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NEW ZEALAND AND THE LABOUR

TRAFFIC 1868-1870

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1870

C O N T E N T S

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND TO THE TRAFFIC:

Since the days of the discoverers, island people had been kidnapped. Occasionally, they served as interpreters, but principally, they provided cheap labour, and during the early years of the nineteenth century, bêche-demer traders, pearlers, and buyers of sandalwood, often trepanned natives to work their ships. But blackbirding scarcely became a trade until the 'sixties' and 'seventies', when a large scale plantation economy, essentially dependent on the availability of cheap labour, began in the Pacific.

A veritable economic revolution occurred in the Central Pacific area with the invention of the manufacture of copra. Large scale coconut growing had not been an economic proposition, the extraction of the oil being a laborious process, and its transportation an additional problem, but after the standardization of copra production, coconut growing began to attract many entrepreneurs in the latter half of the century. ¹ Moreover, cotton growing suddenly became topical at the time of the American Civil War. The cotton blockade not only cut off the principal source of income in the South, but it also deprived buyers in Europe of the enormous supplies of cotton, hitherto exported by America. The sharp rise in the price of raw cotton which followed, initiated the development of new sources of supply. Amongst others, planters in Queensland and Fiji put large areas under cotton, in order to reap the advantages of the high rates. By providing a market for the labour of the islanders the American Civil War - a war fought to free the slaves of the United States - did most to stimulate the labour traffic, a virtual 'slave trade' in the Pacific. When, at the end of the Civil War, the boom in cotton

1. KOSKINEN, A.A., Missionary Influence as a Political Factor in the Pacific Islands (Helsinki, 1953), 145.

subsided, labourers were as much in demand as ever, for sugar had begun to replace cotton as a plantation industry. At the same time the systematic cultivation of certain tropical plants such as coffee, and vanilla, was initiated.

In this way, plantation economy began in the Pacific very suddenly, and with great intensity, and the demand for a labour force became a pressing problem. However, with such a ready market, there was a rush of ships to provide the labourers, and by 1863 a regular trade in imported labour had begun. In that year, Queensland planters had begun to import labourers from the New Hebrides, and other groups in Melanesia, and in the following year a trial shipment of thirty-five men reached Fiji. The traffic was not confined to Fiji and Queensland however, for the French of New Caledonia and Tahiti, the Americans of Hawaii, the Germans of Samoa, and even the Peruvians, shared in the demand. The Peruvian traffic, like the traffic in the west, began with cotton growing, and for the same reason, but in addition, rich deposits of guano were being worked and both mining and sugar industries needed men.² The ruthless Peruvian raiders operated for only about three years but in that time, they swept away thousands of the inhabitants of Eastern Polynesia. In the Western Pacific blackbirding, however, developed into a big business and during the late 'sixties' and 'seventies' vessels scoured the South Seas to secure men, depopulating islands and whole groups, placing firearms in the hands of the natives and spreading the diseases of civilization among the hitherto sheltered peoples of the Pacific.

The recruiters worked over a wide area, but the most profitable nursery was the New Hebrides, the Solomons and Banks' Islands which were almost

1. DERRICK, R.A., A History of Fiji (Suva 1950), i.166.

2. IBID, 168.

totally unvisited by the Europeans.¹ The mild mannered Polynesians, for the most part, were reluctant to work on plantations owned by the white man, preferring instead to cultivate their own land.² The more vigorous Melanesians were more in demand, and at first, whether through curiosity or for adventure, were willingly recruited. It became almost an accepted pattern of life for young men to spend two or more years away from their home village as contract labourers. However, whilst the demand for labour expanded, the actual recruiting became increasingly difficult and honest methods ceased to suffice. Where once chiefs might be bribed by a few gaudy trifles, to supply labourers, they would now be satisfied with nothing less than arms and ammunition, which the natives were quite prepared to use against the blackbirders themselves. Unscrupulous blackbirders resorted to using deception and violence to secure a full ship which in turn, provoked violent reactions from the islanders. Within a few years the scramble for men had deteriorated into an organised system of kidnapping, a virtual slave trade. Yet, as the risks became greater, so too did the price paid for each man. The cost of recruitment varied, being generally £3 to £6, but reaching £10 or even £12 if the bidding were keen.³ Women were much more profitable to the slavers, sometimes fetching £20.⁴ The crew of a labour ship were paid head money, a form of payment by results, the master usually receiving about £1 for each man, whilst members of the crew received perhaps two shillings.⁵ It followed, that it was in the crew's interests that the ship should be as full as possible, and few blackbirders hesitated to resort to the unscrupulous practices that became a feature of the trade. Despite the risks involved, the raiders had

1. 'N.Z. Herald', 30 July 1868.

2. Koskinen, 146.

3. 'Otago Daily Times', 1 January, 1870.

4. DUNBABIN, T., Slavers of the South Seas (Sydney, 1935), 285

5. HARRISSON, T., Savage Civilization
(London, 1937), 188.

considerable success. In 1867, 1,237 islanders were taken to Queensland and by 1868, 2,107 kanakas had arrived. Fijian planters, between 1864 and 1868 had imported some 1,649 natives from the New Hebrides and Gilbert Islands.¹ Smaller, but still substantial numbers had been taken to Tahiti, Samoa, and New Caledonia.

