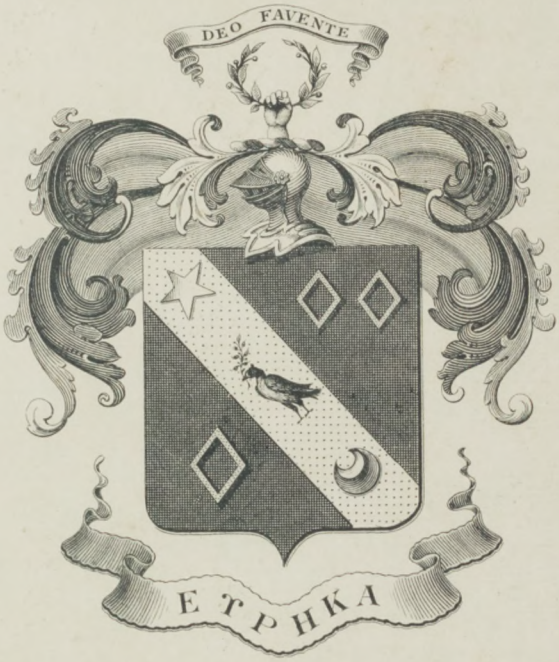

David Scott Mitchell.

THE ANNEXATION OF NEW GUINEA.

To natives of Australia—indeed, to the great body of those who dwell in Australia—it seems strange that there should be the least hesitation in the minds of British statesmen, or the least cavil on the part of the British public, concerning the annexation of New Guinea. The instinct of self-preservation, accompanied by pride in their achievements as colonists, and a sincere and loyal desire to advance the power and might of the empire to which, it is their proud boast, they belong, is all-mastering: they cannot understand the argument of the breeches-pocket which arises in the minds of the statesmen and people of the mother land when they are called upon to assume fresh responsibilities and spread the bounds of the empire further. The colonists as a rule, I believe, are not sympathisers with the Manchester school of politicians, and, except in extreme Radical circles—circles that cherish and openly avow the desirability of separation of Australia from the empire—there is not to be found a spark of approval of that policy which Goldwin Smith enunciated, which secured the favour of the before-mentioned Manchester school, and which drew forth such hearty scorn from the England-loving Laureate in his memorable poem "To the Queen." The colonists in British colonies it has often been said are more loyal than Englishmen themselves; and who that studies the feelings of those around him whilst Britain is at war for the maintenance of her power or empire in any part of the world, or engaged in the diplomacy requisite to avert such calamity, but must recognise that Jingoism is as strong "by the long wash of Australasian seas" as in the most conservative of constituencies in England? A glow of pride filled the minds of men when London *Punch* depicted, with the emphasis Tenniel's pencil can give to a national and patriotic idea, the British lion serenely couching on the banks of the Suez canal, with the keys of India under his majestic paw: the keys which Beaconsfield saw should be in British keeping, for they

opened the gates of the highway to India. The cheers that greeted Lords Beaconsfield and Salisbury on their return from the Berlin Congress—where Britain had once again asserted her right to a voice among the nations, and silenced the *Charivaris* and witlings who had long made her the butt of their scorn and contempt—were echoed by the majority of the Australian people. The hearts of the latter felt with blood-warm indignation the blundering in Zulu-land and Afghanistan, and the humiliation of the Transvaal convention, and welcomed with feelings as sincere as any Jingo of them all the news of victories at Ulundi, at Candahar, and at Tel-el-Kebir. No colonist true to the instincts of country and race will ever care to see "that little isle, that England"—which Shakespeare proudly boasted "never did and never shall sit at the proud feet of a conqueror"—reduced to the condition of "some third-rate isle half sunk in her own seas," like Lear discrowned and contemned amongst the nations. This patriotism it is which, joined to self-interest, is at the root of the Australian belief in the possession of New Guinea by England (or by Australia on her behalf), and which maintains that England does herself and does us wrong if she stays in her course of empire in the southern seas. The "national tradition" is a heritage and belief amongst the mass of colonists yet; and the idea of a federated empire, as well as a federated Australian Dominion, has power to move us to feelings of loyalty and pride. When England renounces her policy of "ships, colonies, and commerce," and says of her colonies "loose the bonds and let them go," we may well lament her decadence, and seek safety in independence. I do not believe that England will ever do anything of the sort, for the common-sense of the nation—her *amour propre*—not to mention her interests, urge that she shall proceed instead of retrogress in her business of spreading civilisation in the South, where her sons have already achieved so much deserving of admiration.

