

THE "ISABELLE" TRAGEDY.

Prior to the enactment of the Pacific Order in Council of 1893, and the establishment of Protectorates in the Gilbert, Ellice and Solomon Islands in the early nineties, commanding officers of Her Majesty's warships were faced with the thankless, and often impossible, task of endeavouring to establish and maintain a reasonable degree of peace amongst the greatly different peoples of the scattered islands of Melanesia and Micronesia.

Their task was rendered onerous by a multiplicity of factors. First, and most important, was the fact that no jurisdiction had been created which could competently take cognizance of offences committed by natives against British subjects in the Pacific beyond Her Majesty's possessions. Naval officers were therefore powerless to take judicial cognizance of any offences committed by natives, none of whom were subjects of Her Majesty, or of any offence committed by other European nationals. In an attempt to combat this problem, it was decided by the British Government that outrages committed by natives outside British jurisdiction were best dealt with by the fiction of declaring war in such circumstances on the natives, commanding officers being solely responsible for determining whether such declarations of war, and actions resulting therefrom, were necessary. It was, however, also laid down that, where it was practicable and would not cause unnecessary delay, the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific (a post created under the Pacific Order in Council of 1877) should be communicated with before action was taken.

There were also other factors which rendered their duties burdensome; thus, the huge areas of ocean which had to be covered, and with a limited number of warships; the presence in the islands of traders and beachcombers, the former being responsible, through their ready sales of firearms, ammunition, and liquor as well as their own personal habits and actions, for numerous acts of violence occurring in the islands; and, perhaps most crucially of all, the activities of ruthless 'blackbirders' seeking recruits, especially from the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands, for service in the canefields of Queensland and Fiji. But, if the 'blackbirders' were ruthless in their methods of recruitment, the natives, so many of whom possessed firearms and ammunition acquired from the traders or brought back after their service in Queensland, were no less ruthless - and treacherous - in resisting the 'blackbirders'.

The state of relations between British authority and the islanders was therefore in general one of intermittent 'warfare' induced or aggravated by the circumstances above-mentioned.

It says much for the judgment, humanity and sense of justice of commanding officers that they were often able to intervene in matters of dispute, or even outrages, and effect a reconciliation. But, even with the added safeguard of the High Commissioner being consulted in the evaluation of evidence and the decision on what action should be taken in cases reported to him, the cooperation between the naval authorities and the civil power was not always unfortunately proof against a mistake.

Such was the case in the tragedy of the "Isabelle", the story of which falls conveniently into four distinct parts.

The "Isabelle", of which one Joseph E. Hawkins was Master, sailed from Suva on the 29th September, 1881, on a recruiting voyage to the New Hebrides. The first mate was one James Hampshire, and the Government Agent, which all Fiji recruiting vessels were required to carry, was named Mair. The vessel first called at Havannah Harbour, where it embarked a sea-captain by the name of Robert W. Haddock, who sought a passage to Fiji.

All went well up to the morning of the 12th November, when the vessel anchored off Cape Lisburne on the island of Espiritu Santo, and there tragedy suddenly struck. Mair, Hampshire and two Fijians, members of the boats's crews, were ruthlessly and treacherously murdered on the shore during the process of recruitment. The Master at once decided to terminate the recruiting voyage and the vessel sailed on the following day for Suva, where two inquiries into the tragedy were held. The first was conducted by the Acting Agent General of Immigration on the 1st December, and the second by the Chief Judicial Commissioner on the 5th - 7th December.

The following paragraphs summarize the evidence given at the first inquiry by Captain Hawkins, Yaminiasi (alias Jimmi), Malakai and Captain Haddock. The Master stated that fires were seen on shore about 9.30 a.m. on the 12th November, that being the usual and accepted signal for the recruiter's boats to come ashore. Captain Hawkins accordingly ordered the boats to be lowered, but Mair stated that a single boat would be sufficient. (This decision almost certainly sealed his doom, since it was the accepted practice always to send two boats in to the shore - one to reach the shore and commence the recruitment discussions, whilst the occupants of the second boat stood off with loaded rifles and covered those in the first boat). Hampshire, Mair and four Fijians were in the boat, which Captain Hawkins observed worked its way down the coast to the northwards and finally out of sight. As it had not returned by evening, Captain Hawkins sent in the second boat under the command of Captain Haddock. The latter reported that the boat had been greeted by "volleys of musketry" and, after expending all their ammunition in returning the fire, they returned to the ship about 8. p.m. Seeing a huge fire on the beach later on that night, Captain Haddock once more took the boat in but again returned just before midnight, though without any news of the first boat and its occupants. Next morning, the boat was again sent in under the command of Captain Haddock. Shortly thereafter, however, Mr. Hoare, the Government Agent on board the "May Queen", one of the several other recruiting vessels in the vicinity, arrived on board the "Isabelle" and reported that two Fijians had swum from the shore to the "May Queen" that morning and had stated that they were the only survivors of the first boat's crew of the "Isabelle". The two survivors were Yaminiasi and Malakai. Shortly afterwards, Captain Haddock returned with both boats and the severed head of Mair, the Government Agent. The grisly remains of the murdered men, which had been hacked to pieces and "scalded prior to being cooked for eating", were also recovered, put in "a musket case filled with quick lime", and buried ashore.

In his evidence Yaminiasi said that, on first reaching the shore, they were advised to proceed northwards along the coast where three men wished to be recruited. This they did but, on approaching the shore a second time, they were again advised to proceed even further to the northwards. On the third occasion, the boat was taken in to the water's edge. Two men were then recruited but, whilst there was some discussion as to whether the third man was sufficiently strong enough to justify recruitment, "a great number of natives from four towns rushed the boat", some seizing it by the bow and running it on shore. Hampshire and Mair were shot almost at once, though not before shooting some of their opponents. The other two Fijians, Yaminiasi stated, were "Don Juani (sic) who was cut down in the neck" and "Emosi who was shot in the chest and fell in the water". Yaminiasi himself was "struck in the head" with an axe, and Malakai "got hit with an axe on the left side of the head and forehead." Though killing several of their opponents, Yaminiasi and Malakai realized that further opposition was fruitless, so they swam to a distant point on the shore and hid in the bush. Next morning they swam off to the

"May Queen" and reported to its captain. Malakai confirmed the story told by Yaminiasi, as also did Captain Haddock, who at the same time reported how he had retrieved the first boat which had been drawn up on the shore and hidden in the bush, together with Mair's head.

Captain Hawkins, Yaminiasi and Malakai also made statements at the inquiry held by the Chief Judicial Commissioner, as also did one Henry Bentley, Chief Clerk in the Immigration Department, and one Charlie, a member of the boats's crews of the "Isabelle".

The evidence of Captain Hawkins was similar to that which he gave at the first inquiry, but with the following additional details. This was not his first voyage "in the labour trade", and they had already recruited 80 men without any trouble before the tragedy. When so doing, two boats had been used, the Chief Officer recruiting with the Government Agent in his boat, and the second boat with the second officer covering the first. He emphasized that "Mr. Mair said he didn't want the other boat" before he finally went ashore and lost his life. It was unusual for the boat to be away the whole day in this particular voyage, but boats were sometimes away in the morning and did not return until after dark, sometimes not until 10 p.m. This was not Hampshire's first season at recruiting; he had previously served in the "Stanley" when recruiting natives for work in Queensland.

Bentley produced the Government Agent's report on the previous voyage of the "Isabelle" in May, 1881, to the same area. It was not very successful in recruiting natives and the reasons given by the natives of Malo (an island off the south coast of Espiritu Santo) were because of -

"the killing and kidnapping (of the natives) by Noumean and Samoan vessels. The Samoan vessel - a three-masted vessel - landed her boat and chased the people into the bush and caught four. No people to be got in consequence".

Bentley further stated:-

"Santo has been the favourite recruiting ground for Fiji for a long time. There are a great many Santo boys in Fiji, and I am familiar with the name of Cape Lisburne, where this occurrence took place, as a locality from whence men frequently come. By a kind of tacit understanding the Queensland vessels used to go to another part of the coast. The most of the Santo natives who come to Fiji come from Big Bay and Cape Lisburne. I should think there must be about 500 Santo men in Fiji at the present moment. It has always been considered quite safe as a recruiting ground; in fact I have heard it said by the recruiting agents that they considered it as safe as Fiji itself".

