

1884.
NEW ZEALAND.

CONFEDERATION AND ANNEXATION.

(CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE AGENT-GENERAL.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. June 11, 1883.

I received this morning your telegram mentioning the rumour of an intention on the part of Foreign Powers to take possession of some of the Pacific Islands, and instructing me to urge upon the Imperial Government the necessity of taking prompt measures for averting such a calamity. See A.-10, 1883, No. 3.

The Agents-General of Victoria and New South Wales have received similar instructions from their Governments, and we shall act in concert. Lord Normanby has also telegraphed to Lord Derby to the same effect, and Press telegrams have appeared announcing the united action of the Australasian Governments upon the question.

But there is something which requires just as prompt a decision on your side. I would not accompany the deputation that lately went up to Lord Derby about New Guinea, because I knew very well that the first question the Colonial Office would ask was whether Australia was ready to provide the cost of administering the new dependency if it were created, and I found that the other Agents-General were not authorized to give a definite answer to it. Even now, Mr. Service, in telegraphing on the Pacific Islands question to Mr. Murray Smith, only says that he "thinks" the colonies would contribute to the cost of the measures that must become necessary if your purpose is to be gained. Having no doubt in my own mind that this question of providing the cost of any action we ask the Imperial Government to take, stands at the threshold of the matter, I telegraphed to you, strongly advising an immediate concert being come to between all the Australasian Governments, with a view to enabling definite assurances to be given to Lord Derby by the Agents-General. The day, indeed, has long gone by when there could be any doubt of this being a necessity: nor will either the Imperial Government or public opinion here be capable of being moved, until the colonies have made up their minds on it. It is the manifest destiny of Australasia to have dominion over the Pacific Islands, unless in the meantime the islands are lost to us by our own supineness, in not doing to-day what we shall certainly have to do in the end. But no one could ever persuade the English taxpayer that he ought to pay for it. Our dominion over the Pacific Islands is a necessity, not to the safety of the inhabitants of England, but to our own; and, so long as we put off saying that we are ready to pay for obtaining that safety, so long must we expect the Imperial authority to doubt, to vacillate, and to delay.

I do not say that even with this condition the Imperial Government will be moved, for there are a great number of complicated questions, and demands of other nations, to be dealt with before any decision could be come to; but without it I am convinced that we shall never succeed.

I have, &c.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

F. D. BELL.

No. 2.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. June 28, 1883.

Lord Derby having appointed to-day for receiving the Agents-General on the Pacific Islands question, we have had a long interview with his Lordship.

The Agents-General for the Australian Colonies had unanimously asked me to undertake the task of opening the question, and presenting the leading points in our case to the Secretary of State. This I accordingly did, to the best of my ability, and the discussion then extended, and was, in fact, led by Lord Derby himself, over a wide range. He seemed to us all to be impressed with the gravity of the representations we made, and said they must receive the consideration of all the Cabinet. For this purpose he desired us to place them fully before him in writing, which we shall do without delay.

As the statement I am preparing of what passed at the interview must necessarily be carefully examined by the other Agents-General, I think it best not to anticipate it here. I have sent you a cablegram in general terms, and messages to the like purport are being sent to the Australian Governments. I think I may, however, express the opinion that, while there certainly are difficulties of no slight nature before both the Imperial Government and the colonies, and, while Lord Derby is sure to be extremely cautious in coming to any decision, what passed to-day has marked a distinct step, and will lead to a clearer definition of the policy that is to guide England on the question of the Pacific.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.

F. D. BELL.

No. 3.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

Government Offices, Wellington, July 14, 1883.

SIR,—

See A.—10A, 1883.

Your telegram of the 20th June, respecting the Pacific Islands annexation question, was received by me on the 21st.

2. An answer was not sent, because it seemed desirable, before replying upon the further conditions which you informed me would be required by the Imperial Government as preliminaries to action, that the results of the pending discussion in the Assembly, should be considered by the Government.

Vol. 44, pp. 139 and 187.

