

A TALE OF THREE TRADERS.

The year 1881 was a bad one for traders and recruiters in the Solomon Islands. The reasons are not far to seek and provide the setting for this tale. Thus, as Captain Bruce of H.M.S. Cormorant explained in his report of the 20th July to the Commodore in Sydney:-

"... I consider the principal and almost entire cause of outrages and hostilities to white men in the Solomon Islands is owing to the labour traffic in all its branches.

First, the men are frequently recruited for Fiji, and taken to Queensland, or vice versa, as the recruiting agent may believe to be the place they would prefer to go. The recruiting agent is generally the second mate of the ship, and is entered for his special qualifications in that capacity, which are not generally of a very honourable nature. He receives, usually, two, three or four shillings a head for labour recruited, which, with a hundred natives, materially affects his salary at the end of a three months' cruise.

It stands to reason that when he lands to recruit, generally not accompanied, as he should always be, by the Government agent, that it is a matter of perfect indifference to that man what promises he may make to the natives, or where he tells them they will be taken to, so long as his bonus is safe, and he knows that once on board the recruiting vessel there is no appeal.

The men thus treated, of which there are scores of them in the islands, bide their time for vengeance, in which they are usually successful.

Second, in landing the returned labourer from Queensland and Fiji, the case too often arises that the captain of the labour-vessel lands his men, to save time, miles away from their own village, and sometimes on a different island, in either of which cases they are almost certain to be killed, nearly every tribe of the Solomon Islanders being head-hunters; and the tribe to which these men belong bide their time for vengeance on the white man, and probably until that massacre takes place, perhaps some years afterwards, the crime of the labour-captain will only then become known.

This mistake may sometimes arise by the vagueness in the directions of the Emigration Departments of Queensland and Fiji as to where the returned labourer should be landed, and frequently, in cruising off the coast, the men do not know their own villages. To obviate this, the name of the village, with the latitude and longitude on a certain chart, should be registered when the men are recruited, and sent back with them when returned to their homes by the Emigration Department of the Colony where they have been employed, for the assistance of the captain of the return labour-vessel.

Third, the massacres in the islands of the Western Pacific are much facilitated by the Governments of Fiji, New South Wales and Queensland.

The Government of Fiji supply their return labour with muskets, powder, shot, and ammunition of various sorts.

The Government of New South Wales allow the exportation to the Pacific Islands of any number of guns, rifles, ammunition, and all other apparatus for destruction of life, including dynamite.

The Government of Queensland afford equal encouragement for native massacres as that of New South Wales, with the addition that almost every returned labourer from that Colony is allowed, and does take away with him, at his own expense, a 'breech-loading' rifle and 'ammunition'.

And nowhere was the likelihood of murder and sudden death, the capture of vessels, and similar events worse than in that belt of islands stretching from Vella Lavella to the Russells, and centred upon the island of New Georgia and the Roviana Lagoon, for the reasons given by Commodore J.C. Wilson in his letter to the Secretary of the Admiralty, dated the 21st November, 1881; thus:-

"Commander Dawson ascertained on very good authority that the attack (on the "Atlantic") was the result of a carefully planned plot by several chiefs of the Rubiana (Roviana) district, no provocation whatever being given for it.

The conduct of the natives when communicated with by the "Miranda's" boat (see below), shows the great necessity for caution in all intercourse with these people, for even when appearing quite friendly they may prove most treacherous.

Lieutenant Farie, the officer in charge of the boat on this occasion, performed his delicate and difficult duty with great tact and discretion. The slightest want of firmness or decision on his part must have brought on a serious collision, and from the strong position held by the natives, probably resulted in great loss of life on both sides.

The natives of this group, New Georgia, generally spoken of as the Rubiana men, are noted as being the most warlike and bloodthirsty amongst the Solomons. It is for this reason they are seldom or ever recruited as labourers.

They are dreaded on all sides as active skull hunters, and expeditions in their beautifully built war canoes are despatched to great distances.

It is chiefly to meet their attacks that at Ysabel and Choiseul islands are found what are known as "tree huts".

These are built at the summit of high trees, in some cases as much as 80 feet from the ground, and are capable of holding from 30 to 40 natives. In them the natives stand siege, and defend themselves by using large stones, (as well as their ordinary firearms), which are kept ready to throw down upon their assailants.

My own experience confirms what Commander Dawson says, that the natives are quite unable to understand our desire to show moderation in our dealings with them.

They too commonly ascribe to fear our desire to be merciful.

I have before myself pointed out that when the natives become more skilled in the use of firearms we cannot expect that our action will be as bloodless as it has been hitherto".

The view of the Commodore as quoted above is strongly supported by Commander Dawson, who addressed the former as follows in his letter of the 11th November, 1881:-

"The men in the Rubiana group are the most warlike in these parts. They travel great distances in their canoes, being away frequently as much as three months at a time.

