The Gentleman at the Bathing Pool

The Life-Myth of Sir Arthur Gordon

by

Scott Whitney

April, 1986
"We are all special cases."

(Albert Camus)

Introduction

Arthur Gordon was given an audience with Queen Victoria prior to his departure from England to become her representative as the first Governor of Fiji. The interview with Her Majesty was replete with the elaborate bows and verbal formalities which their culture required on such occasions. (The natives he was to govern in her name were reputed to engage in quite similar behaviors toward those of senior rank.)

In many ways, his meeting with the Queen represented the high point of his career in public service. While he was later to have the coveted post of Governor of Ceylon, he looked back on his Fiji years as the most productive and historically significant time of his career.

Aside from his own writings, the only comprehensive treatment of his life is Chapman's biography (1964). Unfortunately, this work is not very thoughtful or vivid in its treatment of the personality and value system which Gordon brought to his assignment in the Pacific.

Ian Heath points out some of these deficits:

Good biography needs to provide more than a narrative of places and events that are linked together by a single person. An understanding of the individual's personality, his motivation, the origin of his thinking, and the depth of his understanding of his actions all need to be explored as far as is possible to achieve a true insight into the central figure.
By these criteria Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon has been poorly treated by his biographer and others who have written about him. (1974:81)

Other authors (Sohmer, 1984, France, 1969) have also alluded to these deficiencies and have attempted to amplify the existing body of knowledge on Gordon's tenure in Fiji. They have tended to limit themselves, however, to the development of Gordon's native policy and, while giving excellent interpretations of the dynamics of this portion of his administration, they have still not furnished a complete picture of Gordon's "Personality, his motivation, the origin of his thinking and the depth of his understanding." Sohmer comes closest perhaps, at least in placing Gordon's Fiji experience in the context of the values of 19th century England.

I have attempted to portray the "web of meaning" which Victorian culture spun for its members and to deepen our understanding of Gordon by looking at his personality in this context. I am attempting, in other words, a kind of ethnography of the colonial mind using as my primary source Gordon's own diaries of that period (Stanmore, 1879).

Sifting through the journal articles and the microfilmed records of Gordon's diary I have faced the biographer's dilemma so aptly described by Leon Edel.
Our concern is how to deal with this clutter, how to confront our subject, how to achieve the clean mastery of the portrait painter unconcerned with archives, who reads only the lines in the face, the settled mouth, the color of the cheeks, the brush strokes and pencil marks of time. More often than not this offers us the revealing mask of life. The biographer must learn to know the mask—and in doing this he will have won half the battle. The other half is his real battle, the most difficult part of his task—his search for what I call the figure under the carpet, the evidence in the reverse of the tapestry, the life-myth of a given mask. In an archive, we wade simple and securely through paper and photocopies and related concrete materials. But in our quest for the life-myth we tread on dangerous speculative and inferential ground, ground that requires all of our attention, all of our accumulated resources.

(Edel, in Pachter, M. Ed. 1979:24-25)

I am quite aware of the dangerous speculative ground on which anyone treads who attempts to speak of such things as "the life-myth behind the mask." Yet I do believe that such things exist and can be discovered given the kind of care and well constructed inference which Edel recommends. To say that Arthur Gordon was born in November of 1829 is to make one kind of biographical statement; to say that he spent his psychological life trying to gain the acceptance of his father is to take the risk of operating on a much deeper and more tenuous level of historigrophy.

The risks of looking under the carpet are numerous. The culture and personality of the looker may determine the pattern seen. The pattern may have meanings undreamed of
by an investigation operating a hundred years later or, alternatively, the pattern may have no meaning at all--the product perhaps of some mad Persian weaver--in which case it serves only as an inkblot test eliciting the personality of the investigator.

But the risk is worth it. Gordon's diaries were a pleasure to read. In unguarded moments he shows himself to be peevish and irascible yet in other entries his generosity and cleverness and astute social observation come through with all the vividness of a good novelist.

I have already mentioned his audience with Queen Victoria. Here is what he says of her:

>The Queen has grown old, redder, and her voice, though still sometimes full of its old clear tone, is often gruff and masculine, and she certainly has more German accent, which is odd, as I should have thought she would have less.

(Stanmore, 1879:43)

Another example:

>... The Premier (of Brisbane) distinguished himself by coming out in full uniform! Moreover, he got drunk after dinner, or rather was drunk when he came ... (entry next day)
The Premier (still drunk but happily not still in uniform) came down to the river with us.

(110)

Few history texts could capture the foibles of empire so graphically as comments like these.

Recent publications on the history of Fiji have not really advanced our understanding of Gordon's inner workings

Scarr's *Fiji: A Short History* is very short when it comes to Gordon:

> His rather fluid and highly confident way of playing his part has misled posterity a little, for it was in his nature to make grandiose assertions -- to claim as indigenous, institutions of colonial government... (1984:83)

I am not, however, concerned with whether or not Gordon's interpretation of Fijian culture was accurate or not -- others (Sohmner and France) have handled this question quite well.

What is of concern to me is how the Governor viewed the Fijians as a part of his own personal mythology. His views of his own culture as well as his attitude toward the white settler community is also within the framework of this paper.

His diaries and letters make fascinating reading. If he was grandiose, as Scarr alleges, he was also clever and thoughtful and peevish. He was both a man of his time and a special case.

