

of action. This work is still being actively pressed on with the assistance of a Standing Committee, which is continuously occupied with matters relating to colonial defence.

4. Much yet remains to be done ; and it is, of course, unavoidable that secrecy should continue to be observed with regard to many of the defensive measures in progress or in contemplation. The time has, however, now arrived when an attempt may fairly be made to attain to a better understanding as to the system of defence which may be established throughout the Empire. For this purpose an interchange of knowledge as to the state of preparation or as to the capabilities of organization in each colony would lead to a more thorough understanding of their wants and wishes ; but, whilst Her Majesty's Government would thus be prepared to recommend for the consideration of the Conference certain principles calculated to promote the general defence of the Empire, it is not our intention in calling the Conference to commit either the Imperial Government or any colony to new projects entailing heavy expenditure, but rather to secure that the sums which may be devoted to this purpose may be utilized to the fullest extent, with complete knowledge of all the conditions of the problem.

5. Second only in importance to this great question is one concerning in a special degree the interests of the Empire in time of peace. The promotion of commercial and social relations by the development of our postal and telegraphic communications could be considered with much advantage by the proposed Conference. It is a subject the conditions of which are constantly changing. New requirements come into existence, and new projects are formulated, every year. It is obviously desirable that the question of Imperial intercommunication should be considered as a whole, in order that the needs of every part of the Empire may, as far as practicable, be provided for, and that suggestions may be obtained from all quarters as to the best means of establishing a complete system of communications without that increased expenditure which necessarily results from isolated action.

6. Two leading subjects for consideration have been referred to, but it is not impossible that there may be some other important question which in the general opinion of the colonial Governments might properly and usefully be brought under consideration. But I should deprecate the discussion at the present time of any of the subjects falling within the range of what is known as political federation. There has been no expression of colonial opinion in favour of any steps in that direction ; and Her Majesty's Government are of opinion that there would be no advantage in the informal discussion of a very difficult problem before any basis has been accepted by the Governments concerned. It might, indeed, be detrimental to the ultimate attainment of a more developed system of united action if a question not yet ripe for practical decision were now to be brought to the test of a formal examination.

7. The Conference will necessarily be purely consultative, and it will therefore not be material that the colonies should have equal or proportional representation upon it. The desire of Her Majesty's Government would rather be that its constitution should be sufficiently comprehensive to include, in addition to the Agent-General or other specially-deputed representative of each Government, any leading public man who may be at liberty to come to England next year, and may be specially qualified to take a useful part in the deliberations. It will, I think, be convenient that I should preside at the Conference, and I need not say that I anticipate much advantage to myself and to Her Majesty's Government from the opportunities of acquiring information which will thus be afforded to me.

8. I will only add, in conclusion, that I am confident that your Government will, as I do, feel deep interest in this first attempt to bring all parts of Her Majesty's Empire into joint deliberation. However modest the commencement may be, results may grow out of it affecting, in a degree which it is at present difficult to appreciate, the interests of the Empire and of the civilized world.

I have, &c.,

EDWARD STANHOPE.

To the Governors of colonies under Responsible Government.

P.S.—My own opinion is that the best time for meeting would be the month of April or May, but I should be glad in this matter to be guided by the general opinion of the Colonial Governments.

## No. 2.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 24th December, 1886.

In continuation of my letter of the 7th instant, No. 1,706, it may be convenient for purposes of record that I should send you a copy of the telegram from the Secretary of State to the Governors of colonies under Responsible Government, and of Natal and Western Australia, to acquaint them with his proposal for the Conference next year.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

F. D. BELL.

## Enclosure.

CONFIDENTIAL TELEGRAM from the Right Hon. EDWARD STANHOPE, M.P., to the GOVERNORS of COLONIES UNDER RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT, NATAL, and WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

2ND DECEMBER, 1886.—Referring to Queen's Speech proroguing Parliament, Her Majesty's Government propose Conference in London early next year with colonial representatives to discuss defence, postal, telegraphic communications, and, perhaps, other important questions ; but not political federation, which question not yet ripe. Conference consultative only, so number re pre-