" They collect tortoise shell extensively in Manning Straits, and when over there generally go on to Choiseul or Isabel Island, and attack the natives there for the purpose of procuring skulls and slaves. These islands have been a good deal depopulated by this warfare, the inhabitants not possessing the skill or energy to defend themselves. The skulls are used at all great ceremonials, such as the launching of a war canoe, when one is a necessity, but if more can be procured, it is supposed to augur well for the success of the canoe in its career. The Rubiana people do not, as a rule, bring up their own children, infanticide being very common, which accounts for the steady decrease in the population. When they cannot procure children in their expeditions, they buy them from the neighbouring islands, the price of one I saw, about 13 years of age, having been 10 china trade armlets and one tomahawk".

Finally, Commander Dawson commented:-

"...it is unnecessary to refer further back than to the succession of outrages in the year 1880, when the schooners "Esperanza", "Zephyr", and "Borealis" were all captured, and their crews massacred, not to mention the murders of Captain Ferguson, of the "Ripple", and Captain Schwartz, of the "Leslie", and many other similar crimes".

Although Captain Schwartz must have been fully aware of the very real dangers in trading in this area, nevertheless at 3.30 p.m. on the 17th February, 1881, he anchored the "Leslie" close to the shore at Cape Marsh. After the vessel had anchored, two canoes came alongside with "Cookey", the local chief, in one of them. Captain Schwartz asked him if he had any produce ready for him, but the chief said that he had not. Somewhat remarkably, despite this negative reply, the captain ordered a boat to be lowered and set off towards the shore. He took as a crew one boy from Savo, two boys from Cockatoo (sic), two from San Christoval, and one boy Tu Tolly (sic), aged 15 years. In addition, the captain took one breech-loader, with about two dozen cartridges for pigeon shooting, and two charges of dynamite for killing fish. On the way ashore, the captain used one charge but only succeeded in killing half a dozen fish.

After reaching his trader's place, about a mile from, and out of sight of, the schooner, up an inlet, the captain went ashore, followed by one of the boat's crew, who had a married sister at that place. The breech-loader was left in the boat, but the captain took his revolver on shore with him, but in his pouch which was buttoned down.

Meanwhile, in the boat, the captain asked one Harry (Chief "Cookey's" man of business) why there was neither copra nor beche de mer for him, and what had been done with the trade goods he had left previously. Harry told the captain that all the produce had already been sold to the schooner "Mavis" which belonged to other owners, but he made no mention as to the disposal of the trade goods.

According to the boy who accompanied the captain on shore, the conversation was resumed ashore with the captain sitting down on a dead log, and Cookey and Harry seated opposite him. Behind the captain, about ten yards away, was a hut in which as events transpired there were four natives, whilst a few others, armed with tomahawks, stood nearby. Whilst the altercation about the lack of produce and sale to his competitors, and the fate of the trade goods, were in progress, one of the men behind the captain suddenly slipped forwards and struck him on the head with a tomahawk. Cookey and Harry then seized the captain, pinning both his arms to his sides, and forcing him down on his back. The four men then rushed out of the hut and, after removing the captain's hat, rained blow after blow on his head with their tomahawks.

Thereupon the boy who had accompanied the captain raced back to the boat, and the remaining crew pushed it out from the shore. They were nearly caught, however, as one of the crew lost his oar. The pursuing natives tried to damage the steer-oar with their tomahawks and free it from the boat. Fortunately they failed as the water was too deep to enable them to damage or seize it. A man ashore then fired at the boat, apparently without success. The natives, armed with their tomahawks, then launched and manned canoes with the intention of capturing the boat and crew. They got close to the steer-oar but the boy who had accompanied the captain ashore seized the breech-loader, though it was unloaded (the cartridges being hidden under the stern sheets), and pointed it at the canoes. This frightened the occupants who gave up the pursuit and turned back. The boat returned to the schooner about 5.30 p.m. and the boy concluded his story by stating:-

"The canoe went back to the shore and put the captain's body in it, and took it across the creek. I saw a fire lighted on the beach, and perhaps they roasted him".

On the 17th June, 1881, Commander Bruce of H.M.S. Cormorant arrived at the Russell Islands to investigate and punish the murders of Captain Schwartz. He described the group as:-

"consisting of over a hundred islands of all sizes, some connected by reefs, others steep to, making a perfect maze of reefs and islands",
a matter of some importance in the search for Cookey. Commander Bruce was accompanied by Captain Woodhouse of the "Ripple", who obtained for him the services of one Parry (sic), the opposition chief to Cookey.

On the following day a landing party of five officers and sixty-two men was sent ashore to "make war" on Cookey, some of Parry's men proving useful as guides. But the landing party returned empty-handed that same evening. However, a canoe had been observed escaping from the village, and the natives being unanimous that the two occupants, Ebutu and Rossi (sic), were implicated in the murder of Captain Schwartz, the canoe was fired on and both men killed.