The natives were taken under an agreement to work for a certain period of time, and then to be repatriated at the completion of the agreement. Wages were paid by 'equivalent in trade', muskets and powder, tomahawks, knives and brass bound boxes being most in demand, but even the system of payment, and the promised free passage home were sometimes shamefully evaded. Moreover, it was always doubtful if the ignorant natives understood, or were capable of understanding the terms of the contract they entered into. The planters believed that the nature of the agreement was so simple, and the proficiency required in the English language so little, that even the dullest among them could not fail to understand its implications.² Yet, whilst the best of the blackbirders attempted to make it as clear as possible, often three fingers raised to mark three yam seasons, and a nod, were the extent of the contract. The labourers agreed to these terms by making a mark on a printed form, or by touching the end of a pen in the presence of a witness, but this formality attached only a semblance of legality to conditions that were in fact a limited form of slavery.³ Even the planters, who defended the traffic in their own interests, could not vindicate the actions of the blackbirders employed in the trade during the period 1868 to 1870, for by that time their methods had degenerated to straight out kidnapping.

1. HARRISSON, T., Savage Civilization (London, 1937), 188.

2. N.Z. Herald, 30 July 1868.

3. DERRICK, R.A., 170.

In these years the demand, both in Queensland and Fiji, had increased beyond what could be supplied by willing labour, and the high premium for an able-bodied black was sufficient to tempt masters into obtaining the desired article by all possible means.¹ Some fifty vessels, based on Australasian ports were active during the period. In 1868 alone, six labour ships arrived at Levuka and the number of imported labourers exceeded five hundred.² But the extent of the traffic and the methods employed did not go unheeded by cities of native emigration. Protests from missionaries and honest traders were published and discussed in the press with unprecedented regularity, in both Australia and New Zealand. The Imperial and Colonial Governments were pressured into an awareness of the abuses of the traffic. In 1868, insistent protests forced the Queensland Government to pass its Polynesian Labourers' Act, which required each recruiting ship to take-out a licence, and to give security for the return of the labourers to their homes. The labour traffic, during this period then, involved not only the actual participants, but the missionaries, who form ethical and religious considerations were diametrically opposed to the trade, and whose criticisms not only aroused public indignation but warranted government interference. In New Zealand all three interests, the blackbirders, the missionaries, and the politicians, were implicated.

Whereas most of the vessels involved were based on Australian ports, New Zealand owned and operated ships were employed in the labour traffic. New Zealanders were already trading with the islanders in goods, fruit, curios, cotton, and coffee, and few hesitated to enter a more lucrative activity, the

1. YONGE, G.M., Life of John Coleridge Patteson (London, 1874) ii, 424.
2. DERRICK, R.A., 168.

trade in labourers. In addition, the geographical proximity of Levuka and Auckland, meant that Fiji had an especial interest for masters of New Zealand vessels. An accurate evaluation as to the extent of the participation by New Zealanders is difficult, but evidence suggests it was considerable.

A more influential force that was making New Zealanders aware of the evils of the traffic was the Anglican Melanesian Mission and the Presbyterian Mission in the New Hebrides. By a mistake in his letters patent, the first Bishop of New Zealand, Bishop Selwyn, was given episcopal jurisdiction over Melanesia. The scheme for the spiritual conquest of Melanesia, had therefore, originated in New Zealand, and it gave the colony more than a passing interest in that part of the Pacific, and in the welfare of the natives there.¹ Patteson and his colleagues kept New Zealanders fully informed on the activities of the Melanesian Mission, and did not hesitate to publicly denounce the labour traffic which threatened the very life-blood of that Mission. Moreover, New Zealand Presbyterians had a direct interest in the south-west Pacific for by the 'sixties' they had their own representative missionaries in the field. William Watt of the Northern Church began work on the island of Tanna in 1868, and in the following year the Rev. Peter Milne, representing the Presbyterians of Otago and Southland, went to the New Hebrides, and became the first missionary on the island of Nguna, in 1870. New Zealanders then, by their maintenance of these respective missions, had something of a vested interest in the Pacific, and when that interest became vitally threatened by the labour traffic, their reactions and demands for some form of supervision over the traffic, had a considerable bearing on government response.

1. Stewart, P.J. 'New Zealand and the Pacific Labour Traffic, 1870-1874'

For a number of reasons New Zealand politicians had a particular interest in the trade, an interest, which had roots which went back as early as 1848 when Governor Grey had received accounts of outrages which had been committed throughout the islands, by Europeans or by natives instigated by Europeans, especially 'a species of trade in the inhabitants'¹ which had commenced in the Pacific. Grey sent a warship to investigate and later, reported to London. He saw annexation of the Pacific Islands as the only possible way of controlling the misdeeds of irresponsible Europeans amid a chaotic native society. To the economic and strategic advantages to be gained by annexation, the labour traffic 'provided a moral basis for New Zealand's imperial ambitions.'² Grey's contemplation of political and commercial expansion in the Pacific had become by 1870, a matter of 'national tradition'³ and the labour traffic gave an impetus to the campaign for annexation.

In this way, New Zealand's involvement in the labour traffic was a three-fold one and the extent, the reasons for, and the results of that participation must be examined.

1. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 48.
2. WOOD, F.L.W., New Zealand in the World (Wellington, 1940), 65.
3. IBID, 63.

SECTION II

NEW ZEALAND PARTICIPATION:

The number of New Zealand vessels and traders employed in the labour traffic during the years 1868 to 1870, can be no more than an estimate. Traders were extremely reticent about their activities, often changing the names of their vessels and the ports of registration to avoid suspicion. They would clear out, ostensibly for beche-de mer, coconut oil and cotton, but their real interest was to secure labourers for Queensland and Fiji.

