

Fourteenth Day.
9 May 1907.

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BRITISH
INTERESTS IN
THE PACIFIC.
(Mr. Deakin.)

The single "functionary" has been transformed into a Senator, an ex-Governor of New Caledonia, a joint secretary of the Ministry of the Colonies, and another gentleman from the same office. It is pointed out in the last paragraph that this is not an official Conference, but for the purpose of a simple exchange of views. It must be understood that we remained unaware of any of these proceedings. The distinguished gentlemen came to London, and the Convention sat in February 1906. Except for the information conveyed to us by ordinary newspaper cables, we were still unaware of its existence and of its character. We had not the faintest conception of its scope. We saw the notices in the papers, and were somewhat surprised that the appointment of the French official and the British official who were to settle the manner in which the evidence on titles should be put in had not been communicated to us, but regarding the meeting in that light and remembering that it was to be unofficial and that everything was to be subject to after consideration, we supposed it was by a mere official oversight that we were being ignored upon a matter of small importance. It was not, in fact, until expressions of astonishment began to appear in the Australian papers after I had been questioned about the meeting, that the correspondents of English papers in Australia cabled to London some expression of surprise. It was then that we received the first reply by telegraph, which will be found on page 10, March 5th, 1906, referring to our unanswered despatch of August 29th and informing us that the "Joint Anglo-French Commission has signed "Convention for submission to British and French Governments for settlement of questions in New Hebrides. Convention will not be confirmed until "His Majesty's Government has had opportunity of considering views of your "Ministers. Copy will be sent by next mail." This was signed by Lord Elgin. That was the first intimation we had that there was a Commission, that a convention had been drawn up and signed, and that it was to settle questions in the New Hebrides other than those affecting land titles.

There I can stop my recital of events. But it is at least a matter of interest and of some curiosity to know that though the Convention did not sit until February, 1906, previously, in December, 1905, there appeared in a French paper a forecast of the findings to be expected from this Commission which was posted to me by a very experienced and able member of the House of Commons. So that I was not altogether unprepared for the Convention when it arrived, seeing that it followed, according to the member who posted it to me, and according to my own recollection, the very lines on which the actual Convention was drawn up. That means nothing more than this, that the French Commission went into this meeting knowing exactly what they wanted, thoroughly well equipped with information, with the personal experience of M. Picanon in New Caledonia where he had been Governor for some time, and with the general knowledge of M. Saint-Germain. They knew what they wanted and what they intended to get. There need be no surprise if they got it—nor any suggestion of anything more than their address—knowing their own minds they were successful. Then comes a despatch to us dated March 9th, 1906, which I do not propose to refer to except to quote a line from page 14 the last paragraph, by which we were informed that the draft Convention must be confirmed or rejected practically as it stands. Except the telegram, this was the first reply we had ever had to our suggestions of August, 1905, which, as I have shown, were made in a purely tentative way and subject to consideration, and made only in default of other possibilities. The first information we got was a Convention which we had to confirm or reject practically as it stood. That intimation, it must be remembered, was not made to us by the British Colonial Office for its own purpose, but was an intimation to us that, having debated this matter with the French Commission its officers felt sure no better terms could