

No. 11.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 12th January, 1888.

The yellow-books just issued by the French Government respecting the New Hebrides and Suez Canal Conventions form a curious contribution to the history of those diplomatic transactions. As regards the New Hebrides especially, a light is thrown upon the action of the French and English Foreign Offices which will be new to the public generally, though very little of it has not, for a long time past, been familiar to the New Zealand Government. I am preparing a *précis* on the subject, which may perhaps be of interest to you hereafter.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
F. D. BELL.

Enclosures.

[Extract from the *Times*, Saturday, 24th December, 1887.]

THE NEW HEBRIDES.

Sydney, 23rd December.

THE commander of Her Majesty's sailing schooner "Undine," which has arrived here from the Pacific, reports that the French commandant at the New Hebrides has received orders to evacuate the islands by the end of January. It is added that a French company is buying land from the natives and starting trading-stations.

[Extract from the *Times*, Saturday, 31st December, 1887.]

THE NEW HEBRIDES.

Paris, 30th December.

THE *Matin* this morning publishes a letter from M. Etienne, formerly Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, to M. Deschanel, a Deputy, and author of a book entitled "French Interests in the Pacific." In this letter M. Etienne declares the application of a mixed *régime* in the New Hebrides to be impracticable, and describes a division of the archipelago between France and England as the only logical solution.

[Extract from the *Standard*, Wednesday, 4th January, 1888.]

THE FRENCH IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

(From our Correspondent.)

Paris, Tuesday night.

ALTHOUGH it may be hoped that the Convention of the 17th November respecting the New Hebrides and the islands to the west of Tahiti has removed the causes of difference between England and France, the yellow-book just issued by the French Foreign Office on the subject possesses a more than merely retrospective interest. An attentive perusal of the documents now published leaves on the mind the impression that the French Government has obtained far more considerable advantages than it has granted. By the abolition of the Declaration of 1847, formally recognising the independence of Raiatea and other islands west of Tahiti, France has secured a tangible gain. The yellow-book opens by giving the text of the Declaration of 1847, which was jointly drawn up in London on the 19th June of that year by Lord Palmerston and the French Ambassador, Count de Jarnac, and it is clear, from the perseverance with which successive Ministers of Foreign Affairs in France from 1880 to the present day have been trying to obtain the abolition of that Declaration, that they attached to it very considerable importance. The first despatch which has a direct bearing on the question is a telegram from M. de Freycinet to M. Waddington, dated the 22nd July, 1885. In this communication he says that in the course of a conversation, Lord Lyons having expressed apprehensions lest a fresh convoy of *récidivistes* should be sent to New Caledonia, he replied that there was no present intention of doing so; but that, with a view of allaying the apprehensions of the Australians, he had suggested an arrangement by which the French Government would undertake to discontinue the transportation of habitual criminals to that part of Oceania, provided England would allow France full liberty of action in the New Hebrides. Lord Lyons asked whether the Loyalty Islands would be included in that arrangement, to which M. de Freycinet answered in the affirmative. Six months later, in a telegram to M. Waddington, dated the 9th January, 1886, he repeated the suggestion:—

"It would be well to remind Lord Salisbury that the Government of the Republic continues inclined to enter into certain arrangements concerning the transportation of criminals to Oceania, provided it felt certain, thanks to the possession of the New Hebrides, of obtaining from those islands a supply of free labour to develop the resources of the principal French colonial establishment in the Pacific."

On the 30th April Lord Rosebery informed M. Waddington that the British Government could not entertain the proposal of the cession of the New Hebrides to France. In June a French force landed at the New Hebrides to protect the French residents there, some of whom had been killed by the natives. The French Government explained that the occupation was only temporary, and protracted the negotiations over a year, during which time the Convention with regard to the Newfoundland fisheries and the proposal for the abolition of the Declaration with regard to Raiatea and the other islands west of Tahiti were mixed up with the New Hebrides controversy. The whole course of the negotiations is clearly summed up in a despatch from Lord Salisbury to Mr. Egerton, dated the 21st October, 1887, which runs thus:—