

came together, as they had done, something further would be accomplished in the direction of welding and uniting the Empire." In this respect alone, to say nothing of tangible results, the meeting of the Conference and its harmonious proceedings mark an epoch in the national history.

One matter, however, among those which have so far engaged the attention of the Conference, has, we believe, presented itself more or less in the light of a difficult and burning question. There is no doubt that the continued presence of French troops in the New Hebrides is regarded by the representatives of the Australasian Colonies with very serious concern. This question was yesterday made the subject of a short but interesting conversation in the House of Lords. Lord Harrowby asked what course the Government proposed to take in the matter, and gave a lucid exposition of the recent history and present bearings of the question. The Colonial Conference was not mentioned in the debate, though the official reports of the proceedings have shown that the questions connected with the New Hebrides have on two separate occasions been discussed at considerable length by the Conference. The whole question is one which touches the Australasian Colonies very closely. There is no doubt whatever as to its international position. Since 1878 France and England have been under a reciprocal engagement not to annex the New Hebrides; but for more than a year French troops have been in occupation of certain positions in the islands. The French Government have explained that the troops were originally sent in consequence of outrages perpetrated by the natives in 1885, when certain French subjects were killed and several others wounded and attacked. "They have assured us," said the Prime Minister, "in tones whose earnestness and sincerity we have no right to doubt, that they have no intention of permanently occupying those islands, and that no definitive character ought to be attached to their action." If England alone were concerned, this assurance might suffice. But the colonies are more urgent in desiring a speedy and satisfactory settlement, and we believe that on this point a warm discussion took place in the Conference, the results of which may, no doubt, be discerned in the Prime Minister's statement that he expected the French Ambassador to make a communication of some importance in the course of the present week. Lord Salisbury declined—very properly, no doubt, in the present condition of the question—to go into detail about the matter. But his statement was somewhat hesitating, and was received with some expressions of dissatisfaction and disappointment by Lord Rosebery and Lord Granville, who have both had official cognisance of the question. "I can make no further answer," said the Prime Minister, "except to assure my noble friend that I am as fully sensible as he is of the sacredness of the international engagement which prevents both one and the other country from occupying these islands, and Her Majesty's Government have no intention of departing on their side from that engagement." This, however, is, as matters stand, rather a one-sided explanation, and, as such, it is scarcely calculated to reassure our colonial fellow-countrymen. The French troops are now in possession of certain positions on the islands, and have been in possession for more than a year. At one time, as we learn from Lord Granville, British ships of war were ordered to the scene of the French occupation, "not as a menace or in any spirit of hostility, but in order to put the two countries on the same footing." It does not, however, appear that any ships are there at the present moment, though Lord Salisbury declined to give, without due notice, a definite answer to the question addressed to him by Lord Rosebery on this point. We shall accordingly await with some interest the further explanations of the Prime Minister. In these circumstances we can well understand the anxiety felt on this subject by the Australian Colonies, and expressed by their Delegates at the Conference. The question is with them, as Lord Carnarvon said, a burning question, containing in itself the germs of future trouble and anxiety. No one would attribute to them a disposition to press unduly on the French Government or to act in an unfriendly spirit. But they are naturally more impatient, not to say irritated, than we are at an occupation which has now been continued for more than a year, and to which, so far, no definite term has been assigned.

It is impossible to feel surprise at the existence of this feeling in the Australasian Colonies, or at its manifestation at the Conference. The main purpose of the Conference is to make the Imperial Government better acquainted with colonial feeling on colonial questions, and to inform the colonial Delegates as to the real drift and purpose of Imperial policy. We believe that in this latter respect much good will be found to have been done by the frank explanations offered by Her Majesty's Government to the Delegates in regard to the international aspect of questions concerning Samoa and New Guinea—explanations which have tended to remove much misconception, and have given great satisfaction to the Delegates. To a certain extent the same results may be expected to follow in time from the discussion of the question of the New Hebrides. The Government now clearly understand the strong views entertained by the colonies on this question, and the great importance they attach to its speedy and satisfactory settlement. The explanation and justification of these views are fully set forth in the speeches of Lord Harrowby and Lord Carnarvon. The colonies have watched for some years with much concern the gradual extension of French occupation and influence in the Pacific. They may perhaps be over-sensitive in the matter. There is room for more than one nationality in the Pacific, and the Australasian nationality of the future may perhaps be all the stronger and richer for the infusion of a variety of European elements. But the extension of the area of French occupation in the Pacific is inseparably connected with two questions which touch the Australasian Colonies very closely, and indeed vitally. These are the questions of the labour traffic and of the *récidivistes*. As to the former, it is sufficient to refer to the statement of a French Admiral recently made, according to Lord Harrowby, in the Senate, that the labour that France gets from the New Hebrides is simply another form of downright slavery. The record of the Australian Colonies is not without reproach in this matter, but their conscience is now awakened, and they may well be excused for thinking that the taint of slavery in any form would be fatal to the future civilisation of the Australasian world. The *récidiviste* question is even more serious. The French acknowledge that New Caledonia can take no more convicts, and the Austra-