

have been in perfect agreement as to the extreme desirableness, if not the absolute necessity, of the annexation by the Imperial Government of the Island of New Guinea. Both in the maintenance of Imperial and in the guardianship of colonial interests—in upholding the maritime supremacy of England and in guaranteeing the future peace of these colonies—it has been always regarded, since first the question was discussed, almost as indispensable that this step should be taken. It is well known that nearly ten years ago a much more ambitious and extended scheme of annexation was urged upon the Imperial Government by the then administration of Sir John Robertson, in which two members of this Government, including the Premier, held office. That scheme not merely comprehended the necessity of an entire possession of New Guinea, but included the islands of New Britain, New Ireland, and the chain of islands to the north-east and east of New Guinea from Bougainville Island to San Christoval, the south-easternmost of the Solomon Group, the group of the New Hebrides, including Espiritu Santo, Malicolo, and Sandwich, with smaller adjoining islands, and the Marshall, Gilbert, and Ellice Islands. At the time this representation was forwarded to the Imperial Government, and perhaps for some years afterwards, the realization of the scheme was not only possible, but would in all probability have provoked no antagonism on the part of foreign Governments, and aroused no feeling of jealousy whatever. Of late years, however, although from the colonial point of view the question is precisely in the same state as it was, and the feeling as to the necessity of this annexation is unaltered, the European aspect of the situation is entirely changed. That which could then have been effected without disturbance or opposition is now either altogether impossible or surrounded with grave international difficulties. The reluctance of England to attempt fresh colonial enterprises, even though they were, as in this case, shown to be essential to the freedom from peril to our lines of ocean communication with the mother-country, and, as was pointed out by Sir John Robertson in his minute, to the protection of a coast-line, 1,700 miles in extent, stretching from this capital northwards to within sight of New Guinea, has resulted in the present condition of things. And this disposition on the part of the Imperial Government, which, as is well understood, is a cardinal principle of the political faith of a great party in the mother-country, which strongly resists any extension of the colonial responsibilities of the Empire, has naturally inspired foreign Governments proposing to establish or extend colonial possessions with the idea that in exercising their unquestionable right to pursue this policy they are not by such exercise doing anything to justify the least dissatisfaction on the part of England. It is essential to bear this in mind when this Government is invited to adopt a course of action which may involve serious consequences in its relations with the Imperial Government, and perhaps not less serious embarrassments in the relations of the latter with the Governments of foreign countries. From the date of the sittings of the Convention up to the present time this Government has been profoundly sensible of these difficulties, a statement of which it placed clearly before the Convention, and a consideration of which has guided the whole of its correspondence on the subject. This Government has in no way changed its views in the matter, and is fully prepared to join with the Governments of all the other Australasian Colonies in any effective representations as to the necessity of largely increasing the area of the protectorate already established in New Guinea. But in order to render these representations in any way effective, or even intelligible, and to prevent useless correspondence and the misunderstanding which would almost certainly flow from the present entirely defective information on the subject, it is essential that this Government should know precisely—firstly, whether the recent action of Germany is the result of an arrangement with the Imperial Government; secondly, what are the terms of this arrangement; thirdly, whether, as one of the conditions of this agreement, the English protectorate of New Guinea has been enlarged so as to include the shores of the island from East Cape to the German line of occupation; fourthly, whether, as seems not improbable from the recent inclusion, by an amendment of the Schedule of the Proclamation, of the islands of the D'Entrecasteaux Group in the Protectorate of New Guinea, the Imperial Government has determined to include various other islands, as, for example, the Louisiade Group, Rook Island, the Woodlark Group, and others, the possession of which would strategically command the whole of that portion of the Pacific. It is impossible, in the absence of information on these subjects, not merely to prepare, but even to consider, the terms of any remonstrance to the Imperial Government. If England is acting in concert with the great European Powers who are about to undertake or extend colonization in the Pacific, it is essential that this fact should be known before any representations on the subject are made by any of her colonies. Deeply and peculiarly as they are interested in this question, it would be simply indefensible that they should, without any information, address vague and meaningless protests, which would be certainly valueless, and probably embarrassing. If the Imperial Government is free from international obligations, and has given no countenance to the recent annexation, it may be desirable, by strong and unanimous representations, to urge, with regard to the occupation of New Guinea by a foreign Power, those arguments which have already been so frequently and so forcibly addressed to successive Secretaries of State. And, finally, if the German occupation of a part of New Guinea has been the subject of international arrangement, and the Imperial Government has taken care to provide for a largely-increased area of its own protectorate over the shores of New Guinea and adjacent islands up to the boundary of Germany, any such representations may be wholly unnecessary. This Government has thus, it will be seen, been guarded in its course of action by a determination to uphold the views on this subject to which it has consistently given expression, and at the same time to abstain from anything which would have the appearance of either questioning the undoubted rights of European nations in friendly alliance with our own Imperial Government, or presuming to dictate to the latter on questions of Imperial policy, and, moreover, to take no steps in questions of such gravity and complexity without the fullest information concerning the whole situation. This will involve a brief, but, however, absolutely necessary delay. Having regard to all these circumstances, this Government will be fully prepared, immediately on