FIJI ISLANDS LANDSCAPE

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The two large and many smaller Fiji Islands are distributed over an area about 300 miles square and with their large area and rugged terrain are rather similar to the Solomons (Fig. 8). Viti Levu, with dimensions of 60 by 90 miles, is somewhat larger than Guadalcanal and has the same elevated and dissected surface (Fig. 9). Vanua Levu is similar in shape and area to Malaita. The coastal plains which form the most desirable sites for human activity are limited in area to only 11% of the two larger islands, but these are bordered by rather extensive mangrove swamps which are possibly reclaimable. Coral reefs fringe most coastlines and are strewn in profusion among the islands.

Although adequate climatic data are not available in the Solomon Islands it is evident from a comparison of vegetation that Fiji is somewhat less rainy. Considerable areas in the west and northwest of both Viti Levu and Vanua Levu receive less than 70 inches per year. It is probable that few if any areas in the larger Solomon Islands receive so little. The eastern and higher parts of Fiji, of course, have rainfall averages over 100 inches in most places, and Suva once recorded 37 inches falling during a 13-hour storm. The lower quantities in the western parts of the large islands and a marked dry season are notable assets since these also are requirements for growing sugar cane, by far the most important contribution to Fijian economy.

The distribution of precipitation is closely mirrored in the distribution of vegetation with marked contrasts between the dense and luxuriant rainforest of eastern Viti Levu and the grassy hills and fields of sugar cane in the western part of the island.
The approximate equivalence in numbers between native Fijians and the descendants of indentured Indian laborers is well known. Dominance of sugar cane agriculture by the latter, while land is owned for the most part by communal groups of the former has long been a difficult situation. Problems arising from these relationships are examined in the discourse which follows.