Yaminiasi (alias Jimmi) gave much the same evidence as at the first inquiry. It is, however, worth emphasizing parts of his statement, as follows:-

"On the day Mr. Mair was killed we went ashore in the boat, and asked if any boys were willing to come to the ship. The people on shore told us if we went along the shore we would get men, and we went a long way. When at length we stopped, Mr. Mair got out of the boat. A great many men were then on the shore... the Santo men had their guns, hatchets, knives, and clubs with them.....They told us to wait a little and they would bring us three men from the town...They afterwards brought three men and one of the Santo men asked the price of the three men. This was given to them - three guns, three axes, three knives, twelve pipes, caps, powder, &c., &c. One of the three was an old man and Amosi (one of the murdered members of the boat's crew) said "That is an old man, he will not be able to work in Fiji". He was a weak old man. The people then came round the boat and struck Mr. Mair..."

Malakai also gave much the same evidence as at the first inquiry, but certain of his remarks are worth recording, as follows:-

"A man told me another ship from Samoa had been stealing men...The man was a Fijian who told me, but he said a Santo man had told him '...four men were killed and four men had been stolen'.... On the morning of the occurrence went on shore with Mr. Mair and mate; only one boat. Mair stepped out of boat on beach; mate was on board. When we first reached the shore we went up to where some men were, and they said "You go along beach and you will get men". This was done more than once, and we saw the Santo men were going also along the beach with their guns. Amosi, who is killed, said to me 'You ask the mate for more cartridges as two not enough'. The mate replied if I was afraid I would not come as boat's crew. Mr. Mair said the place was all right: he had been there and nobody would kill anyone there. Mr. Mair then asked the people for boys who were to come to Fiji. He had got one boy; then I got one; that was two recruits. We paid for them with guns, powder, knives and pipes. Then they brought one old man. We, the boat's crew, said he was too old and could not work. The mate said "Enough, give the gun". The old man was not on board the boat but standing near. He was very old, with white hair; that was why we objected. I did not think he would come, and see now it was only a blind to take the boat...The people then suddenly surrounded the boat and attacked us. I saw Mr. Mair and the mate killed..."

The salient part of the evidence of Charlie, a Fijian and one of the crew of the "Isabelle", was as follows:-

"I was not one of the boat's crew on the morning that Mr. Mair was killed as I was sick, but I was surprised to learn that only one boat was to go, as I know the place well; I was formerly there as one of the crew of the "Au Revoir", about five months ago; one day when we were in the boat, Amosi and Don Juani who were killed being also there, a number of the people on shore tried to get us to land; we knew that it was dangerous, because a Santo boy was one of the crew, and told us that the people on shore were shouting to him to come on shore that they might kill us....."

The following points, arising out of the evidence at the two inquiries, are worth emphasizing:-

1. The overweening confidence of Mr. Mair, the Government Agent, that there was no danger in recruiting there. Many of the tragedies occurring in the recruitment of labour arose precisely because of the self-confidence, indeed the excessive self-confidence, on the part of the recruiter or the Government Agent either that there was no danger or that any such danger could be contained;
2. The failure of the Government Agent to insist on the safeguard of having a second boat present at the time of recruitment, to cover the operations of the first boat engaged in recruiting;
3. The fact that, whilst on at least one previous occasion the Government Agent had safely recruited there, the temper of the natives had radically changed by reason of the behaviour of certain French and Noumean recruiters;
4. The complete absence of any provocation on the part of Messrs. Mair and Hampshire, and their boat's crew; and,
5. The failure of either Mr. Mair or Mr. Hampshire to recognize that they were being steadily and increasingly lured away from the safe vicinity of their ship, until faced with large numbers of heavily armed natives on or in close proximity to the shore, and thereby becoming hopelessly outnumbered, outgunned and entrapped.

The reports of the two inquiries were sent to the High Commissioner (in New Zealand) and to Commodore J.E. Erskine, commanding H.M.S. Nelson in Sydney. Although this was done before the close of the year, it was not until early in February, 1882, that action was taken. On the 4th February, 1882, Commodore Erskine issued sailing orders to Acting Commander Thomas E. Maxwell of H.M.S. Cormorant, of which the important parts are as follows:-

"Being in all respects ready, you are to proceed in H.M.S. "Cormorant" to Cape Lisburn, Island of Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, for the purpose of ascertaining on the spot full particulars of the massacre of the Government agent and three men of the schooner "Isabelle", in November last.

2. You will use your best endeavours to discover and secure the persons implicated; and, being satisfied that they are deserving of punishment, you will deal with them as may seem to you most judicious: bearing in mind that we have no jurisdiction over the natives of the South Sea Islands, and that you can only proceed against them by an "act of war", which is not to be lightly undertaken; and in executing this service you will take care that no indiscriminate slaughter of the natives, or wanton destruction of fruit trees, is allowed.

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4. The enclosed copy of the correspondence on the subject of the massacre, received by me from the High Commissioner, is forwarded herewith for your information and guidance".

Acting Commander Maxwell reported his proceedings fully to the Commodore on the 30th March, 1882, as follows:-

"....On the same day (4th March) I left Suva, and proceeded on my way to Santo. Before sailing I engaged the two Fijians, the survivors of the "Isabelle's" boat's crew, as guides and interpreters.

.....

4. To have proceeded directly to the scene of the massacre would, I was aware, only have the effect of making the natives retreat into the bush, where they would remain until the ship left; and in this season of the year, there being no anchorage on that side of the island, I determined to try and find one inside a small island named Tongoa, on the south side of Santo, of which I had received information before leaving Fiji. This place being near Cape Lisburn, I could make inquiries concerning the massacre.

.....

5... By 6 a.m. on the 12th March, the storm having entirely subsided, the fires were drawn.

6. I now sent Malaki (one of the Fijians) on shore, to get information. Shortly after landing he recognized a man as having been engaged in the massacre, and who was greatly startled at seeing him. (He exclaimed, "I thought you were dead".). On Malaki attempting to enter the hut, he threatened to tomahawk him. Malaki returned to the boat and the man took refuge in the bush. I also received information from another source that two men connected with the massacre were then on the island.

7. Two large canoes on the beach opposite the ship were being loaded with live pigs and other provisions; their masts and sails were up, and apparently they were only waiting for the wind and sea to go down to sail. I now laid an embargo on the canoes, and seized some Snider rifles that were in them, informing the owners that they would be returned to them on the two men being given up. In about an hour both men were brought off; the rifles were returned and the canoes released. Both the Fijians identified one of the men as being engaged in the massacre, but could not positively identify the other.

"8. ...On Tuesday, 14th of March, a native of Santo, belonging to a village to the westward of Tongoa, informed me that not only were the two prisoners on board engaged in the murder, but that one of the principal chiefs, who planned and carried it out (by name Mallicaubo), was on Tongoa when we arrived, and had since been hid in the bush till yesterday; when, for better security, he had crossed over to a village in Santo belonging to the Tongoa people, who were sheltering and hiding him. I immediately sent ashore and seized the two principal Tongoa chiefs, informing them that they would be kept as hostages until Mallicaubo whom they were harbouring was given up. This was done so quickly and quietly that they had not time to escape or resist. They at first said that he had called at the island to sell pigs but had been refused admittance, and had then gone on they knew not whither. But on being brought on board they gave orders to their people, who, to the number of from sixty to seventy, armed, crossed over to Santo. In an hour and a half they returned with Mallicaubo a prisoner. He was so terrified that he could not walk, and had to be carried into the boat, when he asked Lieutenant Hawker if he was to be shot at once. The chiefs were then released.

9. Wednesday, 15th of March, the ship was ready for sea... I have examined a number of English-speaking natives, who all give the same reason for the massacre - i.e., the wife of the chief of the village where the massacre occurred recruited in a labour vessel, and went to Fiji. (This information I had also before leaving Fiji: the woman, who is on Taviuni, states that she came of her own accord). The chief, in revenge, attacked the "Isabelle's" boat. I also received information that the adjacent beach villages were implicated, and that the names of the chiefs principally concerned were Packalooloose, Mallicaubo, Sovari, Tambowauke, and Lai Lai Levu; the second of whom we had a prisoner. The Government agent of the schooner "Stanley", Mr. Hore, had been agent to the "May Queen" at the time of the massacre, and it was he who landed and brought off Mr. Mair's remains. From him I received information, and he consented to come with us to the spot.

10. The chief of the village where the massacre occurred, whose name is Packalooloose, being in my opinion the person most implicated in and responsible for the massacre, I was determined to surprise the village before daylight, and, if possible, seize the chief and make an example.... I determined therefore to surprise the place, and, if we got the chiefs, to punish them, and then leave immediately for Noumea. Accordingly, having embarked Mr. Hore, I weighed at 5.15 p.m. on the 15th of March, remained under cover of Hat Island until 10 p.m., and then steamed slowly towards Cape Lisburn.