3. You will learn, from the reports in *Hansard*, that the Legislative Council passed resolutions, submitted by the Government, pledging the colony to bear, "in common with the other Colonies of Australasia," "a fair share of the necessary expenses;" and that the feeling of the Council, in favour of the annexation of various groups of Islands, was general and strong.

4. I was compelled to state to the Council that I did not quite understand your telegram of the 20th June. The consequent doubt on the part of the Government, as to the nature of the undertaking which you had ascertained would be required by the Imperial Government, strengthened a feeling that, instead of submitting to the House of Representatives a merely declaratory or vague motion, it would be well to ask for the appointment of a Select Committee, so that the conditions to which the colony might fairly consent should be considered and formulated by that body for discussion by the House. The Committee was appointed, and it has met two or three times.

Hansard, p. 330.

5. The decisions of the Imperial Government as to Queensland's action touching New Guinea, and as to the proposal of Victoria regarding the New Hebrides, have, of course, been telegraphed to New Zealand, and, it must be presumed, will have their effect upon the proceedings of the Committee.

6. I need not add to the assurances you will find in *Hansard* as to the opinion of the Government upon the general question of annexation, and the possible effects upon the future of Australasia should some of the groups of islands be occupied by Foreign Powers; but the Government were, from the first, impressed with the belief that the pledge given to France by Great Britain in 1878, must raise difficulties, if it did not interpose a positive bar, to any such action as was proposed regarding the New Hebrides.

Appendix, 1878, A.—2, No. 21.

7. The report of the Select Committee shall be sent to you as soon as possible after its presentation to the House.

I have, &c.

Sir F. Dillon Bell, K.C.M.G. Agent-General, London.

FRED. WHITAKER.

No. 4.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

PREMIER, New Zealand.

Pacific Islands. Instruct whether may say you will share cost, like Victoria and rest colonies.

BELL.

London, July 16.

No. 5.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

AGENT-GENERAL for NEW ZEALAND, London.

Assembly approves Government action Annexation, desires British rule unoccupied islands; but House desires, before increasing taxation, statement Colonial Office, contribution required.

WHITAKER.

Wellington, July 31.

No. 6.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Government Offices, Wellington, August 11, 1883.

No. 1.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter No. 169, of June 11th, detailing the steps taken, and those contemplated, by the Agents-General for the Australasian Colonies, respecting the Annexation of Islands in the Pacific, and stating your opinions as to the conditions- precedent to action which would be insisted upon by the Imperial Government.

2. By my letter, dated July 14th, I informed you of the resolution on the subject that had been adopted by the Legislative Council, and why it was intended to propose to the House of Representatives to refer the consideration of the subject to a Select Committee.

3. I now forward to you—(1) Copy of a telegram sent on July 31st, stating the results of No. 5. the discussion in the House; (2) the report of the Committee; and (3) *Hansard* report of the discussion.

4. You will see that the Committee's report was, after its presentation, altered in form, so as to allow of decision upon each of its recommendations; and that some of these were amended by the House, the most important modification being that proposed by Mr. Wynn-Williams, by which the House declined to pledge itself to any money-contribution, until "a statement of the amount to be provided by the colony" had been supplied by the Imperial Government and considered by Parliament.

5. A copy of the Confederation and Annexation Bill, as passed by the House of Representatives and the Legislative Council, is enclosed, for your information.

6. The papers referred to in the Committee's report are a selection from those contained in the Appendix to the Journals. Their reproduction will not be undertaken until after the close of the Session.

Sir F. Dillon Bell, K.C.M.G. Agent-General.

I have, &c.

FRED. WHITAKER.

No. 7.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. July 26, 1883.

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith copy of the letter on the Western Pacific See A.-3, p. 128. question, which I prepared at the request of the Agents-General for New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and South Australia, and which has just been sent in to Lord Derby.

You are no doubt aware, from communications which you will have received from the Victorian Government, that the Agent-General for South Australia has withdrawn from our concert here, and did not feel justified in affixing his signature to the letter. It therefore bears only the signatures of Sir Saul Samuel, Mr. Archer, Mr. Murray Smith, and myself.