> "I have a cursed hankering after certain musty old values."  
> (Lord Peter Wimsey in Weiner, 1981:41)

**The Victorian Ethos**

The life of Arthur Gordon coincides almost exactly with the Victorian era. To understand his cognitive and emotional
landscape we must examine, at least briefly, the conflicts and certainties he shared with his contemporaries.

To be Victorian was to be of at least two minds. The Exhibition of 1851 represented the mind of progress; the mind of certainty which saw technology as the answer to every human discomfort and progress as the inevitable replacement for the loss of theological innocence.

The darker, more conflicted mind is deeply fearful of the changes--social, economic and ideological--which begin during the reign of Victoria. What is one to think of Darwin? What is one to reply to Dickens' depictions of the squalid masses? Who is one to believe?

This is the mind of Dr. Jekyll; it is an awareness of primitive and unbridled instincts which lurk just below the pretenses of conventional behavior. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde represent quite well this duality within the Victorian experience. Biggs elaborates:

The adjective 'Victorian', which first came into use in 1851, is a more fitting label to apply to a highly distinctive age than labels like 'industrial society'. It carries with it all the conflicts and compromises of the times, and all their self-consciousness and pride. But there were many changes in attitudes and values during Victoria's long reign. The notion of a single, shared moral code, to which the label 'Victorianism' has been attached, becomes absurd when one places Florence Nightingale, the 'lady with the lamp', a woman of spirit with the highest sense of service, alongside the Earl of Cardigan, Crimean War commander--who fought a duel as late as 1840, was accused of adultery
and spiriting away the chief witness in 1843, and once ordered his men to wear 'cherry-coloured pants', which, according to The Times, were 'as utterly unfit for war-service as the garb of the female hussars in the ballet of Gustavus'.
Eccentricity was an important part of the Victorian pattern.

(1982:226)

Florence Nightingale represented the Victorian sense of duty above personal gain while she could simultaneously embody the Victorian irony by dying of syphilis (she must surely have been of two minds).

The faith in scientific progress which typified one strain of Victorian thought is extolled in Macauley's popular History of England in which he claims that science had

- lengthened life
- mitigated pain
- extinguished diseases
- increased the fertility of the soil
- given new securities to the mariner
- furnished new arms to the warrior
- spanned great rivers and estuaries with bridges of form unknown to our forefathers
- lightened up the night with the splendour of the day
- extended the range of human vision
- multiplied the power of human muscles
- accelerated motion, annihilated distance
- facilitated intercourse, correspondence, all friendly offices, all dispatch of business; and enabled man to descend the depths of the sea, to soar into the air.

(Macauley in Biggs: 229)

The consumer economy which had already begun in 18th Century Britain was to reach maturity during Victoria's reign. New methods of production, increasing efficiency of transportation and communication, and the growth of the middle classes made commerce a central theme of Victorian society.
The older, simpler dichotomy between peasantry and gentry begins to break down under the pressure of new economic realities. Men who had made money would not necessarily expect to be accepted in a ruling class based on inheritance. Rural peasants were becoming the urban underclass. A new, specialized professional class arose during this period.

In response to this social confusion the concept of the gentleman came to be emphasized. Inheritance was no longer the sole consideration for membership. Gentlemen could be born but they could also be made. The production of gentlemen was the task of the endowed public schools which rose to prominence during this period. One's apprenticeship was considered complete after attendance at Oxford or Cambridge.

Wiener points out that

A distinctive English world view was being formed in the crucible of the mid-Victorian ferment of social ideas. It proved highly suitable to the new upper stratum taking shape at the same time, a stratum produced by the coming together of businessmen, the rapidly expanding professional and bureaucratic classes, and the older gentry and aristocracy. The central institution of the consolidation, the public school, came into its own in this period. From the eighteen-forties, old schools were revived, new schools were founded, and a common ethos began to crystallize. It was an ethos that readily absorbed one side of mid-Victorian social thought, institutionalized it, and propagated it. By Victoria's death, her nation possessed a remarkably homogeneous and cohesive elite, sharing to a high degree a common education and a common outlook and set of values.

(1981:11)
Considering the conflicts and dualities already seen in Victorian culture, the values held forth by the gentlemenly ideal were amazingly unitary. There was an emphasis on service above profit, on 'elevated sentiments' rather than mundane gratifications; duty, honor and proper conduct were the order of the day. The code of the gentleman was an odd mixture of romantic folly and social pragmatism.

The chivalrous Christian gentleman of mid-Victorian days (of whom the Duke of Westminster was a prime example) had more than a touch of the knight about him but he was more practical, domestic and ponderous—the result of a good admixture of Evangelical or High Church seriousness caught from the middle classes. A treasury of Christian gentlemen is to be found in the novels of Charlotte M. Yonge—favorite reading for the more serious young officers in the 1850s. The Heir of Redclyffe contains the type in its most and least attractive aspects: Sir Guy Morville, gay, generous, impetuous, with his efforts at self-discipline, his tremendous repentances for what seem to us very trivial faults, his self-denials—'I have promised never even to look on at a game of billiards'—in short his 'serious ascetic temper, coupled with very high animal spirits'; and the intolerable young prig Philip Morville with his 'grand, sedate, gracious way', his readiness to put others right, his inevitable habit of 'leading the discussion to bear upon the duties and prospects of landed proprietors, and dwelling on the extent of their opportunities for doing good'.

