

## Enclosure 2.

SIR ANDREW CLARKE to the COLONIAL OFFICE.

SIR,—

30th April, 1886.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of Mr. Bramston's letters of the 17th and of the 22nd instant on the subject of the New Hebrides. I at once gave careful consideration to Mr. Bramston's statement of the 17th, that the French Government had undertaken to postpone their action in regard to sending further convoys of relapsed criminals to the Pacific until an answer should have been received by Her Majesty's Government from the Australian Colonies on the subject of the cession of the New Hebrides to the Republic, and that Lord Rosebery had stated that this answer might be expected to arrive towards the end of April. I was previously under the impression that the final answer of the federated colonies had been communicated to Her Majesty's Government by the Chairman of its Committee of Ministers, the Hon. Mr. Griffiths, Premier of Queensland, on the 22nd March, in the following terms: "Colonies in Federal Council, except Fiji, which cannot be communicated with, have insuperable objection any alterations in *status quo ante* New Hebrides in direction sovereignty of France. They adhere to the resolution Sydney Convention and Address of Federal Council, 5th February. In their opinion very strong reason to believe that, if France cannot get an increase of territory, she will have very soon to wholly relinquish to deport prisoners Pacific. Should she not, legislative powers Australian Colonies must be exercised to protect their own interests by exclusion. Under the circumstances no advantage will be derived from accepting proposals, but only very considerable injury."

And I had regarded this reply as being supplemented and completed by the admirable minute of the Acting-Governor of Fiji, of which I had the honour to transmit a *précis* to you on the 8th instant. But on receipt of Mr. Bramston's letter I at once telegraphed to my Government to inquire whether any further answer beside Mr. Griffith's telegram was coming, and, in reply, I received by cable, on the 22nd instant, a despatch stating that Her Majesty's Ministers at Melbourne considered "any reply beyond Mr. Griffith's telegram unnecessary. It declared the deliberate decision of the colonies."

2. I wish here to observe that it is evident to me, although the fact is apparently as yet imperfectly realized by the statesmen of this country, that the Ministers who had conveyed this decision to Her Majesty's Government speak in their own full sense of the powers conveyed to them by the "Act to constitute a Federal Council of Australasia," which in its 15th section refers to the consideration of the Council "the relations of Australasia with the islands of the Pacific;" and that they, under the circumstances, not unreasonably hold that the contemplation of any cession of the New Hebrides to the French Republic, after such a unanimous expression of their opinion as that to which I have just referred, would be a contravention of the spirit and terms of that Act.

3. The record of the proceedings of the Federal Council, which has been communicated to me by the Secretary of State on the 20th instant, contains several illustrations of the sense in which the powers conferred by Parliament on the Council were understood and accepted by its members. In his opening address, for example, the President, Mr. Service, said, "For the first time the exercise of Imperial authority has been transferred to the statesmen of Australasia, by conferring on them the power to legislate on matters beyond their own territorial limits. The relations of Australasia with the islands of the Pacific are daily becoming more close and intimate, and it is a matter for deep satisfaction that the regulation of these relations now rests with ourselves." And he, a little later, says, "The 29th section of the Federal Council Act itself invests us with a power whose importance cannot be overrated, the power for the Council to make such representations or recommendations to Her Majesty as it may think fit with respect to any matters of general Australasian interest, or to the relation of Her Majesty's possessions in Australasia with the possessions of foreign Powers. Occasions for the exercise of this power are likely to be frequent and important, and, if the Council possessed no other function than this, it would be able materially to influence the destinies of these colonies."

4. It so happened that the New Hebrides afforded the first occasion for the exercise of the powers to which Mr. Service referred in language of such grateful and loyal acknowledgment. On the day before its session closed a telegraphic despatch was received from the then Agent-General for Victoria, notifying the publication of the Convention concluded at Berlin, in which the future destiny of those islands was contemplated by the contracting Governments without the least reference to the repeated agreements between France and England to respect their independence. Great alarm was naturally excited by this disclosure, and was expressed in the address to Her Majesty unanimously adopted, in which it was declared that the Council regard it as a matter of grave importance to Her Majesty's Australasian Colonies that the islands should not fall under any foreign dominion (recalling Lord Derby's positive assurance to that effect), and that they advise that the agreement of 1878 with France, recognizing the independence of those islands, should give place to some more definite engagement in order to secure them from being annexed to any foreign Power.

5. It cannot, therefore, I think, be fairly said that the colonies concerned have spoken on the subject in excess of their statutory powers, or with any uncertain sound. I may add that at Hobart, as well as since, they have had fully before them the conditional assurances, not now for the first time put forward on behalf of the French Foreign Office, and urged in Mr. Bramston's letter of the 22nd instant, to the effect that, if the New Hebrides were to be now quietly yielded, the stream of French criminality would no longer be disembodyed in the Pacific, but, if not, not. To such a threat—if it be a threat—the federal colonies will, if I am not much mistaken in their spirit, never yield. Such a bargain, if it is to be regarded as a bargain, I am equally convinced they will never make. There was a time when a great French Sovereign said that the nations of the earth knew, when they saw the flag of France pass, that a great cause went before it, and that a great people followed after it. If the French Republic wills to identify its flag at New Caledonia