

information with respect to the reported and the unexpected action of the French Government in the New Hebrides.

Their lordships adjourned at ten minutes to five o'clock.

FRANCE AND THE NEW HEBRIDES.—(House of Commons, Thursday, 17th June.)

Mr. H. SPENSLEY asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether the Government had any definite knowledge of the asserted massacre of French citizens at the New Hebrides.

Sir M. HICKS-BEACH asked whether the Government had received any information as to the alleged hoisting of the French flag at the New Hebrides, and whether they could make known the contents of the communications that might have passed on the subject.

Mr. BRYCE.—In reply to the question of the honourable member for Central Finsbury and to the question just addressed to me by the right honourable Baronet the leader of the Opposition, I have to state that the only official information in the possession of Her Majesty's Government as to the reported massacre of French citizens at the New Hebrides is derived from the statement made to Lord Lyons by M. de Freycinet on the 10th June that a French company had sent a considerable number of Frenchmen to work in the New Hebrides, of whom several had been massacred by the natives. The rest had called upon the company either to make provision for their safety or to remove them. On the application of the company to the Governor of New Caledonia, two French ships had been sent with troops on board by the Governor to the places where Frenchmen were in danger. On that occasion M. de Freycinet added that it was possible that a temporary post might be established until quiet should be restored, but that the measure taken had no political significance, and that there was no question whatever of occupying the New Hebrides, or of anything tending to relax the obligations of France towards Great Britain respecting them. On the 14th instant Lord Lyons again saw M. de Freycinet, and represented the excitement both in England and Australia which the mere presence of French troops in the New Hebrides was calculated to produce. M. de Freycinet repeated in the most positive manner his assurance that France had no designs affecting the political condition of those islands, nor any intention of occupying them, and that she held herself bound by her agreement with England to respect their independence. He did not know whether any troops had been in fact landed, but, if there had been any put on shore, they would be withdrawn directly the emergency had passed away. The only official information respecting the hoisting of the French flag which Her Majesty's Government possess is contained in a telegram from the Acting British Consul in New Caledonia to the Governor of New South Wales, stating that he had reason to believe that the French flag was hoisted in the New Hebrides, and that he had made a formal protest to the Governor of New Caledonia. The commanders of two British ships of war now at the New Hebrides have been directed to report occurrences without delay. No report as to the hoisting of the French flag has yet been received from them. Lord Lyons has been further directed to call the immediate attention of the French Government to the reported hoisting of the French flag and to the excitement resulting from it, and to inquire as to the circumstances under which it took place, as well as to the particulars of the massacre referred to in the question. The House may rest assured that Her Majesty's Government is fully sensible of the gravity of the matter.

Sir H. MAXWELL asked how long a time must elapse before a telegraphic communication from the New Hebrides could reach England.

Mr. BRYCE replied that the New Hebrides were three days' sail from the nearest point in Australia from which telegraphic communications could be sent.

Sir G. CAMPBELL wished to know whether the Consul now representing the interests of this country in the New Hebrides was a paid Consul or a mercantile man.

Mr. BRYCE asked for notice of the question. All he could say at present was that the official in question was the Acting-Consul.

[Extract from the *Times*, Friday, 18th June, 1886.]

THE leader of the Opposition yesterday asked a question of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs concerning the alleged hoisting of the French flag at the New Hebrides. Mr. Bryce, in reply, gave the House such information as the Foreign Office possessed on the subject, and concluded with the significant remark that "the House may rest assured that Her Majesty's Government are fully sensible of the gravity of the matter." It appears that on the 10th of this month M. De Freycinet explained the situation to Lord Lyons, and stated that the French Government had no intention of occupying the New Hebrides or of doing anything which might tend to relax the obligation of France towards this country respecting them. Four days later M. de Freycinet repeated these assurances with even greater emphasis and particularity, stating explicitly that France held herself bound by her agreement with England to respect the independence of the New Hebrides. With regard to the alleged hoisting of the French flag, Mr. Bryce explained that the only official information received by the Government was in the form of a despatch to the Governor of New South Wales from the Acting British Consul at New Caledonia, stating that he had reason to believe that the French flag was hoisted in the New Hebrides, and that he had made a formal protest to the Governor of New Caledonia. This information is corroborated and to some extent amplified by the telegram from Sydney which we print this morning. It appears that the French transport which conveyed the troops has returned to New Caledonia. The troops are said to have landed on the islands and to have hoisted the French flag at Sandwich and Mallicolo, due notification of the establishment of military posts having been given to the several foreign residents in the islands. It should be stated, however, that no information of the hoisting of the French flag has been received by the Government from the commanders of the two British ships of war now at the New Hebrides.

After the solemn assurances given by M. de Freycinet, and solemnly repeated by him in reply to formal inquiries addressed to him by the British Ambassador—who, we may be sure, duly apprised him of the gravity with which the matter is regarded in this country—we are bound to