

## THE NEW HEBRIDES SYNOD.

### AND THE MISSION STEAMER

[It has been customary to publish in the RECORD a summary of the proceedings of the New Hebrides Mission Synod. The official report of the recent meeting has not yet come to hand, but the letter of a visiting delegate has been received. The writer, Rev. Joseph Copeland, a son-in-law of Dr. Geddie, was formerly a missionary in the New Hebrides, but the health of his family necessitated his removal to Australia, where he now labors. The following is his letter in the Sydney (Australia) *Presbyterian*.—ED.]

### A VISIT TO THE NEW HEBRIDES.

Having been deputed by the Foreign Mission Committee of our Church and by the Dayspring Board, to attend the Mission Synod, I left Sydney on April 4, arriving back on June 2. In the interval I saw a good deal of the Mission in all parts of the group, and perhaps a few items may interest readers of the *Presbyterian*.

To begin with the Synod. The attendance was the largest ever seen. All the missionaries on the group were present, as also their wives (with three exceptions), their children and native nurses, making a party of nearly fifty. The most important question by far was the steamer for the Mission. This question was debated in all its phases on three several days, in all about thirteen hours. The following are the resolutions:—

"After prayerful, prolonged and very serious consideration of all the facts laid before it re the new mission steamer, this Synod, while heartily thanking the Victorian Church, Rev. Dr. Paton, and the generous donors in Britain, who have given their time, strength and money so unreservedly for this purpose, regrets that it had not an opportunity of discussing the subject before the vessel was ordered; and seeing that the matter was taken out of its hands by the action of the Foreign Missions Committee of the Victorian Church, and, as the suitability of the vessel is not assured, resolves that it leaves the matter for the present in their hands, to do what with the additional light now available should be done in the best interests of all concerned."

Thirteen voted for this motion, and four against it. The four, Messrs. Watt, Robertson, Macdonald, and Dr. Lamb, dissented from the finding of the Synod for the following reasons, which were received and ordered to be engrossed in the minutes, viz.:—

1. That it is admitted by the Synod's deliverance that the suitability of the vessel is not assured. 2. That it involves a very serious outlay of from £2500 to £4000 per annum, in addition to say £10,000 for the first cost, whereas for from £1500 to £2000 per annum, with no expense whatever for first cost, and with no responsibility, the Mission at present enjoys a vastly better service. 3. That while the suitability of the proposed steamer is not assured, it, if proceeded with, necessarily terminates the present

service. 4. That while the Synod's action necessitates what is virtually a dismissal of the present Dayspring Board, it lays upon the Board to be appointed the difficult task of managing a discredited service. 5. It is due to the subscribers towards this Mission to know the difficulties that lie in the foreground of this question.

The following was agreed to unanimously:—

"The Synod acknowledges with great pleasure the lively interest that the Dayspring Board has manifested in the work of the Lord on this group, it sincerely thanks the members thereof for their noble work, and renews its assurance of full confidence in their ability and integrity, and as this Synod has *neither approved nor adopted the new scheme*, it trusts that the Board will continue to serve this Mission."

The opposition to the steamer was stronger than I expected, and the outcome was more favourable than I had hoped for. Dr. Paton—a host in himself—was vigorously supported by his son, by Messrs. Boyd and McKenzie (new missionaries and who knew little about the question), by Mr. Milne, and by some others less warmly. Dr. Paton's fame, labours and money power, together with the fact that the steamer had been ordered, made the question a difficult one. Moreover, eleven missionaries out of eighteen had concurred individually. Had the question been simply this: Shall the steamer be built? then I think a large majority would have said No, on the ground of its not being needed and of its expensiveness.

As it is, the Synod has claimed its right to be heard as a Synod on the question. It expressed dissatisfaction at the action of the Victorian Committee in taking the matter out of its (the Synod's) hands. It further questioned the suitability of the vessel, and it remitted the matter to the Victorian Committee to be dealt with in the new light available, with a due regard to the interests of all concerned. And, still further, the Synod declined to accept the resignation of the Dayspring Board, on the ground that it (Synod) *had neither accepted nor approved the steamer scheme*. If, after this, the Victorian Committee proceed with the steamer, the onus of her maintenance will justly fall on their Church.

Some members of Synod moved a resolution with the view of setting Dr. Paton right with the British contributors, to the effect that circumstances had so altered in regard of communication between Australia and the New Hebrides since he raised the first money for a steamer that a mission vessel is no longer needed, and that the money would be better laid out in the maintenance of a small launch for pioneer work in the north of the group and in the maintenance of more missionaries. Dr. Paton, however, would not hear of such a proposal.

It is an unpleasant duty to have to "look a gift horse in the mouth" and to decline to take possession; but the following reasons are more than sufficient to warrant declining the steamer: