

SLAVE HORROR OF "THE NORTH"

Intolerable Insensibility To Australia's Shame

Loathsome Japanese Traffic In Our Native Girls

ALONG several thousands of miles of the Australian coast the most inhuman form of **slavery** is to-day being extensively practised. No serious attempt has so far been made by the Federal Government to abolish it, or restrain it, or even to investigate it. **The commodity sold in this slave market consists of young girls**, aged generally between eight and ten, and the purchasers are Japanese pearlers!

The purchaser buys the girl, body and soul, for a trivial amount. She is taken, away from Australia to serve the bestial needs of many masters, and to die either from maltreatment or from the diseases which inevitably result from such enslavement.

Australia spends large amounts on combating the White Slave trade of the South. So far, it has neglected the Black Slave trade of the North, The traffic is not only inhuman, but immoral. It comes under the control of Mr Paterson, Minister for the Interior, who, in the Freer case, claimed to be so greatly concerned about morality. Even if the inhumanity of the Black Slave Trade fails to move him, surely the immorality of it should do so.

The full extent of the traffic can only be guessed. Investigation at one point, consisting of only a fractional part of the coastline subject to this trade, suggests that it is shockingly active. In its full ramifications, it must mean a terrible tale of misery among the people whom it is our duty to safeguard.

In order to obtain reliable first-hand information regarding the traffic, "Smith's Weekly" instructed Mr. Frank Clune to act as its special commissioner and investigate the traffic at its source...

The facts set forth in this article are the result of his investigations. In themselves they are sufficiently appalling. In their implications they are even more terrible.

The point chosen for special inquiry was Bathurst Island, north of Darwin. This has the advantage that, owing to the existence of a Mission station on the island, it is possible to gain some reliable idea as to what is happening in that locality.

The head of this Mission is Monsignor Gsell and to appreciate the value of his statements regarding the slave traffic it is essential to know something of the genesis of the Mission and, especially, the genesis of a system by which it attempted to rescue, and has been rescuing, infant girls from the barbaric fate which tribal rites imposed upon them.

Up till three years ago, the Mission had thus rescued 135 children, but during the last three years this merciful effort has been nullified. These infant girls are no longer available for rescue because they are being sold to the crews of the Japanese sampans which infest our northern waters.

Monsignor Francis Xavier Gsell, founder of this Sacred Heart Mission, was born in 1872 at Strasbourg. He is a native of Alsace Lorraine, but has been many years in the Commonwealth and is a naturalised Australian. As his photo reveals, he more resembles a benevolent bush-man than an ecclesiastical dignitary. He had spent six years in Papua before going to Darwin...

The personnel of the Mission to-day consists of Monsignor Gsell, Fathers McGrath and Abbott, Brothers Carter and Smith, and three sisters. Since the population of the two islands is over 1000, they have had some strenuous times when such visitations as influenza epidemics have assailed the locality.

The endeavour of the Mission is to train the children along Christian lines while interfering as little as possible with their normal mode of life. The girls of the Mission, when of suitable age, are encouraged to marry congenial youths. Naturally the tribal custom of polygamy is opposed and also the barbaric native practice whereby a girl-child is betrothed at birth to a man who is already old and who already has several wives.

According to Monsignor Gsell, the matrimonial system of the locality is unique. It has nothing to do with the mother's consent or arrangement. When a girl is born her uncles choose a son-in-law for her, and he has the right to marry all the daughters she may have.

Thus, many aborigines have three or four wives who are all sisters, and even allowing for the fact that girls are Initiated into the mysterious tribal ordeal of marriage at ten, it is obvious that the husband will, in most cases, be so greatly senior that he would never have been chosen as a mate by the girl had she been free to follow her natural inclination...