

may appear proper. It will be seen that Mr. Lawes designed that it should be made a public paper. I shall be glad if this may be its use.

The Right Hon. the Earl of Derby.

I am, &c.

GEORGE PALMER.

Enclosure.

DEAR MR. PALMER,—

Port Moresby, New Guinea, September 21, 1883.

I had the honour of addressing you some time ago respecting the annexation of New Guinea, and I want now to call your attention and that of the society you represent to a case of gross injustice, by which it is sought to deprive the natives of a large tract of country.

The district of Kabadi, in Redscar Bay, about sixty miles from here, comprises a number of villages, with a population of about two thousand. The soil is particularly rich, and admirably adapted for the growth of sugar-cane. It is the more valuable from the fact that it is bounded on two sides by navigable water, a salt-water creek on one side and a fresh-water river on the other.

This has excited the cupidity of some adventurers, who see in it a source of speedy wealth. A land surveyor named Cameron, said to represent some Sydney syndicate, went three weeks ago, in company with a Mr. Goldie, to Kabadi, and they profess to have bought 15,000 acres of land from the natives.

We are well known at Kabadi, and the day the land speculators left we arrived on a visit to the people to select sites for teachers' houses. We found that a large quantity of trade, such as the natives prize most highly, had been given them, but they had no idea that it was in payment for their land. One chief led Messrs. Cameron and Goldie about (neither of them had ever been to Kabadi before), and when he saw it was an opportunity for getting tomahawks and tobacco he told them that the land they had seen was his. They accepted his word, guided his hand to sign a paper, the meaning of which he did not know, gave him about ten pounds worth of trade, put up their marks, and now claim to be the rightful owners of the land. The true owner of the soil they never saw, and he was in utter ignorance of the whole transaction. On the speculators' own statement, they gave seventy pounds worth of trade away altogether at Kabadi, and claim fifteen thousand acres of land valued by a scientific agriculturist at £2 an acre. They have now gone along the coast to make other purchases in the same way. When they have obtained some thousands more acres of the best land in New Guinea they will probably ask the British Government to ratify their title and secure to them the lands which have been the hunting-grounds and garden-plots of the natives for many generations. It is here that the Aborigines Protection Society can be of great service in protecting the natives of New Guinea. Before the so-called purchases can be utilized as sugar lands a large amount of capital will be required to procure the necessary plant of machinery, &c., and no capitalists will advance money unless their title to the land is recognized by the British Government. We feel sure that, if the facts of the case are laid before Her Majesty's Advisers, they will never sanction the whole sale transfer of native lands, especially when it carries with it no responsibility with regard to the future of the true owners of the soil.

In the above case the claim must be void, from the fact that the vendor was not the owner and had no right to sell; also that the parties to the contract on the one side did not understand its terms. But cases may arise in which the owners understand the terms and yet dispose of their land: a display of new axes, red cloth, beads, and tobacco would entice almost any native to give up his land, but he would soon repent when he saw his ancestors' lands possessed by foreigners. Surely no Government will recognize any contract made under such circumstances between two such unequal parties. Let it be distinctly known that the Government will not recognize any purchases of land from natives by private individuals and an immense amount of trouble will be saved. If not, collision with the natives is inevitable, and British interests will be damaged for the aggrandisement of a few land-grabbers and sugar-planters. The evil that must ensue to the natives is self-evident. A large influx of foreigners, for whose good behaviour no one would be responsible, and who would be under no restraint but self-interest, could only result in cruelty, wrong, and injustice: the natives would soon be cleared off the land.

Whatever the relations between the British Government and New Guinea may be, it is of first importance that the land of the natives should not be at the mercy of white men "making haste to be rich." If there is to be any transfer of native land, it should only be through the representative of a responsible Government. Only thus can anything like justice be secured between barbarous and civilized races. It is not only the immediate owners of the soil that have to be considered, but the interests of the natives generally. Every district such as that of Kabadi supplies a large outside population with food in return for pottery and other articles of trade. The alienation of any large tract of country would cut off the food supply of neighbouring places, close a large market, and stop useful native industries. These are responsibilities which none but a representative of a civilized Government can assume, and no other can protect native interests.

I need not encroach further on your valuable time. I am writing also to the Secretary of our own society, the London Missionary, and I trust steps may be taken at once to obtain from the Government a declaration that will put a stop to speculation in native lands. A statement made by the Earl of Carnarvon some years ago in reference to a proposed New Guinea Colonization Society quashed it at once, and, more recently, a reply of Sir Arthur Gordon's to a similar association in Victoria had the same effect.

Apologizing for the length of this, I remain, with very kind regards,

Yours very sincerely,

G. Palmer, Esq. M.P. Member of Aborigines Protection Society.

W. G. LAWES.