it does seem rather a cruel return to the missionaries for their hospitality, that their guests should accuse them of luxury, and contrast them disadvantageously with the Romish priests, as if there were any merit in asceticism, and as if it were synonymous with Christian self-denial: though, by the way, we may have our doubts whether the Romish missionaries *do* lead such ascetic lives as they are said to do. On this point, however, we have not sufficient information to be able to judge. But we are not surprised at what sometimes is said on this subject. For it is a matter of experience, that worldly persons who do their best to depreciate Protestant missions, will often speak with comparative favour of *Romish* ones, perhaps because, as they do not profess to believe in the Romish religion, the zeal of her emissaries does not seem to convey any secret reproach to themselves. Miss Cumming remarks on the jealousy of the missionaries and of their influence with the people, which pervades the whites, whether new comers or old residents, as a most strange and unaccountable thing. To us, indeed, it is melancholy, but certainly not accountable. It arises from that enmity which, as we know both from Scripture and experience, exists in the heart of every unrenewed man towards his Maker, and consequently towards all vital religion. This enmity is not always developed, and is happily kept in check by many different influences, or the world would be something like hell, but still it exists, and therefore it is not wonderful that under certain circumstances and with certain individuals it should break forth in full vigour: though in Fiji, it certainly seems strange, considering the facts of the case, that very shame should not in some measure restrain evil tongues.

A detailed history of the progress of Christianity in Fiji would be highly interesting, we think, judging by the various stories connected with the subject which Miss Cumming relates. These have, many of them, a novel-like interest, and they bear strong testimony to the noble spirit of self-sacrifice which was from time to time exhibited, not only by the missionaries, but sometimes also by their wives, as may be seen from the following anecdote. When Mr. Calvert, whom we have before mentioned as one of the first missionaries, found that the people of the island called Vata were anxious to be visited by a white missionary, he felt it impossible to refuse, though already burdened with work. It was (says Miss Cumming) a long and dangerous journey to undertake

in a frail canoe, and involved the absence certainly of weeks, possibly of months, and the thought of leaving his wife utterly alone in the midst of ferocious cannibals was altogether appalling. At this crisis it was she, a most gentle and loving woman, that came to his help and urged him to go (vol. i. p. 213).

Of course the labours of the missionaries have been attended with many obstacles and much opposition. There have been, from time to time, violent religious persecutions, many of the chiefs having forbidden their subjects, on pain of death, to embrace Christianity; and, on one occasion, a serious war, partly religious, partly political, arose. This took place soon after the annexation, when some of the tribes who were only half inclined to accept English rule, and were unfriendly to Christianity, were lashed into rebellion in the following manner. About this time it unfortunately happened that the isles were swept by the scourge of measles, a disease which, when it attacks savages, is (we believe) generally fatal. This visitation was represented by some of the natives as a judgment inflicted by the gods whom they had abandoned. The result was a formidable rising, followed by an obstinate war, a most interesting and graphic account of which is given in vol. ii. chap. xx. As good often comes out of evil, so it may be in this instance. The results of the war and the manner in which it was conducted are likely to prove beneficial for the future, both because they may inspire a wholesome dread of resisting the English Government, and also because they have proved that we can be merciful as well as severe. Only some of the most grievous criminals were executed, and others condemned to various terms of imprisonment and servitude. The mass of prisoners were treated with the utmost leniency. This mode of procedure must have struck the natives as remarkable, from its entire novelty. But it would have been difficult, or rather perhaps impossible, for the English to have enforced this humane treatment of their enemies, had they not found the native Christians willing to fall in with their ways. The only remnant of their old habits which they exhibited was a comparatively harmless one, that of dancing round the body of each fallen enemy as it was brought in. But there was only one instance of their attempting to make a cannibal feast of their foes. Now, this fact alone shows the change which Christianity must have worked in them. Of course, it is impossible for us to conceive the gratification which cannibalism can afford. Still, we know that a depraved appetite for it *does* exist, and surely nothing but a supernatural power could wean so many hundreds from a taste which was bred in the bone. Altogether, "it is" (to quote Miss Cumming's own words):—

Wonderful to think of what a war in this country has hitherto meant, and the appalling horrors involved, and now to think that amidst all these so-called savage warriors none should in any way have brought discredit on their character of chivalrous Christian soldiers, &c. It savours rather of an army of Puritans, to know that every morning, at the first streak of dawn, each separate tribe composing that little army, mustered in array to join the teacher in saying the Lord's Prayer, and a short prayer suited to the requirements of the day, and when the day was over each house separately had reading of the Scriptures, singing and prayer, and every man in the place knelt as he would have done at family worship in his peaceful village. I wonder of how many so-called civilized armies all this could be said? (vol. ii. p. 100).

We are aware that this mission work, about which we have said so much, is carried on by our Nonconformist brethren, but we think it none the less encouraging to those who do not wear the same livery. For, after all, there is a link which binds all Christian missionaries, from the fact that they have one common ground to stand upon in Christ crucified, and one common end and object in the extension of His kingdom.