The Acting Consul in Fiji, John Thurston, required all British owned recruiting ships to take out licences at his office and he inspected all newly arrived labourers, questioning them about their treatment enroute, and learning if they had been recruited willingly.¹ His faith in the licensing system is reflected in his report to the Foreign Office, of December 1868, in which he defended the traders. In his report, Thurston made mention of three New Zealand ships, the Australian Maid, registered in Lyttleton, the Reliance² and the Eagle, both of which came from Auckland. The blackbirders however, were well aware of the limits of the Consul's powers, and when Thurston refused to licence the Mary Anne Christina, a New Zealand owned vessel, the master, Field, defied his prohibition and left for the Line Islands to recruit labourers.³ Thurston may have been justified in defending legitimate recruiting agents, but not all blackbirders operated in this exemplary manner.

1. DERRICK, 174.

2. ROSS, A., New Zealand Aspirations in the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford, 1964), 72.

3. DERRICK, 174.

In April, 1868, the Auckland schooner, Zillah, was seized by the French Government and the whole of the crew, with the exception of the mate, (who was employed to look after the vessel) were discharged. On a previous visit to Tahiti, Captain Wyatt of the Zillah had been engaged to convey a number of natives from there to the Penman Islands. Many of the natives returned to Tahiti, and reported that they had been driven ashore on an island and that several of their number had been drowned. The enquiries made, ascertained that none of the party had reached Penman Island. The Zillah was seized and the crew discharged not for inhuman behaviour, however, but for having neglected to fulfill its engagement.¹

During the same year, the notorious 'Bully' Hayes, master of the Rona, a Lyttleton registered vessel, landed 150 natives of Niue or Savage Island at Tahiti.² William Hayes was apparently no worse, and perhaps no better, than scores of others employed in the trade, but the legend of grandeur which has grown up about him does not befit his activities in that traffic. Somewhat of a reckless navigator, Hayes caused the Rona to founder near Rieron's Island³ but he quickly acquired the schooner Atlantic, which he operated with equal daring. The Atlantic was seized by the British Consul at Apia after a particularly audacious bit of kidnapping. At Danger Island, Hayes kidnapped a score of natives, but when his schooner called at Apia, seventeen were dead and the other three were dying.⁴ Then at Manihiki, he enticed a number of lads and girls on board and once at sea, advised them that they were being taken to Fiji. At Pago Pago, Hayes and his crew were

1. N.Z. Herald, 25 May 1868

2. Dunbabin, 227.

3. RHODES, F., Pageant of the Pacific (New York, 1937), ii.103.

4. Dunbabin, 228.

overpowered by natives, and taken into custody at Apia, but characteristically, the dare-devil Hayes escaped on a schooner bound for Shanghai.¹

By these years, 1869 and 1870 the captains of the labour ships had found that a sufficient supply of willing labourers could not be procured, and Hayes, and others of his breed had begun to cajole them on board. But the increased cultivation of cotton in Fiji, consequent upon the steady arrival of settlers from Australia and New Zealand, meant that a proportionate rise in the importation of labourers was needed. The labour traffic was extended but now, honest methods ceased to suffice.

In November, 1869, March relieved Thurston at the consulate in Levuka, and was seemingly satisfied with the conditions of the traffic for in his report he wrote; "The opinion to which I have arrived after studying the subject of importing natives from the South Sea Islands is that the immigrants while in Fiji are not treated like slaves and that if the proper supervision could be established, especially over the manner of obtaining the natives, their residence among the natives might be beneficial to both parties."² In his report, he listed eighteen vessels in the trade up to November, 1869. Four of the ships were from Sydney, and four from island ports, while the remainder were from New Zealand.³

<u>Name of Vessel</u>	<u>Port of Registry</u>	<u>Master</u>	<u>No. of Natives imported</u>
Mary Ann Christina	Lyttleton	Field	66
William and Julia	Napier	McLiever	51
Swallow	Lyttleton	Bradley	58
Jeannie Duncan	Lyttleton	Nichols	85
Flirt	Auckland	Smith	20
Waiiau	Dunedin	Stewart	23
Sea Flower	Auckland	Chaplin	?

1. IBID, 228; Rhodes, 106-7.

2. MARTIN, K.L.P., Missionaries and Annexation in the Pacific (Oxford, 1924), 73

3. ROSS, 73. March listed the vessels previously named by Thurston, the Australian Maid, the Reliance and the Eagle.

March submitted a scheme for placing the traffic in Fiji on a sounder footing, which included the licensing of ships, and the provision of guarantees against kidnapping. Interpreters were to be carried on each vessel and engagements, which might not exceed three years, were to be made in the presence of the Consul.¹ The Imperial Government did sanction a measure of control over the labour ships by the Consul, but essentially, there remained no control over the actual recruiting except that exercised by the cruising warships, and even that was limited.

Captain Markham of H.M.S. Rosario boarded the New Zealand schooner Helen at Espiritu Santo, and found that the vessel had no clearance from her last port, nor any license to carry natives, of whom seventeen were on board, and there was no log nor official record of her proceedings.² Markham believed himself quite justified in seizing the vessel and sending her down to Sydney for trial but taking into consideration the case of the two other vessels which had been seized by men-of-war, (the schooners Daphne and Challenge), "I contended myself with making the master sign a written statement acknowledging the illegality of his proceedings which record would be sufficient to convict him in any impartial court." Again, at Noumea, Markham seized the Donald MacLean, an Auckland schooner, whose master, Donald McLeod, had stolen an albino woman, the wife of one of the chiefs of Nguna and had sold her in Tanna 'after treating her most barbarously'.³ The Donald MacLean had no papers at all, and her master was also forced to sign a written statement.

The warships engaged during this period, H.M.S. Blanche in 1868 and H.M.S. Rosario, between 1868 and 1871, did limit the activities of the blackbirders, and their officers did supply first-hand information as to the condition of

1. DERRICK, 174.

2. MARKHAM, A.H., The Cruise of the 'Rosario' (London, 1873), 191.

3. MARKHAM, 257; DUNBABIN, 293.

the traffic, but the difficulties of securing a conviction were insuperable. They relied, for the most part, on second hand knowledge, and the natives, unacquainted as a rule with the English language, were unable to give precise information, such as the name of the vessel and the date of an alleged outrage, and until 1872 only a Christian native was allowed to give evidence.¹ What in fact constituted kidnapping, it was difficult to say, and it was possible to evade the spirit, and keep the letter of the law. In most instances, owners of vessels did supply themselves with the proper consular documents in order to justify their traffic.² The Jeannie Duncan, a small Canterbury vessel of 53 tons, left Levuka in December, 1869, and upon her return with 85 men from Tanna, she was boarded by an officer of the United States war steamer Jamestown, but after an inspection of her papers, 'everything was pronounced very satisfactory.'³ Unfortunately, this was not the norm, and the majority of traders used deception and violence to secure a full ship.

In October 1869, the mission schooner Dayspring, came across the Flirt, a brigantine from Auckland, in quest of natives, for Fiji, anchored at Tongoa. Peter Milne, the missionary supported by the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland, reported that there were about 20 natives of Three Hills Island on board and several natives of Tongoa, and when one of the Tongoa natives desired to go ashore he was forcibly prevented. Moreover, Captain Smith had deceived the natives into believing he was bound for the neighbouring island of Epi, when in fact, his destination was Fiji.⁴ In the same year

1. Martin, 73.

2. Otago Daily Times , 27 August, 1870

3. Otago Daily Times , 1 January, 1870

4. KAY, REV. JOHN, The Slave Trade in the New Hebrides

William Stewart of Tahiti, the owner of the Eugenie, chartered the Prince Alfred and the Midz of Auckland, and sailing in company, the three vessels visited the Marshall and Gilbert groups. At Pleasant and Ocean Islands, 10 natives were obtained for a musket and in all, the three vessels procured 500 natives.¹ In September 1870, the Auckland cutter, Sea Flower, arrived in Levuka, from Tanna with 33 natives, and its captain reported that the New Zealand ships, the Queen of the Isles with 4 labourers, and the Coquette with 10 would soon be in port.² In April, the brig Rita had sailed from Fiji in search of labour, but she secured only eight natives after a two months' voyage,³ emphasising the growing reluctance of the islanders to be inveigled into working on the plantations. The Rita was later chartered by Fijian planters, to obtain coolie labour from Singapore,⁴ but the introduction of Chinese labourers was neither as successful,⁵ or as extensive as the traffic in island labourers during this period.

Whilst the main demand was for men to work as plantation labourers some of the blackbirders specialized in kidnapping women, the better looking Polynesian and Micronesian women being most profitable, sometimes fetching £20 in Fiji.⁵ Finlay McLiver, the master of the New Zealand schooner William and Julia was perhaps the most daring of the women stealers. In January, 1870, he arrived at Levuka with a number of women from the Gilbert Islands, whom he consequently sold for £10 a head. McLiver was charged before a naval court with kidnapping, but he submitted that the women had been given to him by his white passengers and as a result, he was found not guilty of slave-trading, but guilty of lesser offences,⁶ including barratry. Nevertheless, as master of the fully armed,

1. DUNBABIN, 285
2. Otago Daily Times, 29 September 1870.
3. N.Z. Herald, 21 May 1870.
4. Otago Daily Times, 11 July 1870
5. DUNBABIN, 285
6. IBID, 286

Nukulau, which was equipped with leg irons and other tools of the trade, McLiver was, in 1871, 'convicted of practices tending to establish a slave trade' by the British Consul of Ovalau. He also faced charges of head hunting and there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that some of the blackbirders did participate in this heinous activity.

Evidence about skull-hunting is given in a statement by the Rev. Charles Hyde Brooke of the Melanesian Mission on his return from a stay on the island of Florida, in the Solomons. He perceived from the natives of the New Hebrides that 'the white master takes on board skull-hunters from the north and they are allowed by him, to take the heads of the southern people, whom they are ever striving to subdue, and that in consideration of this aid the white master may take men or trade on their return to the north.'¹ Brooke boarded Captain Mackenzie's schooner, Helen of Auckland, who, in response to the charge of having carried head-hunters on such raiding expeditions replied, 'if I got a chance to carry off a lot of them I'd do it, I don't deny, but killing is not in my creed.'² If the ~~redoubtable~~ Mackenzie did not associate himself with such activities, then others surely did, but violent behaviour provokes violent reactions and murder was not the sole preserve of the white blackbirders.