11. One of the prisoners now offered, if his life was spared, to guide the party to the house of the chief. As he was one the Fijians did not recognize, I accepted his offer.

12. The party (under command of Lieutenant Charles Moore Luckraft) ordered for the service consisted of Lieutenant Henry C. Hawker; Mr. Fred. C.T. Jones, Midshipman; 28 petty officers and seamen; 1 sick-berth attendant; 1 colour-sergeant and 12 marines; Mr. Hore, Government agent, labour schooner "Stanley"; 2 Fijians, survivors of "Isabelle's" boat's crew; making 48 officers and men, and the native prisoner as a guide. Boats: The cutter, jolly-boat, and whaler. The guard for the boats to be provided from the above party as the circumstances of the case should require, this being left to Lieutenant Luckraft's discretion.

"13. At 3.a.m. I stopped opposite to what I thought to be the place, but, the night being very dark and the coast-line difficult to make out, I could not be certain. The landing party, having had an allowance of some cocoa and quinine, were called away; they got clear of the ship by 4 a.m.: it was dead calm, but a nasty short swell was coming in from N.W.

14. My instructions to Lieutenant Luckraft, were - (1) to endeavour to surprise the village and seize the chiefs; (2) that the natives were not to be fired on, unless they offered resistance; (3) on no account to land unless the surf on the beach was quite practicable.

15. At daylight I found the ship to be a mile from Cape Lisburn. I was very uneasy at seeing that there was a heavy surf breaking on the island. I now steamed along the shore, looking out for the boats. When between four and five miles north of Cape Lisburn the boats were seen at anchor off a beach; and, on getting closer in, the whaler was seen coming off. I also distinguished that our men on shore were engaged with the natives. The whaler reaching the ship, I found that it contained the dead body of Lieutenant Charles M. Luckraft. On this being got on board I left the ship in charge of Lieutenant V.D. Hughes, and landed in the whaler, taking with me a supply of ammunition. On the way ashore I got from the chief boatswain's mate the details of what had occurred. I found the party on the beach exposed to the fire of the natives, who, armed with Snider rifles, had occupied a commanding position on a cliff about two hundred feet above the beach. The state of the surf determined me to embark the party at once. The whaler was the only boat that could be brought in, and then only when veered in with care; should^{it}/be either stove or swamped the men would have to swim off, to the danger of life and the certain loss of their arms; and if the sea-breeze came in, (as it had done on the last two days) landing or embarking would be impossible. I accordingly brought the party off. Attached to this (Enclosure No. 1) is Lieutenant Henry C. Hawker's report of what took place on shore. I wish here, Sir, to bring to your notice that I entirely approve of Lieutenant Hawker's conduct in drawing back the party. The object was to surprise the village; and, that having failed, any further pursuit of the natives would be futile, while our people would be exposed to the fire of the natives, occupying positions of safety, the only result of which would be further loss of life without attaining any object. Their position was also quite protected from the fire of the ship's guns.

16. Having barely sufficient coal to reach Noumea, I decided to proceed to that port immediately.

17. As regards the two prisoners, I thought it better to take them to Sydney for the following reasons:- (1) That any punitive measures now taken against them would appear as a vindictive revenge for the death of Lieutenant Luckraft. (2) That, they being prisoners on board the ship, any action against them would not be an "act of war". (3) That anyone committing an outrage on a British ship or boat, i.e. on British territory, falls within British jurisdiction, and therefore they can be tried for the offence. I accordingly steamed to Tongoa, where I put Mr. Hore on board his vessel. The man who had volunteered to guide, having apparently done his best, was liberated. I then proceeded on my way to Noumea.

18. So far, Sir, we have been very unfortunate, but yet I believe everyone had done his duty to the best of his ability. But now occurred a most disgraceful and scandalous thing. The prisoner Mallicaubo was killed on the topgallant forecastle, at 8.45 p.m. I give a report on this unhappy circumstance, and an inquiry that I held on it; also the statement of Dr. John Horrocks, Staff Surgeon, as to the cause of death.

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20. On the 22nd and 23rd of March received 105 tons of coal (at Noumea), and on the 24th March sailed for Sydney, where I arrived at 7.15 p.m. today (30th March).

21. In conclusion, I beg to state that in my opinion the best way of operating against the village we tried to surprise would be in the south-east season, when landing and anchorage would both be safe; and to be effective a considerable time might be necessary, so as to establish a blockade and bring pressure to bear on the adjacent tribes. The natives are armed with Snider rifles, and on the crown on the beach had constructed good rifle-pits, apparently expecting an attack".

The report of Lieutenant Hawker was brief and need not be quoted. His party reached the village but found it deserted save for two women. All the men had escaped to the bush. There they opened fire on the party, killing Lieutenant Luckraft. Thereupon, and hearing firing between the party's position and the beach, Lieutenant Hawkins decided to retire to the beach, having failed to achieve surprising the village and wisely deciding not to follow the natives into the bush.

The report of Acting Commander Maxwell regarding the death of the prisoner Mallicaubo, however, certainly merits being quoted; it reads as follows:-

"I have the honour to inform you that at 8.30 on the evening of the 16th March I gave orders that the two prisoners then on board should be taken out of irons and put under the topgallant forecastle to sleep there. Up to this time they had been in irons on the topgallant forecastle, in charge of one sentry during the day, and two sentries at night, these precautions being taken to prevent escape. The ship being now at sea, and escape impossible, I considered them unnecessary.

2. At 8.45 p.m. the Senior Lieutenant, hearing a noise, went forward and found the body of the prisoner Mallicaubo lying on the forecastle: he was brought aft and found to be dead. I made what inquiries I could that night: and next day, with Lieutenant Hawker, held a more formal inquiry, the original minutes of which I forward to you, as well as Dr. John Horrocks's (Staff Surgeon) report on the causes of death, from which it appears that a sharp instrument was used with great force, as well as a blunt one. I wish to bring to your notice that this disgraceful act took place in the presence of at least half the ship's company, and within a few yards of the sergeant of marines, the chief of police, and several petty officers; yet I am ashamed to state that not a word of evidence can be obtained as to who the perpetrators were.

3. Edward Culley, gunner, R.M.A., has, I consider, criminated himself, (although warned), by his statement.

4. In the minutes of the inquiry, I have only stated what has borne directly on the subject. I did all in my power to obtain evidence, without success, witness after witness having the same set story.

5. I am inclined to think it happened as follows: The prisoner, being released from irons, seized a handspike and attempted to attack someone with it; the forecastle at the time was crowded with men, who, already excited by the death of the Senior Lieutenant in the morning, rushed on him, and some person or persons took, most probably, the forecastle axe and committed the deed. The night was very dark, and the whole affair only lasted a minute. The axe was afterwards found in the copper punt (she being on the topgallant forecastle), but there were two or three inches of water in her, which removed any stains of blood.

"6. It has fallen to the lot of this ship's company to have had to perform the unpleasant duty of punishing the murderers of the late Lieutenant Bower and the "Sandfly's" boat's crew, and I cannot help thinking that these executions have a very demoralizing effect upon the men; I am perfectly confident that, with a ship's company fresh from England, this tragedy would not have occurred. Nor would Lieutenant Hawker, as he informs me was the case, have had difficulty in restraining the men from killing the two women who were prisoners in their hands while on shore.

7. If I might be allowed to offer an opinion, I would suggest that when a native has to be executed it should be done if possible by natives, and as few of the ship's company be present as the circumstances of the case will permit".

There is little point in recording here the detailed minutes of evidence at the inquiry, save for that of Culley, named by Acting Commander Maxwell; that was as follows:-

'Edward Culley, gunner, R.M.A., states: I was sitting on the forecastle with Joseph Long, second captain foretop; John W. Clark, painter, second class. I got up to look at something when I heard someone behind me call out, "Look out there". I immediately turned round and saw Mallicaubo holding a handspike in a threatening attitude. I seized him by the throat, and he grappled me by the body, and we fell together, Mallicaubo underneath. I did not let him go until he was disabled.

Q - The man was disabled while you were holding him on the deck; Who disabled him, and how ?

A - I don't know.

Q - Did you see any blows struck before he fell on the deck ?

A - No.

Q - Who assisted in taking away the handspike from Mallicaubo ?

A - Alfred Prideaux, stoker.

'Alfred Prideaux, stoker, states: I saw Mallicaubo holding a handspike. I caught hold of one end, and somebody caught hold of the other and took it from him. I was then pushed aside by the crowd.

Q - Was he standing up when you heard the first blow given ?