Delays, however, are dangerous—and the policies of nations alter. France just now, for instance, is developing a desire for fresh acquisitions; Germany is not averse to spreading the wings of her commerce in the South Seas; and it is a matter of history that Prince Bismarck caused exhaustive inquiries to be made as to the suitability of New Guinea for a German naval station; Russia, in spite of her hands being full in Central Asia, has been credited, rightly or wrongly, with designs on Austral Papua; restless Italians, sighing for new homes, have thought it worthy of colonisation; and Anglophobiac Americans—in defiance of their own Monroe doctrine—have

turned their longing eyes, if not their vessels' prows, in the direction of "the second largest island in the world," hinting at its proximity to England's colonies as a most important point in connection with the very improbable contingency of war, should the mother country refuse to transfer to them her Canadian Dominion. There has always been the possibility, if not the probability, of New Guinea tempting foreign nations, and many times has the possible danger been laid before British Cabinets. At a meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute on December 17, 1878, upon the reading of a paper by Signor d'Albertis upon the fitness of New Guinea for colonisation, Mr. Frederick Young remarked:—

"It may not be in the recollection of many of the Fellows of the Institute present that the Royal Colonial Institute has taken a very active part for some period in reference to this very question of the colonisation of New Guinea. More than three years ago, viz., in the month of April, 1875, we organised a most important deputation, consisting not only of our own Council but of a number of the leading merchants of London also, and waited on the then Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, pressing on him the importance, in our opinion, of the Government taking steps to secure the colonisation of the eastern part of New Guinea, because there was a fear that, if it were allowed to be colonised without some superintendence on their part, great and serious consequences might ensue to the natives and to those probably who attempted such colonisation. More recently we have been engaged in correspondence with the last and present Colonial Ministers on the subject, and it was only in the month of May last that I addressed a despatch to Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, the importance of which the lapse of three years since first we communicated with the Government on the question had only more forcibly been impressed on our minds of the Government taking some active steps on the subject."

The interest of the Colonial Institute had been awakened by the proceedings in Australia in regard to annexation. Seventeen or eighteen years ago the formation of a company to colonise the island was mooted, and there were not wanting scores of adventurous spirits prepared to join in the scheme: the one thing wanting was British sanction to "exercise jurisdiction," and this not being obtained the plan fell through. No more practical result followed the despatch of Sir Hercules Robinson (prompted by Sir Henry Parkes) to Lord Carnarvon in favour of annexation, nor an influen-

tial meeting in Sydney with the view of forming a company to colonise New Guinea and trade its products to Australian ports. The Australasian legislatures passed resolutions in favour of annexation, and transmitted them to the Colonial Office; but these had no effect. The deputation from the Colonial Institute, to which Mr. Young refers, was headed by the Duke of Manchester, and strongly advised annexation; but Earl Carnarvon replied unfavourably. A New Guinea Colonisation Association was formed in London by Lieut. Armit, R.N.; but the British Government refused it countenance, and the adventure fell through. From end to end of New Guinea history, of late years, the Australian Governments and people, and the returned colonists in England, have favoured, and the Imperial Government have disapproved of, annexation. The divergence of opinion is significant of possible future differences. It is easy to see that, had a foreign nation annexed New Guinea whilst England temporised, and had its strategetical position and probable industrial wealth been lost to Australia, no slight bitterness must have been felt by the people of the latter land. The *coup* of the Queensland Government has, however, brought the whole question to the point at which resistance to the will of the Australian people can scarcely go further. The loyalty of the colonies to the tradition of the Empire, and their own self-interest, cannot be longer ignored. In taking the action they have done, the Government of Queensland have thrust upon the Imperial Government the necessity of thoroughly discussing the matter. Between the courses of compliance and refusal there is that of temporising; but, if English respect for colonisation is not dead, it is scarcely likely the Cabinet, in view of the unanimous approval of the Australian people, will delay further. Should they do so, it will be the duty of the Australian Governments to continue the agitation for annexation until wiser counsels prevail in England.