(Girouard. 1979:14)

The invention of the gentlemanly more can be seen as a giant sublimation of the baser capitalist drives into an idealized value system which refused to discuss money or to associate with those who were 'in trade.' The maintenance
of "elevated sentiments" also facilitated the denial of sexual as well as other bodily functions. Girouard (1979) points out the lengths to which Victorian architects went to keep the smells of the kitchen from entering other parts of the gentleman's house. Separate rooms were also provided so that the sexes could be kept apart after dinner.

It was during this era that railways and steam shipping facilitated the distribution of consumer goods. Such expanded markets allowed the steady growth of what we call now multi-national corporations; the Nobel Dynamite Trust and William Lever's soap empire are examples of such early companies. Socially, these developments meant an end to personalized relationships between buyer and seller or between worker and owner.

The so-called working class which emerged during this era sullied the old paternalistic squire-peasant relationship which had been the primary social contract until the 19th century. By the advent of the Edwardian period (early 20th Century), the class structure had adjusted itself into a tri-partite division which can be described (too facetiously, perhaps) as: working class, those in commerce, and gentlemen. The new category of the gentleman subsumed both aristocrats--landowners by inheritance--and those from the new meritocracy; that is, those who had earned their money 'in trade' and who had set out to buy their respectability.
This was usually accomplished by buying a country estate and sending one's sone to public school and, hopefully, to Oxford or Cambridge.

Railroads and factories changed the pastoral English landscape and were a source of much anguish to the gentlemanly class. Arthur Gordon, in the first pages of his Fiji remembrances, despairs over the future of the English countryside. He had just returned to England after his assignment in Mauritius and notes in his journal that

...we had much discussion as to the length of time such lovely expanses of park and wood, and such houses as Highcler, will be allowed to last. I hardly give them to the end of the century. The gnawing discontent and desire to have great properties broken up, the growing burdens upon land, combined with the diminution of landholders' wealth and power, must, unless arrested, end in a social revolution: to my thinking a pernicious one. (Stanmore. 1889: 1-2)

His agonizing includes not just the future of the countryside but also the fate of the ruling class. He shows himself in this citation to be quite deeply a man of Victoria's reign. The recurring nightmare of smokestacks, voice and social chaos haunted the Victorian gentleman and became the \textit{bete noir} just outside the garden wall, always present, always menacing the refinements of the Victorian garden party.

Martin Wiener (1981), following the lead of Horne, explains quite thoroughly the cultural solution which the
elite of Britain devised to settle the deep uncertainties which modernization evoked in the English psyche.

The cultural conservatism of the re-formed elite was most evident in its conception of what constituted "Englishness." ... the new national self-image dressed itself in the trappings of an older tradition. One certain sign of the inherent self-limitations within English modernization was the degree to which the increasingly dominant image of the nation denied its chief characteristics—the rise of industry.

This development was not inevitable. An alternative self-image was available to Victorian Britain, one that made the experience of industrialization central. We might follow Donald Horne and speak of two competing metaphores for the nation, "Northern" and "Southern":

In the Northern Metaphore Britain is pragmatic, empirical, calculating, Puritan, bourgeois, enterprising, adventurous, scientific, serious, and believes in struggle. Its sinful excess is ruthless avarice, rationalized in the belief that the prime impulse in all human beings is a rational, calculating, economic self-interest.

In the Southern Metaphore Britain is romantic, illogical, muddled, divinely lucky, Anglican, aristocratic, traditional, frivolous, and believes in order and tradition. Its sinful excess is a ruthless pride, rationalized in the belief that men are born to serve.

In both metaphores, it was assumed that "Britain is best," but in the contest as to what Britain was best at it was the Southern Metaphore that won.

(Wiener, 41-41)
It will be my task in the analysis of Sir Arthur Gordon's Fiji diary and letters to show how deeply he was a man of his times, a man who had adopted, consciously or unconsciously, the mythology of the Southern Metaphore.

The Victorian ethos--that web of meaning in which the Governor of Fiji was inmeshed--could be summarized as a belief system which emphasized tradition over innovation, "elevated sentiments" over baser, materialistic instincts and the primacy of duty, order and honor. This ethos was a triumphant cultural compromise which was to shape (and limit) the British self-image well into our own times.

I hope to demonstrate that Gordon was very much like other Victorian gentlemen in his attitudes, ideals, and fears. He was, like others of his time, prone to gloom as well as to romantic, pastoral daydreams. He shared with his contemporaries a sense of honor and fair play. He was ungenerous toward those 'in trade' or toward those whom he felt were driven by baser economic motives. He feared industrialization and the social anarchy which it threatened. He was intellectually curious and enjoyed the gentleman's pastime of after-dinner dialogue on social and philosophical issues.

Gordon brought to his administration of Fiji both the churlishness and antiquated concepts of his culture as well as the high-minded ideals and behaviors which typified the
Victorian gentleman. But to say that Gordon was merely a man of his times is to trivialize his life. He was also (as is every person in every culture) unique. I hope also to point out where he demonstrates his eccentricity or where he is able to rise above the limitations of his ethos.

Sir Arthur himself recognized in the title of his published reminiscences the distinction between public mask and personal reality: "Records of Private and of Public Life." Others have examined in detail his public self; his pronouncements and policies and political machinations. I have chosen his private life as the domain of this treatment. I must admit to being a follower of Clifford Geertz (1975) in the sense of considering culture as text. That is to say, if one attempts to discuss the meaning of a gesture or a verbal phrase one must also acknowledge the "thickness" of the symbolic world. I can, for instance, describe a wink as a contraction of the right eyelid or as a kinesthetic marker for verbal irony or--even more elaborately--as a signal for shifts of social context. There is, in other words, no end to it.