I hope that the letter, containing, as it does, statements of importance, all verified by official record, may be approved by the New Zealand Government. Its preparation necessarily required a great amount of labour in a short time; and it was my desire, out of a vast amount of material, to select what would probably have most effect, not only on the Colonial Office, but on the English Press and public opinion. I can only regret that the task which my colleagues imposed upon me has been so imperfectly fulfilled.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.

F. D. BELL.

No. 8.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

[Extract from a Memorandum, dated July 27.]

I NOTICE that a cablegram I sent to the Hon. the Premier, on the Pacific Islands question, was received with a very material error. The Premier's memorandum tells me that the message was made to begin, "Pacific Islands perfectly *safe*: turning point," &c.; whereas it was, "Pacific Islands: perfectly *sure* [that the] turning point," &c. Thus, until you got the text of the message from myself by the mail, the Government will have been under a complete misapprehension of its intent.

F. D. BELL.

No. 9.

The SECRETARY to the PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Premier's Office, Wellington, October 6, 1883.

On the receipt of your Memorandum No. 202, of 27th July, the Hon. Mr. Whitaker instructed me to thank you for calling attention to an error in the transmission of one of your telegrams relating to the Pacific Islands; and he desired me to add that, as some error in the telegram referred to was suspected, the Government were not misled by the form in which the message reached Wellington.

Sir F. D. Bell, K.C.M.G.

I have, &c.

E. Fox.

No. 10.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. September 3, 1883.

On receiving your telegram of the 31st August, desiring me to ascertain the amount of contribution which would be required by the Imperial Government, for the purpose of carrying out any new policy in relation to the Pacific Islands, I communicated the same to the Colonial Office, and I now transmit copy of their reply.

Lord Derby thinks your telegram originated in a misapprehension of the intentions of Her Majesty's Government, and concludes that I had already explained to you that they are not "now" prepared to receive contributions from the colonies towards the cost of annexing any of the Pacific Islands. I assume that his Lordship here alludes to the error in transmission of my telegram of the 11th June, which I have already pointed out, and which was doubtless the cause of the

reference to the supposed intentions of the Imperial Government contained in the opening Speech of His Excellency the Governor. You will not, however, take the letter, of which I am now sending you a copy, to be Lord Derby's answer to the joint representation of the Agents-General.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.

F. D. BELL.

Enclosure.

SIR,—

Downing Street, August 29, 1883.

I am directed by the Earl of Derby to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 1st instant, enclosing copy of telegram from the Premier of New Zealand, stating that the Colonial House of Representatives desires to be furnished with a statement from this Department of the contribution required from New Zealand to meet the expenses incurred by Her Majesty's Government in respect of unoccupied islands of the Pacific.

The telegram in question appears to have originated from a misapprehension as to the intentions of Her Majesty's Government; and Lord Derby concludes that you will have explained to your Government that Her Majesty's Government are not now prepared to receive contributions from the colonies towards the cost of annexing any of the Western Pacific Islands.

The Agent-General for New Zealand.

I am, &c.

R. H. MEADE.

No. 11.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Premier's Office, Wellington, October 6, 1883.

See A.—3, p. 128.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letters enumerated in the margin [Nos. 191, 211, and 219], having reference to the annexation question, and also of a number of copies of the letter prepared by you, which, having been signed by the Agents-General for New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria, and by yourself, was presented to Lord Derby, and subsequently, with his Lordship's permission, published in London newspapers.

2. The Government regret to notice that the Agent-General for South Australia did not feel justified in signing the letter to Lord Derby, because they believe that the occasion is one on which, more than ever before in the history of these colonies, unanimous action was desirable. This, it may be hoped, will be secured by the Conference to be held in Sydney, to which, it is understood, the South Australian Government have promised to send representatives.

