

since it springs out of the correspondence about land titles, these being in a very satisfactory position at that time. The French Commissaire Général had been requested to furnish his observations on the proposals made by the British Government with regard to the land claims in the New Hebrides, that is on page 1. The suggestion was that a local mixed commission would be necessary to deal with those land titles, but the French Government thought there would be objections to investing such a commission with full powers, and thought it would be advisable at least to specify the nature of the evidence which could be put on one side or the other. What was therefore suggested by them was not a commission to settle land titles, but only a chat between two officials to settle the terms on which evidence regarding these titles could be put in. The French Government suggested nothing more than verbal negotiations of a purely semi-official character between a French expert and a British official. That was the proposal. The translation given certainly does full justice to the French request, which will be found in the enclosure. Then comes the arrival of my August letter to which I have already referred. The French Government on October 5th agreed that the examination of title deeds should be trusted to a local mixed commission and suggested for the purpose of settling the powers to be entrusted to the commission, that the nature of the evidence which might be put in should be discussed in verbal negotiations of a purely semi-official character. That seems to me to be a little larger than the first proposal, "settling the powers to be entrusted" seems an addition, but it is immaterial. Needless to say, of all this correspondence we heard nothing and knew nothing. So far as we were concerned it did not exist. On November the 4th, the Colonial Office telegraphed to New Zealand to ascertain whether they were favourable to a joint Anglo-French protectorate. They received an answer given on page 5 to say: "If no better arrangement could be made. They would prefer annexation, but failing that the island should be divided." Next, on page 4, we find that the "functionary" named by the French is M. Saint-Germain, a senator of France, occupying a very considerable public position of influence in that country, and scarcely I should say, the kind of functionary contemplated in the earlier correspondence. In addition he is to be supported by two officials, one attached to the Cabinet of the Colonial Office of France, and the other attached to the Cabinet of Monsieur Clémenceau. We are thus prepared for the letter of December 6th, which shows that the next suggestion is that the scope of the commission should be enlarged to discuss the best means of terminating the difficulties which have arisen owing to the absence of jurisdiction over the natives of the islands. The French enclosure is given below. Then we find the Colonial Office informing the Foreign Office that three representatives of the French Government are expected in connection with establishing a land claim tribunal in the New Hebrides. Mr. Lyttelton, the Colonial Secretary, then submits, for the first time, that the opportunity should be taken to discuss verbally with them, if they were willing, the question of a joint protectorate. Of this, too, we knew nothing.

We pass on now to a further communication of January 9th, 1906, from the Foreign Office, enclosing a copy of a communication from the French Embassy. The chat between the two officials about evidence has become a Commission—"au sujet de la Commission des Nouvelles Hebrides" is the phrase used in No. 13. In addition to M. Saint-Germain, who has the title of "Commissaire," there comes Monsieur Picanon, a very capable and high official, who has just been Governor of New Caledonia, and Monsieur Weber, who is joint chief of the office of the Colonial Minister. In addition there is a Monsieur Gournay, who is to be secretary and interpreter.

Fourteenth Day.
9 May 1907.

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BRITISH
INTERESTS IN
THE PACIFIC.
(Mr. Deakin.)