A - Yes.

Q - Did you see or hear any blows given while he was down ?

A - No.

The detailed minutes of evidence reveal a clear conspiracy of silence, evasiveness or denials, a fact subsequently confirmed at a second inquiry as mentioned below. That the death of the prisoner was homicide there can be no question; nor can there be any question but that he met his death at the hands of the crew of the warship. The evidence of the Staff Surgeon alone is proof of homicide. There is no need to record here the grisly details of his preliminary examination and subsequent post mortem regarding the grave damage inflicted on the head and skull of the deceased, but his report concludes:-

"On taking into consideration the position of these wounds, I am of opinion that (with the exception of the wound over the right eyebrow) the others were inflicted by some person or persons from behind him, and could not have been done by them in self-defence. The wound over the right eyebrow must have been inflicted by some person standing on the deceased's right side. Two different instruments must have been used to cause the wounds, viz. a sharp cutting instrument for the incised wounds, and a blunt one for the contused wounds over right parietal bone and left ear. An immense amount of force must have been exerted to produce these wounds, as the skull in this case was much thicker than an ordinary white man's skull".

Commodore Erskine was, however, not entirely satisfied with the results of the inquiry conducted by Acting Commander Maxwell, because he ordered Captain W.H. Maxwell of H.M.S. Emerald (no relation to the former) to conduct a further inquiry. This inquiry was longer and more detailed, as a result of which Captain Maxwell reported as follows on the 5th April, 1882:-

"Having weighed the evidence, I am of opinion -

1. That this native was killed by some persons belonging to the "Cormorant's" ship's company.
2. That the crime was not premeditated, but was the result of a sudden impulse produced by the threatening attitude of the native on being released from irons. The provocation he then gave, acting upon the feelings of the ship's company, already excited by the events of the day which had passed, caused a rush of numbers upon him, and the deplorable result.
3. That no facts have been ascertained or evidence elicited which can bring home the deed to any particular person or persons, or convict any as the actual perpetrators.
4. On the other hand, I consider it my duty to point out the very unsatisfactory evidence given by, and the conduct of, Acting-Colour-Sergeant Joseph Liddle, Joseph Long and W. Peel, second captains of the foretop. The first, by his own showing, saw a rush made upon the unfortunate victim within a few yards of him, without any real attempt to interfere. The other two state that they not only made no attempt to interfere under the same circumstances, but actually conveyed themselves away from the spot as quickly as possible. I find it difficult to believe that these petty officers can have really so acted, and that they are not more cognizant of all that took place than they choose to acknowledge. The conduct of James Dunn is similarly reprehensible, but hardly to be wondered at, if the example was really shown by the petty officers.
5. It seems certain that the ship's company have agreed all round to hold to the attitude of utter ignorance as to the perpetrators of this atrocious act".

Commodore Erskine accordingly advised the High Commissioner that he had come to the conclusion that there was not sufficient evidence on which to frame charges against any man with regard to the native's death, but that the conduct of the Colour-Sergeant and Petty Officers would be dealt with after reference to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

Meanwhile, the other New Hebridean prisoner, one Varri, and the two Fijian survivors of the "Isabelle" tragedy were taken from Sydney to Fiji in H.M.S. Espiègle, arriving there on the 9th June, 1882.

It was clearly felt by the naval authorities that matters could not be left there for Captain Cyprian Bridge of H.M.S. Espiègle was ordered to make a further inquiry on the spot into the "Isabelle" massacre. This he did and reported the results of his inquiry in his letter to the Commodore of the 25th July, 1882, as follows:-

"I have the honour to lay before you the result of the inquiry concerning the "Isabelle" massacre, which you were pleased to order me to hold.

2. I have had before me the written documents, of which you had directed me to be furnished with copies, and I have also examined several persons - white men and natives of these islands - whose statements are forwarded herewith.

3. The following facts are clearly established by the evidence -

- (1) The massacre was instigated by Packalooloos, chief of Keri-vanngi, in revenge for the immigration of his daughter to Fiji, as already stated in Acting-Commander Maxwell's despatch.

- " (2) The people of Keri-vanngi, with the exception of the Chief Packalooloos, and one other, Laisi-si by name (probably "Lai-Lai-Levu") were not implicated in the outrage; indeed they refused to have anything to do with it, and obliged Packalooloos to employ bushmen for its perpetration.
- (3) Tambowanki of Kerarara and So-vari of Aredi - both named by Acting-Commander Maxwell - took part in the massacre. Aredi is probably another village under Packalooloos, though one account seemed to represent it as the district in which Keri-vanngi was situated. Only one person testified to the complicity of So-vari. His case, however, is important, as it is possible that owing to his name being somewhat similar, Varri, whom H.M.S. "Espiegle" conveyed to Levuka, was made prisoner by mistake for him. Lai-si-si held the boat's painter to prevent the survivors shoving off whilst the murders were being perpetrated.
- (4) Mallicaubo, whose proper name is Mulgav, the former being apparently the way it is pronounced by the people of Sauva, and Varri, taken to Levuka from Sydney by H.M.S. "Espiegle", had nothing whatever to do with the massacre. Keri-vanngi, where it took place, must be five miles by land from Wa-Wa, Mulgav's and Varri's village.
- (5) Though Varri was identified by the Fijian survivor Malakai as an actual participator in the massacre, much dependence cannot be placed on Malakai's testimony, for the following reasons:- 1. The evidence tending to prove Varri's innocence is almost overwhelming; 2. Malakai told me that Varri had killed the mate of the "Isabelle" with a tomahawk. I understand that he made the same statement concerning Varri on board H.M.S. "Nelson". In his signed statement, however, witnessed by G. Wright, a copy of which was sent to me, he says "the mate was shot when he fell into the water". Also, at the inquiry by the Judicial Commissioner, Jimmy, the other Fijian survivor, stated that "the mate was shot in the breast".
- (6) The Louvans admit that they were aware that Mulgav and Varni, who had come over to their neighbourhood to trade in pigs, were innocent of the crime, but say that they were frightened and gave them up to the man-of-war (H.M.S. "Cormorant") so as to get back their own chiefs, who were held as hostages.

4. With regard to the evidence on which the above conclusions are based, it should be observed that it was tendered by natives of several different villages and islands, and that in no important particular is there any discrepancy in it. Much was obtained at the place in Mallicolo, which I have ventured to designate provisionally "Espiegle Bay", from labourers on board the "Heath". Not only was their testimony given in a way which went far towards showing its credibility, but also there were no contradictions of one informant by another, and white men who know them, and are not especially favourable to them, told me that natives when away from home as these were, generally speak the truth. It should also be noticed that there was no attempt to screen individuals, but that the names of the persons implicated were freely made known instead of a general accusation being brought against their tribe, which is a common method of concealing the truth. The story that bushmen were employed by Packalooloos is probable enough, as I learn that not only do these people come down when labour vessels arrive, and so were probably at hand at the time, but that it is a recognized practice in the New Hebrides to engage the services of strangers to commit murders - a stranger having been called in to kill the Chief Taratoorah, on Aoba.

"5. With guides, who would probably have been forthcoming, there would have been no difficulty in reaching the village of Keri-vanngi and destroying it. Such a course, in the face of the evidence obtained, would have been neither humane, just nor politic. Even had the villagers in general been guilty of the outrage, the adoption of such a plan must have led to the punishment of some unoffending persons - if only the women and children. But the evidence was strong in favour of the innocence of the villagers, whom- no matter what their motive was for abstaining from helping the chief to murder the people in the "Isabelle's" boat, and it was likely enough only fear of the consequences - it would have been unjust to punish when the real culprits were known. It would also have been impolitic to do so, as they and others might properly argue - were a general punishment inflicted - that massacring white men, or refusing to massacre them, had the same result. I am persuaded, after having had a conversation with some Wa-Wa natives, who have just now no reason to feel friendly to those of Keri-vanngi, that making a distinction in this way between the innocent and those actually guilty is perfectly understood and appreciated.

6. Accounts agreed in stating that the residence of the bushmen implicated was a long way off. To have attempted to punish them would have necessitated a distant expedition, for which probably several days would have been necessary. I venture to believe that I should not have been justified in undertaking such an expedition, which would have assumed almost the dimensions of a campaign, in a tropical climate, in a specially difficult country with the features of which I was entirely unacquainted, particularly as it would have been requisite to detach a considerable number of men from the ship, for which only exposed anchorages could be found during (as was actually experienced) very uncertain weather. For these reasons I determined not to land in force.

