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THE FRENCH IN THE NEW HEBRIDES

(FROM AN OCCASIONAL CORRESPONDENT)

PORT SANDWICH, MALLICOLLO, AUG. 8

It is about 340 miles from Noumea to the island of Sandwich, or Vaté, the most fertile of the New Hebrides group and the seat of what settlement there is here – that is, taking "settlement" to be an attempt at colonization and cultivation. The missionaries and the stray copra traders I do not call settlers. A monthly steamer runs from the capital of the French penal colony to Vaté and Mallicollo, the two islands on which military posts areestalished. This steamer, the Caledonien, is the property of the Compagnie des Nouvelles Hebrides, and receives a subsidy of 60,000f. (£2,400) a year, being £200 a trip, or about 5s. a mile. The Caledonien is a little craft of 110 tons, and can only accommodate half-a-dozen passengers. She is principally a cargo boat, and has been running to the islands for years, carrying copra and other produce. That this vessel now assumes the dignity of a French mail packet astonishes even people in Noumea. But the subsidy was obtained in Paris by the *deus ex machina* of the New Hebrides Company there, and is very useful in assisting to pay the working expenses and salaries of the officials, which it is more than hinted are considerably in excess of the income derived from raising maize and coffee and trading in copra, the latter being the principal source of revenue. In the copra trade this company, which has such high-sounding pretensions, enters into undignified competition with the "beachcombers" of British and other nationalities long settled in the different islands. And it generally gets worsted. The natives will never trade with a Frenchman when they can do so with an Englishman, or one speaking the English tongue sufficiently to pass for an Englishman. So an English captain of long experience in the island trade has recently been appointed manager of the "fleet" of the New Hebrides Company, which consists of one steamer, two small schooners, and a cutter, with a brigantine, which is now engaged in enticing labourers from other islands to work on the company's plantation. The "recruiter" of this labour ship is also an Englishman, and another Englishman occupies the same position on a schooner at present in the Solomon group, which is likewise engaging labourers for the company. When it is known that the manager in question was five years ago the hero of a notorious trial, in which he was charged at Noumea with kidnapping some 90

natives at the Solomon Islands, and when it is known that these English recruiters engage the “boys” ostensibly to work on Queensland plantations, on becomes dubious as to whether the recruiting may not become kidnapping, and the nominally free service slavery.

In nothing is the immunity which the New Hebrides Company enjoys in these seas so apparent as in this matter of the labour trade. Any ship recruiting labour for New Caledonia carried a Government agent, who, as in the case of the officers on the Fijian and Queensland vessels, was supposed to see that none but fair means were used in persuading the natives to leave their island homes for a term of service in the French colony. As a matter of fact, these duties were performed in a very perfunctory way. English recruiters were always carried, and it is generally known that their powers of persuasion were used on the natives to engage them for an English colony. With foreknowledge no “boy” would recruit for New Caledonia. But when landed there he was generally fairly treated, and the Government officials took good care that his wages were duly paid, and that he was returned to his native shores at the expiration of his three years of service, unless he wished to make another engagement. In the Bureau of the Director of the Interior at Noumea one found a complete record of every native imported into New Caledonia. With the exception of the deceit used in recruiting there was not much to complain of. But the vessels flying the French flag now engaged in the labour trade on behalf of the New Hebrides Company carry no Government agents, and are under no official supervision. There is no guarantee that the natives will be returned to their homes at the end of the “three yams” for which they all engage to serve. It is known that many of them have not been so returned. There is no guarantee that they will be paid in proportion to their services. There is no guarantee that they will not be grossly ill-used. Brought from the Solomon Islands and landed on Vaté, the natives are really slaves dependent on the caprice of the plantation manager. There is no law to protect them, no authority to which they can appeal. If they have been violently kidnapped there is no chance of the deed ever becoming known. The only result will be that the next vessel from from Queensland will be attacked in revenge, and British lives will be sacrificed. Kidnapping may take place individually or wholesale. The captain of the Venus was tried at Noumea for enticing the 90 natives on board to move an iron tank in the hold, which was bolted to the deck. The hatches were simply clapped on them and the vessel sailed away. It was partly through the exertions of Bishop Selwyn that the doings of this piratical craft were exposed. The trial was a *cause célèbre* in New Caledonia. But the highest influence was brought to bear. Mr. John Higginson daily drove the merchant skipper to court in his carriage, and an acquittal was the result. With no law in the