3. Telegrams from you, which were received during the late session of Parliament, raised the questions whether the Government would authorize you to say that New Zealand would agree to share the cost of any Annexation of Pacific Islands undertaken by the Imperial Government at the request of the colonies; and whether we would agree to enter into joint, not separate, engagements as to the payment of that cost. As the Parliament was in session, it was impossible the Government should authorize you to make any such engagements, pending a decision by the House of Representatives upon the report of its Select Committee, appointed to consider the question generally.

4. You were informed by telegraph, as soon as was possible, of the scope of the resolutions adopted, and you would learn therefrom that, while each Chamber approved generally of the Government's action, the resolutions of the House were—as to defraying the cost of Annexation—less comprehensive than statements relating to the point contained in the letter to Lord Derby, which had been forwarded to his Lordship a few days before the date of the telegram in question. It would have been well if this discrepancy could have been avoided; but the Government recognize that, to the Agents-General, delay in forwarding the letter would appear to be very undesirable, and it will no doubt be recognized by the Imperial Government, that nothing in the nature of an engagement to apply public funds could be made, except subject to the approval of Parliament, or consequent upon a resolution passed by it. The House of Representatives did, in fact, resolve that there should not be any pecuniary engagement on the part of the colony until the amount that would be involved was known and had been considered.

5. You will, I am sure, understand that my reason for so fully referring to this question of contribution is, that I feel the necessity of preventing any misconception respecting it.

6. Generally, as regards the letter to Lord Derby, I have nothing but congratulations to offer upon the careful research which it evidences, and upon the ability and force with which the results of that research are set forth.

Sir F. Dillon Bell, K.C.M.G. Agent-General, London.

I have, &c.

H. A. ATKINSON.

No. 12.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

AGENT-GENERAL for NEW ZEALAND, London.

Conference, Sydney, November. Procure and forward full information respecting claims Foreign Powers on Pacific Islands.

WHITAKER.

Wellington, September 22.

No. 13.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

PREMIER, New Zealand.

Pacific. Nothing further relating claims Foreign Powers, beyond statement Lord Derby's letter to the Agents-General.

BELL.
London, September 28.

No. 14.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., September 20, 1883.

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the letter which the Agents-General have received from Lord Derby, in reply to their representations on the Pacific Islands question. See A.-3, p. 136.

I have, &c.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

WALTER KENNAWAY,
For the Agent-General.

No. 15.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. September 28, 1883.

I have to return you my best thanks for your despatch of the 11th August, on the subject of the Pacific Islands question, and for the various information which accompanied it.

Since writing to you on the 20th instant, enclosing Lord Derby's answer to the Agents-General, I have received your cablegram desiring me to send you full particulars as to the claims of Foreign Powers on the Islands: but I believe the only information the Colonial Office possesses on that subject at the present time was given in Lord Derby's letter. You will probably have noticed that the letter was dated 31st August, while we only received it about the middle of September; but that date had to be affixed, on account of including the letter in the papers presented to the Imperial Parliament.

I regret to have to inform you that the Agent-General of New South Wales has found it his duty to withdraw from the concert, presumably in consequence of new orders from his Government; and this unfortunate circumstance, like the previous withdrawal of South Australia, must have a bad effect, if the other Governments should desire their Agents-General to take any further steps at the Colonial Office. I think we all alike regret that, as yet, we know nothing of whether the joint representation we made to Lord Derby on the 21st July was approved or not by our Governments.

I have much that I should like to say to you on the present aspect of the question; but, until I know the view which you took of our representation to Lord Derby, I think I had better say as little as possible of my own, especially after reflecting on the general tone of the debate in the House of Representatives, which you sent me on the 11th August. In the meanwhile, I may point out, that the English Press has, with hardly an exception, expressed itself in generous and sympathetic language towards the colonies; being, in that respect, I believe, only the reflex and interpreter of a wide agreement in public opinion here. Nor would it be wise to assume, spite of the cold and cautious tone of Lord Derby's letter to the Agents-General, that the gravity of the question, especially in regard to the French scheme for sending swarms of dangerous criminals to the Islands, is not entirely recognized by the Imperial Government.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.
F. D. BELL.

No. 16.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Government Offices, Wellington, November 2, 1883.

