British Missionary Letters Urging the Annexation of The South Sea Islands, 1883

Letter Published by John G. Paton, New Hebrides Mission:

For the following reasons we think the British government ought now to take possession of the New Hebrides group of the South Sea islands, of the Solomon group, and of all the intervening chain of islands from Fiji to New Guinea:

1. Because she has already taken possession of Fiji in the east, and we hope it will soon be known authoritatively that she has taken possession of New Guinea at the northwest, adjoining her Australian possessions, and the islands between complete this chain of islands lying along the Australian coast.

2. The sympathy of the New Hebrides natives are all with Great Britain, hence they long for British protection, while they fear and hate the French, who appear eager to annex the group, because they have seen the way the French have treated the native races in New Caledonia, the Loyalty Islands, and other South Sea islands.

3. Until within the past few months almost all the Europeans on the New Hebrides were British subjects, who long for British protection.

4. All the men and all the money used in civilizing and Christianizing the New Hebrides have been British. Now fourteen missionaries and the Dayspring mission ship, and about 150 native evangelists and teachers are employed in the above work on this group, in which over #6000 yearly of British and British-colonial money is expended; and certainly it would be unwise to let any other power now take possession and reap the fruits of all this British outlay.

5. Because the New Hebrides are already a British dependency in this sense---all its imports are from Sydney and Melbourne and British colonies, and all its exports are also to British colonies.

6. The islands on this group are generally very rich in soil and in tropical products so that if a possession of Great Britain, and if the labor traffic stopped so as to retain what remains of the native populations on them, they would soon, and for ages to come, become rich sources of tropical wealth to these colonies, as sugar cane is extensively cultivated on them by every native of the group, even in his heathen state. . .The islands also grow corn, cotton, coffee, arrowroot, and spices, etc., and all tropical products could be largely produced on them.

7. Because if any other nation takes possession of them, their excellent and spacious harbors, as on Efate, so well-supplied with the best fresh water, and their near-proximity to Great Britain's Australasian colonies, would in time of war make them dangerous to British interests and commerce in the South Seas and her colonies.

8. The thirteen islands of this group on which life and property are now comparatively safe, the 8000 professed Christians on the group, and all the churches formed from among them are, by God's blessing, the fruits of the labors of British missionaries, who, at great toil, expense, and loss of life have translated, got printed, and taught the natives to read the Bible in part or in whole in nine different languages of this group, while 70,000 at least are longing and ready for the gospel. On this group twenty-one members of the mission families died or were murdered by the savages in beginning God's work among them, not including good Bishop Peterson, of the Melanesian mission, and we fear all this good work would be lost if the New Hebrides fall into other than British hands.

For the above reasons, and others that might be given, we sincerely hope and pray that you will do all possible to get Victoria and the other colonial governments to help and unite in urging Great Britain at once to take possession of the New Hebrides group. Whether looked at in the interests of humanity, or of Christianity, or commercially, or politically, sure it is most desirable that they should at once be British possessions.

Letter Published by Dr. Steel, Sydney:

Some ten years ago, when an abortive effort was made by a number of private individuals to form a settlement on New Guinea, representations were made to some of the colonial governments on the importance of the annexation of New Guinea by the British government. At the same period simultaneous efforts were made by Presbyterian churches to the governments of Australian colonies respecting the annexation of the New Hebrides. The labor traffic at that time excited great interest on account of its many inhumanities.

The government of New South Wales, at the period referred to, formally agreed to recommend the annexation of New Guinea, the Duke of York islands, New Britain, New Ireland, and the New Hebrides. Sir John Robertson, then colonial secretary of New South Wales, addressed a communication to the Earl of Kimberley, the British minister for the colonies, urging the importance of annexation. The answer of the Earl was unfavorable, but the correspondence, which was published by the government of New South Wales, show that this proposal is not now urged for the first time.

The population of natives in the New Hebrides is rapidly declining, and these islands will certainly be annexed by some power, as they are so well fitted to grow all kinds of tropical spices and other fruits. They were discovered for the most part by British navigators, traded with by British vessels, regularly visited by her Majesty's ships of war, and finally evangelized by the labors and munificence of British subjects.