

and that he would be charged five shillings for a "permit to re-ship," besides the usual shipping fee, if he had no indorsement on the colonial form, which he exhibited.

2. The master of the vessel confirmed this, and added that any man shipping for the first time, or having lost his certificates, was charged five shillings for a "permit to ship."

3. I am not aware if this practice, which seems to prevail equally in New Zealand, is known to and approved by the Board of Trade. It appears to me that the shipping masters have no right to deprive a man of his certificates unless for misconduct, in the usual way, and I shall be glad to be furnished with instructions on this head. Neither can I find any authority in the Merchant Shipping Acts for the levying of the five shillings "permit fee."

4. I find great inconvenience from the fact that, in a "Form of Agreement with Crew," used by the colonies, there are no columns for the amount of wages paid to the men on leaving the ship, nor for their signatures in receipt thereof. I have always insisted on receipts being given on separate sheets, but these are liable to be lost.

5. Another improper custom is not infrequent: sailors are allowed to ship and sign articles on board, while in port, without going before the shipping master. In one instance that came before me no amounts of wages were enumerated, and my son, the Vice-Consul, fell in with a vessel in the New Hebrides with the crew in a state of mutiny, declaring that the agreement ("shipping on the day") was different to that which they had entered into not before the shipping master.

I hope I have not stepped out of my province in bringing these things to notice.

The Assistant Secretary, Commercial Department,
Board of Trade.

I have, &c.,

E. C. LAYARD,
H.B.M. Consul.

No. 21.

COPY of a DESPATCH from the Right Hon. Sir M. E. HICKS BEACH to
Governor the Most Hon. the Marquis of NORMANBY.

(Circular.)

MY LORD,—

Downing Street, 28th February, 1878.

I have the honor to transmit to you, for your information and for that of your Government, a copy of a letter from the Foreign Office, enclosing a communication which has been received from the French Ambassador at this Court with reference to the intentions of Her Majesty's Government in respect of the New Hebrides Group, together with a copy of the reply which I caused to be addressed to the Foreign Office.

I have, &c.,

M. E. HICKS BEACH.

Governor the Most Hon. the Marquis of Normanby.

G.C.M.G., &c. &c.

Enclosure 1 in No. 21.

The FOREIGN OFFICE to the COLONIAL OFFICE.

SIR,—

Foreign Office, 1st February, 1878.

I am directed by the Earl of Derby to transmit to you, herewith, to be laid before Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, a copy of a communication received from the French Ambassador at this Court, calling attention to certain articles which have recently appeared in the Australian newspapers advocating the annexation of the Islands of the New Hebrides to the British Crown, and stating that, although the French Government do not attach any great importance to this movement in favour of annexation, still, as they themselves have no intentions with regard to this group, they would be glad to receive an assurance to this effect from Her Majesty's Government.

I am now to state that Lord Derby proposes, with the concurrence of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, to inform the French Ambassador, in reply to His Excellency's communication, that Her Majesty's Government have no intention of proposing any measures to Parliament with a view of changing the condition of independence which the New Hebrides now enjoy.

I have, &c.,

The Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office.

T. V. LISTER.

Sub-Enclosure to Enclosure 1 in No. 21.

The Marquis D'HARCOURT to the Earl of DERBY.

M. LE COMTE,—

Ambassade de France, le 18 Janvier, 1878.

Il s'est établi entre l'île de la Nouvelle Calédonie et le groupe des Nouvelles Hébrides des rapports d'ordre commercial qui se sont rapidement développés, en raison de leur voisinage,