

Lord Lyons has also stated in a despatch of the 9th March that M. Flourens had informed him that he had examined the proposed text of the arrangement to be made, and that he was on the point of sending instructions on the subject to the French Ambassador in London. Lord Lyons strongly urged that there should be no further delay on the part of the French Government.

Colonial Office, 23rd April, 1887.

No. 3.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 18th May, 1887.

SIR,—
No. 1.

My letter of the 6th instant, No. 704, brought up the account of what had been done at the Conference up to that date respecting the New Hebrides.

The publication of the unauthorised account of the Conference proceedings, which appeared in the *Standard* on the 5th instant, attracted some attention, and a debate took place next evening in the House of Lords, of which I send you a *Times* report. Lord Rosebery asked whether the *Standard's* account was authentic, repudiating for his own part any connection with the French Ambassador's proposal of last year for the cession of the islands to France, beyond the fact of that proposal having been submitted to him while Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Lord Onslow (Under-Secretary for the Colonies) replied that the *Standard* article substantially represented what had taken place, but was in some important respects inaccurate and misleading, adding that a general disposition had been expressed by the delegates to accept the proposals of Her Majesty's Government as a satisfactory basis. Lord Onslow promised to lay before Parliament a full report of what had, taken place; and, on Lord Rosebery asking whether the papers would contain the speeches of the delegates, he said the reports would be almost if not entirely *verbatim*.

On the same evening (6th May), in the House of Commons, Sir H. Holland also promised that an accurate account of all the proceedings of the Conference should soon, with the full assent of the Delegates, be presented, excepting only anything of a strictly confidential character.

But hardly had these promises been given in both Houses when a serious question arose as to how far it would be right to publish the Conference speeches on the New Hebrides question at all. Lord Salisbury's address had been a very outspoken one, and had been criticized by Mr. Service and Sir Graham Berry with equal frankness, and strongly defended by the New Zealand Delegates. Everybody knew that something would have to be left out of the speeches before they could be published, but, when it came to the point of what should be left out, so much difficulty occurred that at last Sir Henry Holland had to tell the House of Commons (on the 13th instant) that it might be necessary after all to omit the New Hebrides proceedings altogether from the published records of the Conference. Nothing, however, has been finally settled even yet.

In the meantime, however, the negotiations between the English and French Governments have advanced a stage, and the French note has been delivered to Lord Salisbury. I think you may now look upon it as certain that a satisfactory arrangement will be made. It was supposed that any announcement of a final refusal to cede the New Hebrides would be very badly received in France; but there now appears to be no disposition to quarrel with it there, as you will see from the extracts of French papers annexed to this letter.

I do not allude further to the subject now, because Her Majesty's Government will soon decide whether the speeches in Conference are to be made public or not. If they are, you will be able to judge whether the support given by Sir William Fitzherbert and myself to Her Majesty's Government was not fully justified: if they are not, it will then become my duty to ask permission to send you an account of what took place. But of this you may in any case be quite sure: that the discussions at the Conference have had on the whole an excellent result, for they have brought about a general assent on the part of the Delegates to the proposals of Her Majesty's Government, and have helped to lay the foundation at last of a settlement which, while maintaining the treaty of 1878-82, will open the islands to colonisation by English and French alike, and secure for all not only equality in trade and commerce, but a reasonable protection for life and property.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

F. D. BELL.

Enclosures.

[Extract from the *Times*, Saturday, 7th May, 1887.]

HOUSE OF LORDS.—THE COLONIAL CONFERENCE.

The Earl of ROSEBERY.—I rise to ask the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies a question of which I have given him private notice. It refers to the report of the proceedings of the Colonial Conference which appeared in the *Standard* this morning. It is a very interesting and detailed account, and I shall be glad to learn if the noble Earl thinks fit to tell me whether it is authentic or not. In the next place I wish to know if, in view of the somewhat premature publication, it is proposed to give us the real and actual papers with regard to what has passed in the Conference. I do not know what the authenticity of the *Standard's* account may be; but, at any rate, it seems to me very desirable that, having had four columns of the proceedings of the Colonial Conference published in a newspaper, some more authoritative account should be supplied to the Houses of Parliament. I do not ask for all the somewhat spicy details published in the *Standard*—the interview, for instance, of the Prime Minister with the colonial representatives; but of course we should be glad to have as much detail as possible. There is one point in connection with the account which I will ask your Lordships' permission to say a word or two about. There is a proposition with regard to a compromise with which my name is associated—that, in exchange for the cession