

Sub-Enclosure.

IX.—Navigator
Islands.
Native Labourers

1. It has been reported to Her Majesty's Government that Mr. F. Cornwall, who was British Acting-Consul in Samoa on the 27th November, 1877, had in view the establishment of a plantation, at the smallest possible cost, at Lata, where he claimed to be the owner of about 8,000 acres of land. The natives denied the validity of the sale of a great part of this land; but it has not yet been shown that he is not owner of that portion of the estate which he was putting under cultivation.

2. Mr. Cornwall proposed to carry on the works on this estate by means of coloured labour brought from the Line Islands, in the Pacific. It is stated that the well-being of these labourers was overlooked in the attempt to keep down expenses.

3. In pursuance of his plans, Mr. Cornwall brought, on the 27th November, 1877, in the cutter "Bertha," 15 tons register, seventy coloured labourers*—men, women, and children—who were landed on the beach at Lata. There was no shelter ready for them.

4. About the 27th December, a second load of ~~sixty~~ coloured labourers—men, women, and children—were brought in the "Bertha" to Lata. These are said to have consisted of the weaker labourers and their families, who had been kept for three weeks on an estate in Samoa called Magia, to recover their strength. According to the statement of the manager, Mr. Moors, this batch of labourers was supplemented by the sick people from the Magia estate. Mr. Moors, who is an American subject, was left by Mr. Cornwall at Lata, in charge of the plantation as manager.

5. No list of these labourers was recorded in the Consulate, and the list given by Mr. Cornwall at Lata was made out some time after the arrival of the people, and was imperfect. Mr. Moors had either kept no account of deaths, or he purposely misinformed Mr. Maudslay, the Deputy-Commissioner, who inquired into the subject.

6. The labourers had been brought, in the first instance, from the Line Islands to Samoa, in the "Flirt," for Mr. Cornwall; but it has not yet been possible to obtain the information wished for regarding the "Flirt's" voyage. The treatment of these labourers in Samoa was, in some respects, so shocking, that it is singular the Acting-Consul cannot furnish the information required regarding the voyage of the "Flirt," upon the circumstances connected with which suspicion must rest.

7. From the time of the arrival of the labourers at Lata, their food was insufficient and unsuitable. The water supplied to them was insufficient, disgusting, and deleterious in quality. They were brutally treated: the manager could not tell how many he had flogged. One sick woman was, as a punishment and example, carried on a pole, to which she was tied hanging by the hands and feet like a dead pig, and the same night she was publicly flogged, so cruelly that the wounds in her back required to be dressed. She died some weeks afterwards: her wretched child had died in an attempt the persecuted mother made to escape, before the one for which she was so brutally treated. So many persons died under this system, that the manager either made false statements to conceal the number, or could not remember how many had sunk. Generally, it may be said that 130 coloured labourers were kept for five months on the estate of an Acting-Consul, upon miserably bad and insufficient food—that the water also was insufficient in quantity and filthy in quality—that men and women were alike cruelly flogged at the caprice of the manager—that no account can be given of the number so flogged. They were not allowed to go to church on Sunday: indeed, the survivors state that they were compelled to work on that day; and that the average of daily labour was within a few minutes of ten hours.† Under this system, in five months, twenty-one of these labourers out of the 130 died.

8. It is impossible to read, without being deeply moved by them, the sad statements of cruelty made in these papers. And this feeling is increased upon general grounds, as from these revelations it is almost certain that similar transactions must be daily taking place in many parts of the Pacific, whilst in this particular case indignation is increased by the knowledge that (if I am right in assuming that Mr. Cornwall was the British Acting-Consul) these transactions took place, as it were, under the British flag.