On the following day, the landing party was again sent

ashore to scour the bush and ascertain Cookey's present whereabouts, but it returned again in the evening without having achieved its purpose.

Commander Dawson then took Parry ashore to his village, to tell his people that they were to bring their war-canoe off in the morning. He proposed to keep the canoe until Cookey was captured, when he was to be sent in the first vessel destined for Fiji. If Cookey did not arrive in Fiji within six months, the canoe would be confiscated. The canoe itself was 53 feet long, with a magnificent prow 13 feet high.

On the following day Parry's war-canoe was brought off by his people at daylight, and hoisted in board.

As Cookey and his eight or nine men had now taken to the bush in any one of some dozens of islands which he had in the district, the chances of finding him, and capturing him, was almost, if not quite, impossible. Parry's people said that they could not find him now, but he might emerge after a time, when they could probably capture him in order to ransom their war-canoe.

In a letter to the Commodore of the 6th October, 1881, Commander Dawson stated that it was rumoured that Cookey was again living at the Russell Islands, and that he had offered a reward of £5 for his apprehension within one month but, despite this offer of a reward, the Commodore reported to the Secretary of the Admiralty in his letter of the 21st November that Cookey still remained at large and had hitherto evaded all pursuit owing to his having so many friends in that maze of islands.

The incredible aspect of this tragedy is the utter carelessness, indifference, and over-weening self-confidence shown by Captain Schwartz in his dealings with these natives. He cannot have failed to be aware of the generally hostile environment in that area. It is therefore astonishing that he went ashore alone, out of sight of his ship, save for the companionship of one boy. It is equally astonishing that he left the breech-loader in the boat, and also kept his revolver buttoned up in its pouch whence he could not draw it quickly. It is equally incredible that he should have sat down on a low log with a number of natives armed with tomahawks around him, and without his back against something solid so that he could not be attacked from the rear. One might continue with a further list of his failures to take even minimal precautions, but enough has been said to account for the attack on him, and his tragic death. In those times, and in that area in particular, traders certainly took their lives in their hands, and there was no need for them to weight the scales against themselves so as to invite almost inevitable death as Captain Schwartz did. I can only guess at the cause of the tragedy, but it was surely either the captain's over-weening self-confidence, as with many other traders, that he could 'manage' the natives, or possibly the fact that his judgment was hopelessly clouded by the native trader having cheated him over the matter of produce for which he had deposited trade goods, and disposed of the latter as well.

So much for the tragic tale of one trader.

If the first tale can fairly be described as a tragedy, the second merits the description of a near-tragedy. The generally hostile environment was much the same in this tale, though the setting was in the Florida Group further to the eastwards.

In his letter to the Commodore of the 4th June, 1881, Commander James Bruce of H.M.S. Cormorant reported that the "Meg Merrilies", a labour schooner from Levuka, Fiji, had arrived at his anchorage on the 7th May, and that the Government Agent, one Mr. Weiker, had boarded the warship. Captain Hughes of the schooner advised that he had four labourers on board for discharge at Florida, but Commander Bruce informed the Government Agent that he must not discharge labour between Cape Henslow and Cape Esperance (on the coast of Guadalcanar) or on the west coast of Malayta for a fortnight; and, further, that he was not to go to Florida at all until the Royal Navy had settled with the natives of those islands. Commander Bruce thereupon took the four labourers on board his ship for repatriation.

In this connexion, the Government Agent complained bitterly about the continual lack of information as to the precise places at which returned labourers were to be put ashore, stating:-

"...the captain may frequently, with the best intentions, make a mistake of a few miles, in which case it is extremely probable that the man is killed and eaten by the tribe amongst whom he lands."

It is also apparent that Commander Bruce largely shared the views of Commodore Wilson and Commander Dawson regarding the labour traffic and its dangers, as cited in the first tale, for he wrote as follows:-

"I now beg to mention that I am afraid the state of the natives of these islands is every day becoming decidedly worse and more dangerous to white life, the general opinion being that it is principally due to returned labour.

These men, on their return from Fiji, are supplied by the authority of the Government of that Colony with muskets, powder, bullets, and shot (as evidenced by Mr. Weiker). The return labour from Queensland generally talk English, and are, I believe, supplied with breech-loading rifles by the authority of the Queensland Government.

As firearms are simply used by the natives for inter-tribal wars or massacre of whites, it is apparent that the more firearms that are imported, the more impossible it becomes for white traders to exist; and the most treacherous and dreaded natives are usually the returned labour from Queensland.

It is frequently argued that firearms are not as dangerous in the hands of natives as bows and arrows and spears, owing to the fear they have of firing a gun or rifle, and, consequently, the indifferent aim they take.

I beg to state that I believe the premises of this argument to be unsound and extremely dangerous, for these reasons:- First, a party of men landing on a beach could always, with

ball cartridge, clear the natives out of range of either arrows or spears, and, if they had no firearms, there would be little danger of loss of life to an armed party. Secondly, my experience of the natives is, that there are a great many of them who are first-rate shots with either gun or rifle, and that they are improving every day; that they can remain either in pits in the bush or behind rocks, as they have almost invariably high ground close to, and could pick off any number of men landing from 100 to 1,000 yards, where bows, arrows and spears would be perfectly useless, as there is little chance of any native, unless he is asleep, being within 100 yards of an armed party."

Commander Bruce did not, however, see the "Meg Merrilies" again until nearly a month later, on the 2nd June, when it arrived from Qui Harbour, Malayta, having a white man, belonging to the crew - Captain Jones, alias, William Edward Tatchell - badly wounded by the bush natives around that locality.

The story of the near-tragedy is told briefly in the official log of the schooner, and in more detail in the journal of the Government Agent. The account in the log reads as follows:-

"

May 25th, 1881.

The boat-steerer left the ship unknown to me, and against the orders of the Government agent, and whilst away from the ship got wounded by the natives, having got speared in two places. He then went on board the brigantine "Au Revoir", got treated, and Mr. Nicholl, chief officer, fetched us the news. Mr. Weiker and my second mate then went and fetched the wounded man, and got on board at 7.25 p.m., washed and dressed the wounds for the night.

(Signed) B. Hughes".

The longer account in the journal of the Government Agent reads as follows:-

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Malayta, Emin Bay,
25th May, 1881.

This morning, after breakfast, while I was engaged with the men and the captain writing a letter in my cabin to the mate of the "Au Revoir", Captain Jones, the boat-steerer, left with his boat and proceeded to Qui Harbour, thereby disobeying my strict orders, endorsed by the captain, given last night and repeated this morning, that the two boats should recruit together. This act of disobedience had serious consequences. It appears that, instead of visiting the "Au Revoir", he went to a river opposite Nongasila Island, in Qui Harbour, and commenced recruiting, the "Au Revoir's" boats having left the same place with two recruits just before he got there. He got four men, and pulled out, when the natives called him back, saying that they had another recruit. The interpreter and some natives in a canoe advised him strongly not to return, they evidently having overheard some remarks from the bushmen. In spite of all this he backed in again, and, as soon as the boat touched, the natives made an attack. They speared Jones

"seriously in the chest and groin, and lightly in the side. at the same time they attacked the crew with tomahawks and spears, fortunately only wounding one Jack slightly on the shoulder. Jones could only fire his rifle once; but the crew opened fire with the rifles and muskets, dispersing the attacking crowd and getting the boat off the shore.

During the attack one bushman, who tried to pull one of the crew into the water, was cut down with a tomahawk, and no doubt others were either killed or wounded. The "Sandwich" (Islands) crew boast of ten killed; but no reliance can be placed on such a boast, and at present Jones is in too precarious a condition to enter into any conversation about the matter. After getting clear of the bushmen, the crew put Jones on board the "Au Revoir", where he got every attention from the captain and Mr. Rebman. The first mate, Mr. Nicholl, brought our boat back, when I started with a fresh crew and shifted Jones to the "Meg Merrilies". As I consider Jones dangerously wounded, I have requested Captain Hughes to proceed to Ugi to get medical advice from the "Cormorant". This he will do tomorrow, if there is any wind. During the day the other boat which I kept with the vessel recruited, within sight, four men. They were passed in the usual way, and got their kit. Looked after the men and made them wash. Weather fine; wind light easterly, often calm (11 p.m.). Jones is easier; but as his breath escapes through the chest-wound, I can't tell if the lung is touched. Mr. Rebman tells me that the people of Eri-Eri and Alasi made the attack. Mr. Nicholl, in his letter the previous night, warned us, as the natives had tried his boats.

26th May, 1881.

I forgot to mention, yesterday, that the four recruits, Jones had in his boat when he backed in again, jumped out as soon as the attack was made. I also found out, on examination this morning, that the supposed wound inside was only a bloody mark.

Edward Weiker,
Government Agent, "Meg Merrilies". "

In his letter of the 4th June to the Commodore, Commander Bruce expressed himself forcibly as follows:-

"This outrage has been brought about by gross disobedience of orders and wanton recklessness in taking the boat to recruit against the orders of the captain and labour agent, and in pulling back to the shore against the advice of the native interpreter and canoe belonging to the place; and the only culpable person is now lying between life and death with spearwounds on the right side of the chest, piercing the lung and left side of abdomen, not entering the cavity: he is being treated by the medical officers of this ship.

I have explained very clearly to the captains of the trading and labour schooners and labour agents amongst these islands, that if they insist on going to these places where a man-of-war is powerless to act, even should it be desirable, as the offending tribes come

"from many miles in the mountain bush and are quite inaccessible to white men from the coast, they do so at their own risk, and without any assistance direct from H.M. Navy.