The first attack by South Sea Islanders upon a ship in the trade occurred in January, 1868, when the crew of the schooner Marion Rennie were massacred³ by Solomon Islanders. Captain Bradley of the New Zealand ship, Swallow, died from wounds received whilst on a recruiting voyage in the New Hebrides, and the master and crew of another Auckland vessel, the Wild Duck, were also

1. DUNBABIN, 285

2. IBID., 281

3. RHODES, 95.

reported murdered by the Herald of 4 October, 1871. In the previous year, the Queen of the Isles, owned by Captain Duncan of Port Chalmers, was wrecked on the island of Apia and the lives of the crew threatened.¹ The crew, consisting of five or six whites, and some twenty native labourers, all that was left of an original complement of ninety-nine, formed a sort of encampment around which swarmed several hundred threatening natives, and only the timely arrival of Captain John Rees in the Spunkie saved the crew from certain death.² Late in 1871, fifty Solomon islanders on the New Zealand ship Peri, turned on the crew and murdered all but one Fijian who jumped overboard.³ Two years previously, the Brigantine Samoa owned by 'Bully' Hayes was wrecked off Manihiki Island, and shortly afterwards the Rona, another of his vessels foundered near Rierison's Island, the crew of both ships fore-gathering at Manihiki.⁴ For two of Hays's crews to come together on the same island suggests that there was more to the incident than evidence discloses.

Such occurrences were given full publicity in the New Zealand newspapers, as was the proposal by an Otago businessman, W.B. Yaldwyn, of a scheme to purchase a steamer to be employed in the labour traffic, or to carry passengers and cargo among the islands, with the ultimate object of land speculation in Fiji.⁵ Later in that year, 1870, the screw steamer Waimui, was registered under Dunedin ownership and early in 1871, it became the only steamer employed in the labour traffic, when, under the command of Captain Grey, and with the firm of McCallum, Neill & Co., as agents, it departed for Fiji.⁶ But perhaps the most dramatic report by the press, of New Zealand participation in the doubtful labour traffic, was the reception given the importation of island labourers to work in Auckland flax-mills.

1. Otago Daily Times, 23 September 1870
2. HOPE, J.L.A., In Quest of Coolies (London, 1872), 75; Otago Daily Times 26 September 1870.
3. DERRICK, 172.
4. RHODES, 103
5. Otago Daily Times, 7 Oct. 1870, Otago Daily Times, 22 October 1870
6. Otago Daily Times, 7 January 1871.

The clipper schooner Lulu, the property of Captain Cadell, arrived in Auckland on May 20, 1870, with about twenty-seven labourers from the New Hebrides on board.¹ A Mr Young, had earlier been commissioned by Messrs Brissenden and Walker to procure the natives, the firm paying the owner of the Lulu, the sum of £4 per head for all landed.² Here was an example of direct, active participation by New Zealanders and the indignant general public, who had long been made aware of the worst evils of the traffic by the reports of the missionaries, made sure the experiment was still-born. The missionaries, since its beginning, had been the spear-head of a pressure group advocating the reform of the traffic, and their participation warrants closer examination.

1. N.Z. Herald, 21 May 1870.

2. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 166-7.

SECTION III

MISSIONARY OPPOSITION:

From the very beginning the missionaries opposed the labour traffic. One of the first blackbirders, the Honourable Robert Towns, a Sydney merchant and a member of the legislative council, sent a circular letter to all missionaries with whom his recruiting ship might come in contact, and asked for assistance because he promised to civilize the natives.¹ But the plea for assistance was in vain for the missionaries likened the indentured labour to slavery. The cruel treatment of the natives and the abuses arising from their employment led, from the outset, to protests and complaints. The attention of the general public of New Zealand was continually attracted to the south-west Pacific by the Anglican Melanesian Mission and the Presbyterian Mission in the New Hebrides, whose representatives did not hesitate to denounce the traffic in labourers. The New Zealand press was only too pleased to publicise reports on the abuses of the traffic. The New Zealand Herald for instance, believed that the Rev. Mr Inglis who likened the system of native emigration to 'modified slavery', in a letter dated November 1867, had 'hit upon the right nomenclature for this most extraordinary traffic'.² Indeed, the evidence for such charges was almost the sole preserve of the missionaries, in the field, and when the prospects of steady mission progress were checked by the activities of the blackbirders and native reactions to them, New Zealand had more than a passing interest, for the scheme for the spiritual conquest of Melanesia had originated in the Colony.³

1. HARRISON, 188; INGLIS J., In the New Hebrides (London, 1887), 204.

2. N.Z. Herald, 30 July 1868.

3. STEWART, 50.

The missionaries, with the exception of those carrying on the traffic, had a better means of knowing its true character than anyone else. They came in contact with a number of the ships employed in the trade and conversed with captains, agents, passengers, seamen, natives and others connected with the ships.¹ Moreover, it had been the custom of Bishop Patteson to cruise amongst the Solomons, the Santa Cruz and Banks' Islands in his yacht, the Southern Cross in an endeavour to induce the people to allow their children to accompany him to the mission school at Norfolk Island.² He more than anyone else, was able to report on the effects of the traffic on the islands and their peoples. The children would be brought up in the Christian faith, and eventually sent back to their homes to promulgate the word of God, but the labour traffic created a natural suspicion by the natives, of any visiting ships. The negative attitude of the missionaries to the traffic was not by any means then, the mere result of a hypothetical defence of morals and ethics, for it threatened the very life-blood of their work and was one of the reasons for the slow progress and small achievement of the missionary work in Melanesia.³