I have had, quite literally, a text before me. Gordon's own account of his Fiji years can be read at many levels and his candor allows me to indulge my fascination with meanings both personal and cultural. For this I thank him.
England purchased for some of her subjects, who found themselves uneasy at home, a great estate in a distant country.

(Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, 1776)

Before Fiji

Chapman's biography devotes a scant four pages to the life of Arthur Gordon from birth through his graduation from Cambridge. Yet within those few pages are some tantalizing bits of psychological evidence.

Gordon was the youngest son of the Fourth Earl of Aberdeen, Foreign Secretary to the Wellington cabinet. Arthur's pedigree was thus, from birth, flawless for his standing as a gentleman. But his childhood was unusual even by the standards of his class and times.

On the death, in 1829, of the last of the daughters of his first marriage, Lord Aberdeen transferred to his infant son the affection he had given them. The death of Arthur's mother in 1833 and of his only sister in 1834, and his own delicate health, further focused his father's love and attention him.

Until he was fifteen he was Lord Aberdeen's almost constant companion, and during this time, spent partly in London and partly at Haddo House, the ancestral home of the Aberdeens, he lived a sheltered and even pampered life. Considered too delicate for public school, he was educated at home.

His early harbourage behind the paternal breakwater and an uneven education left Arthur Gordon with personality defects which he never completely overcame. It is true that he might not have survived without the special tenderness shown him by his father,
but that tenderness and his own loving and gentle disposition led him to "desire full returns of confidence and affection," an attitude which later brought him much pain and anxiety. In 1846, Lady Henrietta Frances de Grey chided him for his morbidly sensitive and romantic attachment to her nephew, Goderich.

(Chapman, 1964: 3-4)

This citation suggests some subtle emotional deprivations during Gordon's childhood. Without a shared public school experience to find his bearings with male peers he seems to have exhibited throughout his life a yearning for the company of men and, simultaneously, an affective confusion as to his own place in their midst.

His own writings during the Fiji years do exhibit some themes which could be considered homoerotic and yet one must state in all caution that there is no evidence of active homosexual behavior on his part. He seems to be at ease in his role as husband and father yet his emotional landscape is peopled by male figures, some benign, some menacing, who seem to be the primary focus of his emotional energy.

James Joyce, in a moment of bitterness, once decided that "paternity is a legal fiction." But this was not so for Arthur Gordon. Lord Aberdeen, his father, was the most important person in his young life. After finishing Trinity College he became his father's private secretary. In 1860 he returned to England from his first
colonial assignment in the Ionian Islands to be with his dying father.

He seems to have spent much of his adult life seeking the approval of replacement father images like Gladstone, Lord Carnarvon (the Foreign Secretary) and his father-in-law, Sir John Shaw-Lefevre.

While at Trinity, the young Gordon relied on the guidance and approval of the senior dean, William Carus, who grew to hold this particular student in high esteem for both his studiousness and his piety.

Being away from the paternal home for the first time in his life, he found it necessary to make some rules for himself:

He would, he vowed, attend morning prayers, take Holy Communion at St. Giles as frequently as possible, follow the New Testament lessons in Greek, refuse invitations to supper, and exercise great discretion respecting breakfast parties. He would never return to a wine party after chapel unless at some intimate friend's and he would avoid all immoral society. He would always read from nine until two and in the evening from nine until eleven. He vowed to fast humbly every Friday, and also on Wednesday during Lent. He would attend no parties on fast-days or during Lent, or on the Lord's Day. Finally he would do his duty quietly and humbly, never setting himself up as superior to others or speaking ill of others.

(Chapman, 5)

These are certainly the sentiments of a young Victorian. Such a plan of daily life contains that mixture of diligence and high-minded ideals which typified the best of his generation.
Before looking closely at the Fiji years, I will summarize his career up to that point. After Trinity and a stint as his father's secretary, he held a Commons seat from 1854 to 1857. In 1858 he was posted by the Colonial Office to the Ionian Islands. He returns from this post to attend the last days of Lord Aberdeen who dies in 1860. In 1861 he becomes Governor of New Brunswick and, during this assignment, returns to England to marry Rachael, the eldest daughter of Sir John Shaw-Lefevre. In 1866 he governs the colony of Trinidad and from there is sent, in 1870, to Mauritius. His Fiji journal begins in 1875 on his return to England to wait for what he hopes will be his appointment as first Governor of Fiji.

One question that needs to be addressed is why he chose a career as a colonial administrator. As several of his contemporaries pointed out to him, he could easily have followed his father's lead and become an influential M.P. and, one suspects, eventually gained portfolio as a cabinet minister.

But Gordon emphasizes several times that he is not a follower. A career in politics would have subjected him both to the whims of his constituents and the dictates of his party. Sir Arthur was a man who enjoyed being in charge. He was at heart a patriarch who, while making routine bows to the principles of democracy,
found it necessary to construct for himself a career niche which would allow the expression of his needs for power and his aristocratic desire for distance from the clamor of mob politics.