The wounded man, Jones, was to be landed at Santa Anna; but I have now ordered Mr. Weiker, the labour agent, to take him to Fiji, in order that he may appear before the High Commissioner's Court".

On this occasion tragedy for the recruiter was only narrowly averted, certainly more by luck than good judgment. But, once again, the story brings out the seemingly over-weening self-confidence of the recruiter, despite repeated warnings, ignoring advice, and breaches of orders, and all for the very minimal fees to which he was entitled for recruiting the natives. So much for the tale of near-tragedy in the case of the second trader.

And so to the tale of the third trader, which had a different ending to those in the case of the first two traders. Although the setting was virtually the same as in the first case, the events which transpired on the 2nd August, 1881, in the case of the schooner "Atlantic", of which the master was one John Howie, and his mate George Paulsen, were admittedly very different to those in the case of the "Leslie"; nevertheless, a similar tragedy might equally well have ensued if the personalities of the leading characters had been the same; but, fortunately, they were not. Neither Captain Howie, nor his mate, offered any provocation whatever, in addition to which the former was a dour, cautious, and pragmatic Scot, a man given to observing instructions and advice, and, unlike Captain Schwartz at the time of his death, not, at least at that particular time, apparently worried by being cheated in trading matters by the natives,

Commander E.S. Dawson, of H.M.S. Miranda, who enquired into the "Atlantic" case, reported that it appeared that a monetary reward was offered from Rubiana (Roviana) in New Georgia for the capture of a vessel and the heads of the victims. As already mentioned, that was the common pattern by which murders and attacks were committed in that area; a tribe would not wish to embroil itself in such activities and preferred to employ others, thereby being in a position to deny any responsibility should a man-of-war later come to inquire into such happenings.

On this occasion, the Jurio (sic) natives of Vella Lavella Island, after much discussion, finally agreed to capture the vessel and the procurement of the heads of the victims. One Johnnie, a village chief, was asked to lead the expedition. This he was at first said to be unwilling to do, but, on being taunted with accusations of cowardice, he finally consented, and at once set to work to plan the attack in the treacherous manner so characteristic of those times, and in those islands.

While the "Atlantic" was at Jurio, she was not molested, but received all the copra which had been made ready for her. The natives then told the captain that more copra was ready at Moondy-Moondy (Mundi Mundi), a village some two miles further on. Only about ten men resided there, and the "Atlantic" went on at once. After receiving and paying for the copra, the articles of trade were made ready for distribution in advance of the purchase of more copra when the vessel next returned. In the meanwhile, Johnnie had been making great friends with the crew, sleeping and breakfasting on board.

What immediately followed is best told in a statement made by Captain Howie on the 24th August, 1881, as follows:-

"On the 2nd August, at Moondy-Moondy (Mundi Mundi), a place on the island of Java (sic - not Indonesia), early in the morning, the canoes came off until about forty or fifty islanders were on deck. About 9 a.m. I finished giving the chief his supply of trade goods, which were brought on deck. Amongst the trade goods was a 'half-axe' and a long knife, which I rolled in paper and tied together. But, before it was put in the canoe, the chief and I had a short conversation.

All seemed very friendly, and I walked from side to side of the ship past the wheel. As I turned to walk away from the chief, at that instant I caught a glimpse of the 'half-axe' over my head. At the same time, a fearful yell was a signal for the rest to begin their murderous onslaught. I gave my head a jibb (sic) and the axe fell on my shoulder, but, as it was still rolled in paper, and as Johnnie was in a hurry to strike the blow, it was lucky for me that I was struck with the back of the axe.

I had a bayonet in my hand and sent it through him. Then I was immediately seized by three other islanders. I thought it was all up with us but, whilst I was struggling with them, I fell across the wheel-chains, facing forwards. One of the kanaka crewmen, a powerful fellow, whipt his knife into an islander. At the same time the kanaka crewman turned round and faced me. I saw he had had his death blow, for he was cut from side to side in the lower part of his ribs and the blood was gushing out.

I then made a fresh struggle, and succeeded in getting the bayonet twice into another fellow. Then I saw the mate jump on top of the cabin, but he likewise was held by three or four islanders. But, having his knife in his hand, he succeeded in cutting himself free. We could not use our revolvers since our arms were pinned to our sides.

However, as soon as the mate was free, the islanders all found their designs frustrated, and jumped into the water in every direction, leaving everything behind.

