

New Hebrides.

LETTER FROM REV. H. A. ROBERTSON.

DILLONS BAY, ERROMANGA, Sept. 13, '87.

* * * By one of H. M. S. of War, sailing in about two hours time, I have an excellent opportunity of sending a note *via* Noumea, in New Caledonia. We are all well here. That is Mrs. R., two children with us, and myself. But there is much sickness amongst the natives all over this island, and has been for three or four months. There have been several deaths.

We have had four English Ships of War at anchor here at different times since January, and we expect one soon again. The French have not yet annexed the New Hebrides, but that step is only deferred. They will, in my opinion, take these islands when a suitable time presents. They have no idea of giving them up, and at present they are buying out, as far as they can, all English interests in the group, and the other step will follow in due time. England does not care one shilling about the islands, and but for Australia would not have made any objection to French annexation. A sad day for everything good when the French rule over these fair islands.

As a mission, if we get fair play, by God's blessing we have no fear of the Romish advance. Priests without an arm of flesh to back them up make poor headway.

We have settled, as you all know long since, Messrs. Leggett and Morton on Malekula, Mr. Landels on Malo, near Santo, and Mr. Annand on Tangoa, a small isle about an eighth of a mile from Santo.

At all these islands and places the natives were very friendly, and desired missionaries. At Malo especially were they rejoiced to get a missionary. Being at the settlement of Messrs. Landels and Annand I know these people and districts best. I would go to any of these northern heathen islands to-morrow if Erromanga was provided for; and I heard Mr. McKenzie say the same several times.

By this ship of war we have had letters from Messrs. Morton and Leggett of Malekula. They were well, but did not get much help from the heathen natives. We got no help from any heathen of Erromanga—only Christian natives ever helped

us here. On Malo the heathen helped more or less at the house building by carrying stones and the scantling and boxes and in clearing the ground for the house, but they do not help so well at regular work day after day.

You of course know from Mr. Annand or Mr. McKenzie about our shipwreck on Malo. It was a tame affair—a clear bright day, gentle breeze and a kind people upon whose coast we grounded and there stuck. But it was a good deal better than mid-ocean at night in a storm, and we were all thankful for such a comfortable lock. Still to be kept there for nearly a month and Mr. Annand anxious to get settled and others of us wishing to get to our work and stations, it soon lost all charm.

We have all got back to our stations more than a month ago, and doubtless feel better for the change and rest, and we rejoice that four men with their wives have been settled in this mission this year, with very good prospects of encouragement and success. Messrs. Watt and Laurie were appointed and went in the *Dayspring* to settle Messrs. Leggett and Morton, and Messrs. McKenzie, Fraser and myself were appointed to go in the *Cairndhu* to assist Messrs. Annand and Landels in their settlement. The first deputation did their work well, and we more than settled a missionary for we settled the vessel too. The *Dayspring* came and took us all to Tangoa, where both deputations settled Mr. and Mrs. Annand in quick time.

I would like to be assisting at the settlement every year of three or four missionaries in these islands until every good opening should be filled. But I question very much if the Canadian Presbyterian Church should prosecute or develope much more the work in these islands so far away. There is much force in what is said about Australasia taking hold here in good earnest, and leaving Canada and Scotland for mission fields nearer, which are abundant. And Australasia is beginning to take hold. She has now eleven missionaries in the mission here. Still Canada and Scotland ought to do all they can for the work their men here are attempting.

Sacrament dispensed on the 4th of this month at Cook's Bay.

Mr. McKenzie is going to Sydney in December.

Yours, H. A. ROBERTSON.