New Hebrides, no chance of being brought to account, such a proceeding might very well be repeated and the captain easily earn £10 a head from the company. I am told of one case where nice boys from Mallicollo, taken to a plantation at Port Vila, alleged that they were kidnapped, and ended by stealing an open boat and rowing 80 miles by sea to their home. While Queensland vessels are subject to such rigid restrictions in the labour trade, it is absurd that French ships can carry on what is virtually a slave traffic on behalf of the New Hebrides Company.

I left Noumea in one of the only two schooners floating the British flag in the New Hebrides. The course was inside the great reef which surrounds New Caledonia till we rounded the south-east point of the island, and sailed into the open ocean through the Havannah Pass. Thence north-east through the Loyalty Islands, Lifu and Mare, till we sighted Erromango, and on northwards to Vaté. One advantage of cruising in the New Hebrides is that you seldom lose sight of land. One island no sooner fades away in the horizon than you "pick up" another. In two days after clearing the Havannah Pass we cast anchor in Port Vila, on Vaté. There is an eruption of French flags round this harbour. The tricolour flies over a store and warehouse at the water's edge, on two houses on the slope of the hill, and on a little rock not three yards in diameter, which is joined at low water to the small but fertile island of Vila, off which we are anchored. You imagine at first that this is a signal connected with surveying operations. But night and day the flag floats on this patch of stone, which a charge of dynamite would blow to pieces. As the natives would sell no land in Vila, the manager of the New Hebrides Company bought this rock from the chief for £2, and the tricolour is a sign to all that it is French property. There seems something childishly absurd in this. Yet I imagine that the French official is not by any means a fool. I think the floating of the flag here is more than to please the eye or satisfy the vanity of an individual. Connected with Vila as it is, it is a sign of sovereignty which the natives may get accustomed to. And if by chance some mischievous spirit should pull down the tricolour it would be an act to be avenged by confiscation of the island, and if the natives resisted it would give an excuse for the permanent occupation of Vaté and afterwards of the whole of the New Hebrides. "An insult to the French flag" could easily be magnified in Europe to "an attack on French settlers" and "outrages by the natives," which is what the authorities require as a palliation for the action of sending troops hither.

It must be remembered that when more than a year ago two companies of infantry were landed on Vaté and Mallicollo the excuse given by the authorities in Paris was that it was

merely a temporary measure. The soldiers were camped on shore to defend French settlers from the attacks of the natives in the future as well as to exact reparations for outrages in the past. It was argued that France had as perfect right in operating by land to avenge the murders of Frenchmen as Great Britain's men-of-war had to shell villages. As regards any temporary action this theory might be correct, if it had any foundation in fact or if it had been carried out in practise. But, taking the French view of the case, there was never any excuse for the landing of troops on Vaté. There is no record in our generation of any white man having been killed here, and there has never been any trouble of any kind with the natives. The troops simply took possession of the best harbour in the islands, by their presence acting as the official support to the doings of the New Hebrides Company. And their presence has also been used to provoke the natives to overt action. But for the Presbyterian missionaries who have counselled moderation the ignorant savages might have broken out, when little mercy would have been shown to them and annexation would have followed. I cannot help thinking that all the proceedings here have been the result of a premeditated scheme, which has not succeeded as well as its promoters wished. This flag on the rock on the sands of the island of Vila seems to be part of that scheme of provoking the natives which, if successful, will end in the islands becoming the property of the French New Hebrides Company, and its acres cut up into blocks for the colonists to be imported from France, who will die here as their predecessors settled in Port Vila this year have died. The best of Immigrants cannot succeed in this climate, and the best are not at all likely to come here.

