

explain why so sudden an anxiety had arisen in Australasia on the latter question, when so many declarations had been made that the independence of the group would be respected. It was now nearly three years since the Agents-General had laid a respectful remonstrance before Lord Derby against the threatened increase of French transportation to New Caledonia and the adjacent isles. No secret was then made in the French Chambers of the desire of France to possess herself of the New Hebrides, and Lord Granville would no doubt remember how plainly it was said by prominent speakers that, if Australia succeeded in persuading the British Government to annex New Guinea, “*nous saurons à notre tour nous emparer des Nouvelles-Hébrides.*” No doubt renewed assurances had since been given by France that the informal agreement made some years ago between Her Majesty’s Government and the Government of the Republic would not be interfered with; and the new anxiety which had arisen on the subject in Australasia might perhaps have appeared unreasonable, but for two events which had happened very lately, and which were in fact the immediate cause of the present representation being made.

While the New Guinea question was still under consideration by Her Majesty’s Government, the Colonial Governments had expressed a strong wish to be consulted before steps were taken affecting the relations of Australasia to the islands of the Pacific. In answer to a question in the House of Commons [20th March, 1885] about New Guinea, Mr. Gladstone said that, while Her Majesty’s Government would endeavour to secure the interests of the colonies in transactions with foreign countries, it was not possible to do more than consult their wishes. And, as regarded the New Hebrides, Lord Derby promised, in his despatch of the 21st April, 1885, that no proposal having for its object the annexation of the group by France would ever be entertained by Her Majesty’s Government without consulting the colonies, and that no Government of this country would ever think of giving over the New Hebrides to France without taking care that they should not become a penal settlement. But now two things had happened to cause a new apprehension. In the case of Raiatea and the other islands to leeward of Tahiti the colonies suddenly learnt that the Declaration of 1847, by which England and France had mutually bound themselves “never” to take possession of the group, was abrogated, while the Island of Rapa, to the possession of which the Colonial Governments had attached so much importance, was to be retained by France. And in the case of the New Hebrides the colonies learnt with equal suddenness, from the White Book recently presented to the German Reichstag, that a convention had been entered into between the French and German Governments, pledging Germany to do nothing to hinder France from eventually taking possession of the group. Such an engagement on the part of those two Powers had a sinister aspect for the colonies, especially when they remembered what had been taking place at Samoa. For the same thing that had happened at Raiatea had happened at Samoa. A French officer had, without direct authority, hoisted the tricolor at Raiatea, and it had never come down. A German officer had, without direct authority, hoisted the German flag at the Harbour of Apia, and it had never come down. How could the colonies feel sure that the same thing would not happen at the New Hebrides? That group was excluded from the Western Pacific Acts, and no law existed there for the protection of any British interests; the missions, where so many devoted English lives had been given and so much money spent for twenty years, had no security; and, while English trade and settlement were discouraged, French companies were steadily pushing their acquisitions and seizing upon every point of vantage in the group. Things might soon drift until they reached the point when the same necessity would be pleaded of protecting foreign interests as had been pleaded at New Guinea, Raiatea, and Samoa; and the colonies feared that they might learn one day, as suddenly as they had learnt in those cases, not only that the islands were gone, but that they were gone with a secret purpose of extending there the penal settlements of France: for the colonies could not but remember how powerless every effort had seemed to be to rescue the Pacific Islands from the evils of transportation. The High Commissioner, not less than the Agents-General, gladly took this opportunity of renewing to Lord Granville the assurance, so often given to his Lordship and to Lord Lyons, of how thoroughly the colonies appreciated their constant help, their repeated appeals to the French Government, and the improvement they had caused in the original *récidiviste* scheme. Yet, in spite of everything, the scheme was being pressed on, nor were there wanting signs of its immediate application to New Caledonia being contemplated. Lord Granville would not think the colonies were unmindful of the promise given by Lord Derby. But the Colonial Governments hoped it would not seem unreasonable to ask his Lordship to renew and confirm that promise on the part of the present Government, seeing how deep had been their disappointment in the events that had successively taken place in Pacific Islands affairs. In three short years they had seen the things they most desired and valued slip away, while the things they most objected to and dreaded had come to pass. Half of New Guinea was gone, New Britain and the adjacent islands were gone, Raiatea was gone, Rapa was refused, and Samoa threatened; the *récidiviste* scheme was law, soon to bring with it grave dangers of international quarrel, since the persistency of France would be met by an equal determination on the part of the colonies; what remained of the Pacific Islands seemed fast passing under foreign dominion; and soon the power confided by the Imperial Parliament to the Federal Council of legislating for the relations of Australasia to the islands would be merely a phrase.

LORD GRANVILLE, in reply, congratulated the Australasian Colonies upon the accession of Canada in questions relating to the Pacific, and welcomed, on the part of Her Majesty’s Government, this new sign of a common interest and sympathy between the great dependencies of the Empire. With regard to the *récidiviste* question, he appreciated the reference which had been made to his own constant efforts, while at the Foreign Office, to support the colonies against the *récidiviste* scheme: indeed, he might say that he had “bombarded” Her Majesty’s Ambassador at Paris with remonstrances on the subject, which Lord Lyons had with such ability and tact pressed upon successive French Ministers. With regard to the New Hebrides, he confirmed and renewed the