

it is impossible to converse with any average Queensland colonist, to read their newspapers, or the speeches of their legislators, without perceiving that, even among the most enlightened and humane of their number, the native is regarded simply as an incumbrance on the soil, as being destitute of rights, and as existing only on a sufferance for which he should be grateful.

82. The chief agricultural industries of Queensland require the aid of coloured labour for their successful prosecution. Those now employed in it are imported from various groups of islands in the Pacific. On their introduction restrictions at present exist, imposed by Acts of the Imperial Parliament, and enforced to a certain extent by Imperial officers.

83. But, if New Guinea becomes a part of Queensland, its vast regions will be available as recruiting ground for labour, without any restrictions other than those which the Parliament of Queensland (an assembly largely composed of employers of native labour) itself may think fit to impose. The labour trade along the shores of New Guinea will be a coasting trade, which no Imperial legislation can regulate, and with which no Imperial authority can interfere. Whether those who are most directly interested in the employment of imported black labour are the men to whom the regulation of its introduction can be most fitly committed, it is unnecessary to ask. That the imported labourers may be justly and kindly treated on estates in Queensland is nothing to the point. Admitting all that may be urged by the most zealous defender of the Queensland planters, it cannot be the less unwise to place them in a position of temptation such as it would require almost superhuman virtue to resist. If a vast population of blacks, amounting at the lowest estimate to some millions, be put under the absolute control of a handful of white landowners, it is impossible not to contemplate with apprehension the very serious results which are, to say the least, quite within the bounds of probability.

84. These are circumstances which appear to us to render it undesirable that the Colony of Queensland, a large portion of which is situated within the tropics, should be intrusted with dominion over native races which have already attained a certain measure of semi-civilization. But even did these special objections not exist, we should view the proposal with nearly equal disfavour.

85. Any departure in this instance from the maxim hitherto invariably acted upon by Her Majesty's Government, that, where large bodies of natives and a small number of whites are brought together under one Government, their control should be intrusted to an authority directly responsible to the Imperial Government, and able to bear itself impartially between conflicting interests, would, we think, be in the highest degree unfortunate. To intrust such control to the Legislature of any Australian Colony is, in fact, to intrust it to an oligarchy, in which those governed have no representation whatever, and which cannot but be influenced, in a greater or less degree, by its own selfish interests.

86. Since the refusal of Her Majesty's Government to sanction the annexation of New Guinea to Queensland, an agitation has commenced in Australia in favour of a far wider measure—the assumption of British sovereignty over the whole of the groups of the Western Pacific. It is unnecessary seriously to combat this proposal in its most extended form. Not to speak of the inherent difficulties attending any practical realization of such a scheme, its accomplishment would give rise to international embarrassments not to be rashly encountered. Germany possesses interests, and has entered into treaty obligations, which forbid her ready acquiescence in such a measure; and, though France may not herself desire to possess the New Hebrides, it is certain she would regard with jealousy their acquisition by any other Power. We are therefore persuaded that such a scheme will meet with no more favourable reception from Her Majesty's Government than did the proposal for the annexation of New Guinea.

87. At the same time, we would venture most respectfully to express to your Lordship our firm conviction that it is impossible longer to maintain a purely negative policy, or to defer a speedy resort to more efficient measures than any which have hitherto been adopted for the control of British subjects in the Pacific on the one hand, and for their protection on the other. For the successful accomplishment of such measures, we believe that the machinery of the existing Order in Council offers the greatest facilities, and that through the medium of the High Commissioner and his deputies it will be found possible, without the assumption of actual sovereignty, to exercise as much control as is at present requisite, and as much influence as is at present desirable. That the authority dealing with these matters beyond the confines of the Australian Colonies should be one wholly Imperial, and free from local influences, our experience forbids us to entertain a moment's doubt. We are fully alive to the temptation which presents itself to make over to a federated Australia, should such a federation be successfully formed, the control and the responsibility of dealing with such questions; but there are two objections (not to speak of others) to such a course, which ought in our opinion to be fatal to its adoption.

88. One of these objections is of a permanent character. While we readily grant that many of the objections which apply to annexation to any of the existing provincial Governments would be removed by the federalization of Australia, it yet appears to us that to place the destinies of many millions of men entirely in the hands of those whose interests are always alien, and too frequently antagonistic, to their own, is a measure for which it would be difficult to find justification. Whatever be the condition of Australia, the employers of coloured labour in the North, the shipping interests of Sydney and Auckland, and the capitalists who have invested money in South Sea enterprises, must always exercise a powerful influence, which every Government would seek to propitiate and conciliate. There are no countervailing interests represented in the Legislature; and it may be assumed with absolute certainty that, were annexation of the islands effected, whether to a single colony or to a federated Australia, the government of every group would—unquestionably in fact, and probably in name also—fall into the hands of the white residents in it. The same principles which preclude us from handing over the government of the millions of India to the European community settled there, should forbid the grant to a handful of Europeans in the Pacific of absolute power over the affairs of Her Majesty's native subjects.