Bacon in his essay "Of Plantations" gave good advice to the adventurers who founded Virginia. He wrote – "The people wherewith you plant ought to be gardeners, ploughmen, labourers, smiths, carpenters, joiners, fishermen, fowlers, with some few apothecaries, surgeons, cooks, and bakers." And, again, "It is a shameful and unblessed thing to take the scum of people and wicked men to be the people with whom you plant; and not only so, but it spoileth the plantation, for they will ever live like rogues and not fall to work, but be lazy and do mischief and spend victuals and be quickly weary, and then certify over to their country to the discredit of the plantation." Without saying that the immigrants sent out to work and occupy the lands of the New Hebrides Company were the "scum of the people," they have proved just as useless here. Female Parisians accustomed to buy all their food ready cooked, women having never done more of household work tah nto light a charcoal fire to boil their coffee with, and to whom even the baking of a loaf of bread was a mystery, are as much out of place in a new land as any grand lady of the Faubourg St.

Honoré. Small shopkeepers, pedlars, and clerks to whom the use of an axe and a spade is an unknown art, men lacking both physical strength and skill, finding the handling of tools as difficult to acquire as penmanship to an ignorant adult, would be more helpless in the forests of America or the bush of Australia than half the members of the Jockey Club. The latter would to an extent know how to use their muscles, the gymnasium in youth afterwards riding, shooting, and fencing having trained their eyes and arms. In the healthiest of colonies such people have been sent here would be failures, “and be quickly weary and certify to the discredit of the plantation.” But put on shore in this country where no white man can do labouring work, where fever haunts every yard of ground, the Parisian immigrants looked at the jungle covered acres which were pointed out to them as their future homes and lost heart and cried to be returned to Noumea and to France, and were taken sick and died, till now only seven remain at Port Vila. These men, of stronger constitutions or better heart, live on in hope of getting the grants to their 25 hectares of land, when they imagine that they can sell the properties which originally were bought from the natives for about a stick of tobacco the acre. The best of the immigrants here is undoubtedly the Alsatian Klehm, who says that his companions were mostly lazy and unfit to work. Klehm, however, has lost his eldest son by fever. I have pleasure in recording his testimony to the great kindness extended to the women and children by Madame Bernier, wife of the manager of the plantations of the New Hebrides Company at Port Vila. Klehm says: - “We were left here in the greatest misery, and without the attention of this good lady and her husband more would have perished. She was our guardian angel.” Madame Bernier is a Bourbonnaise, and therefore can stand the climate better than a European. But even she suffers from the fever, and often has to go to Noumea to recover her health. From the slight acquaintance I have with Madame Bernier I can quite believe Klehm’s testimony.

Klehm is the “curly-headed boy” of the colonization scheme. He is pointed out as an example of what can be done by the right kind of people here – those, namely, who do not mind sickness nor death in their families and have money enough to hire native labour and buy provisions until they can obtain a title to their lands. Klehm has a grass house on the shores opposite the island of Melé, and has cleared a pitch of land and planted it with maize. If people can live on corn they can feed well here , for this cereal in the New Hebrides produces three crops a year, often averaging 150 bushels to the acre. The officials of the French company are now, I find, endeavouring to cover up the gross failure of colonization at Port Vila by citing Klehm as the industrious colonist and all those who have died or returned to Noumea as the discontented ne’er-do-wells. But who brought them hither?

However unfitted every man or woman might be they came in ignorance, seduced by glowing promises to the ear, while their eyes were pleased by coloured plans of the settlements of Melé with roads and streets which as yet only exist in the imagination of the promoters of the company's colonization. This same powerful imagination has magnified the acreage of the properties of the New Hebrides Company to nearly the entire acreage of the islands. On Vaté they at first claimed more land than it possesses. To have a share in such a magnificent estate tempted the small stationer from the Luxembourg quarter, the last returned colonist I saw in Noumea. I quote his case as a sample of the "ne'er-do-wells." He was a man who had hoarded a little money and wished, as he said, to make a future for his children as well as save his two boys from the conscription. Enticed by the programme of the Colonization Society he invested most of his store in seeds and tools and outfit presumed to be suitable for a colonist in the New Hebrides. Arrived here, he found not the prairie which he had imagined, but a thick jungle, which it was impossible he could ever clear by his own puny exertions. He and his family were all seized by the fever. One child died, and they returned in the greatest misery to Noumea, ruined in health and fortune, and with no prospect but beggary before them when the father's last franc is gone. As I listened to his tale I felt that his maledictions against those whose false tales induced him to break up and leave his little home were justifiable. If this New Hebrides immigration scheme is not a swindle, like that of the Marquis de Ray's in New Britain, it is as bad as the Brazilian attempt to settle English farm labourers on the tropical rivers of South America, the disastrous effects of which were exposed in *The Times* in 1873, and the immigration from Great Britain stopped in consequence.

