

1890.

NEW ZEALAND.

PROPOSED ACQUISITION OF NEW HEBRIDES BY
FRANCE.

(PAPERS RELATING THERETO.)

[In continuation of A.—3, 1889.]

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

The PREMIER, Victoria, to the PREMIER, New Zealand.

SIR,—

Premier's Office, Melbourne, 29th August, 1889.

I have the honour to forward herewith, for your information, a copy of a memorandum which I have addressed to His Excellency the Administrator of the Government, together with copies of the documents referred to therein, relative to the present position of affairs in the New Hebrides.

His Excellency has communicated the substance of this memorandum by telegraph to the Admiral Commanding on the Australian Station, and as soon as a reply is received from Admiral Fairfax it is intended to telegraph to the Imperial Government on the subject.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington, New Zealand.

D. GILLIES, Premier.

Enclosure.

MEMORANDUM for His Excellency the ADMINISTRATOR of the GOVERNMENT.

Mr. GILLIES has the honour to lay before your Excellency a copy of a letter which he has received from the Rev. A. Hardie, Convener of the Foreign Missions Committee of the Presbyterian Church, dated the 22nd August, in which it is stated that liberated convicts from Noumea are being taken to the New Hebrides and settled there; also that these men are permitted to trade in strong drink, ammunition, and firearms, which British subjects are prohibited from doing.

Your Excellency is aware that the French occupation of the New Hebrides has heretofore been successfully resisted, but far worse than French occupation *per se* is the prospect of those islands being overrun by convicts, either of French or any other nationality.

In addition to Mr. Hardie's letter, there appears in the papers of the 26th instant a most important column of news respecting the New Hebrides, to which Mr. Gillies would ask your Excellency's serious attention.

It is stated that a petition from traders at the New Hebrides has been presented to the Governor of New Caledonia praying for the annexation of the New Hebrides by France, and that the Governor is described as having returned "a cautious but satisfactory reply, assuring the deputation that the petition would receive the utmost consideration."

Your Excellency is aware that this colony is resting on the assurance of the French Government, communicated through Her Majesty's Government, that it entertains no projects of annexation.* But the alleged reply of the Governor of New Caledonia appears inconsistent with the assurances which have been given by the Government of France.

Mr. Gillies begs that your Excellency will be so good as to represent to Her Majesty's Government the anxiety which is felt here as to the fate of the New Hebrides, and that nothing less than the utmost vigilance and firmness on the part of the Imperial authorities can avert the calamity of these islands becoming part of the convict system of France.

As an offset to the petition which has been stated to have been presented to the Governor of New Caledonia, Mr. Gillies would recall attention to the numerous petitions which have been presented to Her Majesty's Government for the annexation of the islands to Great Britain.

A list of these is embodied in a letter from the Rev. J. G. Paton, dated the 8th June, 1888 (copy enclosed herewith).

Premier's Office, Melbourne, 27th August, 1889.

D. GILLIES, Premier.

* See letter of Marquis of Salisbury to the Secretary of the British Legation in Paris, dated 21st October, 1887. (A.—4, 1888, No. 9.)

Sub-enclosure No. 1.

Presbyterian Church of Victoria Foreign Missions Committee,
Manse, Richmond, 22nd August, 1889.

DEAR MR. GILLIES,—

I have the honour to inform you, by direction of our Committee, that, in letters lately received from the New Hebrides, our missionaries say that from twenty to thirty liberated convicts have been brought from Noumea by the French New Hebrides Company, and settled as traders on the islands to the north of Efate. These men are permitted to trade in strong drink, ammunition, and firearms, and, by doing so, are doing serious harm to the natives, and are enjoying an advantage over British traders, who are prevented from carrying on such traffic by British authority.

Moreover, there is nothing to hinder these liberated convicts from leaving these islands and finding their way to Australia. As, however, they are placed on land said to be the property of the French company, we do not know that they can be easily dislodged. Still we think it right that you should know the facts, and are sure that if anything can be done to prevent this evil you will do it.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Premier.

ANDREW HARDIE, Convener.

Sub-enclosure No. 2.

[Extract from the *Argus*, 26th August, 1889.]

