

V.—Fiji, Friendly Islands, and New Caledonia.

of these islands and many of his principal chiefs much desire British protection, and that the establishment of such a protectorate would be popular and acceptable to all the Christian part of the population.

Captain Maxwell, however, points out that a considerable portion, probably about one-third, of the native population are still heathens. Some portion of these are, however, probably really Roman Catholics, but I do not at the present moment anticipate any hostility to the British race upon the part of any of the natives of the Friendly Islands, whether heathen or the contrary.

The whole population of the Friendly Islands are estimated by Captain Maxwell at something less than 18,000 souls, and he states that he regards them as pre-eminently capable of improvement, being in his opinion the finest of the Polynesian race which he has seen, having all the aptitude of learning usually possessed by that race, combined with an energy of character, perseverance, and ingenuity, qualities in which he considers the Polynesian race generally as deficient.

Captain Maxwell was not able to visit the Fiji Islands in order that he might ascertain the accuracy of the statements which have reached me of a desire existing on the part of their principal chiefs of being brought under the protection of Great Britain. I have, however, no reason to doubt that such is their wish. I am informed that the inhabitants of this group amount to nearly 300,000 souls.

Upon the whole, then, it may be calculated that, should Great Britain assent to the desire of the inhabitants of the Friendly and Fiji Islands, and allow them to cede the sovereignty of their country to the British Crown, or should those islands be in any way occupied, a population of about 320,000 souls would come under British control.

Under any circumstances, your Lordship will probably think it proper that some reply should be returned to the memorial forwarded by the late King of Tonga to Her Majesty on the 19th February, 1844, expressing their desire to become Her Majesty's subjects: of which memorial a copy was forwarded to me by the present principal chiefs of the Friendly Islands, in another letter, upon the 28th August last. I have enclosed for your Lordship's information a copy of this letter, and of the original memorial, which show that for nearly four years the inhabitants have not departed from the intention expressed in the memorial of their late King. If it is not thought prudent that any reply should be returned to this memorial, your Lordship will instruct me whether Her Majesty's Government would wish me to comply with the request of these islanders, that I should visit them and advise with them upon their present state, or what answer they would wish me to return to such applications for the future.

The circumstances which have recently transpired in reference to the islands of the Pacific induce me to offer for your Lordship's information the following general observations upon the existing state of British interests in this quarter of the globe, which may, perhaps, not be without interest to your Lordship.

Great Britain in occupying New Zealand took a very important step. In occupying these islands she secured a country offering excellent harbours for her shipping, affording supplies of timber of the finest quality for ship-building, flax for cordage, ample supplies of coal, and provisions of every kind.

But these islands, moreover, present another remarkable advantage for Great Britain. Colonies in time of war are generally objects of great concern and of considerable expense to the mother-country, as presenting weak points to an enemy upon which he is likely to seize; whilst in the case of New Zealand, from the warlike character of its inhabitants, their aptitude for military service, and their growing attachment to Great Britain, there can be no doubt that, so long as it is so governed as to secure the affections of its inhabitants, it would in time of war be perfectly safe as against any force which a European Power could detach to these seas, but it would even be able to afford valuable and powerful assistance in time of need for the protection of our neighbouring Australian settlements.

At the present moment, also, this Government could, in the event of any war with France, immediately raise a force which could without difficulty take and hold the French possessions in these seas.

In the same manner, I think that any extension of our possessions in these seas would not be a source of weakness but of strength, if such possession was assured with the consent of the inhabitants of the territory occupied, and if their good-will was retained, which it easily might be. The islands of the Pacific would all soon afford a sufficient revenue for their own Government, and a sufficient force not only for their own protection, but for aggressive movements against any other Power, should a necessity for such movements ever unfortunately arise.

On the other hand, it must be observed that these islands would present the same advantages to France, or to any other Power which might occupy them with the consent of its inhabitants, and this disadvantage would then be presented to Great Britain: that France could at any moment raise in the Pacific a very formidable force within a few days' sail of Great Britain's valuable colonial possessions in Australia, whilst France would at the same time have within her own colonial possessions in this quarter of the world a native force which could, even if large detachments were made for aggressive purposes, hold their own islands against any force which we could detach against them, and this without occasioning the slightest drain upon the military resources of France.

It may be urged that the now unoccupied islands may still remain unoccupied by any European Power, but I think that such a supposition must prove incorrect. Some European Power must interfere to prevent the disturbances which will certainly take place, and which have already commenced, and it is hardly to be doubted, looking to the advantages they offer, but that some European Power will avail itself of so plausible an excuse to occupy these islands, even if this should be done without the consent of the inhabitants of them; and I then think, from the character of the Polynesian race, and from their aptitude for civilization, that they would in a few years overcome any antipathy to the occupiers of their soil, and become amalgamated with them.