French interests at Port Vila, then, are represented by the remains of the first batch of colonists, by an independent French settler, by two or three half-caste Bourbonnais, and by the store and plantation of the New Hebrides Company. This latter, planted with coffee and corn, is really a fine property. It was cleared and established by Captain Donald Macleod, and four years back sold by him to the company. A large amount of native labour is now employed here, men and women to the number of 200 from the other islands of the group or from the Solomons. As set forth, their service is slavery, or of a character which may be made worse than any slavery depicted in the literature of the abolitionists. Here there is neither law nor public opinion to protect the labourer. The independent French settler is a gentleman at deadly feud with the company, and has received into his service boys who have run away from the neighbouring plantation, defying his neighbours to claim them. But then there is no guarantee that they will be any better treated by Monsieur C.

The other settlers around Port Vila are two Swedes and a Portuguese. The Presbyterian missionary, Mr. Mackenzie, resides some four miles distant, but this, lying within his cure, is weekly visited by him. English interests here at present, then, are only represented by the missionary, and an attempt is being made to drive that gentleman out by the introduction of a Marist priest, who is already making trouble at Melé. The two priest settled on Vaté are without doubt brought hither in their quality as Frenchmen. It is not only the spiritual influence of Mr. Mackenzie that is to be undermined, but he, as a British subject, is to be ousted. The same course is to be pursued with Mr. Macdonald at Havannah Habour. People who, like myself, may not be actively enthusiastic in missionary work will perhaps sympathize with their countrymen. If there are any vested interests in the New Hebrides, they are certainly those of the Presbyterian Mission, which can point to its 35 years of work, to its 14 divines now labouring in the cause, and to the total expenditure of £170,000, money collected in Great Britain and the colonies, as its claim to having the greatest interests here. Are others to reap where it has sown?

The company has done one good thing, however, in settling a medical man at Port Vila. The new doctor has just arrived. He is reported to be subsidized by the Government in addition to his salary from the company. Most of the “colonists” having died or left, his practice, except among the natives, will be limited until the arrival of the next batch of hopeful immigrants from France. The doctor will then be able to alleviate their sufferings somewhat and perhaps prevent deaths. But he cannot prevent fever. Everyone has it here. All work, except such as may consist in supervision of the natives, is impossible to a white man. And so it is little wonder that one finds mere paths on shore, and that the roads and streets marked on the plans in Paris are on the spot not even pegged out. No work, except that absolutely necessary, is done in such a climate. Port Vila possesses a town upon paper. But in a state of nature it is one mass of tropical bush, variegated with cocoanuts, the plantation clearing being but a patch on the hillsides. The houses are so few that, hidden in the trees, they almost escape notice. The tricolour is the only thing out of place. The same flag is hoisted as we round the point at Tukutuk and enter the passage between hat island and the mainland, which leads to Havannah Harbour, three hours’ sail from Port Vila. But as we pass the missionary station the Union Jack is run up by the Rev. Mr. Macdonald, who, with Captain Macleod, represents English interests here. French interests are represented by a store belonging to the New Hebrides Company and the camp of the troops in occupation. Wherever there is a chance the tricolour has been hoisted. Every building on the shore, every boat on the waters owned or occupied by the French is under the

flag of rance. This seems childish; but is, I believe, part of a plan. The authorities may think that as “trade follows the flag” colonization will also follow. But take away the troops from Havannah Harbour, and France could here only claim the “interests” of a storekeeper and a liberated convict from New Caledonia as against those of the Englishmen, Mr. Macdonald and Captain Macleod. The latter has the only brick building and the finest residence in the New Hebrides. It is separated from the French camp by a brawling stream, which here and there has formed deep holes in the coral rock through which it runs, basins overshadowed by spreading trees forming the most delicious bathing places imaginable, where the officers of Her Majesty’s ship Raven, which is now cruising round the New Hebrides, take refreshing dips on their monthly visit to this harbour, when the English flag is displayed on the waters in opposition to the tricolour ashore. The latter, however, looks to the traveller as if it were there to stay. “Nous y sommes et nous y resterons” boast the officials in Noumea.