One notes in his writings also a romantic streak which seemed to draw him away from the centers of industry and commerce. It is as if he hoped to achieve a geographical solution to an emotional and intellectual problem; that is, how is one to escape the anxiety and moral confusion engendered by the spread of industrialization. What the romantic poets of his era expressed in verse, he was able to live out in his colonial assignments. In his own personal mythology Gordon seems bent on recapturing the certainties of his native Scotland as it was in a more feudal, more pastoral time. He was to compare the Fijians to Scottish Highlanders on several occasions and come to view himself as a kind of paramount chief among them.

The people at large, except a few hundreds of heathen mountaineers, are in much the state of civilization that our Scotch rural ancestors were four hundred years ago. Like those Scotch, they are eminently improveable, and the problem is if I may so express it, how to get them from the 15th century to the 19th. I am sure in a few generations this great interval could be got over, but it must take time. My doubt on the one hand is whether they will ever be allowed this time & breathing space, and my effort on the other is to secure it for them.

(Gordon to Gladston. June, 1876 in Knaplund. 1961:69)
The diaries reflect this state of mind. While in England he catalogues the endless and tiresome political intrigues of his time. He pokes fun at the social conventions and pretenses of his fellow Victorians: "Lady Ducie wants repose, and is not so clever as she thinks herself." (Stanmore, 12)

But during his travels and his arrival at Fiji the tone of his entries becomes vivid and enthusiastic. He seems to come alive emotionally only on the fringes of empire where there are no smokestacks, no tedious dinner parties, and no authority but his own.

**White Man, Brown Man, Chief**

March 22, 1875, Monday in Holy Week -  
My last day in England for long - perhaps for ever. At eleven there was a farewell service for us and those travelling with us. It was celebrated at Kings College Chapel, and consisted of the Mission Litany, and Holy Communion. ... Pearse read the Epistle and gave a short address of farewell in very good taste and very well chosen words.  

(Stanmore, 65)

It was thus, with the rituals of his own culture to give meaning and protection for his trip, that Arthur Gordon departed from his homeland. It is interesting that the Mission Litany was used in the service. Like the Anglican and Evangelical missionaries who had preceded him into the Pacific. One of the Governor's jobs was to bring to the islands the "good news" not just of Christian salvation but also
of the benefits of membership in Empire. He was, like the missionaries, engaged in the enterprise of imposing new cultural meanings and rituals on a population which had somehow survived up till now without the protection of a Christian monarchy.

There are several interesting entries in his journal concerning the trip to Fiji. While taking the train to Arles in France he notes that:

The French plan of having only one class in express trains is inexpressibly nasty. I had among my companions two private soldiers and two bourgeois, who spat the carpet into a puddle and stunk objectionably. (p. 67)

One can picture him squirming in his seat—the squeemish aristocraft thrown in among the stench of the masses. He demonstrates here the Victorian fear of bodily functions as well as the discomfort of the elite among their social inferiors. Yet we shall see later, curiously, that he makes no comments about Fijian body odor and seems to have few objections to their free pursuit of biological needs. It is the European lower classes whom he abhores and in whose company he is profoundly uncomfortable.

Another revealing incident on his trip is his questioning of the Buddhist priests during his party's stop at "Cingal." It is a very curious encounter, and he seems fascinated by the Buddhist philosophy. He climbs
up to the temple to see the priests several days in a row. His questions reveal him as an educated Victorian, vaguely dissatisfied with the theology of his own culture but simultaneously unable to abandon himself to the tenets of heretical Easterners.

Some of his questions:

Is the world in which we live co-eval with matter, or was it created out of unorganized matter? If so, when, and by whom? ... What is the origin of virtue, or rather wherein does it consist? Are acts virtuous because they are in accordance with the teachings of Buddha, or has virtue an independent and essential existence? ... What is the nature of punishments which evil deeds entail?

(86 - 91)

The questioner is certainly a Cambridge man. He reflects the uneasiness which Victorians felt with the answers to ultimate questions given by their own ideology. Advances in geology, evolutionary biology and the young science of archaeology had made educated Victorians nervous about the old biblical answers concerning human and material origins. The rapid social changes of his era and the beginnings of the social Darwinist line of thinking also made the issue of virtue open to question. On what could it be based if the old answers were open to doubt?

Yet his private secretary, Maudslay, states that Gordon was a
... high churchman with strong religious opinions which he does not air. He professes to be a thorough liberal, but his aristocratic leanings come out insensibly ... He is very proud of his family and descent.

(Maudslay, 1930, 83)

The kind of intense piety noted during his Cambridge years seems absent in the colonial setting. His attendance at Sunday services seems notable in his diary only by its rarity. In a letter to Gladstone shortly after his arrival in Fiji he comments favorably on the missionary presence.

I have nothing but good to report of the Wesleyan mission. If they have made some mistakes they are but tribles when compared with the great work they have accomplished and the beneficial influence they daily exercise. I confess I was not prepared for the completeness of their success nor for the liberality of view which has, or at all events does now, mark their proceedings. -- Their organization is perfect -- in every village there is a teacher. These again report to the native ordained ministers who are themselves subordinate to the European missionary. Over all is the Superintendent. The machinery at his command enables him to know what is going on in every part of the group with far greater accuracy than the government. Fortunately the missionaries and I are on the best of terms. They would be very formidable opponents for any government to deal with.

(Gordon to Gladstone in Knaplund, 1961:67)

One notices here not so much an impression of the happy conversion of the heathen. What seems to impress the novice governor the most is the order the Wesleyans had
been able to establish. The fact that they had taught Fijians to read and write seemed to delight the governor no end.

