

is a common law of retaliation in the South Seas, and that, if the facts were known, all the misdeeds of the islanders might be traced to misdeeds on the part of the traders. Others, however, who claim to understand the South Sea islanders, tell us that there are sections of them who perpetrate atrocities for no other reason than that they delight in blood, and those who read such reports as the one which we publish this morning will have no difficulty in coming to this conclusion. The effectual cure for these atrocities is of course to be found in civilization or in Christianity. But civilization is a slow process everywhere, and it is especially slow among savages like those of the South Seas. We have been trying to civilize these races for half a century past, but the area of our operations is still comparatively small. Civilization in regions like these is more easily talked about than accomplished. The same, to some extent at least, may be said of punishment. It is easy enough to throw a few shells into such a group as the one which has been the scene of this outrage; but if the shells do any execution at all they are as likely to reach the wrong parties as the right ones. They may do mischief to the savages who inhabit the coast, but this is no lesson to those who fly to the interior. The whole subject is surrounded by difficulties; but for that reason it is worthy of more attention than it generally receives in England. The philanthropists of the mother country are generally ready with a protest when the blacks receive injuries from the whites, but, as a rule, they do not show any great concern when the injuries are in the other direction. There is a good deal that is defective in this one-sided philanthropy. It is not desirable that we should have one law for civilized races and another for savages. If we punish the whites for the wrongs they do, we are bound to see that the blacks are punished likewise. But this is not what we are doing. Savages like those who people the Solomon Group have for some time past been showing the world that they can kill and eat white men, and go unpunished.

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FOR the sake of natives, as well as of traders, the Solomon Islanders who so savagely murdered Captain Ferguson and three or four brave men who perished with him, ought to be promptly and severely punished. It will be a serious calamity if atrocities like this are allowed to be perpetrated with impunity. Savages have but one way of regarding immunity from punishment: they look upon it as an indication of weakness on the part of the whites whom they delight to ill-treat, and from it they naturally draw encouragement to continue their sanguinary courses. That the natives of some of the islands of the South Seas are taking this view of the license which they enjoy may be inferred from the increasing prevalence of massacres in Polynesia. In the Solomon Islands especially, murders by the natives have been painfully numerous of late, and there seems to be too much reason to fear that, unless a wholesome lesson is administered to these cannibals, a reign of terror will be established before very long.

The massacre of Captain Ferguson and his comrades is one of the saddest that we have had to record for some years. It is difficult to account for an outrage which, so far as we are able to learn, was wholly unprovoked. The theory has been that such acts of hostility to white men have a cause of some kind or other. It has been said that they cannot be accounted for merely by an inborn love of cruelty, or by a natural hostility to strangers, but are inflicted in return for wrongs that have been inflicted upon the natives. The law of retaliation we are told is common law among the natives of the South Seas; by virtue of it one man is punished for the crimes of another, and a whole people are held responsible for the misdeeds of an individual. It was said, as our readers will remember, that the inflicting of five wounds and no more on the body of Bishop Patteson made it certain that he had been murdered in revenge for the death of five islanders. Another notion has been that the atrocities in the South Seas are usually originated by some two or three ringleaders, who stir up the islanders for the purposes of their own profit or revenge. It is now becoming clear that these explanations of Polynesian massacres will have to be modified or given up. The "Ripple" was attacked by no less than three hundred natives, and the only conclusion to be drawn from the sad story which has reached us is that this murderous horde was moved only by a savage thirst for blood. In former times, when abuses by traders were doubtless too frequent, there was some reason for the belief that massacres were committed in revenge for wrongs received.

These abuses, however, have now for the most part ceased to exist. The great majority of the traders in the South Seas are men of character and respectability, and the trade itself has for some years past been under strict Government control. Captain Ferguson especially was known throughout the islands not only as an honest trader but as a philanthropic man. On many occasions he distinguished himself by his courage and self-denial, and was the means of saving a large number of lives. From the Solomon Group he was to sail on a mission of benevolence to the unhappy island where the remnant of the colonists of the Marquis De Ray were in a state of destitution, and, from the evidence which has reached us, it would seem that he was detained at Bougainville Island as much in the interest and desire of the natives as for purposes of his own. Under these circumstances his murder was marked by peculiar features of atrocity, and it will be an ill omen for the future if such an outrage as the one in question is allowed to go unpunished.

It is easy to see how a massacre like that of Captain Ferguson might have been avoided. It is said that the captain ought to have been on his guard; that traders should on all occasions treat South Sea Island natives as potential murderers; and that it was a fatal mistake to allow so large a number of islanders to board the vessel at all. This may all be true. The policy of trusting a set of blood-thirsty savages may be most ill-advised; but after the event it is generally easy to see what ought to have been avoided. Successful traders find it necessary to trust the natives up to a certain point, as well as to watch them. It is also said that those who trust their lives among savages must take the consequences. As long, however, as British subjects are engaged in legitimate trade, they are working for the benefit, and are entitled to the protection, of their country. These colonies reap no small advantage from the South Sea Island trade, and they expect to reap larger advantages hereafter. In a remoter way the trade of the islands is as necessary to the mother-country as to the colonies. Where