IMPORTANT NEWS FROM THE NEW HEBRIDES.—RENEWAL OF FRENCH ACTIVITY.—ANNEXATION EXPECTED.

Sydney, Sunday.

THE latest news from New Caledonia states that a deputation of landowners and traders in the New Hebrides presented a petition, signed by all the English and other traders in the group, exclusive of Frenchmen, praying the French Government to annex the islands. The Governor gave a cautious but satisfactory reply, assuring the deputation that the petition would receive the utmost consideration. The residents of Franceville, an important harbour in the Island of Sandwich, did not sign this petition, they having proclaimed their independence on the 9th August, and elected M. Chevillard President of the Commune. A Proclamation was read, and the Franceville flag hoisted, in the presence of the captain of the French war-ship "Saone," who landed a firing party, and saluted the flag. A circular letter has been addressed to the Governments of the various nations praying them to recognise the Commune of Franceville. The captain of the "Saone," at the conclusion of the ceremony, made presents to the natives. The total population of Franceville is forty Europeans (no Englishmen, except a missionary), and five hundred imported black labourers, employés of a French company, and other settlers. There are other signs of French activity at the New Hebrides. The Nickel Company, the New Hebrides Company, and others have been busily engaged purchasing every piece of land they can get hold of. Even the Government officials at Noumea are investing, and it is considered certain that France will shortly take some decisive action with a view of securing possession of the New Hebrides and the adjacent islands.

THE EXTENSION OF FRENCH INFLUENCE.

WRITING on the 16th July, our correspondent at Havannah Harbour, New Hebrides, furnishes the following information with regard to the efforts which have been made to extend French authority over these islands:—

The French company has, as I mentioned in a former letter, now a coffee-plantation in the Island of Santo, in addition to the one at Fila, which they purchased at the formation of the company from Captain Macleod. Since then the Fila plantation has been greatly enlarged and improved. M. Bernier, who did so much for the Fila plantation, is now at Santo, in charge of the plantation there. It is well situated on the south-east part of the south side of Santo, on the bank of a river, opposite to the Islet of Aore. At this place, between Aore and the mainland, is a large bay with good anchorage. The French war-steamer "Fabert," Captain Bernier, spent recently, just before leaving for France, four months surveying this bay.

The ships that have been calling in this harbour since the 14th June afford a proof of the enthusiasm with which the French are striving to absorb the trade and secure the islands of the New Hebrides. On the 14th June, in the morning, the "Tenterden," after a stay of two hours, went out, followed by the French war-steamer "Saone" at a distance of about an eighth of a mile. In the afternoon H.M.S. "Opal" left, following the "Saone" to Noumea. From that time to the 7th instant the following vessels have called: Arrived 19th June, the mission schooner "Dayspring" (British), left 22nd; arrived 20th June, "Fairy Queen" (French), left 22nd; arrived 22nd June, steamer "Nickel" (French), belonging to the Nickel Company, Noumea, and with the manager of that company on board, left 23rd; arrived 28th June, "Telegraph" (French), from Noumea, left 1st July; arrived 2nd July, "Admiral Pallu" (French), from Noumea, left 4th July; arrived, steamer "Nickel" from a cruise through the group, and left for Noumea 6-7th July; arrived 7th July, a small vessel (French). The mission schooner "Dayspring," the only British vessel in the above list, is not a trader, and, so far as the development of New Hebrides trade is concerned, is as much French as English, for her work is a work that makes the islands safe for all nationalities, and in this connection the same may be said of the work of the English missionaries generally. The French are proceeding on the plan deliberately laid down on the formation of Higginson's company for procuring the annexation of the New Hebrides by France. The establishment of French marines in the group in 1886, and their withdrawal in 1888, has in no way altered or materially affected that plan; as it turned out it was only a little premature, that was all. The plan is to buy the land from the natives, and to buy out, or crush out by State-aided competition, the English trader—a process the more easy as the latter was not only not State-aided, but State-hindered and

-hampered. It is true that the French vessels of the above list are small vessels, but, owing to the proximity of Noumea, only small vessels are required. Meantime let our friends in Australia take note of the significant fact that the French company, which drew in its anti-English horns on the withdrawal (in March, 1888) of its marine associates, is now beginning again most arrogantly to push them forth in this place.

