

is the second French military post in these islands. This harbour, though not so large at certain seasons of the year, is considered by nautical authorities to afford even better shelter than that of Havannah. The camp is on the south side. Under some cocoa palms, scattered about a low sandy spit of land, are the brown grass huts of the soldiers. There is a background of hill and thick tropical bush. It looks a charming little bit for a scene-painter. The officers in their white tunics and brass buttons, the soldiers in their solar topees, add to the theatrical impression—the idea of a “set” in some extravaganza at the Gaiety or Eden. The men walk about in just the listless make-believe manner which supersedes on a stage generally affect. There is an air of unreality which is borne out in fact. For this post is even more a sham than that at Havannah Harbour. To guard the adjacent copra store of the New Hebrides Company, to keep the tricolour flying, to parade at *reveille* and *rappel*, and to sicken with fever—this is not real work for the brave soldiers of France. They know that there has been no necessity for their presence here; that the pretence of action against the natives will never be carried out. To go on the war-path against the latter would be impossible here, even if there were any excuse for it. French as well as British copra-traders have been killed on Mallicolo. Some, it is hinted, deserved their fate. But to protect or avenge these a post of soldiers is of little avail. At the present moment the gunboat, the “Dive,” from Noumea, is shelling some villages on the adjacent island of Ambrym, no one exactly knows why, but that is the only form of military operations which the French will take in these islands. Here in Port Sandwich the French troops are merely a sign of sham authority, a cover to the doings of the New Hebrides Company. The officers and men know this, and, when you get confidential with them, are as loud in their curses against the wirepullers in Paris, whose money-making machinations have caused their banishment to this unhealthy spot, as are the colonists of Port Vila. The only man here who is not a “super” is the doctor, and he has enough to do.

The French camp and the adjacent store of the New Hebrides Company are on the most unhealthy site possible to select. The English flag floats over a house on the bluff opposite, and catches the fresh breezes of the ocean, which assist in dispersing the miasma. Here is the large store of Mr. Lee Walker, formerly of Wolverhampton, who is clearing and cultivating the adjacent land, raising vegetables to supply passing ships and making experiments in tropical agriculture. The tobacco which he has planted seems to flourish well. Indigo also promises to be a most profitable article of cultivation if the same conditions of labour as in India applied here. There is no disputing the fertility of the New Hebrides. These islands could be rendered very valuable if any security of tenure were given to English or Australian settlers. As it now is, these are handicapped in every possible way. While French settlers can obtain labour, as I have before set forth, British subjects are liable to be called to account by the commanders of the men-of-war if they attempt to “recruit.” It is quite right that there should be proper regulations, and that Englishmen should not have the power over natives whom they might employ which Frenchmen in these islands possess. But *bona fide* English settlers like the few I have mentioned should not be debarred in properly employing natives for legitimate work. As an instance of the “slavery” mentioned in connection with the operations of the New Hebrides Company, I may mention that we landed a returned labour hand from one of the company’s plantations at a village near this port. Perhaps the French captain who asked us to do this had his reasons for not visiting the place. The “boy” was useful on board ship, and worth more than his passage. He had been in Queensland before, and spoke English fairly. For nearly five years he had been employed by the New Hebrides Company, having been “recruited” soon after its formation in 1882. When we arrived at the half-mile of beach which he called his home, I accompanied the man ashore. The wealth with which he returned, the payment for his years of service, consisted of a rifle, ten rounds of ammunition, and a small deal box containing a few yards of print and some tobacco. The whole was not worth £4. Now, if engaged for work in Queensland, he would have been paid at the end of his three years of service £18 in money, which he could have expended as he chose. “Boys” who have been to Queensland learn the value of money; they do not spend all their coin before returning home, but often keep an amount to purchase tobacco and calico from passing ships. In this present cruise I have seen natives with five to ten English sovereigns in their possession, which they knew how to make the most of. The Island of Api was said by one skipper to be “full of money.” A New Hebrides labour hand in Queensland has his rights before the law, and is paid as regularly as any white man. In the service of the French New Hebrides Company he is a slave for a longer or a shorter term, and when he is returned to his native home he is paid off with any paltry present the agent or manager may like to give him.

But on arrival here I learn of even a worse case from the Rev. D. Macdonald, of Havannah Harbour. The brigantine referred to as “recruiting” labourers for the company’s plantations in Port Vila two weeks back landed “seventy head” there. There were a number who protested they had not been engaged to work at this place. One night twenty-five of them took a large boat, and with only two oars rowed out to sea, endeavouring to escape. But they were driven ashore at Hat Island, just outside Havannah Island, a small desolate, uninhabited spot. Pursued by a cutter with armed crew, like dogs they were lashed into it and taken back to slavery to work for a term in irons. Should any of these boys ever get back to their native islands, little wonder if they attempt to avenge themselves on any helpless Frenchman. This is how men are dealt with; young women have a value of another sort. These French traders have a regulation price for a girl—£30 will buy one, body and soul. Perhaps the trader buys her from her parents or even husband. Women are but chattels in many islands. But too often I believe they are “recruited” nominally for work in the colonies. In any case, this buying and selling of human flesh is slavery worse than any in the Southern States, as there is no public opinion to restrain brutality. The traveller at present voyaging in the New Hebrides acquires three prominent impressions—that the much-talked-of French interests here are sham and fictitious, and that the much-abused Queensland labour traffic is highly popular with the natives who profit by the visits of the English ships. But the most