

THE QUEENSLAND LABOR TRAFFIC.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE AGE.

SIR,—Will you kindly allow me space to reply to the Rev. J. G. Paton's letter in your issue of to-day. In the first place the rev. gentleman does not seem to like the statement I made to the effect that it was to the interest of a labor collector to return as many men as possible, and quotes from my letter of the 14th in support of his argument, but only so much of my letter as suits his purpose. I said it would be difficult for a labor vessel to get supplies if he did not return the last lot he took away, "that is if he returns his own labor." I say so still; but this latter portion of my statement he passes over. I myself stated that many men were never landed at their own homes, and stated the consequences. I still say, and very decidedly, that on board any vessel on which I was employed, I never saw any native badly treated or starved, and on my next visit I will call on the Rev. Mr. Paton and allow him to inspect my craft, and show him that some men who require laborers know how to use them, properly, though certainly some do not. Mr. Paton must be exaggerating when he states that he does not believe one half of the natives ever get home. I have never had the value of a brass nail in goods or food from any of the reverend gentlemen on any of the islands, as I always go to sea well found in all respects. As to the rev. gentleman's statement, that no South Sea Islanders are married to white women, let him make a few inquiries in Queensland, and he will find there are, and those men have a perfect right to take the women to the islands should they see fit. As regards the mission I still say the result is very small from the sacrifices of various sorts made to obtain it. He says, "little over 30 years ago this mission was begun, when the whole inhabitants of the group were cannibals, naked savages, without a written language, bowing down to stocks and stone idols. Infanticide was common among them, and the sick and aged were destroyed when no longer able to work for themselves." Now, in all conscience, does not this state of affairs exist in nearly every island from New Guinea to Tanna? I say yes. There has been, off and on, a mission station on the latter island for some 30 years, and I conscientiously believe there are not two really Christianised Tanna men on the island, and since 30 years ago how many frightful murders have not been committed on that island? Many of them well merited deaths, 'tis true. Mr. Paton, of course, puts up Anewa as a "test" island, but how many inhabitants are there on Anewa? Very few. Nor have they any influence on their wild neighbors, the Tanna men. Of the mission on Efate little can be said excepting that of giving the highest praise to the noble lady residing there who puts up with such a state of things. If it took 10 years to Christianise 70 of the Anewa people, how many years will it take at that rate (and under such peculiarly favorable circumstances) to civilise 10 Tanna men? As to being an "enemy to Christianity," and "having no sense of justice," these are statements which do not affect me. A few more words and I have done for the present. On my next trip I will amuse myself by making a few notes. Let any one compare the lives of the South Sea natives with the lives of some of our own race, especially in large cities. Natives among themselves are well enough, they have their laws and see them enforced in their own fashion, sometimes a very summary one, certainly, but take them all in all I fancy the balance in the "great ledger" will be found in favor of many an island compared with many a city. Of course there are some exceptions; compare the life of a native with that of a child in our back slums, of which we hear something now and again. I ask any person who knows anything of the matter, and who is not biased, whether the life of the young savage "making their summer lives one ceaseless song," hardly ever wanting food or shelter, never having to look forward to a life of shame or violence for a living, beautifully supplied by nature with all their requirements, I ask are we not more justified in leaving such beings in "darkness" so long as such a dark crowd rubs our shoulders in our streets and cries aloud to any thoughtful man "come over and help us?" As in the days of old, so now—first preach the Gospel to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For my part I cannot put my hand in my pocket for the missions. The slums are not reached, the wavering poor are never or hardly ever cheered or helped on the right track; no hand is stretched out, or at any rate, but a feeble, cold, one to lift them from the slough of despond; while thousands, ay, tens of thousands, are left on the stranger and the alien. Our own neglected walls stand shivering in the church porch, while eloquence within is pleading for the children's peace in aid of a happy though heathen race. I am, &c.

23rd May.

MALICOLA