Ethical considerations did however, promote the widespread attack on the methods of recruiting the native labourers. The deception and violence used to entice or convey natives on board ship, provoked a storm of protests on the part of the missionaries. In some cases, blackbirders disguised their vessels as missionary ships and sent their most respectable looking individual ashore dressed as a missionary, with a bible or some other book under his arm, to entice natives on board.⁴ Such deception constituted a grave danger to missionary work, and native reprisals were to be feared in all islands where the labour traffic was carried on. Bishop Patteson distinguished three types of vessels

1. KAY, 13.

2. MARKHAM, 60.

3. KOSKINEN, 150

4. PALMER, G., Kidnapping in the South Seas (Edinburgh, 1871), 185.;
Markham, 75.; Yonge, 11, 126

in the trade; 'the fairly conducted one with the government agent on board; the "snatch-s snatch", which only inveigled, but did not kill and the "kill-kill", which absolutely came head-hunting.¹ Not only the methods of recruitment, but also the terms of the agreements received generous criticism.

Patteson considered that the natives were quite incapable of understanding the meaning of a civilized contract. 'The natives don't intend or know anything about any service or labour They are brought away under false pretences, else why tell lies to induce them to go on board?'² The Presbyterian missionaries believed that, 'to talk of emigrants, passengers, free labourers, engagements, contracts and interpreters in connection with these poor islanders, as if these words conveyed any ideas at all equivalent to those which they convey when applied to Europeans, is simply to prostitute words, pervert the English language, and turn it into a vehicle of deception.'³ Whether or not such accounts were liable to exaggeration is open to question, but 'missionary exaggeration', was an easy term for disposing of all defence of the islanders and the difficulty of making an uncivilized man, whose language is not understood, understand the terms of a civilized contract, appears insuperable.⁴

Apart from ethical and religious considerations, the attitude of the missionaries was influenced by many practical factors. The aim of all the missionaries was to convert and civilize the savages and the point of difference between them was whether the labour traffic could be a valuable means to this

1. Yonge, ii.553.

2. Ibid, ii.381

3. Kay 11.

4. Yonge, 425.

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end. The Melanesian missionaries at first, valued the trade, if properly regulated, as a means of bringing the natives into contact with a higher and Christian civilization, but further experience of the flagitious traffic changed Patteson's views markedly. In 1870 he wrote; 'As to the boasted civilization, a sugar plantation has not been found a very advanced school for the American or West Indian negro and as a matter of fact, the islander who has fulfilled his term and comes home bringing tobacco, clothes, and firearms, only becomes a more dangerous and licentious savage than he was in his simplicity.'² The Presbyterian missionaries, on the other hand, never believed that the labour traffic could be regulated satisfactorily, and that since it withdrew the native from their teaching, would always hinder their work.³ In general then, the native returned home with the vices and not the virtues of Christian civilization. Indeed, by 1871, the proportion of returned labourers to the island of Futuna who professed Christianity was one in twenty-six.⁴ In addition, they often degenerated morally during their period of labour. They contracted the worst venereal diseases, and brought them to their home islands.⁵ Moreover, blackbirding deprived the islands of large numbers of young people, so much so, that Joseph Atkin, a New Zealand trained deacon, did not think 'it an exaggerated estimate, others would say it is under the mark, that one-half of the population of the Banks' Islands had been taken away.'⁶ On the island of Three Hills in the New Hebrides, Atkin counted in 1870, about forty-eight people where previously there had been up

1. PARNABY, O.W., Britain and the Labour Trade in the South-west Pacific (Durham, N.C.) 1964, 76.
2. YONGE, 425.
3. See answers of Presbyterian missionaries in New Hebrides to Anti-Slavery Society questionnaire printed in Kay, pp. 48 ff.
4. IBID, 18.
5. KOSKINEN, 149.
6. The Report of the Melanesian Mission, 1870.

to three hundred.¹ Depopulation of the islands and demoralization of the islanders then were the ultimate consequences of the labour traffic.

Island labourers had, by this time, been introduced into New Zealand and the missionary reports, as to the consequences of native emigration, had direct relevance. The New Zealand Herald of May 25, 1870, recognised the error in calling the islanders' service a voluntary action for 'how can a three years agreement be entered into with a savage who never thinks of looking forward to any more distant period than the next yam season.' Moreover, at the conclusion of their term the labourers 'will leave for their own islands with a bundle of muskets, an intense hatred of the European, and an unsurpassed vocabulary of filthy language, the sole profit, if any, finding its way into the pocket of the solitary mill owner.'² The editorial epitomizes not only the reasons for missionary opposition, but also, the reactions of the New Zealand public to their published reports. The constant pressure applied by the missionaries, in the form of letters and reports, against the evils of the labour traffic, had borne fruit. The public had become increasingly aware of what the trade implied and the time was ripe for some form of regulation to be demanded.

Since November, 1867, Bishop Patteson had advocated the abolition of the worst abuses associated with the 'semi-legalized slave trading'³ and in July, 1870, he sent an official letter to Sir George Bowen on the subject.⁴ In it, he submitted a remedy for the regulation of traffic.

1. IBID

2. N.Z. Herald, 25 May, 1870

3. YONGE, ii.140

4. IBID, ii. 440-44

'It is clearly desirable that a uniform mode of dealing with this question should be adopted in these, (the Fiji Islands), or any similar fields of labour, which may be created in countries not within the Queen's Dominions The mode of licensing vessels; the character and fittings of the vessels; the number of natives that may be carried in vessels of a certain tonnage; the rules concerning the seizure and forfeiture of unlicensed vessels engaging illegally in trade, with other similar points, should be laid down by the Imperial Parliament.'