I have the honour to inform you that your letter No. 236, of the 3rd September, relative to the Annexation question, and certain correspondence thereupon with the Colonial Office, has been received.

The Premier is absent from Wellington, and, having regard to the lapse of time and to the present position of the question involved, it has been decided to leave for Major Atkinson's consideration whether any advantage is likely to be gained by further discussion upon the points raised in your letter.

Sir F. Dillon Bell, K.C.M.G. Agent-General.

I have, &c.

WM. ROLLESTON.

No. 17.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the COLONIAL OFFICE.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. August 30, 1883.

Adverting to a passage in the letter from the Agents-General to the Earl of Derby on the 21st July last, where allusion is made to a proposal of Sir Julius Vogel for the formation of a trading company for the Pacific, I have received a letter from Sir Julius Vogel, of which I beg permission

to enclose a copy, pointing out that it was not intended by that proposal to confer any exclusive right of trading on the company.

I should be very much obliged if Lord Derby would allow this correction to appear in any papers that may contain the letter of the Agents-General. I have, &c.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies.

F. D. BELL.

Enclosure.

DEAR SIR FRANCIS,—

135, Cromwell Road, London, S.W. August 29, 1883.

In the able document concerning the Pacific Islands, to which your signature as well as those of other Agents-General are attached, I find a slight error in relation to the South Sea Island scheme which my Government proposed in 1874. The importance of the error, however, is somewhat increased by the fact, that the misconception is made a ground of argument against the scheme, which I venture still to think it would have been desirable to adopt. The memorandum states, in effect, that it was proposed, that the chartered company should be endowed with a monopoly of trading, and proceeds to say that, if the granting of such a monopoly was possible, it was at least open to grave objection. Now it was not intended or proposed that the Government or Legislature should give to the Company any other monopoly than that its own wealth and the largeness of its operations might secure for it.

I am sure you will think it right to send the substance of this correction to Lord Derby, to whom the memorandum was addressed. I am, &c.

Sir F. D. Bell, K.C.M.G. Agent-General for New Zealand.

JULIUS VOGEL.

No. 18.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. December 7, 1883.

I beg permission to offer my congratulations on the great event which has taken place in Australasian history, by the meeting of the Convention at Sydney. The first series of resolutions passed by the Convention appeared in yesterday's papers, and has been very favourably received.

In my letter of the 30th November (No. 344) I promised to send you a full account of the French claims in the Pacific which appeared lately in the *Journal Officiel*. It has been necessary for me to make a careful *précis* from that statement, and, as I did not like to intrust the translation to any one else, I cannot send it by this mail: I shall, however, do so very shortly, with a map.

Upon receiving the intelligence of the meeting of the Convention, it seemed to me that it would be advisable for you to have a summary of the French claims, as well as of my letter of the 30th November, to Lord Derby. Accordingly, I sent you the two telegrams, copies of which are annexed.

Three days ago, the Agent-General for New South Wales received a cablegram from the President of the Convention, desiring that every changing phase in the Pacific question which might happen here should be immediately cabled to them. All the Agents-General thereupon met (with the exception of Mr. Archer, who was in Ireland) and agreed upon a cablegram to be sent in reply, stating that we were acting in concert, and would telegraph anything that seemed to us of importance.

I trust you will approve of the tone of my letter to Lord Derby of the 30th November. As to that part of it which appeals to Her Majesty's Government on behalf of the native races in the Pacific Islands, it seems to me that, great as would be the calamity to those races if the French scheme were carried out in New Caledonia, it would hardly be greater than that which would fall on the Eastern Pacific, if the Marquesas are used for the *récidiviste* scheme. The Marquesas and Society Islands, the Low Archipelago, and the Austral Group, which are now the most distant from Europe, will become the nearest when the Panama Canal is open, and Tahiti will probably be the first port of call for Panama steamers south of the equator, as Honolulu is now for San Francisco steamers north of the line. It would indeed be a cruel fate for the aboriginal races in that great cluster of more than a hundred islands, virgin yet of such contamination, if the French should persist in making them the receptacle for their *récidiviste* criminals.