In a former letter I mentioned the visit of the French packet-boat "Tanais," with the Mayor of Noumea and others on board, and of the consequent proposed French municipality at Fila. It now appears that the formation of the Australasian New Hebrides Company had become known, and that this was in part a counter movement. It is this company that is referred to in the first paragraph of the following letter, which I give translated, from the new "Mayor" of Fila and "his colleagues in Noumea," who had by that time returned home in the "Tanais" to that place:—

"MESSIEURS,—The situation in the New Hebrides is accentuated. The Australian colonists, not content with a Press war against the French Hebridean enterprise, are throwing themselves into the lists with all the confidence given by an unlimited credit; from all sides rise up powerful companies specially created to dispute with us the preponderance in these islands. We have only, Messieurs, our union and our energy to resist this invasion.

"The creation of French municipalities in the New Hebrides is the most efficacious method of preserving intact the situation we have conquered with so much difficulty; for the rest, history shows us that it is above all in municipal institutions that the vitality of a race centres. The foreign sabre has often been blunted against these institutions. Small Holland, strong by its municipal organizations, is always mighty. . . . The aristocracy of Poland lives only in memoirs!

"We have, Messieurs, a great moral interest in showing to our adversaries that we are able—we also—to organize one of those self-governments of which they are so proud. For too long it has been agreed, even among our compatriots, that we are incapable of colonising. We will prove what a few French colonists can do by union of wills and concentration of efforts, concurring towards a common end, and if, in the future, success, prosperity crown our enterprise, the mother-country shall be happy and proud to count us among the number of her children.

"Messieurs, the Hebrides colonists are poor . . . and not able to ask pecuniary assistance from our Government, since international conventions condemn it to neutrality, but we can solicit our fellow-countrymen for aid by a public subscription towards the construction of a modest Town Hall, which shall serve for a rallying point to the French established in the New Hebrides; and I address myself to you, Messieurs, with a confidence wholly filial. . . . We are not the first colonial expansion of New Caledonia.

"I have the honour to be, M. the Mayor, MM. the municipal Councillors, your most humble and obedient servant,

"The Mayor of Franceville

"F. CHEVILLARD."

On receipt of this effusion the Noumean Town Council, as might have been expected, met and agreed to send their congratulations to the new Mayor of Fila, and to start a public subscription in New Caledonia as requested, and unanimously, without discussion, agreed to head the list with a sum of 1,000fr. (£40) from the Town Council of Noumea.

One curious fact brought out is that Mr. Macleod and M. Chevillard have jointly given a piece of their land (where the boundaries meet) for the erection of this proposed French Town Hall. The oldest settler in Fila, not a Frenchman, but a German, says he has no objection to the Town Hall, but draws the line at municipal taxation, to which he will not agree.

Sub-enclosure No. 3.

DEAR SIR,—

Cotham Road, Kew, Friday, 8th June, 1883.

I am sorry I could not sooner send you the required dates of memorials and petitions to the Queen for a protectorate, and for annexation of the New Hebrides Islands. I feel also sorry the following are so imperfect, as all such records are kept by Dr. Steel, the agent of our mission in Sydney, and now he is in Melbourne attending a Conference, but they can be got from him on his return; but at present I forward all I have been able to get from blue-books, though very imperfect, as a number are not noted in books now within my reach.