7. There can be no doubt that the "Isabelle" massacre is an exceptionally outrageous crime, even for the New Hebrides. It had not even the miserable excuse, which these savages consider a valid one, in being committed in revenge for deaths of natives caused by white men. It seems certain that the chief's daughter went to Fiji of her own accord. Justice therefore demands that Packalooloos, Laisisi, Tombawauki and perhaps So-vari should be punished. I have reason to hope that some or all of these men will be given up to the commander of a naval force detached to undertake an operation of war in their territory, with a view to their punishment. I had determined to return to Cape Lisburn before the end of the month, Packalooloos having fled at my former visit, when I hoped to capture those implicated in the massacre; and I had made up my mind as to the steps to be taken concerning them in my capacity as the officer conducting a warlike operation in their part of the island. Should the "Miranda" bring me no orders likely to interfere with this plan, I shall try to carry it out on identifying the individuals.

8. I would respectfully suggest the early release of Varri, and that he should in some way be compensated for his detention, for which he has to thank the Tonoa people. With regard to Mulgav (Mallicaubo), I considered it fortunate that his people did not mention his name to me, as I should have found it difficult to explain what had become of him. For upwards of ten years Mulgav has had the character of being an especial friend of the whites. The remains of the murdered Government agent of the "Isabelle" were buried in his territory with, I am told, his permission, shortly after the massacre. The grave has been respected.

"At pages 343, 344, 448, 449, of Dr. R. Steel's most useful work ("The New Hebrides and Christian Missions") will be found some account of this chief. Dr. Steel states that Mulgav rendered great service to Commodore Markham, of the "Rosario", who had to deal with a tribe further north for seizing a vessel and murdering and eating the crew. Information had been given to me which made me look forward to obtaining his assistance in the present inquiry, and it was not till I was actually in sight of Cape Lisburn that I learnt that Mulgav and Mallicanbo meant the same man. He seems to have been regarded with affection by his tribe, for Captain MacDougal, of the "Heath", stated that they expressed a strong desire to have him back. I have mentioned these things in case you should be pleased to deem it advisable to take the subject of compensation to his people into consideration.

9. Throughout the inquiry it has been evident that the natives interrogated thoroughly understood the meaning of (it). They evinced no sort of repugnance to any plan by which justice should be vindicated. Should Varri be released he would perhaps give information that would lead to the capture and identification of Packalooloos and the others. If it became known that whenever a man-of-war visited the New Hebrides it was an object to capture and punish the perpetrators of the massacre, they would most likely be placed in the power of her Commander in time.

10. A rough sketch of the coast line, showing the approximate position of the different villages, from natives of which information was obtained, and of the scene of the massacre, accompanies this letter. The statements of the natives examined are also appended."

(Enclosure to above letter)

(Evidence concerning "Isabelle" massacre).

At Espiègle Bay, Mallicolo Island, 15th July: Mr. Chater, Government agent of the "Heath" said that having just come from Cape Lisburne he had heard that the massacre was perpetrated by the chief of the village of Keri-vaungi 4 or 5 miles north of the Cape; also that the people dwelling at Cape Lisburne came off to the "Heath" to ask why their chief, Mulgav (Mallicaubo), had been taken away by a man-of-war, and if he would be brought back.

Captain MacDougal, of the "Heath", gave similar information, and said that he had told the Cape Lisburne people that if their chief Mulgav (Mallicaubo) was found not to have killed the white men he was sure that he would be brought back to them.

15th and 16th July: Wuss-Wuss lives at Eu, a village close to Keri-Vanugi. He said that Packalooloos, Chief of Keri-Vanugi, was the author of the massacre in revenge for the carrying away of his daughter to Fiji. (There was no sign of a belief that this daughter had gone off otherwise than of her own freewill). Packalooloos paid bushmen to murder the "Isabelle's" men. He was not able to persuade the people of his village Keri-Vanugi to do it. The bushmen employed live a long way from Keri-Vanugi, on the other side of the mountains.

Tabooa lives at Wa-Wa, close to Cape Lisburne. The name of his chief is Mulgav, who is also called by the whites, Mallicaubo. Varri (the prisoner taken in the "Espiègle" to Fiji) is also a small chief of Tabooas' tribe. The Wa-Wa people had nothing to do with the massacre of the "Isabelle's" boat's-crew; there are several villages between Wa-Wa and Keri-Vanugi, for instance, Eu and Grenalus, besides others. He confirmed the story of Packalooloos' employment of the bushmen. Mr. Mairs' (the murdered Government agent of the "Isabelle") grave is in the territory of his village. He has seen it; it has been respected by Mulgav's people.

Tabooa further said that Tambowanki, who lives at Kerarara, near Eu, but is not a chief, killed the white men in the boat.

" Laisisi, not a chief, but an inhabitant of Keri-vanugi, and the only person from that village concerned in the massacre besides Packalooloos, held the boat's painter whilst the crew were being murdered.

Boar belongs to Wa-Wa; he saw the white men burying Mr. Mairs' remains.

Oatz, who lives at Grenaluss, a village near Eu, confirmed the statement that Packalooloos massacred the boat's-crew in revenge for his daughter's going to Fiji, and that Bushmen from a distance had been employed to do it.

Maraud, of Wa-Wa, says that Mulgav (Mallicanbo) was his chief; he was a good man, very friendly to the whites, and especially to the missionaries. Varri was a minor chief at Wa-Wa; Mulgav and Varri went to Togoia to trade pigs; when the Tonoa chiefs were seized by the "Cormorant", their people took, and delivered up Mulgav and Varri to get their own chiefs back. He corroborated the statement that Packalooloos instigated the massacre because of his daughter going to Fiji, and that he employed bushmen to carry it out. He also corroborated the statement that Laisisi, of Keri-vanugi, held the boat's painter. The actual participators in the massacre hauled the boat up on shore after it was done. The bushmen left some of the things taken from the boat in Keri-vanugi on their way home; they also mutilated the bodies and left certain parts behind them. Nothing taken from the boat was found in any other village.

Valulu, wife of Maraud, generally corroborated the statement as to Packalooloos, the bushmen and the Keri-vanugi villagers. She said that Laisisi (not Lai-Lai-Levu as I had at first supposed) was concerned in the massacre, and that he had held the boat's painter.

Mayella, of Wa-Wa, said that bushmen, not the Keri-vanugi men, killed the white men. The same men who killed the crew hauled the boat up on shore.

All assert that Mulgav and Varri had no hand in the massacre.

Awoou, from Eu, corroborates the statement that Packalooloos had engaged bushmen to massacre the "Isabelle's" boat's-crew.

Lewetz also corroborates the statement.

18th July, 1882: At Malo (St. Bartholomew), Maili, of Tonoa, says that his people knew that Mulgav and Varri were innocent of the "Isabelle" massacre, but were so frightened that when their own chiefs were taken by the man-of-war they gave them up.

Bau, of Tonoa, (a boy), says that Lambowanki lives with Packalooloos, at a place called Maravedi or Aredi.

19th July, 1882. At Tonoa.

So-maili, of Tonoa, says that Mulgav and Varri came to Tonoa in a canoe to trade in pigs; the man-of-war asked where they came from; the Tonoa people said that they were Santo men who had come to trade in pigs. The Tonoa people gave over the two Santo men, Mulgav and Varri to the man-of-war.

The Tonoa people all appeared to agree that Packalooloos killed the boat's-crew of the "Isabelle". Packalooloos, as far as could be made out, belongs to the district of Aredi and the village of Keri-vanugi.

Mulgav and Varri, all the Tonoa men say, had nothing to do with the massacre; they belong to a different place.

21 July, 1882, at Cape Lisburn.

Lee-boot, of Wa-Wa, says that he returned from Fiji in the schooner "Aurora"; that the schooner went on further, and that Charlie, a half-caste belonging to her, "recruited" the daughter of Packalooloos. For this, when another schooner (the "Isabelle") came, Packalooloos killed two white men and two Fijians in one of her boats. Packalooloos got bushmen to come and kill the white men, &c.

" Laisisi, of Kerivanugi, held the boat's painter while the men in the boat were being killed. Varri had nothing to do with the massacre. Maylee, of Wawa, corroborated the above.

Tasso, of Wawa, son of Varri, whom H.M.S. "Espiegle" landed at Levuka, says that Tambowanki, who lives at Erarara (?Kerarara), was engaged in the massacre, and also a fourth man named So-vari, who belongs to Aredi. Aredi is a town near Kerivanugi, and is under Packalooloos. All three say that the Kerivanugi people in general had nothing to do with the massacre."

