

assume either that the French flag has not been hoisted in the New Hebrides, or that, if it has, the exact significance of the act has been somewhat misapprehended by those who have reported the occurrence. M. de Freycinet stated that it was possible that military posts might be temporarily established, and, if unofficial telegrams are to be trusted, it would seem that this step has been taken. It may be that the French flag has merely been hoisted at these temporary posts. But if it has been hoisted in any other circumstances than these, the matter at once assumes a very serious aspect. We know only too well that French commanders and French officials in distant parts of the world often exceed their instructions, and that their official superiors in Paris often find it somewhat difficult to restrain their excess of zeal. It so happens, indeed, that we have direct evidence of the state of French feeling in New Caledonia on the subject of the New Hebrides. "The Press of Noumea," says a telegram from Sydney, "congratulates the French authorities on having accomplished the annexation of the New Hebrides in defiance of England and her colonies." The Press of Noumea is not, perhaps, a very powerful organ of public opinion, but it is not without significance that it should have congratulated the French authorities on having done what the French Prime Minister declares they have not done, have not thought of doing, and will not be permitted to do.

The case is so clear and the assurances of the French Government are so recent and so explicit that we may safely rely upon M. de Freycinet's moderation and good sense to remove promptly any misunderstanding that may have arisen. So much, at least, is due to consideration for a friendly Power in respect of a solemn engagement. But the feeling of this country is not the only nor the most important thing to be taken into account. The feeling of the Australasian Colonies is strong and unanimous in the matter. They entertain a strong and perfectly intelligible objection to the extension of European sovereignty, other than that of England, over the Pacific Islands adjacent to Australasia. This feeling rests not upon mere territorial greed, but upon political and national sympathies, and upon a regard for the future homogeneity of Australasian political society which is worthy of all respect. In regard to France it rests also upon more immediately practical considerations. New Caledonia is a penal settlement. If the New Hebrides came under the sovereignty of France, there is no security that they would not in time be made penal settlements too. Australasia does well to be jealous on this point. England could not have continued to send her convicts to Australia without seriously imperilling the connection of Australia with the Crown. As little could she now consent to allow France, in defiance of a solemn engagement, to extend her sovereignty over the New Hebrides, with the ulterior prospect of those islands being made into French penal settlements. But there is no need to consider a contingency of this kind. The French Government fully understands that England could not if she would and would not if she could release it from its engagement, solemnly undertaken and repeated within the last few days, to respect the independence of the New Hebrides; it has declared explicitly that it has no desire to be released from the engagement and no intention of evading it. If, therefore, it should be found that the authorities in New Caledonia or the military commanders in the New Hebrides have, either through excess of zeal or for lack of proper instructions, done anything at variance with these declarations, we may be sure that M. de Freycinet will know how to vindicate the honour of the French nation by a prompt and unreserved disavowal of their acts.

No. 15.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Premier's Office, Wellington, 19th June, 1886.

The discussion on the New Hebrides question is still unconcluded. Since I last wrote you the Committee of the House reported as follows: "That it is desirable that an arrangement should be concluded between England, France, Germany, and the United States neither to occupy nor annex any island or islands in the Western Pacific Ocean. If possible the recognition of this convention by other Powers should be obtained. Following the analogy of the mixed Commission for the suppression of the slave trade, which sat for many years at the Cape of Good Hope, such a mixed Commission for the Pacific might be created, consisting of Commissioners appointed by the contracting Powers, the said Commission having all the powers conferred by the Imperial Act 38 and 39 Vict. (1875), c 51, on the High Commissioner for the Pacific, whilst the United Governments would exercise over the Pacific the powers which are by the same Act conferred upon Her Majesty in Council."

The report was carried by a majority, but other motions proposed were as follows: By Hon. R. Stout: "That as the United Kingdom has no outposts in the Eastern Pacific, and no harbours for coaling-stations for steamers, it is desirable that, if possible, the island of Opara or Rapa should be obtained by England." By Hon. Sir Julius Vogel: "That it is desirable that the High Commissionership of the Pacific should be held by the Governor of New Zealand, and that he should exercise his powers thereunder as far as possible with the constitutional advice of his Ministers. That Great Britain should not agree to any change in the status of any of the Pacific Islands as independent countries, without recognizing how greatly the Australasian Colonies are interested in the question, and therefore without consulting them, and giving due deference to their advice."

When the report came before the House Sir George Grey moved that the report be confirmed, and Mr. M. J. Scobie Mackenzie moved an amendment as follows: "That it is of importance to Great Britain, and of especial importance to the Australasian Colonies, that a satisfactory understanding should be come to between the several States having interests in the Western Pacific as to their respective rights and claims. That the most pressing question at present requiring settlement is that between Great Britain and France in reference to the New Hebrides; that the most satisfactory settlement of this question, which now appears to be practicable, would be a treaty between Great Britain and France, whereby Great Britain should withdraw all opposition to the acquisition by France of the New Hebrides Islands on condition—(a) That no more convicts of any class