

correspondent is that, going in a labour schooner with the hope of exposing untold iniquities in the traffic, he found the natives in a conspiracy against him. Some accepted the terms, and some declined them, but all acted of their own free will. Under the present regulations the so-called scandal of the labour traffic is merely the gossip of old women. Let us assume that the planters are as hard-hearted as a Legree. They find that they cannot have one Polynesian on board the labour schooners unless the Government agent is satisfied that he is there of his own free will and that he understands his position. Let us suppose that the Government agent is in league with the planters and disregards the law; then the labourers are asked by the Queensland inspectors whether they have any complaint to make. We must next assume that the inspectors are bribed by the wicked planters to overlook acts of kidnapping and genuine grievances on the sugar-cane estates. But this is too absurd. The profits on sugar-growing are not large enough to admit of a system of slavery under the present regulations. Whatever the planter might desire, he must be content to treat the Polynesian as a free labourer.

"Many British subjects would envy the lot of the kanaka labourer in Queensland." Such are the words in which our representative who has made a cruise incognito in a labour vessel through the Solomon Islands, who has seen with his own eyes the recruiting of the plantation labourers, who has visited the beach in the boats of the schooner *Helena* and seen the relatives and friends of those who volunteered for the Queensland service, and who has talked with the recruits on their voyage to Bundaberg, and had every opportunity of discovering whether they had any complaint to make or whether any advantage was taken of their supposed ignorance by an unscrupulous captain—such are the words in which our representative sums up his experience of the labour traffic. Sentiment is cheap, and it is an easy thing for people who have never seen an islander from the Solomon group, and who know nothing of the intelligence of that race, which is mentally and physically one of the strongest among all the races that inhabit the lands of the Pacific, to assume that the labourers are cajoled or kidnapped by the guile or force of the white man. It is easy also, and it may give pleasure to such men as the Rev. Dr. PATON, to say that the labour traffic is injurious to the mission settlements. A complete answer to this sentimental quackery is given by our special correspondent. So far as the mission stations are concerned, we need only refer to the fact that the Florida recruits on board the *Helena* who had been converted to Christianity kept up religious services during the whole of the voyage, and thus showed that they were capable of maintaining a spiritual enthusiasm even when they had left their own islands, and the little thatched church, with ornaments of shells and coral, to which they had been attached.

We may go, however, beyond what is absolutely necessary to disprove the wild statements of the malcontent missionaries, who cry out against the labour traffic. In the district of Bundaberg, as our correspondent points out, more than one-half of the kanaka labourers are attending Sunday schools. Now, we must bear in mind the fact that a number of the Polynesians employed on the plantations are pagans, who have never come under missionary influence at all, and who would not show the slightest desire if they remained in their own islands to become acquainted with the religion that is taught by Europeans. We must remember also that the churches complain frequently that little or nothing is done to meet the spiritual wants of the South Sea islanders in Queensland, although large sums are spent in missions to the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. Let us take these facts and ask what inference can be drawn. We find, on the one hand, that a very large proportion of the kanaka labourers in Queensland keep up their religious services; and, on the other, that the churches acknowledge and confess their own neglect in the matter. Our representative informs us, moreover, that the native preachers in the Solomon Islands are perfectly willing to help the recruiting agent; and this shows that neither they nor the European missionaries who direct the work in the group see any reason to dread the labour traffic. It might, in fact, be assumed that they regard a service of three years in Queensland as an education for the younger men, and that they are not willing to debar any recruit from the one opportunity offered to him of seeing what civilisation is. On this aspect of the subject it is unnecessary that we should say more. It is for the missionaries, who have agitated the community, or a part of the community, to disprove the deliberate and disinterested statements which our correspondent has made out of the fulness of his experience.

We come now to the charge that the South Sea islanders are kidnapped, and that the labour system is only a modified form of "slavery." This is a statement which no one who has visited the islands or who has seen the labourers on the plantations could possibly repeat; because it involves an utterly absurd reflection upon the intelligence of the Polynesian races. That there may have been abuses in former times we are ready to admit. But as it is impossible now to redress the evils that occurred in the last decade or in the last generation, we must abide by the facts of the present time. And the fact is that the natives know thoroughly well what service is expected from them, to what colony they are going, and what are the conditions of their service. During its voyage the *Helena* touched at harbours where nobody cared to volunteer, and it visited places where recruits were plentiful. At one time it seemed that the trip would be utterly unprofitable, and in the end more labourers were offering themselves than the ship could accommodate. But one thing is clear. In both cases the natives knew exactly the terms of the engagement into which they were asked to enter, and were absolutely free to accept them or reject them as they saw fit. Many of the recruits followed the ship for miles along the coast in order that they might volunteer. A large percentage were labourers who had been previously in Queensland, and who were anxious not only to return themselves but to take their friends with them. Quite a pathetic story was told in the course of our articles when a former Queensland labourer brought his youngest brother with him, and when the latter was sent back on account of his youth he pleaded that he might be given another chance on the return of the schooner. It is childish to suppose that on islands which contain so many returned labourers there can be the slightest doubt as to the terms of employment on the plantations. This ridiculous supposition is, however, frequently put forward. And the answer of our