

with the perpetuation of that taint of abandoned and derelict crime from which some of our colonies in their early days so severely suffered, and whose effects are perhaps even yet felt, it will be difficult to make the new nations of the Southern Seas for ages to come believe that its cause is the cause of right and justice, or its people a people who really love liberty and civilization. I would rather hope that a people like the historic French nation, of naturally great and generous instincts, ever proud of its fair fame and sacrifices for freedom, whose citizens have been always welcome to visit or to abide with equal privilege in our colonies, and who have yearly multiplying relations of prosperous commerce in those seas, will recognize, on due remonstrance, that it is not to their own honour or advantage to maintain as their sole representative settlement in the Western Pacific that which is regarded by the adjoining States as a source of danger and infection, and a cause of ill-will and bad neighbourhood. The colonies can and will protect themselves, as you well know, but the strict moral and material quarantine by which they must do so may unhappily involve great danger to the friendly relations which it is their most sincere wish to cherish with the French people.

6. Mr. Bramston, in his letter of the 22nd instant, states that the French Government have explained that a further supply of labour must be provided for their islands in the Western Pacific, and that for this purpose they must send out further convicts, unless they can secure the necessary labour by acquiring the New Hebrides. But why should the annexation of the New Hebrides be necessary in order to obtain supplies of labour for New Caledonia? It is not surely intended to reduce the people of those islands to a state of servitude. At present their labour is freely recruited for the English colonies and for German settlements. It is this very reason which, when alleged as a ground for annexation, most revolts the Christian conscience of Her Majesty's colonial subjects. It is notorious that all that has been done to introduce civilization and religion among the races of the New Hebrides has been done by the people of Australia. They are shocked at the thought that it will all be most assuredly undone if the French convict and the native convert are to be compulsory associated together. I will take leave to cite here the four reasons given in the petition of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria to Her Majesty, forwarded in the despatch of Governor Sir H. Loch to Lord Derby on the 15th April, 1885: "First, because the inhabitants of the islands emphatically object to French authority, and earnestly desire to be under British rule. Second, because the civilizing influences and commercial enterprises that have made these islands accessible have been mainly promoted by British subjects. Third, because the action of France in the Loyalty and Society Islands shows that such annexation would be detrimental to the interests of the Christian missions already established on the islands at a considerable expenditure of money and sacrifice of life, of which your petitioners have contributed their share. Fourth, because the transferring to these islands of French convicts would not only result in serious injury to the natives, but become a source of danger to your Majesty's loyal subjects in Australasia." It was after submitting this petition to the Queen that Lord Derby wrote, not merely would no proposal for the annexation of the New Hebrides to France ever be entertained by Her Majesty's Government without consulting the Australian Colonies, but also "without securing conditions satisfactory to those colonies." Relying ever since on the pledge thus given on so solemn an occasion, it is easy to conceive the indignation with which the colonists now find themselves, after a year, confronted with the alternatives presented by Mr. Bramston's letter, and of which the one most odious to their feelings is pressed upon their acceptance. Mr. Bramston says that the New Hebrides form a part of the same geographical group with New Caledonia. I think the argument of natural geographical grouping has never hitherto been very attentively considered in the growth of the British Empire; and certainly, on the last occasion, when it might have been appealed to with some effect—I mean on the occasion when Germany was allowed to seize North-eastern New Guinea, with New Britain and New Ireland—the Australian Colonies had no reason to feel that it was much regarded by the British Government. But I submit that it does not involve much study of very large maps to conclude that there is none of the reasons which fall within the ordinary pale of geography which would not sustain, with greater force, the argument that the New Hebrides are more naturally related to the Fijian group of islands than to New Caledonia. Mr. Bramston declares that "French enterprise has made considerable progress in the New Hebrides." I am aware that there have been some lands purchased by French subjects; but it is notorious that the bulk of the trade of the islands is with Australasia, and that it is a growing trade; and that in the highest kind of human enterprise at least £160,000 have been spent by subjects of the Queen on building churches and maintaining missionaries. The result is simply and succinctly told in the words of one of the most venerable and devoted of those missionaries, the Rev. John Paton: "By God's blessing on our persevering labours ten of the native languages have been reduced to a written form, and other four are being reduced to writing. The Bible is translated, printed, and now read, by those who were once cannibals, in ten different languages; eight thousand natives profess Christianity; family worship is regularly night and morning conducted in every Christian family; and all things are rapidly changing under the blessed light and power of the Gospel. Life and property are now safe on the fifteen islands occupied by missionaries, and comparatively safe on the whole group." These results have been purchased not by gold nor by toil alone; the blood of Bishop Pattison and many another missionary martyr has sanctified the field of English Christian enterprise, whose inhabitants it is now contemplated to abandon to the lot of the compulsory labour-reserve of a French convict settlement.

7. While speaking in the temporary charge which I hold on behalf of the Government of Victoria, as I am instructed to do, I hope I may be excused if I add that their present policy is entirely in consonance with what my own early and intimate personal knowledge of those colonies would have led me to expect. Forty years have passed since I witnessed, as I may say, the dawn of the history of those now powerful and prosperous Commonwealths, and felt honoured, as I shall continue to do to my last day, in bearing my part in their early organization and government. I was witness to the strong national sentiment evoked even in those days by the attempt of the Imperial Government to continue and extend the convict system, and I feel sure that, if that policy