For omitted portion of this letter, see A.—3D.

See A.—3c, No. 9.

It will not have escaped your attention that Lord Derby, in his correspondence with the Agent-General for Victoria, Mr. Murray Smith (of which I enclose a copy), distinctly contemplated a policy of transferring to the Australasian Colonies the obligations of this country to the native communities of the Pacific; but I am sure, as I said in my letter to his Lordship, that, neither by the Imperial nor by the Colonial authorities, can those obligations ever be fulfilled, if the Pacific Islands are to be the theatre of this new experiment in criminal law, made by a great and friendly nation.

Returning to the question of the French claims, you will remember Lord Derby doubting whether the Agents-General were correct in saying, last July, that very little was known in Australasia upon the subject. I believe this doubt arose from the circumstance that the Governors of all the Australasian Colonies are in possession of confidential information from the Colonial Office upon the subject, with copies of the treaties or other instruments affecting the relations of England with Foreign Powers in the Pacific.

It will also be in your recollection that Lord Derby sent our letter of the 21st July to the High Commissioner and the other two members of the Western Pacific Committee. The Committee have sent in their report, but it will not be made public for some time—not, at any rate, before it is presented to Parliament. I have, therefore, been unable to obtain a copy of it for the Convention.

With regard to Sir George Grey's Confederation Bill, which was reserved for Her Majesty's

assent, no decision has yet been come to by the Colonial Office. I have, however, some reason for thinking, that if the Convention were to approve of a principle like the one of that Bill, and propose a measure by which the united Governments of Australasia should be at liberty to do what the Bill proposes in the case of New Zealand, there would not be much difficulty in obtaining the assent of the Imperial Government to it.

I take this opportunity of transmitting herewith, copy of a letter which was addressed by the Agent-General of Victoria to his Government, on the 30th November, containing a clear account of the interview with Lord Derby.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.

F. D. BELL.

Enclosure 1.

PREMIER, New Zealand, Sydney.

Pacific Islands. Following statement French claims published in *Journal Officiel*. Western Pacific—Caledonia, Loyalty, Pines. Eastern Pacific—Firstly, Marquesas, eleven islands; secondly, Society's, Tahiti, and Moorea; thirdly, Low Archipelago, eighty islands; fourthly, in Australs, Tubuai and Vivitao, French, two others independent; fifthly, Rapa Island. All these claimed as dependencies of Tahiti, formerly under protectorate, now united to France by law 1880. Sixthly, Leeward Islands, near Tahiti, independent by declaration, France and England, but French flag flying, Raiatea, since 1880.

BELL.

London, December 3.

Enclosure 2.

AGENT-GENERAL for NEW SOUTH WALES, London.

Press telegrams assert French Chamber likely pass *Récidiviste* Bill. France asserts farther claims in Pacific: Agents-General protesting. Convention deems important that, while sitting, every changing phase be instantly wired by agents for consideration, and Convention's voice heard.

STUART.

Sydney, December 4.

Enclosure 3.

PRESIDENT, Intercolonial Convention, Sydney.—

Agents-General acting in concert. Any fact or changing phase will be wired by me on behalf of all. *Récidiviste* Bill still before Committee of Senate. Nothing to add to Victorian Agent's telegrams; but think Convention should consider whether not advisable ask Lords Derby, Granville, permission Agents see French Ministry direct, to explain attitude colonies, before Bill reaches further stage. Full statement French claims cabled by Bell yesterday. We are making every exertion impress Imperial Government gravity of position.

SAUL SAMUEL.

London, December 4.

Enclosure 4.

AGENT-GENERAL for NEW SOUTH WALES, London.—

Convention recognizes British Government only official channel communication with France.

STUART.

Sydney, December 5.

Enclosure 5.

SIR,—

8, Victoria Chambers, Westminster, S.W. 30th November, 1883.