The paramount question is, What is to be gained by the occupation of New Guinea? The strategetical position of the island is the first point of advantage; the value of its trade the second. So long as Great Britain recognises the duty of protecting her possessions whilst she is involved in war, so long will she consider it a duty to retain every point of vantage from whence they may be attacked. A glance at the map will show that New Guinea is a point from which a blow may be struck at Australia. In its present state, possibly it may not menace us; but what may not happen, after ten or twenty years of occupation by a nation

with military instincts? The island would simply be a *point d'appui* from whence hostile forces, naval and military, might be despatched to prey upon our coasts and commerce—a commerce, by the way, which in ten or twenty years will have vastly increased, and may be expected to have extended in all directions in the Pacific, Indian, and Southern Oceans. Such a contingency as hostile fleets and armaments in these waters, having a basis at New Guinea, may be remote; but it is not altogether improbable. That the country is tropical, and supposed to be inimical to Europeans, may be cited in disproof of the likelihood of the establishment of a naval depôt upon it by a foreign power; but the theory of the island not being fitted for Europeans to live upon seems simply to be a supposition contrary to experience. Europeans *have* lived there, just as they live in other countries of similar temperature; and although it is possible at the outset lives would be lost through the malarial influences engendered by the rank vegetation and swamps, such influences are rapidly modified by cultivation and the removal of the sources of disease. The fears entertained that the country is not suitable for Europeans appear to be the fruit of ignorance of the country. I may point out that there were similar fears entertained with regard to the interior of Australia at localities where human life and the existence of stock were held to be impossible. These supposed deserts have proved to be well-grassed lands, and have been occupied and made to yield up their resources. It is equally likely that some current notions on the head of New Guinea's unfitness for European occupation may be dispelled—that it may prove to be simply an Austral-India, and just as capable of supporting white men's lives. Its elevated plateaus and mountains approaching the snow-line are points of resemblance to Indian topography, and it is reasonable to believe that, when the interior is opened up, life will be just as bearable as it is in Northern Queensland, the Northern Territory, or the Straits Settlements. It must be remembered, in discussing this matter, that ignorance of New Guinea is still profound. Something is known of its coast. Missionaries and explorers have advanced some distance up its navigable streams, and have contributed all that we know concerning it; but, withal, Papua is still almost a *terra incognita*. Only one individual ever professed to have explored it thoroughly; but that individual proved himself to be the very Ferdinand Mendez Pinto of explorers, and, like Congreve's hero, "a liar of the first magnitude." It cannot be said with the slightest degree of certainty

that New Guinea cannot be opened to European occupation, and whilst this uncertainty exists there is the present fear of foreign occupation.

Not alone is there fear of the island being accepted by a foreign power as the base of naval operations. Should it fall to France to take possession of New Guinea, what hostage have we that it would not become a Cayenne or New Caledonia, and Australian society be menaced by the felonry and vagabondage of the Republic? Such is the purpose the *Republic Française* imagines England intends the island for, and such would appear to be the idea entertained by the French Government of colonies in the South Seas. From this fate, from the fate of colonisation without superintendence of a strong and authoritative character, it is to be hoped the natives of the island will be spared. It is England's great mission to develop and civilise the native races; her missionaries are foremost in the work, and it would be a matter for deep regret if the Papuans were subject to any other than her benign influence.

But the argument having most weight with the British people is unquestionably the prospect of trade. We in Australia have not done badly in assisting England's commerce from the time when (*vide* "Wade's Chronological History") the receipt of a few mats woven by convicts at Botany Bay was considered an occurrence worthy of chronicling. £23,982,404 of imports from, and £26,975,381 exports to, the United Kingdom do not form a bad record of Austral progress; nor is the advancement of Fiji, the latest of Britain's southern colonies—possessed of a tropical climate—to be thrown away as an insignificant argument in favour of further southern annexation. Each fresh colony adds to the wealth and might of Great Britain, and her additional "responsibility" is in small proportion to her advantages from new "plantations." The question next arises, What are the resources of New Guinea?

Signor d'Albertis, who made several excursions into the interior at a distance of from twenty to twenty-five miles, travelling in various directions, speaks of its well-irrigated and extensive plains, and alleges it is very suitable for colonisation, "being a well watered country with an abundance of grass, suitable both for agricultural purposes and the rearing of cattle; the climate being good and the heat moderate." There are fine plantations of bananas, yams, taro, and an abundance of bread-fruit. The rivers teem with fish and the woods with cocoanuts. Signor d'Albertis considers New Guinea easy of colonisation, and suggests for the purpose an agri-

