

BRITISH
COLUMBIA
AND VAN-
COUVER
ISLAND.

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No. 8.

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THE COLONIAL SECRETARY'S OPINION.

I HAVE read the correspondence accompanying the Secretary of State's Despatch No. 38,* of the 26th October, which his Excellency has been pleased to forward for the opinions of the Members of the Executive Council.

I am strongly averse to the division of the See of British Columbia, as proposed by Bishop Hill. If it is the intention of the present Bishop of this Diocese to continue to reside in Vancouver Island, I think it will be of advantage to this Colony that the See should be divided, but simply under the same limits as are contained in the commissions of the respective Governors.

I gather from the Bishop's letter that his Lordship would propose to continue, as it were, Metropolitan Bishop, and that the new Bishopric should be merely designated "New Westminster," but that the new Diocese should comprise the entire mining districts of the Colony, which will probably contain during the season of 1865 a population of from 15,000 to 20,000 white men. While Bishop Hill would desire to continue his jurisdiction over what no doubt is a very large area of the Colony, but an area which we are well aware is at present uninhabited by white men ;—

The Indian tribes on the northern coast are, with the exception of Mr. Duncan's admirable mission at Methlakathla, almost entirely converts to Christianity through the praiseworthy perseverance of the Roman Catholic Church ; and I should be very sorry to see any attempt made to shake their faith in their present religion by trying to convert them to a Protestant's belief.

It would therefore be little more than in the designation alone that Bishop Hill would continue to hold a portion of this Colony in connection with the Diocese of Vancouver Island ; a measure which would be extremely unpopular to the colonists in general, and be the means of further increasing the ill-feeling which already exists between the two Colonies.

From the correspondence it would appear that the sum which is actually required by the Crown before a new Bishopric can be formed is the only money forthcoming for the See of New Westminster. It will surely be asked by the inhabitants of this Colony, what has become of the large and munificent gifts of Miss Burdett Coutts and others ; which amounted, if I remember rightly, to from 16,000*l.*, to 20,000*l.*, and which was subscribed, I believe, solely to foster our Church in the mining districts of this Colony.

The Church of England is at present represented in British Columbia by an archdeacon and two clergymen. The former and one clergyman reside in New Westminster, the latter at Lillooet, a distance of 300 miles from the capital, leaving Yale, Quesnelmouth, and the many other smaller towns of the interior, as well as the mining districts of Cariboo and Kootenay, with a winter population of from 400 to 500 men in each, entirely unprovided with the means of religious instruction. It cannot therefore be said that British Columbia is at present deriving the advantage that might be expected from the large subscriptions of 1859.

I do not know what might have been done with the Indian population in the earlier history of the Colony, but I am convinced that it is too late now for the Church of England to attempt the work which has been so well carried out by the Roman Catholic Church. No better example of the work done by the two Churches could be given than on the occasion of the Governor's invitation to the river Indians on the 24th of last May, when over 4,000 came under the care and superintendence of one Catholic priest, Father Fouquet, while our own Church was represented by five individuals.

I think the experience of the last year tells us that it is the policy of this Government, for the present at least, to keep as much as possible under its own immediate control the trade and intercourse with the Northern Tribes, which even the ecclesiastical separation proposed would tend to weaken.

(Signed) ARTHUR N. BIRCH.

Colonial Secretary's Office.

January 5, 1865.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OPINION.

I have perused the despatch of the Secretary of State for the Colonies of 26th October 1864, No. 38, to Governor Seymour ;

That of 25th October 1864, from same to the Archbishop of Canterbury ;

And that of 6th October 1864, from the Bishop of Columbia to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and (I am fain to confess) with much surprise.

1. A proposal to divide the present See into the two separate Dioceses of British Columbia and Vancouver Island, conterminous with the two countries, and under separate Bishops, deriving their titles from their respective Sees, would meet with universal favour and acceptance.

2. The division, however, in the papers before me, is one which would be particularly obnoxious to all the adherents of the Church of England in this country.

3. The Lord Bishop of the Diocese is well aware of the exceedingly strong feeling of rivalry and antagonism that has sprung up within the last five years between this and the neighbouring Colony, taking its rise from unsatisfactory political relations, and thence extending to matters which should have been entirely free from such influence.

4. A division of the Diocese, consequently, which would seek to couple any part of British Columbia, or its dependencies, with Vancouver Island, will be received with the utmost disfavour throughout the whole land, and seriously injure and retard the sacred cause it proposes to serve.