It was in May, 1886, that the Acting Governor of New Caledonia, Monsieur Jacques Marie Benjamin Arthur Ortus, Knight of the Legion of Honour, and Lieutenant-Colonel of Infanterie de Marine, in pursuance of some plan of his own or under instructions , despatched two companies of troops to the New Hebrides. One hundred and fourteen rank and file were landed at Havannah Harbour on June 1, the like number at Port Sandwich on June 5. Certainly they stop there, but that is all they do. The pretence of operations against the natives necessitated by outrages on French citizens has never been carried into action. There was no ground for this pretence then; there has been no ground given by the natives since. The military posts have simply been guards for the trading stores of the New Hebrides Company, and evidences of the intention of French occupation *de jure* as well as *de facto*. Monsieur Ortus, it may be remarked, has been promoted to the rank of Colonel. The two posts are now reduced to 50 men each, who protect the transactions of the New Hebrides Company, the interests of a dozen French settlers and traders, and a dozen French copra makers of the “beachcomber” stamp who are scattered about the islands – that is, there are two soldiers for each civilian. British taxpayers would object to such an arrangement; the soldiers themselves do not like it. Life, says the young lieutenant who is in command at Havannah Harbour, is *triste* here, and the men have all suffered terribly from fever. The extra fatigue duty in making their houses of wattle and lime, and thatched roofs, buildings cool and comfortable and adapted to the climate, has, perhaps, had its effect. But every one gets the fever in the rainy season here, if not in the present dry winter months. Even the seamen on Her Majesty’s ship Raven, who, practically, it may be said,

are never ashore, have suffered severely. A third of the crew has been down with sickness at one time. In this connexion it may be noticed as an extraordinary fact that the sailors who were fever-stricken were nearly all members of the Good Templar organization. It is narrated in “Cook’s Voyages” that when the crew of the Endeavour was attacked with fever at Batavia, the surgeon and others dying, “it was remarkable that every individual had been ill excepting the sailmaker, who was an old man between 70 and 80 years of age, and who was drunk every day during the residence of our people in Batavia.” French soldiers are temperate enough – they have few opportunities to be otherwise, but the fever in the New Hebrides affects them worse than it does many an old “beachcomber” whose only god is square gin.

Havannah Harbour has for many years been the most important calling-place for vessels trading in the Western Pacific. Ships from Queensland made this their rendezvous. Landlocked as it is by protecting islands, a better harbour cannot be found in the South Seas. Until a year or two back hardly any flag was seen here but that of England. The interests of England were prominent on shore. There were other *bona fide* British settlers like Captain Macleod, who cleared and cultivated the land. Even at present the only plantation of importance, after that of the French Company at Port Vila, is owned by Mrs. Glissan, an English lady, widow of the gentleman who made a magnificent and fertile property out of primal jungle. The coffee grown at Sivaree is some of the best in the world. Besides the twi Presbyterian missionaries settled on Vaté, there is one on the adjacent island of Muna, and another at Tongoa within three hours’ sail. So English interests even now are quite equal to those of the French. Great Britain can here claim the right of discovery, of occupation, and of usage, while the French claims are only of recent date, and these the partly fictitious ones of the New Hebrides Company. Irrespective of any other aspect of the question, to allow the French to retain possession of Havannah Harbour would be to give them one of the best ports in the Pacific, unsurpassed as a coaling station. There is no coal stored there as yet. Her Majesty’s now go to Noumea to coal. In New Caledonia large supplies have been accumulated by the authorities in readiness for war. Havannah Harbour in this respect could be made equally important, and English interests could easily have been maintained here, and the whole group gradually absorbed, if any encouragement or protection had been given to the early settlers, instead of letting them be officially considered as legally pariahs outside all law and nationality. There is no doubt that many of the “beachcomber” type would be pleased to be so considered and left alone. But others wanted some security for their properties, some legal recognition of their rights as British

