

serious impression is that a British subject has no rights in the New Hebrides which a Frenchman is bound to respect. For I hear that in Havannah Harbour a fence erected to protect land belonging to the Presbyterian mission has been torn down, and cattle belonging to the company driven in to destroy the plantations. This property, a large tract of land, worth perhaps £4,000, was in 1882, in presence of the commander of Her Majesty's ship "Sandfly," legally transferred by the natives to the New Hebrides Synods, that they and their heirs for ever might be protected from any attempt to despoil them of their plantations by force or fraud. These plantations are the only means of support of the Christian natives. It is doubtless because they are Protestant Christians that they are so outraged. Mr. Macdonald intends appealing to Admiral Fairfax on his expected visit to this group at the end of the month. Should he obtain no redress he may well say that the Anglo-Saxon is played out and the French are masters in the New Hebrides.

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THE FRENCH AND THE NEW HEBRIDES.

In the *Times* of Wednesday there was a long account of the French occupation of the New Hebrides, part of which deserves more attention from the English Government and the English public than we fear it is likely to get at the present time. The French have not done much in the way of colonising the islands. The wrong sort of people have come out, and the majority of them have either died or gone back to France. It is very doubtful, however, whether the right sort of people would have fared much better. The climate is one in which white men cannot work, in which they may think themselves fortunate if they can even live. What the French have done is to establish a new and apparently flourishing slave-settlement. The plantations of the New Hebrides Company at Port Vila, in the Island of Vati, are worked by some two hundred men and women "recruited" from the other islands of the group, or from the Solomon Islands. Englishmen have not many stones to throw at other nations in respect of the trade in native labour. There have been horrors enough in the past to make them very chary of criticism on this head. But at least we took what seemed to be adequate precautions against obvious abuses. If they sometimes failed to answer the purpose, it was the fault of the agents through whom we had to work. The general success of our efforts is shown by the most significant fact that the New Hebrides Company, which is French, is obliged to employ Englishmen as recruiters. The reason for this can only be that the natives will not willingly work in any but English colonies. The protection they enjoy there is at least sufficient to make the service fairly popular, and it is only by deluding them into the belief that they are going to Queensland or Fiji that the New Hebrides Company is able to obtain labourers at all. The natives have very good reason for making this distinction. The vessels of the New Hebrides Company carry no Government agent, and are under no official supervision. There is no one to see that the natives are sent home at the end of the three years for which they are nominally engaged; and when they are sent home it seems, in the matter of money, to be pretty much as they came. A company which recruits its labourers in this fashion must regard with dismay the prospect of being left without military support in the event of a difficulty with its "boys;" and, in view of what is going on in Paris at this moment, it seems not impossible that the French occupation of the islands may be partly in the interest of the company.

All this would be no concern of Englishmen but for two considerations,—one is, that the military occupation, under cover of which the New Hebrides Company follows its trade, is in open violation of a treaty obligation; the other, that this violation goes on under the eyes of our own colonists. Few things, it may at once be admitted, are more difficult than to say when the fulfilment of a treaty obligation ought to be demanded at all hazards. In public as in private affairs there are rights upon which a wise man will not insist, though he is clearly entitled to them. He says frankly he could have them if he chose, but only at the cost of more trouble or more annoyance than the rights are worth. At the same time he will not, if he be really a wise man, ignore the risks in which thus to forego his rights may land him. The history of bankruptcy, for example, is to a great extent the history of dishonesty nourished by the supineness of creditors. A man does not care whether he can pay his debts or not, because he hopes that those to whom they are due will be equally indifferent. If the omission to enforce a right leads to the denial of other rights, it may be a more costly process than the enforcement would have been.

Is it quite certain that this may not be true of the French occupation of the New Hebrides? To our minds, we confess, it appears the very reverse of certain. Our conduct of foreign affairs, as we pointed out last week, is passing through a very critical stage. Eventually, we believe, it will regain the vigour, the decision, the willingness to submit to great sacrifices for great ends, which formerly belonged to it. But in the interval those qualities are wanting, and they are wanting at a time when Europe is uneasy, and when the action of every great Power is very closely scanned. It is useless to expect that England can sit still while an undertaking quite recently given to her by France is ostentatiously disregarded, and not suffer by her apparent indifference in the opinion of other nations. In what ways she may suffer may be seen by a passage in the *Hamburg Correspondent*, which was translated in the *St. James's Gazette* of Tuesday. The German writer sets out what the French have done in the matter, and then goes on thus: "Instead of categorically demanding the evacuation of the New Hebrides and the fulfilment of the undisputed agreement, England has confined herself to feeble representations. At the Colonial Conference in May, Lord Salisbury expressed himself so pusillanimously on the question that one of the Australian representatives assured him that his speech would have done the highest honour to a French Premier. . . . On the whole, we must regard England as in a very unsatisfactory position. Russia, France, and America are openly of opinion that, even under Lord Salisbury, it is time to say, as a Russian diplomatist remarked to the English Ambassador in St. Petersburg ten years ago: 'Resistance, my Lord—that is a word which no longer has a place in the English dictionary.'" If this extract represents the opinion held of England in Germany as well, the conclusion inevitably