Gordon arrives at Nasova, Fiji on June 25, 1875. Lady Gordon has remained behind in Sydney to await the preparation of their living quarters. The recent outbreak of a measles epidemic plunges him into immediate action, dispatching medical personnel to the outer islands and arranging for financing of the depleted budget. He spends his first several months traveling widely around the islands and taking the political measure of the European as well as the native communities. Lady Gordon does not arrive until the Fall of that year and in some ways Gordon seems at his best and most enthusiastic during this period. In a letter to Lady Gordon he describes his daily routine to her.

The glorious flood of golden light, which fills the eastern sky and is reflected on the stretch of sea between us and Wakaya, before the sun rises behind the island, wakes us early. We get up soon after daylight and half dress. The others generally go out and I sometimes go with them, but more often I have to use morning hours for writing. I work on till they return, when we all adjourn to the end of the pier, from the steps of which we bathe. ... We generally swim for about some time, dawdle on the pier steps in that pleasantest of all garments in these latitudes, one's own skin only--dive again into the clear warm salt water, which we are loathe to quit--and at last go in and regularly dress for the day....Breakfast at 8:30, after which we go to our various work. The Colonial Secretary comes to me
first with a wicker basket full of papers, received in his office that morning, and forming the current business of the day, which we discuss and on which I minute.... Then come in all sorts of people who want interviews. Interviewing takes a great deal of time, but is very useful, and I purposely make myself as accessible as possible.

(191)

Interspersed throughout his journal of those years are brief notations about interviews he has had with various people. He is prone to very quick judgments about people's character, a habit he had developed to a 'fine art' in Trinidad and Mauritius--where he once noted after an interview with a puisant judge that he was "an old creole idiot." (Chapman, 107)

Planters and Europeans 'in trade' are judged with uniform harshness.

Interviews - Mason - Taviuni - University man but rather objectionable.
Hill; Rambi - Conceited though cleverish....
Lee, Planter, Nomena - Bad sort. Wants to transfer some labour ... wants to set up what would be virtually a Slave Trade Company.
Caven - Planter, Nadroga. Says natives are going to give trouble there, near mouth of Sirgatoka. Perhaps so. He cleverly wishes it, and he and others may do much to render a collision inevitable.

(151-152)

John Young describes another scene:

Within such a house in 1875, Sir Arthur Gordon found Mrs. Pillans, a piano, 'and several nice, clean healthy-looking children, well cared for and well-looking and neatly, though sensibly
dressed'. In another, nearby, sat Mrs. Barrack, whom he rather unkindly describes as 'a silent and depressing woman with an objection to bathing, which she considers weakening', similarly surrounded by children.

((in Scarr & Davidson, 1970:156)

In an account of his visit to Lovoni Valley, he tells Lady Gordon,

We stopped at a few white settlers' houses, and found them all complaining of their want of money, and of the hard times they had had. It will require a new set of men to come in before there is any real prosperity in the colony. Most of the present holders of land will sell, and, as is unusual in all new settlements, the first comers will be ruined and go to the wall.

(137)

Later in his own notes he theorizes about the motives of the planters and their expectations following cession.

The white settlers had apparently imagined that the mere assumption of sovereignty by Great Britain was to raise them at once from indigence to prosperity, that their claims to land would be at once allowed, that an abundant supply of labour would at once be found for them, and that their claim to supremacy over the natives ... would be at once acknowledged. They were, therefore, bitterly disappointed to find their hopes not realized.

(144)

The values he uses to judge other Europeans are the values of the Southern Metaphore. The honor of civilization lies not in modernization and commerce but in service, duty, and "elevated sentiments." As is common with the
privileged, Gordon seems unable to sympathize with those whose preoccupation is money. He seems bound and determined that these baser instincts of the planter community will not determine the fate of his administration of Fiji.

He could not abide the Northern Metaphore.

Young points out the contrasting mythologies which kept the Governor and the settler communities at odds:

The price of cotton had fallen and, without its economic base, the invading culture had proved vulnerable to local influences. Gordon saw the settlers' predicament in moral terms:

"A view of the planters are men of energy and character. Others have energy without character, or character without energy. The majority have neither. They lead a miserable existence drinking gin when they can get it and yagona when they cannot, living with a greater or less number of Tokelau women, taking no trouble to make their surroundings less uncomfortable and complaining of the low price of cotton."

The idea of a modern Gades may have been a myth, but it was a myth in which the planters believed. The way in which the planters lived and their influence on the history of the islands in which they settled were the product of a conflict between this myth and the realities of making a living in an island environment. Their culture was the product of a balance between the forces of continual outside reinforcement and continual modification as a result of local experience.

(in Scarr & Davidson, 1970:148)

Gordon, acting on his own mythology as warrior-chief defending his highland clans, seems to see the settlers as the savages. It is they he has come to tame,
not the noble and literate and brown (not black, he emphasizes repeatedly in his letters) Fijians. In a letter to Gladstone he shares an anecdote:

You will be amused to hear of the greeting I received here from an American settler. "Good morning, Sir--wish you kindly welcome, Sir--not a bad bit of country this, Sir--When you've cleared out those damned niggers a man might do something here in sugar, Sir!" --But I don't see why I should "clear out" these "damned niggers" who are making a very good use of their own soil. It is painful to think that this reflects the feeling of nine tenths of the whites here.

(Knaplund, 1961:70)

He employed in his administration only those who he felt to be sympathetic to the Fijians and to his ideals.