9. In despatches written thirty-one years ago, especially in one written on the 14th March, 1841, I pointed out to Her Majesty's Government that transactions such as are now under consideration would occur. I especially called attention to the species of trade in the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands which was certain to spring up; and I suggested that a remedy should be at once applied, by the acquisition of the islands which did not then belong to Great Britain. With the view of facilitating this object, if it was approved, I made arrangements for the cession of the Fiji Islands. I argued that we should certainly be compelled ultimately to accept the cession of those islands. I showed that we might at that time do so unembarrassed by the land claims which in a few years would spring up, and free from many difficult questions which would have come into existence during the few years at the end of which I predicted we should be compelled to accept the cession.

10. When I made these recommendations, a compliance with them would have entailed but a trifling expense on Great Britain during a short period, for the Customs duties of each island would have paid the cost of the modest Government which it would have been necessary to establish.

11. As a part of this plan, hospitals were provided in New Zealand at which sick persons from the Pacific Islands could be cared for, and placed under skilful medical treatment. Schools were established in several parts of New Zealand at which, under special provisions for the purpose, which were intended to supplement primary education in the Islands, the children of Pacific Islanders could receive an excellent education; and numbers of such children were brought to New Zealand and educated here. The endowments for these establishments are still in existence. But my recommendations were overruled. A stop was put to the arrangements which had been made alike as to the Fiji Islands and the Friendly group; and I stopped negotiations I had entered upon with regard to the cession of the Samoan Islands. All the difficulties I foretold grew into existence, and Great Britain has had to take the Fiji Islands and to face those difficulties. If, however, those plans had been sedulously followed out during the last thirty years, the Pacific would now have been studded with rising communities: a considerable and constantly-increasing commerce, very valuable at the present moment to Great Britain, would have been in existence; the city of Auckland would have been a great emporium for the Pacific trade; and such shocking scenes as are disclosed in the papers under consideration could not have taken place.

12. I still remain of the opinion I so long ago expressed; and I think now that, if Great Britain will not accept the cession of those islands in the Pacific which do not belong to her, she should allow her colonies in this part of the world to do so. Their future interests and welfare are to the highest extent involved in this question: in fact, the whole future advancement and civilization of this part of the world depend upon it. On it hangs the question whether a common language, common laws, common civilization, and a similar form of government, shall prevail throughout the Pacific.

13. If other Powers come in and occupy the Pacific Islands, they will establish arsenals close to these colonies, which will not only imperil the future safety of the colonies, but will force a large and constant military expenditure upon them. The Powers who take such islands may also establish in them convict colonies, which may ultimately

*A 15-ton registered vessel would be of about the following dimensions: Length, 42 feet; beam, 14 feet; depth of hold, 5 feet 6 inches; and would have a cubic capacity of 1,500 feet, exclusive of space for crew. She would require about 5 tons of ballast. The deck space in superficial measurement would be about 440 feet; deducting one-third for permanent incumbrance, such as hatches, masts, boats, &c., would leave about 300 superficial feet available space for passengers. The 5 tons of ballast would reduce the depth of hold to about 4 feet, and the capacity to 1,000 cubic feet.

The cubic space usually allowed to each passenger in coasting vessels is 72 feet; 1,000 divided by this figure would give the number in hold 14.

The passengers in the hold would not be able to stand upright. Each deck passenger would require a space of 3 feet by 3 feet, equal to 9 feet superficial; 300 feet divided by 9 would give 33 as the number that could be carried on deck, and this could only be done for short distances and in fine weather, as small vessels of this kind have very low bulwarks and no other protection.

The above computation would give the number of passengers that a 15-ton vessel could carry as 47 in all, and with that number I consider that she would be much crowded.

Vessel ought to be fitted with proper skylights and hatches.

Marine Department, Wellington, 30th January, 1879.

† Mr. Moors states that the labourers commenced work half an hour after daylight, and ceased three-quarters of an hour before sunset; a rest for two hours, from 10 o'clock until noon, being allowed them. The sunrise and sunset is almost exactly at 6 (within a few minutes) at all times of the year. Daylight, as there is little twilight, would begin at 5.30 a.m., and end at 6.30 p.m.

R. JOHNSON,
Secretary.