citizens, which they were unable to obtain from Australia or Fiji. Sir Arthur Gordon, when Governor of Fiji, once it is said proposed to appoint Mr. Hugh Romilly, C.M.G., as Assistant Commissioner at Havannah Harbour. But he was sent to study savage life in the Solomon Islands. The appointment here of such an Assistant Commissioner, under the Governor of Fiji, would even now be of great benefit as a practical evidence of English interests in the New Hebrides. Such an official would examine the *bona fides* of the titles to land claimed by British subjects. I fin the old days no Englishman could obtain any legal recognition of his claim to any property here, the system lately inaugurated is perhaps worse. Documents presumed to be land titles can be sent to Fiji and registered in the office of the High Commissioner for Western Polynesia on payment of a small fee. This registration is only legally considered to be an acknowledgement of the applicant's claim, but by many is held to be a good title, and certain British subjects resident in Noumea have lately been buying land from the natives, have had the titles registered in Fiji, and have then sold to the French Company, to whom the natives would not have given their lands. *Bona fide* settlers here would receive protection and assistance from a Deputy Commissioner, but he would discourage as much as possible all land speculations by Englishmen resident in Noumea and New Caledonia.

From Havannah Harbour I cruised round the group. Nowhere are there any "French interests" to be seen except those of copra makers, men who drift from island to island, leading a vagabond, careless life, victims to fever or square gin, whse career is generally ended by a bloody death. There are only two *bona fide* settlers north of Vaté. One is Mr. George de Latour, an English gentleman who has many acres of maize on his property on Aorè, a small island south of Esperitu Santo, the Austral land of the Holy Spirit named by Quiros, the first white navigator in these seas. But of the copra makers more than half are English or Scandinavians. The English flag floats over most of the ships we meet, labour vessels recruiting from Queensland or Fiji. And on every beach where we land there is some one to speak English, of a "pigeon" kind certainly, but still English. The French or Bourbonnais copra makers have to learn this dialect to communicate with the natives. At Port Sandwich, on the south-west side of the island of Mallicolo, is the second French military post in these islands. This harbour, though not so large at certain seasons of the year, is considered by nautical authorities to afford even better shelter than that of havannah. The camp is on the south side. Under some cocoa palms, scattered about a low sandy spit of land, are the brown grass huts of the soldiers. There is a background of hill and thick tropical bush. It looks a charming little bit for a scene painter. The officers in their white tunics and

brass buttons, the soldiers in their solar topees ad to the theatrical impression – the idea of a “set” in some extravaganza at the Gaiety or Eden. The men walk about in just the listless make-believe manner which supers on a stage generally affect. There is an air of unreality which is borne out in fact. For this post is even more a sham than that at Havannah Harbour. To guard the adjacent copra store of the New Hebrides Company, to keep the tricolour flying, to parade at *reveille* and *rappel*, and to sicken with fever, this is not real work for the brave soldiers of France. They know that there has been no necessity for their presence here, that the pretence of action against the natives will never be carried out. To go on the war-path against the latter would be impossible here even if there were any excuse for it. French as well as British copra traders have been killed on Mallicolo. Some, it is hinted, deserved their fate. But to protect or avenge these a post of soldiers is of little avail. At the present moment the gunboat, the Dive, from Noumea, is shelling some villages on the adjacent of Ambryon, no one exactly knows why, but that is the only form of military operations which the French will take in these islands. Here in Port Sandwich the French troops are merely a sign of sham authority, a cover to the doings of the New Hebrides Company. The officers and men know this, and when you get confidential with them are as loud in their curses against the wirepullers in Paris, whose money-making machinations have caused their banishment to this unhealthy spot, as are the colonists of Port Vila. The only man here who is not a “super” is the doctor, and he has enough to do.