In September he receives a letter from Consul Layard complaining that people are talking about Gordon's appointment of relative unknowns to his administration. In a surly reply, Gordon argues that

It is quite true that Captain Havelock, Mr. Mitchell, and some others recently appointed, are unknown to the half-dozen quidnuncs who constitute the "public" of Levuka. It is sufficient that they are known to me... That people's tongues "wag freely" is to me a matter of course--and of supreme indifference. A small society always has some members who delight in slander, ... I don't suppose Levuka is any exception in this respect.

(224)

Gordon despised the settlers' towns, especially Levuka which he calls "about as disgusting a town as I ever saw" (144).
He created his own little world and surrounded himself with men who shared his ideals. The previous citation in which he describes his daily life to Lady Gordon shows this very clearly. He set himself apart from other Europeans creating an almost neo-Fijian fifedom of his own.

Lady Gordon after her arrival at Nasova writes a letter to her sister, Madelein Shaw-Lefevre. In it she describes one of the rituals of her husband's fifedom.

The gentlemen are all gone to have their yaqona. They all sit on the floor in a semi-circle in Captain Olive's room (next to this) whilst it is being solemnly prepared by the Fijians, who are also sitting on the floor in another half circle. They keep up a monotonous but not unpleasant chant while this is going on. When it is ready, a small bowl of it is brought to the Governor and poured into his own bowl, and they shout and clap their hands. While he drinks they remain silent, and when he throws down the bowl they call out again and clap, and it goes round to all the others.

We go through this ceremony every evening.

(293)

All these may seem faintly ridiculous to us now—an English aristocrat seated every night with the Fijians drinking kava. But Gordon was actually engaged in something very unique. It seems an attempt to impose a meaning and a symbolic web on his colonial assignment which neither Lord Carnarvon nor Queen Victorian herself could ever have envisioned. He was always presented the kava
first, that is, he was acting as the ranking chief in these ceremonies.

He avoided the rituals of his own culture. He could have entertained other Europeans nightly. The dinner party was the analogous ceremony in British culture, but he avoided these events whenever possible.

Toward the Europeans he behaved much as he had as the aristocrat on the French train. Their self-seeking and their crassness repelled him. He acted toward them out of the tenets of the Southern Metaphore and behaved as a true gentleman would toward the unruly and bratty children of the working classes.

He seemed to find great joy in his acceptance by the Fijian people. Wherever he went in the islands he was treated royally.

The houses of the principle natives are really fine houses, lofty and comfortable, with any amount of fine soft mats piled on the floor, and mats and tapa hung on the walls and from the beams. When I came in and sat down on the mats a chief came and sat near, but below me, and began to fan me with a large reed fan like what you see in Thakombau's photograph, during which operation the villagers trooped in with their baskets full of husked cocoa-nuts, their fowls, pigs, etc., and laid them down before me. They all make great use of garlands of flowers and green leaves, which look extremely pretty on their brown skins, which said skins, by the way, are as soft and glossy as silk.

Several weeks after his arrival the former Fijian "king" came to pay homage to Gordon. In a letter to
Lady Gordon he describes the event as "the Feudal submission of old Thakombau" which was "one of the most interesting days of my life" (126). This particular event seems to please and honor him more than even his audience several months earlier with Queen Victoria.

He walked with a long gold-headed walking stick. His sons were dressed like him, but in light brown tappa figured with black balls and geometrical patterns. When he got near me he raised the salutation given by an inferior to his chief, a sort of sighing inspiration, more like the "Woh! one says to stop a horse than anything else. This, at his lead, was taken up by all the rest in a great shout of Woh! One of his sons carried behind him an immense root of kava. This he now took into his own hands and laid at my feet, breaking off at the same time, rather nervously and hastily, one of the smaller portions of it and placing it on my hand. This was the decisive act of vassalage.

I said, Au sa tara opo: ena vinaka sara ko Viti, (I accept this: may it be well with Fiji). Then they raised the shout of Mana! and clapped hands. This formal act over, I shook hands with the Vunivalu, as he is henceforth to be called, and asked him and his sons into the house. He was a good deal agitated, as was not unnatural, for, though he has signed treaties of cession and hauled down flags, this is probably the first time in his life that he ever performed a personal act of homage to another, and that too in the presence of his people. The effect has been electric. Wherever I go now the natives shout Woh! and crouch down, as before their own great chiefs, and they admit and understand that I am their master.

If you read Eka this account, you may tell her that I was sorry she was not present at a scene she would have so much enjoyed. But, had she been here, I should only have allowed her to peep through a window!
The stack of yams amounted to about two tons weight! I have sent the greater part to the starving people in the island of Ono.

At night my guard had a meke or dance, and we sat looking at it for a long time. You cannot conceive anything more wild and picturesque. Of their costume you may form some idea from the enclosed sketch of one of our footmen presenting a glass of curacoa to the Commodore.

(127)

He seems almost erotically attracted at times to Fijians: "they are not black but brown - much lighter than most coolies, and many of them are very handsome" (124). Or again, "my native orderly officer Sokiusa, now approaching with his beautiful brown skin, becoming though scanty dress and bright smile" (151).

The web of symbolic meanings which Arthur Gordon spun for himself on Fiji seems a mixture of several trends. Toward the Fijians he acted as a benign paramount chief, benevolent and patriarchal. He seemed to be living out a romantic myth of the High Chief, defending the Scots against the clever but corrupt Britons in the South. If he poorly understood Fijian custom, this did not stop him, for he had received the full submission of "old Thakambau."