It would appear that they had made up their minds to do the fatal work with the 'half-axe' and long knife (there were plenty of tomahawks in the canoes); I was to receive the first blow, after which it would be no trouble to hold me, and the mate being also held, the action could be easily finished. But the bloody design was frustrated fortunately by the failure of the first blow. Further, the chief having received the bayonet thrust, another islander took the 'half-axe' and was making towards the mate, when the crewman was struck by it. It was then that I saw the crewman use his knife, and soon afterwards the mate jumped on top of the cabin. He had a hairbreadth escape, as was apparent by his shirt and ringlet being cut through and his skin just cut about six inches long from a blow of the 'half-axe'. We both got free about the same time, but the mate was able to put a bullet through the last islander to let me go as he dived off the rail.

It was our turn now, and revolvers and two Winchesters went to work. I saw very few reach the shore. We buried the

"kanaka crewman two hours later and doctored the rest (two wounded kanaka crewmen) as best we could".

The briefer statement of the mate confirms the foregoing. He also stated:-

" Upwards of 30 men came on board. All had appeared quite friendly and had had no disputes. Master was giving trade for the purchase of copra, when all of a sudden one of the natives attacked the master. I knew nothing till I heard a yell from all the natives, and was seized by four or five. Had a knife in my hand and cut the fingers of the men holding my arms and got clear. Jumped up on the top of the cabin hatch, pulling my revolver out of my waist-belt. Saw the captain struggling with a native and shot him at once, and kept firing at natives till they disappeared. All on board were Jurio men".

In another statement, Captain Howie remarked:-

" I had been dubious of these natives, as I had heard at other places that, there being only two white men, they intended to have a try at us, so had a bayonet in my hand, filing and cleaning it".

It should hardly be necessary to stress the difference in this case compared to the two others. Captain Howie mistrusted the Jurio men and was on the alert with his crew to defend himself though, even so, tragedy almost resulted. Further, not only were the master and crew ready for treachery, but the master was armed with a bayonet and the mate with a knife in anticipation of trouble. Nevertheless, it was surely foolish of them to allow so many natives on board at any one time, for they must have been aware of the natives' technique whereby they boarded such schooners in overwhelming numbers with the aim of overpowering the one or two Europeans on board. Finally, it was surely foolish of the captain to turn his back on the native chief, even if only for the briefest of moments.

It was rumoured at Rubiana, and on the island of Renongo, that only three men had been killed, but Captain Howie thought that the number was greatly understated.

Commander Dawson considered it necessary to take immediate steps in the "Atlantic" case since he felt sure that, if it was not immediately dealt with, it was morally certain that the frustrated natives would make further attempts against other vessels. He accordingly left the island of Ugi in H.M.S. Cormorant on the 8th October, arriving at Rubiana two days later. Here he visited Mr. Nelson, the resident white trader, in order to glean full particulars of the attack on the "Atlantic". The accounts given by Mr. Nelson, by Captain Cable, master of the schooner "Avoca", and by one Mengo, a native chief, left no doubt that an unprovoked attack had been made on the vessel by the Jurio natives with a view to capturing it and murdering the crew.

The Jurio men having failed, another chief, one Tulo of Billowa, offered to take the money and capture a vessel and crew. Shortly after the "Atlantic" affair, therefore, a Billowa war canoe came over to Mr. Nelson's island, but Mengo seeing them coming and fearing the worst went over in his canoe to warn Mr. Nelson, who at once armed himself and his few reliable natives. The Billowa men,

finding him ready, however, said that they had only come over to tell him that they had some copra to sell. But Mr. Nelson said that he refused to have any truck with natives who attacked white men. Before leaving Rubiana, however, the Billowa natives decapitated a slave belonging to a nearby chief in order not to return to their island without a head.

Mr. Nelson's position at Rubiana was by no means a safe one. He had cleared the space round his house to give himself and his men an uncluttered field of fire, but he rarely, if ever, left his house after dark. Whilst, however, the Rubiana men would probably not have dared to kill him themselves, if for any superstitious or other reasons they wished to be rid of him, they would have bribed another tribe to come and commit the crime.

Commander Dawson, like all other naval commanders in those days, almost certainly recognized that the chances of capturing those who had staged the attack on the "Atlantic" were very remote, especially since any native informers who provided information as to the whereabouts of the miscreants would certainly be signing their own death warrants. Nevertheless, he decided that the attack on the "Atlantic" could not be overlooked and doubtless resorted to the legal fiction of "declaring war" on the Jurio tribe. Although in those years some naval commanders did in fact condemn to death those natives whom, after due enquiry, they were satisfied were guilty of murder, this was technically ultra vires their judicial powers in 1881 since the natives were in any case not subjects of Her Majesty - hence the legal fiction of "declaring war" in which casualties might reasonably be justified. In fact, however, the guilty men were seldom caught, since they retreated prudently into their fastnesses of bush and mountain in a myriad of islands and islets.

As an example of this curious legal fiction of a "declaration of war", the following document was issued by Commander Bruce, then commanding H.M.S. Cormorant, in 1881, following upon the murder in 1880 of Lieutenant Bower and some members of his crew of H.M.S. Sandfly on the island of Mandoliana:-

"

H.B.M.S. Cormorant,
At Floridas Islands,
15th May, 1881.

