

Enclosure.

NEW HEBRIDES.—COLONIAL OFFICE MEMORANDUM.

IN January, 1878, the French Ambassador at this Court drew the attention of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to certain articles which had appeared a short time previously in the Australian Press advocating the annexation of the New Hebrides to the British Crown, with the view of forestalling any action which might be taken by the French Government in that direction.

Comte d'Harcourt stated that, without attaching much importance to this movement, his Government felt bound to declare that they had no intention of interfering with the independence of the group, and added that they would be glad to be informed whether Her Majesty's Government were equally disposed to respect that independence.

The reply of Her Majesty's Government was to the effect that they had no intention of proposing any measures to Parliament with the view of changing the condition of independence enjoyed by the group.

This correspondence was sent to the Governors of the Australasian Colonies, and forms the understanding—often referred to, and expressly renewed in 1883, by the exchange of *notes verbales*—on which Her Majesty's Government have relied when any apprehensions have arisen in Australia or elsewhere owing to the attitude assumed by the French colonial Press, or the movements of French vessels of war.

In January, 1886, the French Government inquired whether Her Majesty's Government would consent to waive their objection to the establishment of French sovereignty in the New Hebrides, if the French Government would pledge themselves not to send any more convicts to any place in the Pacific. Having regard to the strong protests of the Australasian Colonies against the continuance of transportation, Her Majesty's Government felt that this proposal deserved serious consideration, especially if the French Government should also be willing to cede the Island of Rapa; but, in view of the repeated assurances given to the colonies to the effect that the understanding arrived at by the two Governments would be maintained, Her Majesty's Government felt themselves precluded from entertaining any such proposal without first consulting the colonial Governments. The colonies were consulted, and objected to the proposal, which has consequently lapsed.

In June, 1886, Her Majesty's Government received telegrams from Australia reporting that French vessels had left New Caledonia for the New Hebrides with troops, provisions, and materials for barracks.

On reference being made to the French Government, it was explained by M. de Freycinet that in consequence of outrages committed by the natives of the New Hebrides upon French subjects engaged in working for a French company, which had appealed for protection to the Governor of New Caledonia, it had become necessary to send two ships with troops. These were intended to proceed to the localities in which Frenchmen were in danger, and, if necessary, to land troops and retain them there until the danger should be past and tranquillity restored.

It was stated that this intelligence had been telegraphed by the Governor of New Caledonia to the French Minister of Marine.

M. de Freycinet added that possibly a temporary post might be established until calm should be restored, but that the measures adopted were without any political significance; and he stated explicitly that there was no question whatever of occupying the New Hebrides, nor was there any intention to depart from the obligations contracted by France towards Great Britain as regards the independence of the group.

A telegram from the Governor of New Caledonia was sent from Sydney on the 15th July, 1886, to the French Minister of Marine, giving a list of the agents of the French company killed by natives in the New Hebrides. They were: One in 1882, two in 1883, three in 1884, seven in 1885, two in 1886: total, 15.

In addition to these, some other persons had been wounded or attacked.

Her Majesty's Government, while fully alive to the importance of maintaining in its integrity the understanding above referred to, were not entitled to object to any action which the French Government might take for the protection of French subjects or their interests in the New Hebrides, nor to define a time at which the French troops should be withdrawn, nor did they think it necessary or desirable to place in the islands corresponding detachments of British troops, in the face of repeated assurances from the French Government that there was no desire or intention on their part to infringe the understanding. They felt it, however, to be advisable that British interests should be maintained concurrently with French interests in the New Hebrides; and, accordingly, in the autumn of last year they proposed that a joint French and English Naval Commission should be appointed for the protection of French and English subjects.

This proposal was accepted by the French Government, who undertook that the evacuation of the islands by the French troops should take place upon the approval by both Governments of regulations for the guidance of the joint Naval Commission.

Draft bases of arrangement were forwarded by Her Majesty's Government for the consideration of the French Government in October last, and on the 1st November the French Government communicated certain counter-proposals, which were considered by Her Majesty's Government and in part accepted. The reply on this subject was made to the French Ambassador on the 26th November, and during a considerable interval no further communication was received from the French Government, in consequence, as it is understood, of the political changes in France. A despatch was addressed by Lord Salisbury to Lord Lyons on the 19th February, expressing regret that no reply had been received, notwithstanding the friendly attitude assumed by Her Majesty's Government, and pressing for an answer.

To this the French Government have replied that an answer might be expected almost immediately.