Three weeks later, on the 15th August, 1882, Captain Bridge addressed the Commodore further as follows:-

"I have the honour to report in continuation of my letter of proceedings (25th July), despatched on July 27 by H.M.S. "Miranda", that I sailed from Havannah Harbour, having made good a defect of H.M.S. "Sandfly", on 31 July, and arrived at Cape Lisburn.

2. Until the 2nd August no natives made their appearance. On that day, accompanied by Mr. C. Rebman, Government Agent of the "Mana", whose assistance was of great use to me, I communicated with the natives of Wa-Wa, who came down to the beach to the number of about 40. Amongst them were some very intelligent men, several of whom spoke unusually good English. One had been 12 years in Queensland. The Wa-Wa tribe, though there is no active warfare going on just now, is hostile to that of Kerivanugi. The latter is the stronger; and the Wa-Wa people consider it unsafe to venture singly into the territory of Kerivanugi and its allies.

3. I obtained ample corroboration of the criminality of the four persons mentioned in my report on the "Isabelle" massacre. The evidence already forwarded was so complete that there was no necessity to record any further statements. Packalooloos and the others had again fled across the mountains on the man-of-war making her appearance.

4. The Wa-Wa people, who hope to get Varri, now in Fiji, back again, undertook to make known to the surrounding tribes that sufficient evidence had been obtained to establish the guilt of Packalooloos, Tambowanki, Lai-si-si, and So-vari, and to clear the Kerivanugi villagers in general of participation in the massacre. They appeared pretty confident that the actual criminals will sooner or later be got hold of. They advised that no step should be taken with the object of capturing them for some time.

5. As far as could be learned from the chief, Packalooloos and his accomplices have been much harrassed by our visits, having taken to flight when we went to Tonoa, and on both occasions on which we anchored at Cape Lisburn. Mr. Rebman, who has had a long experience of the New Hebrides, expressed to me his conviction that no tribe will continue very long to harbour the murderers if doing so is attended with inconvenience. The people on the coast of Santo are very desirous of obtaining the "trade" goods which can only be got from white men, and any interruption of friendly relations with the latter is very unwelcome to them. This perhaps explains the abstention of the Kerivanugi people when the "Isabelle's" men were murdered.

6. From what I have seen of the inhabitants I am inclined to believe that Mr. Rebman's opinion is well founded, and that they will not be indisposed to terminate a state of war (of which they suffer many of the inconveniences) by the surrender, directly themselves or through the ostensible intervention of a neighbouring tribe, of really guilty persons. The recent assassination of the chief Taratoorah tends to prove this. It is probable that some remuneration would have to be given either as a reward, as a present, or as a return for services rendered. Could instructions be issued to the Government agents of all labour vessels going to

"the New Hebrides to desist from calling at any point of the Santo coast, north of Wa-Wa, as far as Pussy, until the perpetrators of the late most inexcusable massacre were punished, their capture would very likely not be long deferred.

7. Our cruises to Cape Lisburn in connexion with that deplorable event have not been fruitless. The innocence of Varri, at present in detention, has been probed; the guilt of Packalooloos and his accomplices has been fully established; an opportunity has occurred of showing the natives, and they appeared to thoroughly understand it, that even in such a case as that of the "Isabelle", the man-of-war's justice is discriminating; also the criminals have already been compelled to lead lives of much terror and harrassment, whilst the prospect of eventually punishing them has improved. Intimation has also been sent to the natives that they must not permit "bushmen" or other strangers to come in and injure white men on their territory, which likewise they will fully understand. If the pursuit of criminals is never finally given up till they are punished, but is always resumed on the visits of men-of-war to these parts, a knowledge of the unrelenting determination of the white men on board such ships to do justice, and to allow no lapse of time to interfere with its execution, will be spread abroad among the people of the island, and can hardly fail to have an excellent effect.

8. ...I left Cape Lisburn under steam at 9.15 a.m. on that day (3 August)".

The Commodore forwarded the reports of Captain Bridge to the High Commissioner and sought the latter's opinion as to the steps which should be taken with respect to the release or otherwise of Varri, detained in Fiji. He expressed his own views as follows in a letter dated the 7th September, 1882:-

"Considering that the tribe of Wa-Wa, from whom Captain Bridge derived his information, are known to be at war with that of Kerivanugi, of which Packalooloos is the Chief, it is not surprising to me that they should exonerate themselves and endeavour to implicate their neighbours, and I do not place the same reliance on their evidence that Captain Bridge does, and I cannot agree with him that the guilt of Packalooloos and the innocence of Mallicaubo and Varri is so clearly established.

The positive identification of Mallicaubo and Varri by the two Fijian survivors of the massacre at the island of Tonoa, and the evidence of Malakai, detailed in Acting-Commander Maxwell's report, is not, to my mind, shaken by the story given by the Wa-Was, and I see no reason for believing in the innocence of Varri, or for ordering his release, even on the grounds of doubt".

The High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Gordon, who was in Sydney on the 18th September, however, did not entirely share the views of the Commodore in the matter. He addressed him that day as follows:-

"I have now carefully reperused, besides the reports of Captain Bridge, all the evidence taken with regard to the murder of Mr. Mair and his companions before the Immigration Office in Suva, Fiji, before the Chief Judicial Commissioner, and before Captain Bridge.

2. I regret that the study of these papers has not left upon my mind precisely the same impression as that which they appear to have made on yourself, with regard to the balance of probabilities in this case.

3. While I admit the force of the arguments employed by you as to the weight to be assigned to the direct evidence of the Fijian Malakai, I must confess that it appears to me that the testimony obtained by Captain Bridge from independent sources, but similar in character, coupled as it is with the antecedent improbability of an alliance between two hostile tribes, for the purpose of

"avenging an injury done to the Chief of one of them, wd. in itself outweigh the alleged identification of the prisoner Varri with one of the murderers of Mr. Mair.

4. But I have not, like yourself, had the advantage of personally questioning Malakai, or forming any opinion as to his reliability or untrustworthiness; and this consideration (to which I attach the utmost importance), and this alone, induces me to suspend formation of a decided opinion in accordance with that of Captain Bridge.

5. I understand that H.M. Ship "Diamond" will shortly visit Fiji, and I wd. venture to suggest that Captain Dale should be instructed further to investigate the question, in conjunction with the Chief Judicial Commissioner, by whom the original investigation in this matter was held. I think it highly probable that Varri, if really guilty, wd. now, if discreetly approached, be without difficulty brought to confess his guilt; while on the other hand, if the story told by Malakai be untrue, it would, I think, not be difficult, with the clue now possessed to detect its inaccuracy.

6. Should you concur in this view, I will at once direct the Chief Judicial Commissioner to confer with Captain Dale on the subject on his arrival in Fiji."

On the following day, the High Commissioner wrote to his Assistant in Fiji in the following terms:-

"Your Excellency will observe that Captain Bridge has arrived at the conclusion that the man Varri, now detained in custody at Levuka as having been concerned in that massacre, was in fact free from any participation in it.

Against the evidence collected by Captain Bridge may be set the positive identification of the prisoner by the two Fijians, Malakai and Jimmi; and Commodore Erskine, who had opportunities of personally examining Malakai which I have not enjoyed, is very strongly impressed with the reliability of the statements made by him.

In these circumstances, the Commodore and I concur in the opinion that a further interrogation of the Fijian witnesses is desirable; and as an investigation into the case has already been conducted by the Chief Judicial Commissioner, we have resolved to request him to undertake this task, in conjunction with Captain Dale, R.N., H.M.S. "Diamond" who holds a commission as Deputy Commissioner for the Western Pacific.

It is, I think, highly probable that the prisoner himself, if discreetly approached, would, if guilty, admit his guilt; and if not would be found to give a narrative confirmatory of the account received by Captain Bridge, and of which he is ignorant. I conceive too, that with the particulars now ascertained, it would not be difficult to test the value of the identification by Malakai and Jimmi.

In the event of the innocence of Varri being established to the satisfaction of the Chief Judicial Commissioner and of Captain Dale, arrangements should be at once made for the return of Varri to Santo by the first labour vessel calling there."

By letter dated the 19th September, the Commodore concurred in the High Commissioner's proposals.

The Assistant High Commissioner wrote to the Acting Agent General of Immigration on the 10th October, 1882, requesting him -

"to take such measures as may seem fit to him for the purpose of having Varri interrogated with reference to the said circumstances which have been brought to light by Captain Bridge. I feel that any inquiry accompanied by force and solemnity wd. be useless - it is felt wd. produce the answer 'Yes', or no answer at all, to any

"question, and the only way of finding the truth from him is to ask him quietly as to the new information now received after first satisfying him that no harm but only good can come from the examination.

