

from Mr. Cameron (formerly an officer in the Ministry of Mines in this Colony), replying to certain statements of the Press that he represented a syndicate of speculators with the object of purchasing land in New Guinea.

2. Mr. Cameron admits that a purchase of land (some twelve thousand acres) was made by him from the natives, but states that it was made in the most fair and legitimate way.

I have, &c.

The Right Hon. the Earl of Derby.

AUGUSTUS LORTUS.

Enclosure.

[Extract from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of November 23, 1883.]

AN ACCOUNT OF MR. JOHN CAMERON'S VISIT TO NEW GUINEA.

SIR,—

To the Editor of the "Herald."

I left Sydney on the 21st July last to visit New Guinea, and I arrived back in Sydney on the 15th instant.

I find that statements have been made in various public journals with reference to my visit, and these statements are to the effect that I represented a syndicate of speculators in Sydney, that the sole or primary object of my visit was to "grab" land from the natives for next to nothing, and I am told that the proclamation by the Queensland Government, that purchases of land from the natives of New Guinea would not be recognized, was mainly caused by my late visit.

Instead of answering categorically these several statements, I will simply state the facts of the matter.

I am a geodetic surveyor, and hold one of the highest positions on the trigonometrical staff of New South Wales, and have been connected with the surveying staff of that colony since 1875. During the years 1869, 1870, and 1871 I was employed in a private business as surveyor in Fiji, and surveyed and laid out the Town of Suva, the present capital of Fiji, and at the same time I selected and bought a thousand acres of land on the Navua River. During my sojourn in Fiji I became thoroughly acquainted with the language and customs of the natives, and had considerable experience as to the employment of native labour. I was also employed in sugar and cotton growing. I had, whilst in Fiji, considerable experience in the buying of land from the natives, and I may state that none of the purchases made by me, or under my supervision, have ever been upset, although they were investigated by a Commission appointed for the purpose by the Government appointed by the Home authorities. Purchases also in New Hebrides, made by British naval officers and others on exactly the same terms as those I made in Fiji, have never been questioned. At the beginning of this year I had twelve months' leave (without pay) granted me. After my leave commenced I was induced to undertake a survey of a large tract of country, which occupied my time for some six months. On my return to Sydney I heard, like the rest of the public, a good deal of talk about New Guinea. When in Fiji I had, and ever since have had, a strong inclination to visit New Guinea, and, as I had nothing particular to do for the rest of my leave, I determined to pay that country a visit. My idea was that, in the event of New Guinea coming to the fore, my knowledge might prove of considerable professional value to me, and I also intended to see if any other than Port Moresby might prove a better port, and, if so, to take up land there. I also thought it quite possible that I might find auriferous lands. I estimated roughly that such a visit would cost me about £500, including the cost of a small schooner with which to survey the coast and rivers. I saw a gentleman in Sydney with reference to buying a boat, as I knew he was interested in a company which employed a great many boats on the coast of New Guinea, and he at once offered to afford me every assistance, and offered to join me in the venture. I accepted his offer, as I considered that having the benefit of introduction to his commercial connections in the Torres Straits and coast of New Guinea would be much better than going, as it were, alone. (The word "syndicate" is comparatively new to me, and I must leave to others to decide, from the above facts, whether I represented a syndicate of land-grabbers in any sense of the word.)

I left Sydney, as before stated, on the 21st July last, and Thursday Island, the 6th August, and took nineteen days to sail to Port Moresby in the "Alice Meade," of fourteen tons. I found there were some eight hundred natives at Port Moresby, with some six white men. The natives are, in my opinion, indifferently honest, except those, as a native naively explained to me, who have not felt the civilizing effects of the white man. I noticed that further inland the natives had more sense of decency in dress than in the neighbourhood of the missions. The cause of this I am unable to explain. The natives of New Guinea do not appear to me to average over 5 feet 4 inches. They appear intelligent, and will work well for themselves, but not for employers. The country around Port Moresby disappointed me greatly, as there was a total absence of tropical vegetation, and the soil for a radius of some ten miles appeared very sterile. I travelled 125 miles along the coast (from long. 146°0 to 147°30), and went thirty-two miles inland, and formed a general opinion of the country for over ten miles inland along the 125 miles. The land I saw was low and flat, and the sago palm appeared very prevalent, which from my experience is evidence of poor swampy soil. The principal vegetable productions are yams, sweet potatoes, bananas (which latter are of a very inferior quality), sago, arrowroot, cocoa-nuts in limited number, sugar-cane, bread-fruit, mummy apple, beetel-nut, and tobacco; but noticeable by their absence were oranges, grandillas, guavas, and limes. I did not discover that the missions had done anything in increasing the variety or improving the edibles of the natives. Tobacco, cotton, coffee, and sugar could unquestionably be grown in New Guinea: but there is but a limited quantity of land fit for such purpose along that portion of the south coast which I saw, for the coast land is, as already stated, poor and swampy, and the valleys are far too narrow; and, from all the reliable information I could gather, the same objection to the land exists all along the south coast. I now come to the subject of the purchase of land which I made. I bought some 12,000 acres, of which I estimate 1,000 acres to be fit for