In continuation of my letter of the 16th instant (No. 2,747), I have the honour to inform you that the meeting, referred to in its concluding paragraph, was held at this office on that evening, and was attended by the Agents-General for South Australia, New South Wales, New Zealand, and Queensland. After an interchange of views, which showed that we were in good general accord, it was decided that we should request the Secretary of State to grant us an interview, and I was asked to communicate with him on the subject. I enclose a copy of my letter to Lord Derby, and of his Private Secretary's reply.

II. We accordingly attended at the Colonial Office on the afternoon of the 23rd instant. At the desire of my colleagues, I first addressed his Lordship, and expressed to him—following, as nearly as possible, the terms of your late despatch, and having regard to the approaching Convention at Sydney—the natural desire of your Government, and of the colonies in general, to know on what terms Confederation, with the accompanying assumption of Her Majesty's obligations in regard to neighbouring native races, whether by protectorate or annexation, would be sanctioned and supported by the Imperial Government. I assumed, and throughout the course of the interview it was assumed, that, for the present at least, Confederation would probably amount to a common union in the form of dominion for the purposes of mutual defence, the protectorate of such Australasian islands as it might be considered advisable by the assembled Governments to include within the boundaries of the dominion, and, perhaps, such further purposes as a postal union.

III. As I have already informed you, in my telegraphic despatch of the following day, Lord Derby's language was, throughout the interview, exceedingly guarded; but on this point he said

that he had no doubt that Her Majesty's Government would approve almost any form of confederation which the Governments of the assembled colonies might unitedly propose.

IV. The discussion then passed to the subject of the unoccupied Australasian Islands: the danger to which they were exposed of foreign annexation, menacing for military reasons, or obnoxious on account of convict settlement. Sir Francis Dillon Bell urged, with great force and complete knowledge of the subject, the imminent and odious danger which the colonies incurred from the obvious determination with which the French transportation scheme was being pressed through the Chambers. Upon this point, Lord Derby, while promising that further remonstrances should be addressed to the French Government, through the Foreign Office, expressed his own doubt whether the perils resulting from the measure were so great as were contemplated by Sir Francis Bell, his Lordship's view being, that the convicts would be kept under surveillance, and were not likely, therefore, to become such a nuisance and danger to the colonies as we apprehended. Mr. Archer, at this point, interposed the pertinent observation that, within a comparatively brief period of time, his Government had returned to the Government of New Caledonia no less than fifty-five escapees, and that, in the last notorious case, the Administration of the French island had absolutely refused to apply for the extradition of three dangerous criminals, who were therefore obliged to be set at large in the colony.

See A.—3, p. 89,
No. 21.

V. This naturally led to a discussion of the question of New Guinea. Having in mind the letter addressed to the Administrator of Queensland last summer, in which Lord Derby referred to the cost of annexing that island, we pressed him to state whether, in the event of the colonies agreeing to share the charge of such an operation, in regard not merely to New Guinea, but to other islands, he would be prepared to assent. But he declined to give any positive answer. Pressed by me to state whether, even as regards New Guinea, on the colonies agreeing to contribute, say, £10,000 annually (which I had reason to believe was the estimated charge), he would then agree to declare even New Guinea under protectorate, he still declined to give any certain assurance. At the same time, he admitted that the question of New Guinea was by far the most pressing, and claimed that Her Majesty's Government had, by action taken in the course of this year, effectually warned Foreign Powers against attempting to occupy the island.

VI. As to the New Hebrides, he stated that Her Majesty's Government adhered to the agreement made with the French Government in 1878, and renewed this year, that the independence of those islands should be respected by both Powers; but added that the agreement in no way contemplated such complications as might arise in connection with the French transportation scheme. As to the other islands, he declined to pledge himself beforehand in any way, adhering, in fact, to the line already taken in Mr. Bramston's letter, in reply to mine of the 5th ultimo.

VII. In compliance with the request of the other Agents-General, I prepared, and forwarded to you the account of the interview contained in my telegraphic despatch, of which I enclose a copy.

I have, &c.

The Hon. the Premier, Melbourne.

ROBT. MURRAY SMITH.