Patteson did not advocate the suppression of the traffic but its regulation for 'deception, inhumanity, unjust detention of natives, and violation of agreements are not necessary for the purpose of procuring and maintaining a supply of labourers.'¹ The letter anticipated Patteson's official memorandum on the subject, which he submitted to the General Synod of the Church of England in New Zealand, early in 1871.² In his memorandum, a sophisticated version of his earlier petition, Patteson gave a description of the deplorable traffic and advocated 'Imperial legislation to put an end to this miserable state of things.'

The reception given the memorandum by the general public and the Government of New Zealand was encouraging. Although it was received too late, to be read before the Synod, it was published with the report of its proceedings and the newspapers gave it full publicity. In addition it was laid before both Houses of Parliament and later, was transmitted to the Colonial Office. Bishop Patteson had finally solicited the support of the New Zealand Government in his demands for Imperial legislation, but previously, government interest had been conspicuously absent.

1. YONGE, ii. 442.

2. A. to J., 1871, G.-35.

SECTION IV

GOVERNMENT REACTION

The participation in the labour traffic by New Zealand owned and operated vessels was an established fact by 1870, and yet, members of the Government were extremely reluctant to recognise this axiom. Early in that year, Consul March wrote to Governor Bowen stating that most of the vessels which arrived in Fiji from the ports of New Zealand were chartered 'for the purpose of conveying so-called immigrant labourers to Fiji.'¹ March's suggestions on the subject were forwarded to the Collectors of Customs, the respective shipping masters of the ports of New Zealand, and both the Consul and the Colonial office were informed that 'the most energetic measures for preventing any vessel or seamen from New Zealand, from being concerned in enterprises of doubtful legality', would be taken by the Colonial Government. But Bowen's assurance that the utmost co-operation would be given, all instructions from Her Majesty's Government on the subject was a false premise, for the reception given a circular despatch of 20 April, 1871, fell well short of co-operative action.

The despatch, addressed to the 'Governors of the Australian Colonies', requested them to ascertain whether the Government of those colonies would be prepared to 'defray the expenses of proceedings taken, with their concurrence, in the colonial courts, against persons guilty of the offence of kidnapping or decoying natives by fraud from the islands of the Pacific.'² A ministerial memorandum on the subject questioned whether the word 'Australia'

1. A. to J., 1871, A.-1, 9.
2. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 160.

repeated in a second despatch of 29 April, was used advisedly or not and whether it literally included New Zealand. The reluctance of ministers to associate New Zealanders with the iniquitous labour traffic remained, but in their favour they agreed that 'assuming that persons did set out from New Zealand on such expeditions, as those alluded to by the Earl of Kimberley, such persons oughtto be tried, and if guilty, punished in New Zealand and that New Zealand should bear the expenses necessarily attaching to such trials.'¹ Kimberley acknowledged the inadvertence of using the term 'Australia' but alluded to New Zealand's particular interest with the Fiji Islands, and for this reason the circulars were properly sent. There is no doubt that Kimberley was well aware of the participation by New Zealanders in the traffic and assuming this, there was no reason why New Zealand politicians should be less aware.

The reluctance to assume any responsibility continued however, for when in March 1872, the Earl of Belmore informed Bowen that there appeared some reason to suspect the schooner Helen of Auckland of illegal proceedings in the trade, Bowen assured him that 'nothing tangible in the shape of legal² evidence' could be procured in the colony respecting such accusations. Lord Belmore accused a man named Crossley 'of complicity in some of the irregularities of the labour trade', but the police were unable to confirm the rumour. Again, in May 1872, the Governor of Queensland notified Bowen that the Peri of Auckland supposed to have been 'employed in the kidnapping³ trade' was beached with all sails set off Cardwell in that colony.

1. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 161.
2. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 161.
3. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 163-4.; Derrick, 172.

The New Zealand Governor acknowledged that the Peri had once belonged to the port of Auckland, but had been transferred more than a year previously to a person resident in Fiji. The New Zealand Government's attitude during this period is best summarized in the words of Bowen, 'The allegations made in Australia as to certain persons resident in New Zealand, and certain ships stated to belong to this colony, having been connected with crimes and irregularities committed in the South Sea Islands seems to have hitherto failed to bear the test of inquiry.'¹

To avoid any responsibility for New Zealanders participating in the traffic, the Government had gone as far as to disregard available evidence. There would be no doubt about the twenty-seven labourers imported from the New Hebrides by the New Zealand ship Lulu in May 1870.² Moreover, the Government was made acutely aware of their presence by the press, who gave their importation a most unfavourable reception. The New Zealand Herald questioned the economics of employing black labour where there was 'no tropical heat to prevent the employment of Europeans.'³ In addition, the native labourers threatened the employment of the white labouring class or as the Herald put it, 'if masters cannot afford to employ white labour this is no country for the working masses.' The newspapers did not confine their criticism to the economic problem but demanded legislative measures to prevent abuses which must follow the importation of savages who were 'utterly ignorant of redress.' Two editorials read:

1. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 164.
2. N.Z. Herald, 21 May 1870.
3. N.Z. Herald, 23 May 1870.

