

On the first night that the new Parliament met (21st instant), Lord Salisbury declared in the House of Lords that there was not, in any hypothesis, any danger of the annexation of Samoa by Germany. Some events, he said, had not only been imperfectly reported, but the reports had not even reached the Court at Berlin at all; and, while Her Majesty's Government were at present unable to place an exact interpretation on these events, they had received the most positive assurances from Germany that she would adhere to the existing treaties about Samoa.

Under these circumstances you will, no doubt, see that any contrary action by England is now out of the question, especially after the United States having ordered a ship to be sent forthwith to the Samoan group. There has been a rather curious suggestion from Berlin for a partition of the group among the three Powers concerned, England receiving Savaii, Germany Upolu, with the Port of Apia, and the United States Tutuila, with the great harbour of Pagopago; but as yet the suggestion seems to be without any authority. Every question, however, relating to the Pacific may go into a new phase now, in consequence of the defeat of Lord Salisbury and the resignation of his Government; and I think it would be futile for me to say any more until the new Government is formed.

Copies of the telegrams are annexed, together with the extracts from the *Times* to which I have referred.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

F. D. BELL.

Enclosures.

[Extract from the *Times*, Thursday, 21st January, 1886.]

THE FOREIGN OFFICE UNDER LORD SALISBURY.

It is well known that when the late Government resigned, and the affairs of the Foreign Office were handed over to Lord Salisbury and Mr. Bourke, many questions of great perplexity and importance were left unsettled, while in some cases a positive deadlock existed. We are not concerned to inquire whether this untoward condition of the foreign relations of the country was due to mismanagement on the part of the late Administration, or whether it resulted from an unfriendly attitude assumed by the representatives of certain foreign Powers, and especially by the German Chancellor. The fact is sufficient for our purpose, and the fact is indisputable that the change of Government was welcomed by many, irrespective of party predilections, as affording a prospect of improvement in the foreign relations of the Empire. Let us see how far this prospect has been realized. We can best accomplish our purpose by reviewing the recent history of some of the more important foreign questions which were still pending when the late Government resigned. Our object will be rather to state clearly what has actually been done than to express any opinion, whether favourable or unfavourable, as to the merits of the policy pursued.

The question of the Afghan frontier was the most urgent and perplexing of those with which Lord Salisbury was confronted when he received the seals of the Foreign Office. It is not necessary to deal with the earlier events in the history of this question, such as the agreement made by the late Government that the frontier should be defined, the discourteous treatment of the English Commission, the advance of the Russians into the debated and debatable territory, the capture of Penjdeh, and the occupation of the Zulfikar Pass. When Lord Granville agreed that Penjdeh should be retained by the Russians on condition that Zulfikar should remain to the Ameer, it was ascertained that the proposed Russian line would practically command the Afghan part of the pass, while the Russian Government contended that the Afghan line at another part of the Pass was carried so near to the road leading to and from Russian stations that in this respect it was inadmissible. Several attempts were made to reconcile the difference between the two Governments, and at one time it was proposed to refer the matter to the Frontier Commission; but Lord Granville and M. de Giers could not agree upon the terms of reference. It will be remembered that on the 11th of May Mr. Gladstone announced in the House of Commons that the Government "had arrived substantially at an agreement which was satisfactory to Her Majesty's Government and to Lord Dufferin and his Council." A month later, however, the discussions were still being carried on without much prospect of final accord, and M. de Staal had informed Lord Granville that the "Imperial Cabinet did not find it possible to agree to Lord Granville's terms." The Government being about to change hands, Lord Granville promised to convey this intimation to his successor. When Lord Salisbury assumed office he at once abandoned the idea of referring the question to the Frontier Commission, and, after communication with Sir West Ridgeway, determined to maintain fully his objection to that part of the Russian line which practically commanded the pass. On the other hand, he offered to modify the English proposal with respect to that portion which gave to the Afghans the command of the roads connecting the Russian stations. In accordance with this principle the Afghans retained command of both defiles, but were precluded from interrupting the communications between one Russian station and another. Sir Peter Lumsden, Sir West Ridgeway, and the Government of India being of opinion that this solution might be accepted, the protocol of the 10th September was signed by Lord Salisbury and M. de Staal. This protocol set forth in great detail the course of the line through the Zulfikar Pass, and thence the whole way to the Oxus. In pursuance of this agreement the Commissioners have completed a portion of their task. The work of delimitation has been accomplished to within a short distance of the Murghab River, and boundary-stones have been erected. It is possible that some differences may arise between the Commissioners as to that part of the frontier which has not been accurately explored, but there is no reason to anticipate that any serious difficulty will occur, or that even in such a case the appeal from the Commissioners to the respective Cabinets which the protocol provides for would fail to solve this difficult question in an amicable manner. The work of the Commissioners may be interrupted for a short time by the weather, but it is expected that it will be completed to the Oxus early in the spring.