cultural mission to teach the natives European methods of cultivation, concerning which he found them curious and eager. Mr. Lawes, the well-known missionary, disparages to some extent the productions of New Guinea, urging also that the natives do not require nor favour European production ; but his views were expressed years ago, and it is possible he may have since modified them. Whether or not, it must be remembered, as I have mentioned before, very little is known of either the resources or capabilities of the island, and that only when native races are brought into close contact with Europeans do they adopt the usages of the latter, and become consumers of their productions. Mr. Lawes speaks of the possession by the natives of clubs made of ebony and rosewood, and of the circumstance of nutmegs having been found in the crops of pigeons, pointing to the probability of spices being indigenous. Other authorities show that coffee and splendid sugar-cane can be successfully grown. Concerning its flora and fauna, Professor Owen declares " there is no tract of intertropical land from which so much of novelty and interest may be expected as from New Guinea" ; the bird of Paradise—the *Paradisea apodea* of Linnæus—is found in abundance, and its skin has long been an article of trade. Gold exists in the island ; the Dutch have obtained it in their portion of New Guinea, if the printed information on the point is to be trusted. But whether it exists in payable quantities or not on the eastern side of the island remains to be proved, no systematic prospecting over any large extent of territory having been done. Mr. Hanran, however, who formed one of the Colonist expedition, says—" New Guinea is well known to be auriferous, and I know of no country with such indications as we found there, without payable gold being discovered in some part of it." The discovery of payable gold would speedily lead to the opening up of New Guinea ; but, as in Australia, pastoral and agricultural occupation is likely to precede that event." Mr. Hanran also says : " From the very little I know myself, and from what I could learn from others, I think it will become a rich field for the planter. The virgin soil producing such rich vegetation spontaneously, and the beautiful sugar-cane and other tropical plants that are grown by the natives, are inducements that will attract the attention of men who will initiate and fertilise the growth of rice, sugar, and other tropical produce in that country." Mr. Chester, who recently took possession of the country in the name of the British Government, writing some time ago, said of the inhabitants—"These people cannot be dispossessed of

their country as easily as the aborigines of Australia. They have vested interests and rights that cannot be disregarded ; but I am sanguine the day is not far distant when this land will be opened up to the markets of Manchester and Sheffield." And Mr. Labilliere, speaking before the Colonial Institute, pointed out the similarity of New Guinea to Ceylon, and expressed a belief that it will produce tropical products which can only be produced in a very limited area in the world—those which can only be cultivated upon elevated table lands or mountains in the tropics ; whilst, should the land be opened up to commerce, England will receive the raw material and furnish the manufactured goods for the New Guineans. These expressions of opinion, with many others which might be quoted, show the advantages likely to accrue to England—and also to Australia—from annexation, if the business of colonisation be carried out. I am aware that there is a vast difference of opinion prevalent as to the actual facts of New Guinea's suitability for Europeans. Some observers describe the products as scant, the soil as marshy, the atmosphere as malarial and unhealthy, and the natives as idle thieves ; but the probability is that the truth is to be found between the two extremes of opinion. The recently published accounts by Mr. Chester and the missionaries concerning the schools, villages, and plantations of the island, go far to show that the harsh judgment of the population as lazy and inclined to theft is an invention, or refers to a section of the natives only, and that the opinion of Mr. Stone, F.R.G.S., given to the Royal Geographical Society—viz., that the New Guineans " are far above the ordinary savage in both physical and moral attributes"—is more correct. In all probability, when the truth concerning New Guinea is known, it will be found to lie with those who take an optimist view of its resources and value, rather than with those who pronounce it a country which should remain, so far as civilisation is concerned, amongst " the waste places of the earth."

A vast deal that is both interesting and instructive might be written, if space allowed, upon the explorations and discoveries in the island, the progress of missionary effort, and the aspect of the annexation movement ; one thing, however, needs to be said : The business of colonisation must be proceeded with under the strictest conditions. There must be a higher motive than cheap labour for Queensland plantations at the root of the enterprise ; the development of the native races in the arts of peace and civilisation, not

their degradation and debauchery, must go hand in hand with the steps taken to make it a "white man's country," and to reap the gains of its commerce. As is well said by a writer in a Sydney journal: "English power in New Guinea should be, of itself, a beneficent influence; but it must be a stern and strong and terribly restraining power; it must watch and guard the rights of the present inhabitants jealously, as it guards the right of Sir Thomas M'Ilwraith to his house in Brisbane or his station on the Maranos. It must advance the civilisation of the people by slow degrees; must teach without robbing them; must give them food and keep them from poison; must begin, in short, upon the simple and justifiable assumption that it is necessary, for the welfare of the empire and the safety of Australia, that England should have and hold that great territory adjacent to our shores, and should proceed upon a recognition that possession implies duty."

Only upon such recognition, and such methods, can English honour be sustained and prosperity achieved for the community which it is proposed to bring within the pale of civilisation.

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