

of 1872 and 1875, but it can be scarcely necessary to point out how very grave the consequences of such action must be. In no case, whatever the character of the community, can the authority of a father or husband be outraged with impunity; and it must be, moreover, recollected that individuality, as we understand it, is almost unknown in the South Seas. The whole life of a Polynesian is bound up with that of the community to which he belongs, however small or subdivided it may be. He moves, acts, and thinks only as a part of a whole, and the bitterest resentment is created by the open contempt shown for the will of the community, or of the chief acting as its representative in cases where he is so. This is especially the case with regard to the recruiting of women.

140. The labour ship endeavours to obtain as large a number of recruits as possible, and it depends very much on the character of the labour agent, whether women are recruited, and in what way. Some only take women accompanied by men who profess to be their husbands; some take any woman who offers.

141. Now, the presumption is that any woman who offers herself is married, and, if she offers herself singly, that she has run away from her husband.

Sometimes the woman is caught again by her husband, and very likely put to death by him. The Rev. Mr. Bice saved a woman's life at Aoba three years ago, who had thus run away, and whose husband was on the point of killing her.

142. Sometimes the husband demands his wife back again from the labour vessel, and, on being refused, wreaks his vengeance on any white people he may come across. This was the case at Lakona, on the Island of Santa Maria, where two women were recruited, and refused to their husbands, who demanded them, and who then killed two Malicolo men, the boat's crew of a white trader living there.

143. Sometimes the woman is given to some other man as his wife, which gives rise to complications on their return home.

144. That women are (especially in the Line Islands) recruited avowedly for immoral purposes, is undeniable. But, great as are the evils which attend the engagement of women, there are other considerations connected with the subject which are of much importance. It may be a question whether the immigration of labour into Fiji or Queensland should be permitted at all unless the immigrants are accompanied by a certain proportion of women of their own race. Not to speak of obvious moral evils to which this absence of females is in both colonies likely to give rise, there is, in the case of Fiji, the additional inconvenience that the introduction of a number of strange single men into the midst of the Fijian population tends to disorganize the domestic life of the Fijians themselves, and to give rise to dangerous disputes and quarrels in the villages near which the labourers reside.

145. We have, thus far, touched only on abuses which attend the first recruiting of labourers, but we have reason to apprehend that it is not uncommon for the return of time-expired immigrants to be conducted with culpable carelessness as to their being landed at their own homes. When it is recollected that any neglect of this description often—indeed it may be said, usually—involves the death of those who are thus landed among strangers, it will be seen that the matter is one of very serious import, and requiring the most exact and scrupulous attention.

146. The fact has been denied, but the denial cannot be seriously maintained. The testimony by which it is established is overwhelming, and to disregard it shows either an entire incapacity to estimate evidence—an ignorance which disqualifies from discussion of the subject—or an audacious partisanship which cannot be restrained.

147. One of the most unsatisfactory features in the present aspect of the labour trade is the character of persons usually employed as Government agents. There are, no doubt, exceptions, and we have known Government agents who performed their duties efficiently and conscientiously, and in such a manner as to command our respect. But we are bound to record that, as a rule—and each member of the Committee has had abundant personal experience of the fact—the Government agents on board labour vessels are unsuitable, and eminently untrustworthy.

148. This is, we may say, an almost inevitable result of the mode of their selection and appointment, and the circumstances of the employment.

149. The pay being small, and the hardships and risks of such a life as theirs considerable, it cannot be expected that men of any character or position would present themselves for the office under the present system, and, as a matter of fact, they are usually found to be broken-down planters and traders, and men who come under the comprehensive colonial term of "loafers."

150. They know nothing of the languages of the people whom it is their duty to protect, and to inform of the nature of the engagements into which they are entering, and, being too often men of overbearing temper, harsh disposition, drunken habits, and profligate life, not unfrequently greatly exceed and abuse their authority. This, we believe, will continue to be the case so long as they are appointed as they now are.

151. No guarantee nor security appears to be exacted to insure their fulfilment of their duties to the Government and the natives; and the circumstances of their life on board the labour vessels, which throw them into such close contact and intimate relations with the masters, tend to render their views and interests identical with those of their employers.

152. Under these circumstances, any honest independent discharge of their functions could scarcely be expected, even were they drawn from a far higher class of men, and we are convinced that a radical change in all that concerns this agency is that which of all others is most imperatively called for.

153. The most essential alteration in the system at present prevailing appears to us to be the transfer to the High Commission of the whole control of the trade, the issue of licenses, the appointment and payment of labour agents, &c.

154. At present licenses are issued by the Governors of the Australian Colonies, acting as Imperial officers. Neither they, nor those on whose advice they act, can have any great acquaintance with the character or history of those applying for their license. The most heartless ruffian who ever