In A.D. 1862 the chiefs of Tanna sent a petition through me to Sir John Young, Governor of New South Wales, for a protectorate. He did not forward it. In A.D. 1868 a petition was presented to the Earl of Belmore by the New Hebrides Mission for Her Majesty the Queen. In A.D. 1868 a petition was presented to Lord Stanley by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, for Her Majesty the Queen. In A.D. 1872 a petition was presented to Earl Kimberley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, for the Queen. In A.D. 1874 a petition was sent to the Queen regarding the labour traffic, and implying a British protectorate, like all the above noted. In November, 1874, another petition was sent from Victoria regarding the "slave or labour traffic," and a protectorate. In A.D. 1874 or 1875 a petition was sent by the natives of Efate, per Lieutenant Carey, of H.M. gunboat "Conflict," which was presented, for annexation like Fiji, as they expressed it, through Mr. Macdonald. In A.D. 1877 the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, and the Free Church of Scotland, and the Mission, all sent petitions to the Queen for annexation of the New Hebrides to Great Britain. In A.D. 1882 a petition was sent from a Conference which met in Sydney, representing all the Presbyterians of Australasia, and others followed from Victoria, and South Australia, and Tasmania, and the New Hebrides Mission, and the natives, and the Free Church of Scotland, to the Queen, entreating the annexation of the group to Great Britain.

The above will show you that the subject has been long before the minds of the natives, the missionaries, and Europeans on the islands, and all the churches at Home and in our Australasian Colonies, which have been engaged in the work of civilising and christianizing the New Hebrides Islands.

In the Conference of the Australasian Presbyterian Churches which met in Sydney in April of last year I pleaded for British annexation of the New Hebrides Islands, on account of eight reasons which I have written out to you and enclose, and which led to the six petitions being sent to the Queen, as above referred to, for annexation to Great Britain.

Thanking you heartily for the cordial reception of our deputation, and wishing you every blessing in Christ Jesus,
The Hon. James Service, Premier.

I remain, &c.,
JOHN G. PATON.

[I enclose this from Dr. Steel, Sydney.—JOHN G. PATON.]

SOME ten years ago, when an abortive effort was made by a number of private individuals to form a settlement in New Guinea, representations were made to some of the Colonial Governments on the importance of the annexation of New Guinea by the British Government. At the same period simultaneous efforts were made by Presbyterian Churches to the Governments of Australasian Colonies respecting the annexation of New Hebrides. The labour traffic at that time excited great interest on account of its many inhumanities. The Government of New South Wales, at the period referred to, formally agreed to recommend the annexation of New Guinea, the Duke of York Islands, New Britain, New Ireland, and the New Hebrides. Sir John Robinson, then Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, addressed a communication to the Earl of Kimberley, the British Minister for the Colonies, urging the importance of annexation. The answer of the Earl of Kimberley was unfavourable; but the correspondence which was published by the Government of New South Wales shows that this proposal is not now urged for the first time. The population of natives in the New Hebrides is rapidly declining, and these islands will certainly be annexed by some power, as they are well fitted to grow all kinds of tropical spices and other fruits. They were discovered for the most part by British navigators, traded with by British vessels, regularly visited by Her Majesty's ships of war, and justice frequently administered by Her Majesty's naval officers, and finally evangelised by the labours and munificence of British subjects.

No. 2.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

(Telegram.)

Wellington, 17th September, 1889.

Co-OPERATE with Victoria at Colonial Office respecting possible annexation New Hebrides by France, or settlement there of liberated convicts from Noumea.
H. A. ATKINSON.

No. 3.

The PREMIER, New Zealand, to the PREMIER, Victoria.

(Telegram.)

Wellington, 17th September, 1889.

YOUR letter 29th August *re* New Hebrides. Have wired Agent-General to co-operate with you at Colonial Office.
H. A. ATKINSON.

No. 4.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 17th September, 1889.

I have received to-day your telegram directing me to co-operate with the Victorian authorities at the Colonial Office with regard to any possible annexation of the New Hebrides by France, or the settlement there of liberated convicts from New Caledonia.

There is not the least danger of France annexing the islands, for such a step would be in open contravention of the recent agreement between the French and English Governments, so that on that point you may rest assured. On the other hand, as to *libérés* from New Caledonia going to the islands, I have always felt there was a very great risk; nor is it clear how they can be prevented doing so. At any rate, I am very certain that after all that has happened on the New Hebrides question, the Foreign Office will, on its part, do nothing whatever that is not strictly within the mutual engagements between France and England which are embodied in the agreement.

But as soon as I know what the Victorian Government has directed Sir Graham Berry to do in the matter I will, of course, do all I can, as you desire, to support the action he may take.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
F. D. BELL.

[Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, nil; printing (1,300 copies), £2 10s.]