

Victoria annex ; or, better still, let a number of the Australian Colonies unite with her to annex, and throw the responsibility on Great Britain of refusing to recognize the annexation. This will arouse a storm in Parliament. We will support your views, and let you know how we sympathize with Australian interests in the present crisis." The deputation felt extremely anxious, and hoped that the Premier would, if possible, save the colonies and the islands from the calamity which threatened them. If the Government could help them in the present crisis, it would confer a lasting benefit, not only on the missions, but on the whole of the Australian Colonies. If a successful effort were not now made, it would necessitate the maintenance of large armaments in Australia to warn off dangerous neighbours.

The Rev. S. ROBINSON had a very strong conviction that the political aspect of this question had not been at all exaggerated. There was a strong probability of a European convulsion before long ; and, if in the time of war different European nations held ports in the South Seas, it would necessitate the Australian Colonies keeping up an armament equal to the armaments of European Powers.

Mr. GILLIES agreed that this question was a very serious one, and it appeared as if it were becoming more serious every day. If there was any foundation for a telegram that appeared in the *Argus*, it was proposed to send this year a thousand convicts to New Caledonia. They had good evidence that New Caledonia was scarcely capable of holding any more convicts—certainly not with satisfaction to the free people there. He thought, if a French Government proposed in reality to send out that number of convicts, it was only the beginning of a movement in that direction. As soon as he saw the telegram in the *Argus* he telegraphed to the Agent-General asking him to ascertain if there was really any truth in that statement. The English Government were certainly led to believe that, although the Récidiviste Act enabled the French Government to send out two classes of criminals to New Caledonia and some other islands of the Pacific, the French Government did not intend to do so, and that in all probability no new criminals would be sent to those islands. There could be no question that, if this was the beginning of a policy, very serious results might be looked for. He quite agreed with the view taken by the Rev. Mr. Paton that it would be a very serious thing, not only for the present but for the future of Australia, if the French got possession of several of those islands and populated them with the worst of her criminals. The Australian Colonies would require to take steps to protect themselves, and in the not very distant future they would require armaments, assisted by England, to protect their shores. That would involve a much more serious expense than they could at present contemplate. He was pleased to think that all the Australian Colonies had the same views on this subject. He had received on the previous day a deputation from the Australian Natives' Association, who expressed very strong views on the same question. He could only assure this deputation that anything this Government could do, either in communicating with the Imperial Government or the other colonies, he would be most anxious to do to avert any catastrophe of that kind. They were perfectly persuaded that the New Hebrides was a very valuable group. As far as they could possibly take steps to protect any of those islands from being annexed by France, Germany, or any other foreign Power, it would be their bounden duty to do so, in the interests of Australia. He could assure the deputation that the policy pursued by Mr. Service as head of the late Government they all strongly supported. He was satisfied that the civilizing influences brought to bear on the natives of the South Sea Islands by the missionaries of the Presbyterian Church were of the highest possible value. If looked at from the lowest point of view, merely as a civilizing influence, and not from a religious point of view, by any one, whether he believed in Christianity or not, the work of those missions could not be undervalued. That those islands would belong to Australia in future, whether they had to fight for them or not, he felt perfectly confident. If they could manage, by any influence they were able to bring to bear, to induce the Imperial Government to resist any attempt by France to take those islands, of course those efforts would be made by his Government. The only thing he feared was that in the struggles at Home, in pursuing certain lines of home policy, France might take the opportunity to hoist the French flag on those islands, and England would for the time being do little more than protest. But they were bound to live in hopes that England would be prepared to view the case differently. During the last two or three years a strong brotherly feeling had arisen between Great Britain and the Australian Colonies. There was now probably a better feeling between the centre of the Empire and these colonies than had ever existed, and it was to be hoped that that feeling would not be weakened but strengthened, and that gentlemen such as those whom the Rev. Mr. Paton had mentioned would use their influence in a way that would be highly valuable. He could assure the deputation that, as far as his Government was concerned, nothing whatever would be left undone to induce the Imperial Government to take such a stand as would warn French hands off any of those islands. He was glad of the opportunity of meeting the deputation, and of being assured of their co-operation and assistance to the Government by morally strengthening their hands.

The deputation then withdrew.

No. 26.

W. D. STEWART, Esq., M.H.R., to the PREMIER.

I INTENDED to get deputation to wait on you *re* New Hebrides. Hope Government will strongly protest against control by France.

3rd April, 1886.

W. D. STEWART.

No. 27.

The PREMIER to W. D. STEWART, Esq., M.H.R.

WE cannot at present make public our negotiations *re* islands ; but you can rely that we are doing