

1888.

NEW ZEALAND.

FEDERATION AND ANNEXATION.

(FURTHER PAPERS RELATING TO THE PACIFIC ISLANDS.)

[In continuation of A.-3, 1887, Session II.]

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 6th May, 1887.

At the Conference on the 25th April the present position of the Samoan question was explained by the Secretary of State in a minute laid before the delegates, of which the following is a brief summary.

Her Majesty's Government pointed out that the Samoan question had been a complicated one for several years. Three Powers had commercial interests in the group—England, Germany, and America—and each Power had a separate treaty with the native king. After reciting what had happened since 1880, including the agreement come to between England and Germany for the A.-5, 1887, delimitation of the British and German spheres of influence in the Western Pacific, the minute went Sess. I., No. 5. on to remind the Conference that the Samoan and Tongan groups were especially excepted from that delimitation, because assurances had been repeatedly exchanged between the British and German Governments that neither would interfere with the independence of the islands. It had been decided that the future government of Samoa, and the protection of the rights and interests of the three nations and their nationals, should be reserved for consideration of the two Powers in concert with the United States; and in the meanwhile each of the three Powers had sent a Commissioner to Samoa to ascertain the facts necessary for the basis of a settlement, in preparation for a Conference of the three Powers to be held very shortly at Washington. The investigations by these officers had led Her Majesty's Government to the conclusion that the natives of Samoa were incapable of forming by themselves a stable and efficient administration, and that the only satisfactory method of preventing the peace of the group being disturbed by the conflicts and rivalries of native chiefs, and of strengthening and securing the interests of the three civilised nations on an equal footing, was to be found in a plan for governing Samoa by one of the three Powers as the mandatory of the other two. This is, accordingly, the plan which Her Majesty's Government will advocate at the Washington Conference, and provision will then be made for preserving the independence of the group, for securing to each Power full freedom of commerce, navigation, and jurisdiction in matters affecting its nationals, and for establishing a joint Land Court to ascertain and secure the land claims of all persons, of whatever nationality.

Having regard to the events that have taken place in Samoa during the last two or three years, and especially to the ever-growing chance of a German annexation, notwithstanding the engagement between England and Germany to preserve the independence of the group, the Australasian delegates were unanimously in favour of the course proposed by Her Majesty's Government.

It will now rest with English diplomacy at Washington to gain, if possible, the assent of Germany and the United States to England being constituted the "mandatory" Power. I cannot, however, say that I have myself any expectation of this being done. German interests still predominate in the islands, and my own impression is that the United States will throw in their weight in favour of giving the mandate to Germany. The chance we had of gaining the preponderance of interest by acquiring the German companies' rights, and of obtaining Prince Bismarck's consent to the inclusion of Samoa in the English sphere in the Pacific, is lost, and the United States are not likely to help us to regain it. But we must, nevertheless, be glad that the plan adopted by Her Majesty's Government does not exclude us from regaining it at a future day, and, at any rate, prevents the otherwise inevitable annexation, formal or informal, of the group by Germany.

In regard to Tonga, Her Majesty's Government are of opinion that it is not desirable to make any distinct proposals at present to the Conference, inasmuch as the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific is actually conducting a personal investigation into the affairs of the group, and they wish to have his report before taking any further steps. This announcement was well received by the Conference, in view of the religious complications which appear to have brought matters to the present crisis, and of the hopelessly-conflicting statements which continue to appear, even up to this day, as to the true state of affairs in the islands.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

F. D. BELL.