

THE CONTRIBUTOR.

A CRUISE IN A QUEENSLAND SLAYER.

BY A MEDICAL STUDENT.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.)

The 9th was a Sunday. A period of suspense was passed to know if the schooner could weather a rocky point of Aoba, towards which we were making dangerous leeway. The captain held on with unwonted courage, and success was ours. Soon after I ventured to offer my services at the wheel, and was flouted with the corrosive sarcasm of "Don't want you, my friend; you're better away." We had to land three boys on one of the most dangerous places of the island—dangerous by reason of an inherent propensity of the natives to regard a succulent man as the daintiest of luxuries. The recruiter, Bill and the crews were therefore armed to the teeth, and amid great excitement the boats set off. The Government agent stayed on board. The scenery was delightful. A heavy sea was breaking on the rock bound coast, and we could see no opening for the boats to enter. And such was actually the case. They could not venture through the breakers, and there seemed a possibility of the boys having to put back to the schooner. The natives were crowded on the beach, and one more daring than the rest dashed in his canoe through the surf, and time after time braved its fury till he had taken off the contents of the boys' boxes, which were then floated ashore, the returns swimming alongside.

Being the last Sunday that the Api boys would probably spend with us, after sundown they sat together in a group and began chanting their wild hymn of joy. Higher and higher their voices grew, the chorus swelled as their spirits became elated, till they could sit still no longer, but springing to their feet, rocked to and fro humming gently a while, then breaking out into a magnificent chorus which echoed far over the waters. Louder they sang, louder they stamped time with their feet. And now all on board were so warmed into joining that the vessel shook with the vibration from rudder to bowsprit. So I wrote at the time. In cold blood now I should say that a more infernal soul rasping, temper-trying ungodly din could not be conceived.

The following morning we were off Amboym, the sea a dead calm, a fore and aft schooner being in sight in the offing, while a light wind took us slowly along. The two boats tried for some recruits from a crowd of boys that could be seen standing on the beach. As the boats came near the boys edged off to some rocks, and two or three of them who could speak English distinctly told the recruiter that they did not wish to have anything to do with him. One man, in derision, asked the agent what he would give him to go in the boat. He offered to pay him now or in Mackay. "No fear," replied the savage, feelingly, "white man too much bloody gammon." Here, again, our recruiting has been tampered with by French unscrupulousness. An islander decoyed to Noumea has a harder lot than his brother in Queensland. He is set to work in the nickel mines, he is badly paid and poorly fed; indeed, his condition is a bad form of slavery. A Noumea schooner cannot get boys except by kidnapping them and by representing herself to be in the Queensland labor trade.

We had only a solitary lad to leave at Amboym, but the wind was so light we drifted long past his home, so he had to be told that he must wait on board till we return from Tanna. He was very much disappointed, and as we drifted further and further down the land far beyond the white man's cobra station, he became frightened that we were going to keep him altogether. He went to the Government agent, and, pointing to a place, asked to be landed there, as from it, he said, he could easily reach his home. The boats were forthwith lowered, not before we were treated to the excellent sight of the Government agent warmly reprimanding our Dutch mate for his cowardly bullying and bustling about of the boys, which he well deserved. He is a cruel-hearted fellow, mean and obsequious to the crew, who have no respect for him, and is forced to vent the spleen of a nasty disposition on the black boys, who cordially detest him.

The boats having been lowered pulled to a beautiful spot, where stood some houses and two large war canoes drawn up above high water mark. We could see from the schooner the natives thronging to meet them, we could see the boats backing in, then suddenly they were lost to sight behind some sheltering rocks. Our minds were filled with apprehensions. Near here the boat's crew of the Isabella, including our Jerry and Peter, were fired at twice; near here only the other day the natives opened fire on the boats of the Stanley as soon as they came near the beach. A long time the boats were hid from view, then a shot was heard, the signal we all feared of approaching hostilities. Just then the boats could be distinguished pulling out, the captain's leading, and our excitement became intense. They pulled out some distance, turned half round and rested on their oars. We wondered what was up, but a puff of smoke quickly followed by the report told us too plainly that the natives had fired on our poor men, who were now retreating. Both boats waited till we again saw the smoke and again heard the firing, and Frank, who was at the helm, distinctly saw the bullets of the schooner