

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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UNDER WHICH FLAG—GOD OR MAMMON.

A celebrated South American on being asked how he accounted for the backwardness of South America when compared with the northern continent replied: "We were founded by Spaniards in quest of gold; North America by men seeking for God." Gold or God. It is the test stone for national character. Are we seeking material prosperity at the sacrifice of honour and righteousness? This question we must decide in connection with our latest dependency—Samoa. To decide rightly we must know the facts, and these we set forth in this article. The particulars about New Guinea were given us by a Missionary who spent 16 years there and can be depended upon to know facts and to state them truly. Upon the question of indentured labour for Samoa, we as citizens of this Dominion are responsible. We appeal to all to study these facts carefully. Is it logical that a Government, which dare not compel its own people to labour for increased production at home, should yet compel helpless savages to labour that Samoa may be more productive. Is not the cry for productivity a red herring drawn across the trail.

Indentured labour is of two kinds—Native and Imported.

The South Sea Islands have native indentured labour. Fiji, South Africa and other places have imported Chinese or Indian coolies. In New Guinea the Government will not allow any person to employ the natives unless the contract, called an indenture, is

signed before a Government official. This is done for the protection of the native. The Mission plantations all have to secure their labour in this way, but on these plantations the labourer brings his wife and family. This is not insisted upon by the Government, and many planters do not allow it. Bad as it undoubtedly is, to take the man and leave his family behind, yet still he is among people of his own race, and there is not the racial pollution that follows imported labour. Upon this question a mission worker in the New Hebrides speaks of the irregular life led upon these plantations where so many men more than women are recruited; and adds "It is granted that the islands cannot be developed without labour, but it is the duty of the Government to devise a scheme whereby the present evils are at any rate, mitigated. If only married couples were allowed to go, and no hindrance placed in the way of building up families, part of the problem would be solved; but would the planter be willing to accept such a solution? He would get two "hands," for a woman loses very little time in caring for her children in these places, and I venture to think that many of his "hands" would become permanent ones, thus reducing his recruiting expenditure. In course of time, should the natives desire to return to their homes, they could do so, and take their families with them. At present it is quite an exception for a "recruit" to bring any family home with him, and if he should bring a wife she often belongs to a different island, and there is no permanence about such a marriage, but too often trouble and dispute."

Even in New Guinea, where the Government does not wink at injustice to the native, cases of blackbirding occur. The difficulty is to discover such cases in that large and thinly populated island. In New Guinea the planters wished the Government to be responsible for a supply of labour. In plain language, this meant that the Government official would demand from each village a certain number of labourers, which they must supply. A Commission was set up, and examined planters, missionaries, and other witnesses. The missionaries mostly were opposed to the scheme, and a high Anglican dignitary being asked if he thought the Government should supply labour, to his honour replied, "No! To force natives to work for the gain of private individuals is slavery."

There he hit the nail right upon the head. If it is ever necessary to conscript labour, that labour must be only for the common good of all, for the State, and not to put dividends into the already over-full pockets of planters and shareholders. In Samoa the question is of imported labour. The Samoans will not work, we are told, and for the development of the island it is necessary to import Chinese coolies or South Sea Islanders. As this question is to be discussed in our Parliament, we wish all White Ribboners to clearly understand the position. In a nutshell, it is this: The Samoan will work in American Samoa, because he reaps the reward of his own labour. Judge Watson, in his book on Samoa, says, referring to American Samoa, that as regards copra, the Government has eliminated the private