That, in consequence of an English officer and boat's crew being murdered by Florida men, the Queen of England declares war with the whole tribes of Floridas, unless the actual murderers are given up in fourteen (14) days.

2. That all trade with Floridas will then be stopped, all canoes coming to and going away from Floridas will be captured and destroyed, and a man-of-war will always remain amongst the Floridas until the murderers are given up.

3. In the case of any other white men being killed in the Floridas Islands, the whole of the chiefs will be held responsible, and the Floridas Islands will be considered to be at war with the Queen of England.

(Signed) James Bruce, Commander, R.N.,
Commanding H.B.M.S. Cormorant".

The rest of this tale illustrates the difficulties faced by Commander Dawson and his colleagues in their attempts to capture murderers or would-be murderers. Whilst Commander Dawson failed to

capture the would-be murderers, however, he caused widespread destruction of their properties, and warned them to desist from murdering Europeans and destroying and damaging their properties, lest they suffered constant harassment from Her Majesty's men-of-war. An account of his activities in his own words is as follows:-

" Captain Cable, master of the schooner "Avoca", who has traded for years in this group, being specially well acquainted with Jurio, volunteered to accompany me, and I accordingly embarked him, and started forthwith for Renongo, where it was hoped to procure the services, as guide and interpreter, of "Sandy", a chief who has always been most friendly to Europeans. I arrived off the island at 8.30 p.m., and as it was necessary to reach Jurio at daylight to prevent the perpetrators of the outrage being warned by the canoe sent off, Captain Cable at once proceeded on shore in a five-oared whaler, manned and armed, to procure "Sandy", the ship laying off under easy steam at a distance of about half a mile. I should mention that Captain Cable has traded for years at this island, being well known to the principal chiefs, and has landed frequently at all hours of the day or night, the population everywhere being most friendly.

The ship having stopped a little too far along the coast, one point being mistaken for another, the boat had some distance to pull, but eventually went on shore at a village 200 yards from "Sandy's". My instructions to Mr. Pasco, midshipman, were, that the boat was to be kept laying off, but that Captain Cable was at liberty to land if he wished to do so. It was not probable that this would be necessary, as "Sandy's" house is on the beach.

On the boat reaching the shore, her bow just touching as the surf receded, four unarmed natives came down and entered into friendly conversation, stating that "Sandy's" village was close to, but that he was away. After conversing a few more minutes, all of a sudden two of the natives seized off the bow thwart a pouch of ammunition, a seaman's cap, and a jumper. Captain Cable, who was sitting forward talking, saw at the same time about 15 natives a little way off, apparently armed with tomahawks; it was a bright moonlight night. He at once said the word "rifles", on which the natives all ran away, and the boat returned on board. After hearing this statement I determined to return and enforce the restitution of the stolen articles, and to take such further steps as after a full enquiry into the circumstances seemed necessary.

I proceeded at once for Jurio, anchoring there at 6.30 a. m. in $15\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms, between the three islands marked on the chart. A force of 45 officers and men left the ship just before coming to an anchor, under the command of Lieutenant Trench, myself following immediately after anchoring. Not a native was to be seen. The village was entirely deserted, but being taken by surprise, they had only time to remove their personal effects. The village, with ten war canoes, and several smaller ones, was then completely destroyed. A large number of skulls, clubs, and spears, and a few muskets were found. The destruction of the village is in itself but a

"slight punishment. The huts are of the roughest description, and the whole will probably be completely restored in the course of a few weeks. The loss of their canoes will be much more severely felt, as a considerable amount of labour is spent in their construction, and there is little doubt it will effectually show these tribes that such outrages cannot be committed with impunity.

The force returned on board by 12.30 p.m., and I proceeded at once for Renongo, arriving off the island at 4.30 p.m. I despatched Lieutenant Farie on shore with directions to demand the restitution of the stolen articles, failing which he was to inform the chief that the village would be burnt. He was also to inquire fully as to who was responsible for the outrage, but not to fire unless the natives attacked. These instructions Lieutenant Farie carried out with great discretion. On landing he found the natives most defiant. They were all armed with muskets or spears, and at first kept at a short distance, but finding they were not fired on, appeared to think fear was the cause of our not doing so, and approached nearer, being seen pointing their guns from behind trees and other cover. The two chiefs were at last persuaded to confer with Lieutenant Farie, who advanced with 17 men a short distance to the front. The chiefs approached with their spears poised ready for use, and only by pointing rifles at them could they be persuaded to put them down, one of them during the conversation raising his spear to his hand with his toes. They were most defiant in their tones, but on being told that the village would be burnt if the stolen things were not restored, (the native interpreter ran for the beach as fast as he could after translating this), they were all collected and brought in, with the exception of the seaman's jumper.

