

1879.

NEW ZEALAND.

NEW HEBRIDES GROUP: A POSSESSION OF THE CROWN.

MEMORANDUM REGARDING THE VALUE OF THE ISLANDS FOR PURPOSES OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMERCE IN THE PACIFIC.

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Sir G. Grey, with the leave of the House.

MEMORANDUM ON SECRETARY OF STATE'S DESPATCH dated 10th October, 1878.

IN reply to the Secretary of State's Despatch, No. 48, of the 10th October, 1878, on the subject of the New Hebrides, I venture to remark as follows:—

2. I understand it to be admitted that the New Hebrides Islands were a possession of the British Crown, as indicated by commissions to several Governors of New Zealand; but that, the limits of the Colony of New Zealand having been altered, those islands no longer form a portion of the colony. This fact, however, does not affect the status of the islands as being a possession of the Crown, which they may still remain, although they have ceased to be a part of this colony. It appears that Her Majesty's Government have given to the Natives of those islands, as well as of other islands in the Western Pacific Ocean, protection from the misdeeds of British subjects, and have provided British subjects with Courts of Justice having civil and criminal jurisdiction; and that, having proceeded so far, it has no intention of doing more in the direction of a political protectorate.

3. I think that what has been done is not sufficient to meet the actual requirements of British subjects in Australia and New Zealand. What their interests require is that there should exist in the Pacific Islands forms of government which can insure protection of life and property, and Customhouse officers who can protect trade and prevent smuggling.

4. I base my views in this respect, in as far as New Zealand is concerned, upon the following facts and considerations:—

5. The New Zealand Islands lie in a great ocean, and are separated by long distances from any continent, and indeed from any land except those islands of the Pacific which lie in their vicinity. They are thus peculiarly safe from invasion, and from any chance of being overrun by a hostile army.

7. New Zealand has been endowed by Nature with coal fields of vast extent, which are very rich in workable strata. It also possesses water-power, in almost every portion of its islands, capable of being used in manufacturing processes. In addition to the precious metals, it contains iron in abundance, as well as copper. It further produces wool in great quantities; whilst the islands which lie nearest to it are capable of producing large crops of cotton, at a very moderate price. The same islands yield, in addition to most other tropical products, various materials from which oils of the most valuable nature may be extracted. All these circumstances combine to point out New Zealand as one of the great future centres of manufacturing industry; whilst, from the productive character of its soil, it yields food in the greatest abundance, and is therefore able to sustain a very large manufacturing population.

7. These great advantages can be only utilized by its commercial resources being developed in a degree proportionate to the increase of its manufactured goods, and by its having markets in which it may readily dispose of its commodities.

8. From the geographical situation of New Zealand, its commerce can only succeed by its possessing a population trained to the sea and composed in part of skilful sailors. A population of this nature is daily growing into existence. The coasts of New Zealand abound in harbours and deep ocean inlets, the shores of which are inhabited by an industrious people delighting in the sea, and carrying on already their intercolonial pursuits in fleets of small vessels built in the vicinity of the spots inhabited by their owners. Thus, not only is a hardy population of seamen being raised here, but, the forests of the country affording the finest timber in the world for constructing vessels, ship-building has become one of the main features of the industry of the North of New Zealand, and many vessels of a most superior class are annually built in the colony.

9. Many circumstances thus combine to raise here a nautical population, and to secure a large mercantile fleet fitted in every respect to carry on our commerce. It is worthy of remark that this state of things has long existed in New Zealand, showing that it springs from the natural resources and conformation of the country, which combine to develop human energy in the directions indicated; for, long before we occupied these islands, the aboriginal inhabitants were a race of seamen possessing large and admirably-constructed canoes, in which they navigated every portion of the coasts of these islands, and trained up their youth to be experienced sailors, so much so that, in many vessels trading in this part of the world, their services proved of the utmost value. They became most skilful whalers; and they are, I believe, unsurpassed as seamen by any other race of men.

10. Any attempt to confine the Anglo-Saxon race within the limits of the New Zealand Islands must prove a failure. It might as well be attempted to confine the birds of the ocean within the same limits. The disposition, natural instincts, and wants of that race will compel them to navigate the Pacific in every direction, and to cultivate relations of commerce with the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands, which relations will be more or less profitable, and more or less satisfactory as regards their humanity and all other respects, in exactly the degree in which life and property are allowed by good regulations to be made secure in the islands to which they trade, and in which their partners or agents must reside.

11. The same remark applies with greater cogency to the aborigines of New Zealand. They already, in some instances, visit Rarotonga, delighting to traverse, in small vessels which are their own property, the calm waters which lie to the north of New Zealand. This pursuit opens to them a field for their energies and love of adventure—a field of a most useful nature; and to attempt to shut those energies and this love of adventure within the limits of the native districts in these islands will be to insure future disturbances between the two populations. I believe that the best way to avoid this is to afford to the Natives full scope for the exercise of that love of action which is inherent in their youth, and which must find an outlet in some direction. In the Pacific Islands, advantageous openings could be found for the employment of many Natives of New Zealand, amongst races who speak languages nearly identical with their own.

12. These circumstances all point to the necessity of establishing a central government in each group of islands. But, in speaking of the establishment of such systems of government, it should be remembered that another important question is touched upon, for the islands are nearly all now greatly under-populated.

13. Mr. Des Vœux, in a message to the Legislative Council of Fiji, on the 29th January last, gives an estimate of the area of the Fiji Islands. In doing this he shows that one of those islands alone is as large as Jamaica, and much larger than Cyprus; that another of them would contain Mauritius three times, and Barbadoes ten times; and that the aggregate area of all the Fiji Islands is greater than that of all the British West India Islands (Jamaica, Trinidad, and the Windward and Leeward Islands). In short, he shows that the Fijis, with their soil and climate, have an area which would enable them to sustain a suitable population of from 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 souls.

