

FURTHER PAPERS

RELATIVE TO

COLONIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN NATIVE AFFAIRS.

No. 1.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE GOVERNOR.

Adverting to the subject of the Duke of Newcastle's Despatch of 26th February, Ministers conceive that the position of the Governor in relation to them under the Resolutions of the House may be inferred from the following considerations :—

The House had manifested in several previous Sessions a desire to bring the Native Secretary's department under the control of Responsible Ministers. This desire the House had expressed in resolutions and other proceedings in former Sessions, and entertained it as strongly during the last Session.

At the same time the House was decidedly of opinion that, in the then circumstances of the Colony, Sir George Grey having been specially appointed to deal with the Native difficulties and carry out a policy of pacification, which policy had already been partially brought into operation, the direction of this or any other Native policy should be left with his Excellency.

The second resolution therefore stated that Ministers should undertake the administration of Native affairs, reserving to his Excellency the decision in all matters of Native policy.

In practice the result of the resolutions has been virtually to place a large control over the administration of Native affairs in the hands of the Governor.

The Native Minister has conducted his department in all its details solely with a view to carrying out his Excellency's plans, and directing all its proceedings towards that object.

The difference between the conduct of business in the Native and in other departments is this: in the other departments, whatever the importance of the matter in hand, it is merely referred to the Governor, and then only as matter of form, unless the Governor is by law or by the Queen's instructions required to take personal action in the matter. In the Native Office, every matter of importance is submitted to the Governor, and is the subject of personal or written communication between the Governor and the Ministers. In like manner with respect to legislation—while the laws which were passed last Session on Colonial subjects were as usual introduced and passed solely on the responsibility of Ministers; when the Native Lands Bill was brought in, and subsequently in its stages through both Houses, Ministers were bound to submit it for the Governor's approval or acceptance before the third reading.

But the really important practical part of the Native business is in the personal communications which take place between the Native chiefs and the Governor. It is in these that the most important declarations on both sides have been made; and it is to these that the Natives themselves look for their guidance, and not to the opinion of the Native Minister of the day, even if he has the advantage of an acquaintance with the Native language. Nor while Sir George Grey is in the country could this be otherwise under any Native Minister whatever. While, on the other hand, if complete Ministerial responsibility be established on Native affairs, it would be impossible that such personal communications should take place without the constant risk of cross purposes between the Governor and the Minister.

It appears to Ministers that the Duke of Newcastle has not kept this practical and necessary consequence of Sir George Grey's mission sufficiently before him in the Despatch under consideration.

If Sir George Grey were to abandon the exercise of this by far the most important portion of the practical administration of Native affairs, his usefulness and power over the Natives mind would be incalculably diminished, and his appointment rendered comparatively nugatory. On the other hand, if it is to be continued, as the good of the Colony imperatively requires, the whole responsibility for the guidance of Native affairs cannot be placed in the Minister.

The fact seems to be that the responsibility in question must be shared between the Ministers and the Governor.