The force now marched down to the boat, which was only 30 yards off, but the natives had formed a regular ambush in a water-course close on the left of the village. As the last man was getting into the boat, fire was opened by the natives, one shot striking the sand just under the bows, and the men having been kept at the ready in preparation for an attack which had been momentarily expected, a volley was returned, which had the effect of causing the natives at once to retire. Had the natives closest to the boat not been afraid to fire, they must undoubtedly have done some execution, but the rapidity with which their fire was returned completely demoralized them, and they retired precipitately, although without sustaining any loss, being completely sheltered by their position. A gun was cleared away on board the ship on observing the natives open fire, and three shells were subsequently fired in the direction of the village. Darkness having set in by the time Lieutenant Farie and party had returned, I lay off the island under easy steam for the night, a strong force being held in readiness for landing in the morning.

The Chief Sandy came off in a canoe at daylight, and stated the intention of the hostile tribe had been to plunder the boat, but not to kill the crew, being unaware at the time that she belonged to a man-of-war. This tribe, he also said, had for some time avowed their intention to capture the first

"ship or boat that came there, that he had endeavoured, but in vain, to dissuade them from such a course, which he assured them was certain to bring its own punishment.

A force consisting of Lieutenants F.J. Trench, and J.C. Farie, Staff Surgeon M. Greany, Mr. Crabb Gunner, Mr. Bowman, midshipman, and sixty seamen and marines was disembarked at 7 a.m. (October 12th), landing myself to superintend the operations. The natives retired to the bush on seeing the boats approaching. Two war canoes, a few smaller ones, and the village were then destroyed as a punishment for the outrage committed, and at 9.30 a.m. the force embarked and returned on board. From the numbers seen the previous evening it is probable, judging from the small size of the village, that this tribe was reinforced by men from the adjoining villages.

The natives of this group state openly that expeditions from men-of-war are afraid to approach their villages if any resistance is shown, and I have no doubt this view was confirmed by Lieutenant Farie's force returning on board without making any attack. This course was pursued under instructions from myself, with a view to avoiding, if possible, any sacrifice of life, but had it been desired to take the village that evening, the force was ample for the purpose, and probably not one native would have been seen after the first volley. A larger force was landed next morning, as it was possible they might be encouraged to offer resistance by the events of the previous day should less force be displayed.

The natives seem utterly unable to understand our desire to show moderation in dealing with these cases, and at once ascribe to fear any attempt to negotiate instead of at once proceeding to active measures. When, in the course of a few years, they have become more skilled in the use of firearms, and have learned the advantage they possess in the natural strength of their positions, it will be necessary to adopt other tactics on these occasions. Captain Cable regards this affair as simply the sequel to the "Esperanza" and "Atlantic" attacks, neither of which cases had then been dealt with, and this, together with the hostile attitude lately assumed at other portions of the group, is quite sufficient to account for the altered disposition of the inhabitants of this island.

I directed the Chief Sandy to let the tribe know that if no more outrages were committed they would not be molested, but that while we were most anxious to continue on friendly terms, we would not allow unprovoked attacks to be committed with impunity. Having been unable to effect any communication with the natives of Jurio, I directed him to deliver a similar message there, as canoes are continually crossing from Renongo to Jurio, the inhabitants of these islands being on most friendly terms between themselves.

Sandy also confirmed the particulars of the attack on the "Atlantic", which he said was made for the sake of plunder. He stated only two of the assailants were killed during the attack but that one more had since died of wounds.

" I proceeded for Hathorn Sound, Rubiana, at 10 a.m. and anchored there at 6 p.m., in 17 fathoms, just at the entrance of the passage leading to the small island of Rubiana, near which Mr. Nelson resides. Mr. Nelson, at my request, had sent round to tell all the neighbouring chiefs I wished to see them at his island on 13th October, and I accordingly left the ship that morning with two five-oared whalers, manned and armed. On my arrival at Mr. Nelson's island, about six miles from Hathorn Sound, most of the principal chiefs assembled with about a hundred of their followers. I proceeded to address them (an interpreter interpreting sentence by sentence), stating that they would be held responsible for any attacks on the lives or property of white men generally, and British subjects in particular, in this neighbourhood; that men-of-war came here for the purpose of seeing justice done between the white men and the natives, but if they allowed or incited distant tribes to come here and molest peaceable traders, then they would be dealt with just the same as if they had themselves actually committed the crime. The leading chief then addressed those assembled at some length, stating that what I had said was just, and that in future no attacks of any sort would be permitted at that place. One of the chiefs present was the leader in the attack on the schooner "Dancing Wave" about five years ago, when the crew were massacred. There is little doubt that this meeting, coupled with the recent proceedings at Jurio, will do a great deal towards rendering the lives and properties of Europeans at Rubiana safe for the present. "