

among the natives were brought about by certain foreigners who were engaged in contraband trade with which the French annexation interfered.

NEW GUINEA.

Brisbane, 29th December.

ADVICES received here from Thursday Island state that Mr. Theodore Bevan has returned there from an exploring expedition into the interior of New Guinea, where he found splendid river-systems, forming the highways of a large agricultural country.

[Extract from the *Times*, Thursday, 5th January, 1887.]

THE British Government has for the last three or four years been attempting to procure an international agreement with regard to the traffic in arms and alcohol in the Western Pacific. From the blue-book issued yesterday it appears that the attempt has failed, and that the failure is largely owing to the refusal of the United States to become a party to a convention prohibiting its traders from carrying on the work of civilisation in those regions. There can only be one opinion as to the nefariousness of this traffic, which is rapidly demoralising the natives of nearly every group of islands in the long chain which extends from Fiji to the eastern shores of New Guinea. The spear, bow, and arrow of the Pacific islander are now nearly superseded by arms of precision, to possess which is his ruling passion. Their possession acts as a revelation upon his bloodthirsty instincts. Even before his fingers ever pressed a trigger he was not the incarnation of gentleness and innocence that Rousseau would have liked to think him. But now the unlimited power over human life with which new weapons have invested him is used without any of that sense of responsibility which accompanies their possession by civilised men. He thirsts to spill blood, and he is never at a loss for a pretext for doing so. In every island there is a multiplicity of tribes or septs, with feuds raging between them in plenty. The result is illustrated by the state of things which prevailed in 1884—and which may prevail now for aught that appears to the contrary—in an island curiously named “Pleasant Island.” Pleasant Island is inhabited by about twelve hundred people, none of whom have any religion, and who for the most part drink to excess of sour palm-toddy. “The state of affairs in Pleasant Island appears to be this: The tribes are distinct, and eight out of the eleven have a trader. If a family or tribe wishes to revenge itself upon another family or tribe, they first proceed, cocoanuts in hand, to their particular trader, and purchase ammunition. The trader, knowing perfectly well that the cartridges he is now exchanging for nuts will be used within the next week, possibly that night, for the cold-blooded murder of women and children—for these people do not confine their warfare to the men—eagerly sells it. The purchasers then stalk their victims, and, if the latter do not happen to be looking out, shoot them from behind trees and run away. The family of the people shot then go to their trader for cartridges, and proceed, when a good opportunity presents itself, to stalk the other family. The more quarrels in the island the better for the trader.” Other islanders, instead of killing one another, devote their energies to killing the inhabitants of some neighbouring island. These conditions of society do not exist, of course, in islands occupied by Great Britain or dominated by any civilised Power. But even in Samoa, where German influence is supreme, the active traffic in firearms carried on between Europeans and Natives alone perpetuated the wasteful wars, or intertribal murders, by which the titular King, Malietoa, was harassed. Nor is this all. Bishop Selwyn, of Melanesia, whose letter to the Colonial Office is nearly the last of the series, points out that “the command of firearms has made the attack on ships and boats more frequent and more easy. Any outrage committed by a white man is sure to be avenged by a volley fired at the next boat’s crew that lands. If murder ensues a man-of-war has to be sent and a party landed, often in the face of a heavy fire, exposing valuable lives for the most trivial of causes.” He is corroborated by a striking passage contained in a memorandum issued by the Colonial Office for the information of foreign Governments: “Commander Acland, of Her Majesty’s ship ‘Miranda,’ reports to the Commodore from the New Hebrides on 9th July, 1884, in reference to the boats of the ‘Eliza Mary,’ which had been fired on: ‘At Mattua the natives said the boats were shot at because they think the ship was the “Tongatabu,” which ship had recruited two sons of the chief Brandiree for Maryborough (Queensland), but had taken them to Samoa, where they had died. (The “Eliza Mary” and “Tongatabu” are alike in rig, size, and colour.) They said that they always shoot at Samoa ship, and that black Samoa man shoot boy from tree on shore.’ The ‘Tongatabu’ had been mentioned in previous reports as a vessel flying German colours, and service in Samoa is known to be very unpopular among the islanders.”

It remains to be seen how the natives acquire arms and ammunition. In the first place, there is the simple method of trade. But, apparently, the quantity of firearms supplied through this medium is inconsiderable, because the natives have few commodities sufficiently valuable to barter even for Hamburg guns. Perhaps, however, we should call labour a commodity, and labour is the only thing of value which the natives have to sell. For many years the competition among Australian, Fijian, and Samoan planters for labourers has been severe, and recruiting-vessels have scoured the islands of the Western Pacific for that purpose. Recently it has been found that the most powerful inducement that can be offered to an islander, or to those who have the disposal of him, is the offer of a rifle. In this way arms and ammunition have become a sort of currency, which appeals to the savage mind far more than cash or trinkets. To make it worse, the labourer who had served his time in Queensland or Fiji used to take out part of his wages in the form of a gun, which he would proudly bear back to his home. In this way it is calculated that the natives obtained their large supplies of arms and ammunition. Winchester rifles, repeaters, revolvers, and even dynamite find their way into the islands in large quantities. So much for firearms. The liquor traffic is a mischief which needs no illustration, and which is taken for granted throughout this correspondence. It need only be noted that the supply of inferior and noxious spirit comes mainly