The French camp and the adjacent store of the New Hebrides Company are on the most unhealthy site possible to select. The English flag floats over a house on the bluff opposite, and catches the fresh breezes of the ocean, which assist in dispersing the miasma. Here is the large store of Mr. Lee Walker, formerly of Wolverhampton, who is clearing and cultivating the adjacent land, raising vegetables to supply passing ships and making experiments in tropical agriculture. The tobacco which he has planted seems to flourish well. Indigo also promises to be a most profitable article of cultivation if the same conditions of labour as in India applied here. There is no disputing the fertility of the New Hebrides. These islands could be rendered very valuable if any security of tenure were given to English or Australian settlers. As it now is these are handicapped in every possible way. While French settlers can obtain labour, as I have before set forth, British subjects are liable to be called to account by the commanders of the men-of-war if they attempt to “recruit.” It is quite right that there should be proper regulations, and that Englishmen should not have the power over natives whom they might employ which Frenchmen in these islands possess. But *bona fide* English settlers like the few I have mentioned should not be debarred

in properly employing natives for legitimate work. As an instance of the “slavery” mentioned in connexion with the operations of the New Hebrides Company, I may mention that we landed a returned labour hand from one of the company’s plantations at a village near this port. Perhaps the French captain who asked us to do this had his reasons for not visiting the place. The “boy” was useful on board ship and worth more than his passage. He had been in Queensland before, and spoke English fairly. For nearly five years he had been employed by the New Hebrides Company, having been “recruited” soon after its formation in 1882. When we arrived at the half-mile of beach which he called his home, I accompanied the man ashore. The wealth with which he returned, the payment for his years of service, consisted of a rifle, ten rounds of ammunition, and a small deal box containing a few yards of print and some tobacco. The whole was not worth £4. Now, if engaged for work in Queensland, he would have been paid at the end of his three years of service £18 in money, which he could have expended as he chose. “Boys” who have been to Queensland learn the value of money; they do not spend all their coin before returning home, but often keep an amount to purchase tobacco and calico from passing ships. In this present cruise I have seen natives with five to ten English sovereigns in their possession, which they knew how to make the most of. The island of Api was said by one skipper to be “full of money.” A New Hebrides labour hand in Queensland has his rights before the law, and is paid as regularly as any white man. In the services of the French New Hebrides Company he is a slave for a longer or a shorter term, and when he is returned to his native home he is paid off with any paltry present the agent or manager may like to give him.

But on arrival here I learn of even a worse case from the Rev. D. Macdonald, of Havannah Harbour. The brigantine referred to as “recruiting” labourers for the company’s plantations in Port Vila two weeks back landed “70 head” there. There were a number who protested they had not been engaged to work at this place. One night 25 of them took a large boat, and with only two oars rowed out to sea, endeavouring to escape. But they were driven ashore on hat island, just outside Havannah Harbour, a small desolate, uninhabited spot. Pursued by a cutter with armed crew, like dogs they were lashed into it and taken back to slavery to work for a term in irons. Should any of these boys ever get back to their native islands, little wonder if they attempt to avenge themselves on any helpless Frenchman. This is how men are dealt with; young women have a value of another sort. These French traders have a regulation price for a girl - £30 will buy one, body and soul. Perhaps the trader buys her from her parents or even husband. Women are but chattels in many islands. But too often I believe they are “recruited” nominally for work in the colonies. In any

case, this buying and selling of human flesh is slavery worse than any in the Southern States, as there is no public opinion to restrain brutality. The traveller at present voyaging in the New Hebrides acquires three prominent impressions:- that the much-talked French interests here are sham and fictitious, and that the much-abused Queensland labour traffic is highly popular with the natives who profit by the visits of the English ships. But the most serious impression is that a British subject has no rights in the New Hebrides which a Frenchman is bound to respect. For I hear that in Havannah Harbour a fence erected to protect land belonging to the Presbyterian mission has been torn down, and cattle belonging to the company driven in to destroy the plantations. This property, a large tract of land, worth perhaps £4,000, was in 1882, in presence of the commander of Her majesty's ship Sandfly, legally transferred by the natives to the New Hebrides Synods, that they and their heirs for ever might be protected from any attempt to despoil them of their plantations by force or fraud. These plantations are the only means of support of the Christian natives. It is doubtless because they are Protestant Christians that they are so outraged. Mr Macdonald intends appealing to Admiral Fairfax on his expected visit to this group at the end of this month. Should he obtain no redress he may well say that the Anglo-Saxon is played out and the French are masters in the New Hebrides.