There is no hurry in the matter. All that is required is that the man's story should be elicited before the return of the "Diamond" in about 3 weeks, when he can be examined again".

It is important to note that Captain Dale was not therefore expected to return to Suva before the 1st November at the earliest.

Varri was interviewed by one H. Milne, the Depot Keeper, on the 25th October, the result of that interview being recorded as follows:-
"My name is Variki Luwilu(?), my town is Sawani (?) at Malo. I went in a canoe to the town of Vanniogi at Santo to buy pigs. I was going to see if there any small pigs. I wanted to buy them for a large pig with Tusks that I left at my town.

I did not hear of the whitemen's murder before I left my town, the Vanniogi people told me of the murder.

I was two days at Vanniogi where I was taken on board the man-of-war. I heard at Vanniogi that the Cececaka people killed the white men. Mako is the chief of Sawani, I am Mako's brother. Cececaka is a long way from Vanniogi".

Varri was further examined by the Acting Agent General of Immigration, one H. Luson, on the 31st October. To ensure the accuracy of what transpired, two interpreters from Malo were engaged, one of whom spoke Fijian and the other broken English. A record of the interview was as follows:-

"Sawani is a large town, not the largest. There are several as large as Sawani in St. Bartholomew's Island (Island of Malo).

Vanniogi is a sea town in Santo. I don't know Pakalooloos. I don't know a town by the name of Vierri Vaggi (?) I was staying at Vanniogi when I was taken.

I took cocoanuts and bananas to the Man-of-war to sell, four men went with me. I was the fifth. I was taken and separated from the other four men.

Drum-drum is chief of Vanniogi. I went to exchange a large tusk pig for small pigs. I was two days at Vanniogi; I went in a canoe, to Santo in a Malo canoe. Two men went with me - Lin (?) is the name of one man, Natalin (?) that of the other. They remained at Vanniogi, they were not taken.

Molikaoo (Mallikaulo) was a Santo man.

Lin's town is Sawani - Natalin is also of Sawani".

However the final act in the "Isabelle" tragedy was not far off. For, on the 4th November, 1882, almost a year after the massacre, Mr. Luson, the Acting Agent General of Immigration, addressed the following letter, to the Assistant High Commissioner:-

"I have the honour to inform you that Varri, a native of the island of Bartholomew or "Malo", supposed to have been concerned in the murder of Mr. Mair, died yesterday at the hospital, Suva.

He had been ailing for three weeks at the Depot where he was treated by the C.M. Officer, and all possible care taken of him by the Depot Keeper, who, I believe, furnished him with food at different times from his own house.

I interviewed him on or about the 1st instant at the Depot and found him in a very desponding state.

He entered hospital on the third of November and died on the third.

The papers relating to his case forwarded to me for inquiry shall shortly be returned to your office.

I have desired the C.M. Officer to ascertain as far as possible the cause of Varri's death, but owing to an abrasion of the skin on his hand, he will probably be unable to undertake a regular "post mortem" examination".

In a further letter written on the 10th November, 1882, Mr. Luson stated:-

"For some time past Varri has been unwell and under medical treatment, and showed such evident signs of depression and weariness at the subject of his capture that it was difficult to extract anything out of him, and when he gave any answer it was in what appeared to me to be in tones of bitter irritation. I have little doubt in my own mind that "Molikao" (Mulgav or Mallicaubo) and "Varri" were neither of them connected in any way with the "Isabelle" case and if this view of the case is a correct one, unless the relatives of the deceased are conciliated with presents, that disastrous effects may ensue from their deaths to recruiting vessels from this or any other Colony visiting the island of Malo and the neighbourhood of "Vanniogi" on Santo".

With the deaths of Varri and Mulgav, matters drifted for some months though the naval authorities, perhaps due to twinges of conscience regarding the death of the last-named, never lost sight of the need to bring Packaloolos and his accomplices to book. Thus, as late as August and September, 1883, Lieutenant W. Osborne Moore, commanding officer of H.M.S. Dart, made further enquiries concerning the "Isabelle" massacre and those responsible for it.

His first report, dated the 24th August, 1883, was as follows:-

"Ship at anchor $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile north of C. Lisburn, Espiritu Santo.

Taas (Tasso), son of Varri, says:-

'The people who actually committed the murders were Packaloolos, Laisisi, Tabawau, So Varri, Peelmul and Petalolo, who is a bushman. All these men are now in Keravanugi (or Keravanue) except the last-named.

Packaloolos an old-fellow man; he very saucy man.

Maylee, also belonging to Wa Wa corroborated the above.

Wood, son of the late chief of Wa Wa, Mulgav, or Mulhav, says he was not in Santo when the massacre took place; but he has made enquiries from the people, and understands that the "pretext" was that a schooner took away a woman belonging to Petalolo, who appealed to Packaloolos to help him kill the white men.

(NOTE. It seems probable that this woman was a daughter of Packaloolos, but I could not get direct information on this point. W.U.M.).

The Wa Wa people declined to convey any messages into the Keravanugi territory, and state that they made the same refusal to the "Espiegle" - "Suppose I go, they shoot me".!."

In a further report, dated the 5th September, Lieutenant Moore stated:-

"I have the honour to submit to you such small items of information as I have been able to collect respecting the "Isabelle" massacre during a visit to C. Lisburn in H.M.S. under my command

2. What I was told at C. Lisburn was corroborative in the main points of the information collected by my superior officer, whose inquiry made in the "Espiegle" less than a year after the occurrence, is far more exhaustive and likely to be correct.

3. I beg to offer it as my opinion that, although the villagers did not collectively perpetrate the massacre, there is no reason to doubt they fired on Captain Haddock on two occasions while he was attempting to recover the boat. That they have since allowed the actual murderers to live in their village, and that they therefore deserve to have their village and crops destroyed.

"4. A hut (having no sides) can be rebuilt in one day by one man, and the burning of Keravanugi (or, as some call it "Keravanua") would not be a heavy punishment.

The destruction of the crops at certain times of the year, and the pigs at all times (being the property principally of the chiefs), is a great loss, and likely to be remembered for some years".

In a further report, dated the 17th September, Lieutenant Moore addressed the Commodore as follows:-

"6..... we proceeded down the west coast of Mallicolo, watching for labour vessels, without success, and in the afternoon to Cape Lisburn, Espiritu Santo, where we anchored at 4.p.m.

7. On the 23rd (August) the Executive Officer and Mr. Dawson proceeded to survey the anchorage. I landed abreast the ship at 9, but failed to attract the attention of the natives either at Cape Lisburn or at Ndrepo, $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles north. However, at midday on the 24th, three Wa-Wa men and a boy appeared on the beach unarmed, with branches, and made a smoke. I went in, and found they could speak English. One, whose name is Wood, was a son of Mulgav, another, Tass, was a son of Varri, the third being the brother of the latter unfortunate chief. They made many inquiries after Mulgav, (or, as his son pronounced it, Mulhav). To my first enquiry, "Who is the chief?", they replied "Our master Mulhav; big ship, three masts, she take him". Wood was working in Queensland at the time his father was treacherously handed over by the Tongoa people. After the enquiry respecting Mulgav had been made the third time, I thought it best to tell them that if they came off to the ship on the following day I would inform Wood about his father and Varri. Some information corroborative of that obtained by Captain Bridge was given me respecting the "Isabelle" case.....

8. On the 25th the Executive Officer made a sketch plan of the anchorage off Keravanugi in case you should be pleased to direct one of the small ships of the squadron to proceed against the village by act of war for harbouring the murderers. He found that there is sufficient room for a small vessel, like the "Dart" opposite the village - if the wind is (as usual) off the land, and if there is not too much swell setting in around Cape Lisburn - close enough to the beach to cover a landing party.

Keravanugi, or, as some call it, Keravanua, is, like all villages in the New Hebrides, hidden among the trees. Lieutenant Beresford had orders not to approach the shore within 300 yards, as it was undesirable to provoke any firing, pending your orders. Directly his boat appeared there was much "cooeing" in the bush. One native was seen in a conspicuous situation who appeared to be a sentinel - for after seeing the boats he vanished. No doubt the people went into the bush, which must be inconvenient this (to them) cold weather.

9. At 11 o'clock on this day Wood, Tass and Varri (the brother) came on board with some Wa Wa people. I explained to Wood and Tass that Mulgav had died on board the ship which took him away, and that Varri had died in hospital at Viti (these natives never speak of Fiji, and do not understand the word). I gave them each a considerable present.... and expressed to them the regret felt by H.M. ships at the death of Mulgav, who was known to have been a friend of the whites, and especially the missionaries.