'If however, this native labour is to be accepted as an institution, immediate legislation on the subject is loudly called for. The General Assembly must on the very earliest opportunity, enact on the subject.'¹

'If the Government sees fit to permit and approve of this new phase of affairs in common mercy and decency, let there be legislation on the subject.'²

But as in the past, the Government was slow to respond. Governor Bowen did register the need for special legislation in June 1870, but the House of Representatives did not inquire into the true facts of the case until September. Moreover, the inquiry merely consisted of asking the opinion of the Superintendent of Auckland and as he did not see 'the necessity for immediate active interference' the Government abandoned the intention of proceeding any further in the matter.³ A memorandum by Mr Fox verified this:

'The Government has already given attention to this subject and after inquiry, has satisfied itself that nothing has occurred in New Zealand as yet, to justify its interference, but it will take care that no abuse shall be permitted.'⁴

A police inspector was instructed by the Government to keep the matter under his observation and to report when he saw occasion, but it appears that such an occasion occurred only once, in June 1870, when a complete report on the condition and treatment of the islanders was forwarded to the Government.⁵ Thompson reported that there was no reasonable grounds for complaint upon their treatment, but each party had the same grievance, that he had been deceived as to the length of his employment.

'They assert, and in this they are unanimous, that Young the agent, distinctly agreed that they were to be engaged for one year only, for which, they were to receive a musket and ammunition, tomahawk, knife and blankets, and at the end of that time were to be returned to Fate, the island from which they were taken.'

1. IBID., 23 May, 1870.

2. IBID., 25 May, 1870.

3. N.Z.P.D., 1870, VII.21.

4. A. to J., 1871, A.-1, 9.

5. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 166.

Kimberley, at the Colonial Office, was satisfied as to the treatment of the natives, but to him, the very fact that they had^{been} deceived over the length of their employment proved the necessity for legislation. ¹ The Colonial Government did protect the welfare of the islanders and they were eventually repatriated, but the Government was implicated not because of any real interest, but because of the public agitation consequent upon the introduction of the labourers. Government involvement, did not rest upon any moral basis but rather upon the compulsion to intervene.

During the years 1868 to 1870, and immediately after, the Colonial Government was aware of the participation by New Zealanders in the traffic and the irregularities of the trade in general, but there was a determination on her part to avoid any responsibility for that participation. Not until the untimely death of Bishop Patteson on 20 September, 1871, and the realization that the depravity of the traffic could be useful in furthering New Zealand's imperial ambitions, did the Colonial Government become involved out of genuine interest.

1. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 167.

SECTION V

CONCLUSION

There is no real evidence to attribute the death of Bishop Patteson, and two of his colleagues, at the hands of natives of Nukapu Island, to the labour traffic, for missionaries had been martyred before for less conspicuous reasons.¹ The missionaries freely risked, and often lost their lives in these pioneering years when many natives were but untamed savages. Nevertheless, the allegation that Patteson's death was an act of retribution for outrages committed by white blackbirders was accepted at the time, and even later. To contemporaries his death incorporated all the ingredients of the labour traffic, and New Zealand's participation in it. It was recognised as the direct result of the activities of the blackbirders; it prompted the already extensive public concern with the evils, which were so obviously in existence, to a more vigorous demand for regulation, and it provoked the New Zealand Government into appealing for Imperial legislation on the subject. It was forthcoming, for on 27 June, 1872, the Pacific Islanders' Protection Act, designed 'to deal with criminal outrages by British subjects upon natives of islands in the Pacific Ocean not being in Her Majesty's Domains nor, within the jurisdiction of any civilized power,'² became law.

Such a surge of activity would not have taken place, had not the New Zealand Government and the general public become increasingly preoccupied with the impropriety of the labour traffic. The flagitious trade in human beings and the persistent criticism of that trade by the Melanesian missionaries, during the years 1868-70, had prepared the grounds for the assumption by both

1. By 1872 six missionaries had been murdered on Erromanga Island, in the New Hebrides; Harrison, 161.
2. DERRICK, 175-6; PARNABY, 26-7

parties, of a moral responsibility to intervene. The propaganda of the Melanesian and Presbyterian Missions had been responsible for promoting an interest in the Pacific and the extensive public concern with the pernicious aspects of the traffic prompted by the death of Bishop Patteson was an attestation of that interest. The petitions and addresses from New Zealand demanding the regulation of the traffic played no small part in influencing British policy.

Moreover, the labour traffic provided a new platform for New Zealand's imperial ambitions. Colonial statesmen had long had the vision of New Zealand being the centre of an island empire and in the 'seventies' these imperialistic aims began to take a more definite shape under the vigorous guidance of Julius Vogel. His proposal that the Navigator Islands should be placed under the protection or guidance of Great Britain or a British Colony was in part motivated 'with a view to the better prevention of the iniquitous traffic in Polynesian labour.'¹ His hope for a more direct liaison between New Zealand and the South Sea Islands by the establishment of a trading company would, in his opinion, offer protection to the islanders.² Vogel's flamboyant proposals were unsuccessful, but he had extended New Zealand's attachment to the Pacific and he had recognized that New Zealand could take a lead in agitating for the control of the unsavoury trade in human beings.

New Zealand's interest in the labour traffic did not cease with the introduction of the Islanders' Protection Act of 1872 then, but 'once Vogel had passed by and the memory of Patteson's martyrdom had grown dim, the labour traffic disappeared from New Zealand's conscience.'³

1. A. to J., 1884, A.-4, 133.
2. A. to J., 1874, A.-3, 8.
3. STEWART, 58.

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