14. Yet the Fiji Islands have at present a population of little more than 100,000 Natives, and a small European population. The same state of things prevail in other groups of islands in the Pacific, varying in proportion to their respective areas.

15. Now, if it is worth the while of Great Britain to go to a great expense to render life and property secure in Cyprus, and to establish good government there, surely it is much more worth the while of Australia and New Zealand to take care that life and property are secure in the most fertile of the islands in the Pacific—where there are many Cypruses—and that good governments are established in them. Indeed, their future safety from war, and troublesome disputes with other Powers, depends upon this being done; for the population of those islands will be displaced in various ways, and the gaps thus left will be filled by miscellaneous populations being poured into them, composed of elements difficult of assimilation, not readily susceptible of control, and whose entry into the islands should be carefully watched and provided for. This heterogeneous population will most probably be composed of some of the aborigines of each island, of inhabitants of other islands, of Malays, Chinese, runaway sailors of various nationalities, escaped convicts from the French penal settlements; and it is almost certain that the various persons making up the mass of those populations will contain amongst their number some of the most indifferent characters of the classes which they represent. Thus those islands will either be sources of wealth and commerce, and the abodes of contentment and good order, or sources of wild disorder, and the cause of long-continued and desolating strife.

16. Should Great Britain, however, determine to refrain from occupying the Pacific Islands, and to prevent its own subjects also from occupying those islands, whilst foreign Powers are to be permitted to take possession of them, then I think such a line of policy will be in effect, to say to the inhabitants of New Zealand—"We think it necessary to take care that the frontiers of the Indian Empire are not too nearly approached by any foreign Power, and to attain this object, and other ends in which you have no direct interest, we may often become involved in war. Whenever this happens, it will be your duty, as good subjects, cheerfully to make great sacrifices, by being prepared to bear the expense of fortifying your harbours and protecting your outlying settlements, to provide against descents being made upon you by the enemies with whom we are at war, and to prevent your commerce from being interrupted, nay, possibly, paralyzed. We now think it right further to intimate to you that it is our inten-

“tion not to permit you to occupy the various islands of the Pacific which lie in your vicinity, but
 “to allow foreign Powers to do so, and thus enable them, if they think proper, to shut you out
 “from a commerce upon which your future prosperity must greatly depend. We also shall thus
 “allow them an opportunity of forming, close to you, arsenals from which, at the very moment
 “a war breaks out, expeditions can issue to interrupt your commerce and to assail your coasts.
 “It will therefore be necessary for you at all times to maintain a considerable standing military
 “force and some naval force, and to incur a great and continued cost in so doing, in order to
 “protect yourselves from any sudden dangers that may arise from these causes; for, as we con-
 “duct negotiations without consulting you, and determine whether a war shall or shall not take
 “place without your having any voice in the matter, or being certain of having time afforded you
 “to make preparations to meet the exigencies that may arise from such a war, it will be necessary
 “for you to be prepared at any moment to meet a contingency which you can neither delay nor
 “control in any manner whatever. You must also remember that our policy relating to our
 “dependencies is a variable policy. At one time, a Government is in power which is determined
 “to hold the Empire together. After a short interval another Government may come into power
 “which may consider it wise to rid itself of all dependencies, as valueless and embarrassing to the
 “mother-country. Thus at any time your connection with us may suddenly cease. You should,
 “therefore, be prepared to meet this event, and to be in such a position as to be able to defend
 “yourselves, if necessary, against the foreign Powers we have assisted, by our policy, to occupy
 “islands in your immediate vicinity and to establish arsenals there.”

17. It should also be remembered that the products of the Pacific Islands are amongst the most valued necessities of life to the inhabitants of New Zealand; whilst, on the other hand, their products are articles most highly prized by the islanders. To incur any risk of closing a commerce so beneficial and lucrative to the two races would therefore appear to be unwise—nay, almost disastrous.

18. I think that a calm review should be taken of all these circumstances. A consideration of the misery and great expenditure which may be brought upon the British colonies in this part of the world by following one line of policy, whilst a vast commerce, wealth, and enterprise will be gradually called into existence by pursuing another course, must, I believe, afford convincing reasons in favour of the wisdom and justice of allowing the colonies either to annex to any colony by agreement, or to occupy, with the consent of the inhabitants, islands in the Pacific Ocean the cost of governing and maintaining which it may be willing to undertake.

19. I confidently think that a generous policy of this nature will raise feelings of gratitude in the minds of the colonists to the mother-country, and will bind the Empire in stronger bonds of union, producing results equally advantageous to the trade and commerce of the colonies and of the mother-country; and that to follow the opposite course of refusing to allow the colonies to assume the government of the Pacific Islands, and yet to permit foreign nations to do so, will ultimately result in unpleasant feelings towards Great Britain, and in a series of disasters, as years roll by, which can now be easily provided against. Surely, it is better for Great Britain to allow great, wealthy, and prosperous communities to develop themselves in this portion of the world, spreading the Christian faith, British laws, the English language and literature, this series of events proceeding quietly and regularly in a natural order, than to stint and impoverish communities capable of such a beneficial extension, thereby creating discontent in the minds of a people who, from sympathy and natural feeling, now cling so closely to the mother-country, and readily undergo many inconveniences and incur much expenditure to promote and sustain the greatness of the nation from which they have sprung, and in the might and beneficence of which they feel the greatest pride.

G. GREY.

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