

E. Hemsheim, in Jaluit, on the Marshall Islands, the Archipelago of New Britain and New Ireland has been recently much visited by vessels sailing under the English colours, which are fitted out in Queensland or Fiji to recruit labourers for the plantations in those parts among the South Sea Islanders. Although these vessels are regularly accompanied by Government officers, whose business it is to see that the colonial regulations respecting the engagement and transport of the Polynesian labourers are carried out, yet instances are not wanting, according to communications in the hands of the Imperial Government, in which the natives who are designated as free labourers have been brought on board against their will and detained there by force. The social relations which prevail in New Britain and New Ireland, and which differ from those of other groups of islands in the South Sea, offer a temptation to these labour-recruiting vessels to depart from the scrupulous observance of the laws enacted to protect the islanders from whom these labourers are drawn.

The number of natives who, of their own accord, or out of any desire for the plantation service, hire themselves is, among the warlike races of these remote islands, comparatively small, and consists, for the most part, of such persons only as have no family ties, and are too poor to marry, or who, on account of some offence, are under the necessity of fleeing from their tribe.

Such individuals allow themselves to be prevailed upon by the promises of the chiefs, who take the earnest money for them to go abroad as labourers for several years in order that they may obtain wives, or be adopted by influential landowners on their return. The islanders not coming under this category who are found on board the labour ships, have been as a rule simply sold by the chiefs, for the institution of slavery has long been planted amongst those natives. In order to procure arms the chiefs sell prisoners of war who have been captured from a different tribe, but not unfrequently even their own subjects. Of course such natives as have been brought into the labour ships under these circumstances do not voluntarily remain on board, but have to be narrowly watched. When, as is very frequent, escapes are attempted, the crew make use of their firearms, and, if the pursuit is followed up on shore, bloody conflicts often ensue.

The following occurrences officially communicated to the Imperial Government may serve as examples of this. Out of 104 men who were on board the English three-masted schooner "Hopeful," which in May last paid a visit to New Britain and New Ireland with the object of recruiting labourers, thirteen escaped by plunging into the sea, notwithstanding the distance the vessel stood from land. Six of these men were brought back by the crew; three were given back by their chiefs in consequence of threats; the remaining four must have been drowned.

The labour-recruiting ship "Fanny," from Port Mackay, in Queensland, had engaged several chiefs as interpreters and recruiting agents in the village of Nadup, about four miles from Matupi (New Britain), and went with them last May to the Island Man, off the north coast of New Britain. The natives of that place declined to go on board the "Fanny," and their refusal led to acts of violence between them and the crew, owing to which one of the Nadup chiefs was killed. The captain then took the "Fanny" back to Nadup to give information of what had happened, and to pay an indemnity in goods for the chief who had perished in his service; the inhabitants of the village were nevertheless so exasperated at the news that they armed and attacked the captain and his men, who were only able to save themselves with much difficulty by making use of their revolvers. The captain, as well as the Queensland Government Agent who accompanied the "Fanny," were seriously wounded in this encounter. Moreover, the wrath of the natives fell upon a French missionary named Lanzuel, who had been long resident in Nadup, who, notwithstanding, that he had had no share whatever in the occurrence just described, was obliged to flee and relinquish his whole property, including the furniture, &c., of a Roman Catholic church. The agent of the German Trade and Plantation Company, stationed in the vicinity of the same village, was also obliged to abandon his house for fear of being attacked by the natives, who sought every means of avenging the wrong they had suffered. Finally, a third case is reported in which the violent proceedings of the labour traffic ships were directed, not indeed against the labour population, but against the property of a German firm.

About the middle of last April the Queensland schooner "Stanley," Captain Davis, in search of labourers for the Queensland sugar plantations, arrived at the Laughlan Islands, a group known for the peaceable disposition of the inhabitants, where the Hamburg house of Hemsheim and Co. have now for three years maintained a commercial agent. This agent, by name Titzloff, counselled the native chiefs to decline any engagement with this labour-recruiting party, whereupon hostilities ensued between the agent and Captain Davis, which culminated in the captain's ordering the station belonging to the firm of Hemsheim, with stores of copra to the amount of about twenty tons, to be set on fire. The said firm has enforced its claims for indemnity at law, while at the same time the affair has been brought to the notice of the Colonial Government of Queensland, in order that the guilty parties may be prosecuted under the criminal law.

No such legal means of obtaining redress for the unlawful proceedings of labour-recruiting ships sailing under English colours are within reach of the South Sea Islanders, who accordingly take upon themselves their own defence, and avenge themselves on all foreigners with whom chance may bring them into contact.

The first to suffer from this state of things are the German settlements in New Britain and New Ireland, which, now that the last Australian English commercial stations have been taken over by the German Trading and Plantation Company in Samoa, have the trade of those places entirely in their hands. The good relations hitherto subsisting between the German traders and the natives of those localities have been disturbed by the abuses and excesses committed by English labour-recruiting expeditions; and, unless a timely check is put upon such proceedings, serious danger to the life and property of the Germans resident in those parts is to be apprehended.

While, in pursuance of instructions from my Government, I have the honour to acquaint your Lordship with the foregoing, I respectfully beg that your Lordship would, if possible, kindly inform me whether the Royal Government of Great Britain has already received reports upon the system practised in recruiting labourers for the Colonies of Queensland and Fiji from among the natives of