

5. The French Government, after long parliamentary discussion, have come to the conclusion to resume sending *récidivistes* to New Caledonia. This continued deportation of criminals not only casts a stain on the islands held by France in the Southern Seas, but affects most prejudicially the whole of the British Australasian possessions. Whatever law may be passed by the colonies to prohibit the landing of French convicts on their shores cannot effectually answer the purpose desired. Of course the tendency of such an influx of criminals is to lower the moral tone of the colonists. The convicts sent to New Caledonia comprise people hardened to crime, both by descent and education. If the foul blot of convictism could be removed, there would be an enormous gain to all the colonies; and the question the Presbyterian Church has to consider is, what sacrifice it is prepared to make to secure the inestimable advantage of putting an end for ever to the transportation of criminals to the Southern Seas.

6. It should be clearly understood that the proposals are not only that convicts shall not be deported to the New Hebrides if these islands are acquired by France, but also—

- (a.) That convicts shall not for all future time be sent to New Caledonia, nor to any of the French possessions in the South Pacific, and that this agreement shall be ratified by treaty.
- (b.) That the trade rights and commercial privileges granted to Frenchmen shall be also open to British subjects residing in or resorting to the New Hebrides group. This has been arranged regarding Raiatea, and a similar arrangement would be made regarding the New Hebrides.
- (c.) Adequate safeguards are to be provided that religious freedom will be maintained throughout the group, and that the present missions shall be protected in their property, their rights, and their privileges.
- (d.) That France shall cede to England the Island of Opara or Rapa, and also shall not stand in the way of Rarotonga, or rather the Cook or Hervey group, being annexed by England if the natives are willing.

7. You will recognize the enormous importance of the last-mentioned cessions when I state that the Cook or Hervey group has been civilized by English missionaries; that this group and Opara lie near the French territory of the Society and Austral Islands; and that, if they are not obtained, England has no outposts in the Eastern Pacific. From an Imperial point of view, supposing the question were not complicated with that of the Presbyterian Mission, there is no doubt whatever that it would be of far greater advantage to England to obtain Opara and the Hervey group than the New Hebrides group. I trust that your Church will carefully consider this point.

8. If the present negotiations were to cease it is quite possible the French Government might find a pretext, in special French interests alleged to be jeopardized, to annex the New Hebrides group without any of the concessions I have mentioned. The extent and nature of the justification of such a course would take years to discuss and unravel, and meanwhile the flag would fly. I do not suppose for one moment that your Church, or any of the people in the colonies, would in such an event urge Great Britain to go to war with France, nor, were England urged to do so, is it likely that heed would be given to such a recommendation.

9. I have endeavoured to place the position fairly before you. I do not undervalue the responsibility which is thrown upon you, nor the magnitude of the sacrifice to which you are asked to assent. I recognize that treaty engagements may possibly fail to so effectually secure you that liberty of action which the Church enjoys under the present *quasi*-British protection. I recognize that the exclusiveness of your missionary work may be impaired. I recognize also that, having engaged in your labours on the faith of the territory being denationalized, you have a right to protest against a change so subversive of the conditions under which you entered on your mission. I admit also that, in the face of your continued opposition, it is improbable the many British communities concerned will consent to the cession. I have felt it my duty to point out the contingency of the French taking the law in their own hands. But, in coming to a decision, I would rather you would consider that with you rests the power of assenting to the proposals under consideration, or of absolutely vetoing them. It would ill become me to lessen the heroism of any sacrifice you may decide to make. I see also the vast weight that the necessity of coming to a decision imposes on you. Nevertheless, the Church must accept its responsibilities, and it is called upon to decide between the interests of the two races. On the one hand, by consenting, it may impair the effectiveness of its efforts to bring the natives to a sense of religion and civilized usages; on the other, if it refuse, it must condemn the European races of all the territory in the Southern Seas to continue under the withering and baneful influences of near proximity to convict settlements constantly replenished with fresh criminals. The extent to which your usefulness to the natives may be lessened is uncertain; but there is no question of the moral harm the European races will sustain if your consent be withheld. You have to choose between a possible diminution of the good you are able to do to the natives, and the bestowal on the white population of a vast moral boon which will earn for your Church the gratitude of the colonists and their descendants for generations to come.

10. As I am in correspondence with the Agent-General, and with the Imperial Government, through His Excellency, on this subject, I hope you may be able to give me an early expression of the determination at which your Church arrives.

The Rev. T. R. Cairns, Sydneyham.

I have, &c.,

ROBERT STOUT.

No. 41.

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

NEW HEBRIDES: Referring your telegram 19th March, trust Bell is still maintaining firm attitude. Lord Granville having promised consult colonies prior to answering French proposal, everything now