

As to the occupation by France of the New Hebrides, he understood that the Government did not wish to give any information as to the negotiations. He felt bound, however, to direct attention to the subject. The Australian Colonies were sensitively interested in the New Hebrides question. It was discussed at the recent Colonial Conference, and the discussion was of so vivacious a character that Her Majesty's Government had not printed it in the report. The Australian colonists trusted the House of Commons to see that their interests were properly safeguarded; and we were bound to put them in the position they would be in if they had representatives in this House. (Hear, hear.) It was only in this way we could reciprocate the cordial attachment of the colonists to this country. In regard to the New Hebrides the simple statement of the facts was better than any comment. In 1878 the French Government, alarmed by articles in the Australian newspapers advocating the annexation of the New Hebrides by us, asked us to join in a declaration that both countries would respect the independence of the New Hebrides, and that neither would seek to occupy them or to establish a protectorate over them. That was agreed to, and the Australian Colonies were informed that both countries had adopted a policy of non-occupation. The agreement was renewed in 1883 by a *note verbale*. In January, 1886, the French Government asked whether we would waive the agreement if they would undertake to send no more convicts to New Caledonia. We sent the proposal to the colonies, where it was strongly objected to. Next we received angry protests from Australia that a French expedition had started for the New Hebrides, carrying in ships of war troops and materials for the erection of barracks. We despatched a vessel of war to see fair-play done. The French Government admitted that they were bound by the agreement, and promised to withdraw their troops, but they claimed a right to protect French settlers. We proposed a scheme of joint naval protection; the French Government sent us a counter-proposal; we replied on the 26th November last; and since then, as he understood, there had been no further reply on the part of France. But in September last a fresh batch of convicts was sent to New Caledonia, and every fresh batch increased the alarm and anxiety of our colonists. It had been stated in that House, in reply to a question, that there was no agreement between us and France bearing upon colonisation; and that was quite true. The settlement of French colonists was nothing in itself; but each settlement was taken to mean a further step towards annexation. In this state of facts the French Government continued to evade the demands of Her Majesty's Government for an immediate settlement of the question. It was understood that the French Government were endeavouring to mix up the question of the evacuation of the New Hebrides with the questions of the Suez Canal and of Egypt; but he hoped suggestions of that kind would be resisted by the Government. He quite admitted that Her Majesty's Government had not treated the two matters as one; but, unless much care was taken to show that in their view the two matters were entirely distinct, there was a serious danger that we might be drawn into a sort of bargain. (Hear.) That was a thing this country ought to resist. (Hear.) It was impossible to imagine a clearer diplomatic case than that which we possessed—it was a case which there was no occasion to mix up with any other diplomatic dispute in any other part of the world; it ought to be dealt with on its own merits. There was a rumour, he trusted unfounded, that Her Majesty's Government had thought of making some concession to France in some other part of the Pacific in return for France quitting the New Hebrides. That would be looked upon with great disapproval by this country, and he hoped that the right honourable gentleman would be able to show that no such bargain was in the contemplation of Her Majesty's Government. If there was, he thought that it would be their duty to ask the House and the country to express their disapproval of it. He did not wish to interfere with any current negotiations in what he had said, but we were under a serious liability of duty to our Australian Colonies in this matter. He hoped that Her Majesty's Government would be able to give a satisfactory assurance, and satisfy the colonies with the news that the New Hebrides would be soon evacuated by France.

Sir J. FERGUSSON said that in his reply to the honourable member on Saturday he might have given an inadequate answer upon some points; but the Government had had some hopes of passing the vote on which they were engaged, and he had not felt justified in speaking at greater length. . . . With regard to the observations of the honourable member as to the New Hebrides, he had no complaint to make. He thought that the question was one which must necessarily attract very much attention in this country, and, beyond that, the degree of anxious attention which it attracted from the Australian Colonies must render it a topic to which attention must be called. That was quite evident. The right honourable gentleman had referred to the discussion which was said to have taken place at the Colonial Conference. For reasons which he need not go into, those deliberations had not been published; but he must say that the rumours which had got afloat on that subject had been extremely exaggerated. He thought it was of very great advantage that those intelligent and eminent men did not hesitate to express themselves frankly to Her Majesty's Government as to the feeling of the colonies which they represented; and, if Her Majesty's Government had been at all insensible on the matter, they would have been impressed by the manner in which it had been brought to their attention by those gentlemen. He had himself passed six or seven years in those colonies, and he thoroughly understood and appreciated the feelings of the colonists upon the subject. But at the same time we must have regard to the feelings of other countries in such matters. (Hear, hear.) It must be evident that other countries, having a sense of power and a desire of expansion, were anxious to occupy the unsettled lands of the world, and we ought to have consideration for their feelings in that respect. With regard to the New Hebrides, it was quite true that certain engagements had been entered into between Great Britain and France as to an occupation. But the French Government held that the French settlements there required the temporary protection of a military force. Her Majesty's Government could not look without fear and doubt upon the continued occupation by a military force of a group which it had been agreed should be neutral, and therefore successive Administrations had urged upon the French Government the necessity of each nation fulfilling its pledge to