

Enclosures.

[Extract from the *Times*, Tuesday, 3rd May, 1887.]

HOUSE OF LORDS.—THE NEW HEBRIDES.

The Earl of HARROWBY, in rising to call attention to the condition of affairs in the New Hebrides, and to ask what course is proposed to be taken with reference to this subject by Her Majesty's Government, referred to the continued presence of British soldiers in the islands of the New Hebrides, although there stands on record a diplomatic understanding between France and England that neither Power should do anything in contravention of the independence of the islands. The subject, he said, was an important one from three points of view. In the first place, it was important from the native point of view; secondly, from the Imperial and Australian point of view; and thirdly, and still more important, because if it was the fact that French troops were still in occupation of these islands the sanctity of all international engagements was called in question, or, rather, would be called in question if such an occupation was sanctioned by the Government of France. He could not but believe that it was the rashness or over-zeal of local authorities which had kept French troops in the islands, for, unless he had strong evidence to the contrary, he should be very unwilling to suppose that the French Government would for one moment take the line of showing such complete disregard of international undertakings. The islands, he might remind their Lordships, were discovered in the first instance by Captain Cook, and under the charter of 1840 they were included in the Colony of New Zealand. They consisted of about thirty islands extending over a length of ocean of about four hundred miles north-and-south. They were extremely rich, were more healthy than the rest of the Pacific islands, and contained several valuable harbours. The population, numbering from one hundred thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand, were rapidly becoming civilised, and the story of their civilisation and christianization by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland was one of the most creditable in our history. So far as any European language went English was the only tongue known in the islands, and the feeling of the natives towards English people was exceedingly friendly. In every island an Englishman might go about unarmed, though he did not know that quite the same could be said with regard to other nationalities. Australia was especially interested in these islands from their proximity to her shores, and she was in a panic lest they should become the home of the lapsed criminals of France. In quite recent times both France and Germany had shown their appreciation of the strategic and commercial importance of the group. He thought we had a right, when we found those islands civilised entirely by British enterprise, christianized by Scotch enterprise, and wholly British in feeling, to protest against their being handed over to any other country. France, of course, would like to have the islands for a labour-supply to her colony of New Caledonia. That labour question in the Pacific was one of the most terrible blots in our modern civilisation. A French Admiral, who had held a high position in the Government, recently stated in the Senate that the labour that France got from the New Hebrides was simply another form of downright slavery; and that might be accepted as undoubtedly true. In the French Chamber it had been announced that New Caledonia could not take more convicts, and that it would be well if she could get them over to the New Hebrides. Anything more pitiable than such a result he could not imagine. What was the legal position now between France and England as to the New Hebrides? Lord Derby wrote to the Colonial Office in February, 1878, enclosing a letter from the French Ambassador, calling attention to articles in Australian newspapers advocating the annexation of the New Hebrides to the British Crown, and stating that, though the French Government did not attach great importance to this annexation movement, still, as they themselves had no intentions with regard to that group, they would be glad to have an assurance to that effect from Her Majesty's Government. Lord Derby informed the Colonial Office that he proposed, if they concurred, to inform the French Ambassador that Her Majesty's Government had no intention of proposing any measures to Parliament with a view of changing the condition of independence which the New Hebrides then enjoyed. The Secretary for the Colonies concurred in this answer. As time went on the feeling in favour of annexation became stronger and stronger in Australia, and alarmed the French Government. A communication was made to Her Majesty's Government that the Government of the Republic felt it their duty to ascertain whether the declarations of 1878 still remained as valid in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government as in that of France, as otherwise they would feel it their duty to insist on the maintenance of the existing state of things. In a despatch to Lord Lyons, the noble Earl who was then at the head of Foreign Affairs (Earl Granville) had said that the agreement of 1878 was considered by Her Majesty's Government to be perfectly valid. On the 31st August, 1883, the English Chargé d'Affaires informed Lord Granville that he had left at the French Foreign Office a *note verbale* to this effect. Lord Derby, when at the Foreign Office, had assured the Australian Colonies that no proposal for the annexation of the New Hebrides would be entertained without consulting the Australian Colonies, and also without securing conditions satisfactory to those colonies. When the noble Earl opposite (Lord Rosebery) had been Foreign Secretary an offer had been made by France to give up the transportation of relapsed criminals if she might take the New Hebrides. That was refused by the Australian Colonies on being consulted, and the noble Earl had then informed the French Government of that refusal. There the matter rested; but in June, 1886, without any formal annexation on the part of France, or without the central Government at Paris being in any way connected with the matter, French troops were placed on the island. From a letter which he had received from a well-known Scotch gentleman at Melbourne, he understood that the French still occupied a military station, and were erecting what appeared to be permanent buildings and putting up wooden sheds either for convicts or for additional troops. He had had another letter, dated the 6th December, 1886, from another Scotch gentleman at Havannah Harbour, Exatè, stating that on the 1st June a military post had been established in that harbour with over a hundred French marines, and immediately afterwards a