The Gentleman at the Bathing Pool

Early in his diaries, before his departure to Fiji, Gordon describes a particularly gloomy day on which he visits a country house which "took hold of my imagination powerfully":
Tuesday, October 27 -- Dull, close day...
Rather bored on the whole. Catesby's house is wonderfully well preserved but is an eery sort of place and took hold of my imagination powerfully. Not a stone seems to have been touched for two hundred and seventy years, and the offices, gardens, garden walls, and green terraces seem to be now just as they were then ... It is a place to grow mad in. ... Warren Hastings tomb a mere urn -- tasteless and mean.
I looked on the tomb of that great governor with a sympathetic interest.

(Stanmore, 13)

The irony of his sympathetic interest in the dull fate of a former colonial governor really points to the darker side of Gordon's personal mythology.

He is really describing here the cold fate of the Northern Metaphore, a fate which he sought to avoid in his own career. Sanity, it seems, as well as warmth, lies to the South. His ruminations on this cold fall day really came out of the Victorians' dawning awareness of the morbid side of the myth of civilization. He is here quite close to the voice of a Dickens or to the gothic, nightmare experience of Dr. Jekyll.

In his own mythology he seemed to see Fijian society as civilized in some ideal form. He sees that they have political organization and that they are farmers. In this way they seem to fit the criteria for the Victorian romantic view of a pastoral Eutopia.

The people are not nomadic; they live a settled life in towns of good and comfortable houses; they respect and follow agriculture; their social and political organization is complex: they amass property, and have laws for its
descent; their land tenures are elaborate; they read they write and cypher.

(Stanmore, 199)

He is quite pleased to be their chief. These literate pastoralists who live in "good and comfortable houses" are a far cry from the gloomy Victorians who must live out their days in houses "to grow mad in."

There is one scene which Gordon takes special care to describe for his diary. It stands out among many others because of the vividness of his depiction and because of its obvious dreamlike significance to the Governor.

I wish I could at all adequately describe the pearl of all bathing places, Waitovu but that is impossible. Nevertheless, I must try ... The native village is situated on the flat near the shore at the mouth of a steep valley, and is sheltered by very fine ivi and breadfruit trees, and of course the ever present cocoa-nut, bending in every direction, so that the stems cross and recross in the most bewildering confusion. The town contains some of the best native houses I have yet seen....

We pass through the village, noticing some giant bamboos the Commodore, who is very fond of the place, has planted, and pass along a narrow path, which after a short diagonal ascent leads one to a passage on stepping stones across the stream under a magnificent dawa..... One is standing on the brink of a gray bare cliff, over the top of which water pours downwards toward the tree-top below us, among which the farther course of the stream is hidden. Right in front of one -- the horizon at a great height--is the sea, and the island of Wakaya just filling up as the space between the trees on either side. The island is glowing in the light of the declining sun, which we cannot see, for it is hidden from us by the mountains
behind us.... These two pools form our bathing place, and a more exquisite one in every way it would be difficult to imagine...

Here, in the afternoon, whenever a man-of-war is in harbour, one may find lieutenants and middies basking on the warm rocks or swimming in the pools, and attendant natives jumping from heights into the water, the naked figures, white or brown, adding to the completeness of the picture...partly from an indifference to the picturesque, the European community of Levuka for the most part let the place alone, whereat I and my staff rejoice.

(192-193)

All of the themes of Gordon's personal mythology seem to come together in his attachment to the pools at Waitovu. It is an all male world steeped in a surreal, tropical glow. It is far from the sordidness of Levuka and in its naked calm, it challenges all the pretenses of European commercialism. White man and brown can mingle freely here.

It is a haven from the discrimination and repressions of "civilized" colonial society. But the white men in this scene are special. They are common sailors and Gordon's hand-picked colleagues. One senses that Arthur Gordon, deprived of the affiliation with other boys in his sheltered youth, found at Waitovu the scene he had always dreamed of.

The evils of trains and smokestacks could be forgotten here. Petty political intrigues had no place at the bathing
pool. One can imagine Gordon, seated on a warm rock perhaps, looking down on this scene of frolicking sailors and playful Fijians, knowing deep in his heart that he was their protector and their chief.

While Sir Arthur went on to other posts in his career, he held on tenaciously—at times embarrassingly—to his achievements in Fiji. Nothing could ever quite satisfy him after he lost control of this young colony. I suspect that no other assignment ever held the emotional satisfactions which he enjoyed while there.

With typical Victorian understatement he summarizes his tenure there as he is about to public his recollections.

The Government of Fiji was certainly the most interesting of all my colonial experiences. I had very nearly a clear field to work in. There was no established routine of administration from which it was hard to break,—no one to say in monitory tones that it had "always been useful" to do so-and-so....

I made mistakes; but when I look back on the work done whilst I was in Fiji, I am not wholly dissatisfied with it. That is to say, I am in the main content with what was done; but I am very far from being so when I think of the many things left undone, which I wished to do, and which, with more constant labour, I might perhaps, at least in part, have effected.

(Stanmore, N.P.)

Fiji, more than any post, allowed Arthur Gordon to express his diligence and competence as an administrator. But it also allowed him to live out for himself a deep and moving personal mythology which was the real, human
mask behind the outer mask of Gentleman Administrator. It was Fiji that he could act upon the figure under the carpet.
REFERENCES