10. I trust, Sir, that my action in this matter will meet with your approval. Unless the vessel avoided Cape Lisburn altogether, the inquiries made by Mulgav's son were inevitable, and I could not see that anything was to be gained by delaying the answer. In my opinion it would have mystified the tribe and shaken their confidence in the justice of H.M. ships.

"11. Wood and Tass speak English, and are superior men for a cannibal island. It is probable that Wood will be the chief, but it is by no means certain. The tribe consists of forty two men, ten of whom are working as labourers in Queensland. The village is on the south side of the spur which terminates Cape Lisburn. They have no canoes, and are a weak tribe. As you are aware, there was once a mission here, but Mulgav was not strong enough to protect the missionary from the bushmen, and they had to leave. It is not possible that the Wa Wa could have had any hand in the "Isabelle" massacre, as they dare not cross the Keravanugi boundary. Wood expressed the relations between the two tribes thus, "I no go Keravanugi. Suppose I go, they shoot me". I enjoined Wood and Tass to make themselves known to any of H.M. ships visiting Cape Lisburn, and they said they would do so.

12. On Monday, 27th August, I weighed at 5 a.m. and proceeded to Tonoa or Tongoa off the south coast of Santo"

The Commodore forwarded the reports of Lieutenant Moore to the Admiralty, and also to the High Commissioner, informing the latter of the tenor of his remarks to the Admiralty, thus:-

"The visit of the "Dart" to the island of Tongoa, off the south-west coast of Espiritu Santo, enabled Lieutenant Moore to report While his enquiries at Cape Lisburn confirm the version of the "Isabelle massacre", which was obtained by Captain Bridge from the people of Wa-Wa. I entirely approve Lieutenant Moore's action in acquainting the Natives of that village with the news of the death of Mulgao and Varri, and of his giving the sons of those unfortunate men the presents enumerated in his letter, with the expression of deep regret felt by H.M. Ships on account of these untoward events.

With regard to the "Isabelle" massacre which occurred in November, 1881, the case seems to stand as follows, vizt:-

Pakalooloos, Chief of Keravanugi, employed Bushmen to murder the "Isabelle's" boat's crew, that being the only way he had of showing his very natural resentment for the abduction of his daughter, who, however, had recruited voluntarily. It remains now, after a lapse of 2 years, and having lost a gallant officer in an unsuccessful expedition against these people, to be decided:-

1st Whether any steps should be taken by "Act of War" (the only means of dealing with these Natives) to punish Pakalooloos, or the Bushmen implicated in this murder.

2nd What punishment should be inflicted and how carried out.

After mature deliberation on both of these points, I am forced to the conclusion that, in the interests of justice, it is necessary that punishment should be inflicted. And with regard to the mode of punishment, I am of opinion that a ship-of-war should be sent to Keravanugi and that the person of Pakalooloos should be demanded, and that he should be executed, and a severe fine imposed on his tribe, and until our demands are satisfied, I would suggest that the natives of the South Coast of Espiritu Santo should be debarred from any intercourse with either labour or trading vessels.

Before proceeding to this extremity I shall consult His Excellency the Acting High Commissioner (on) the subject, and as the season is too far advanced to admit of immediate action being taken in this case, I shall also await further instructions from their Lordships.

I shall be glad to be favoured with Your Excellency's views on the various matters detailed in these reports".

The above-quoted letter was dated the 22nd October, 1883.

The Acting High Commissioner wasted no time in replying to the Commodore, in a letter dated the 7th November, 1883. He wrote:-

" With regard to the "Isabelle" massacre, I see no reason to differ from your view of the case and of the course to be taken with regard to it. At the same time I should be glad to have an opportunity of conferring with you as to the possibility of inflicting a punishment short of death on Packalooloos. Notwithstanding his crime and its sad ulterior results, I cannot but feel that the abduction of his daughter created a not unnatural desire of revenging himself upon the countrymen of the abductors; and the gratification of this feeling by a savage cannot be regarded as of the same moral turpitude as is the case of a white man. I am well aware that the death penalty is sometimes necessary as a deterrent for crimes of this kind without reference to the degree of fault of the perpetrator. But I am disposed to think that mercy might be extended to this man while at the same time awarding him a punishment which as an example would be scarcely less efficacious than his execution.

If the man were to be brought to Fiji by one of Her Majesty's ships, I should be willing to take the responsibility of retaining him here, and though I am aware that my course would be what may be called extra-legal, I should be fully prepared to justify it.

His separation from his people and his detention for eight to ten years in Fiji would cause them to believe him dead, and apart from this, I am inclined to think that, as regards punishment so long after the crime, the fact of its reaching him at all would even more than its nature strike the savage imagination.

This, however, is only a somewhat doubtful impression. I cannot say that I feel certain on the point and I think it quite possible that your better knowledge of the facts (as to which I have not time now to refresh my memory) may induce me to think that the severe course is the only expedient one".

The views of the Acting High Commissioner were thereafter conveyed to the Admiralty through the Commodore and on the 28th December, 1883, the Secretary to the Admiralty addressed the Commodore, stating -

"I am commanded by my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to direct you to suspend all action in dealing with the persons implicated in the massacre of a boat's crew of the "Isabelle" in 1881..."

Unfortunately no reasons for the decision are given; it may be that the Lords Commissioners were thus persuaded by the fact that the massacre was then over two years old, by the fact of the inexcusable killing of a New Hebridean chief on board one of Her Majesty's ships by naval personnel, or by the fact that, in such circumstances, further action would savour of retribution rather than justice.

Thus ended what has been more commonly recorded as the "Isabelle" massacre". But that title relates only to the opening chapter of the story. The fact that there was indeed a shocking massacre is indisputable. But I have preferred to entitle this story "The 'Isabelle' tragedy", which title seems to me to be equally indisputable, but much more appropriate once the final chapter of the story has been told. Thus, consider the ingredients:-

First, the killing of two Europeans - a Government Agent and the mate of a recruiting vessel. Unlike many engaged in recruiting, neither gave the slightest provocation whatever to those who killed them. True, both were overweeningly self-confident in their abilities to persuade the natives to recruit, and foolhardy in the extreme in proceeding to the shore without the cover of a second boat; and even more foolish in allowing themselves to be lured into a trap which was clearly designed and destined for their slaughter. But such provocation as there was, namely, that their killing was an act of revenge for the recruitment of a chief's daughter to Fiji, was unknown to the white men and later found to be quite false.

Secondly, there was no excuse whatever for the killing of the two Fijians, members of the boat's crew, both of whom were clearly nervous and, unlike their employers, extremely suspicious of the attitudes and actions of the New Hebridean natives on shore.

Thirdly, there was the death of one whom the Commodore described as "a gallant officer" in an unsuccessful, indeed clearly somewhat futile, expedition against the offending tribe, who only had to retire into the jungle to outwit their pursuers.

Fourthly, a New Hebridean chief was killed - one almost wrote "murdered" - by naval petty officers and ratings on board one of Her Majesty's men-of-war - an almost unbelievable blot on the White Ensign, the every appearance of which in those times and in those seas was devoted to promoting peace and justice for all, black and white alike; and, to add insult to injury, ironically the victim was later found to be a firm friend of the white men, especially of the missionaries, and completely innocent of the crime of which he was suspected and virtually found guilty, without trial.

Fifthly, there was the death of another New Hebridean chief detained in Fiji, but also found later to be completely innocent of the crime of which he was suspected and virtually found guilty, without trial; and who seems simply to have pined away in the confident and burning knowledge of his innocence in lonely isolation far from his homeland and his kith and kin.

More than a massacre - the deaths of seven innocent men - a tragedy in every way at every step.

But let the last words in this tragic story be said by Acting-commander Maxwell and Commodore Erskine. The former wrote thus, after the death of Mulgav on his ship:-

"I would venture to call your attention that nearly all the outrages in the Pacific can be traced directly or indirectly to the labour trade, and that so long as it is allowed to continue outrages on whites will take place, and valuable lives will be lost. Another effect of their traffic is that the natives are rapidly becoming possessed of arms. Only a few years ago firearms were unknown in the New Hebrides; now nearly every man of the black tribes has a rifle, many of them breech-loading, and what is of more consequence is that they are learning to use them skilfully".

Commodore Erskine wrote:-

"the evils which can follow in the train of the existing system of sending ships on flying visits to punish massacres committed by the natives, & the extreme probability of inflicting punishment on the wrong individuals".

But, alas, the cessation of the labour traffic was still a long way off and rifles and ammunition continued to be constantly smuggled into the islands from Queensland.