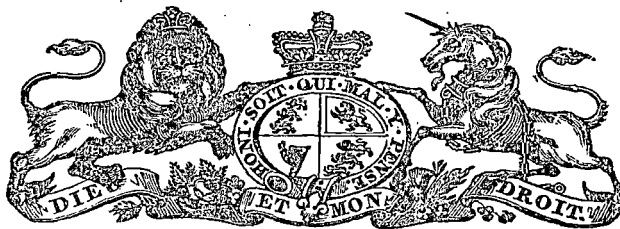


(No. 25.)



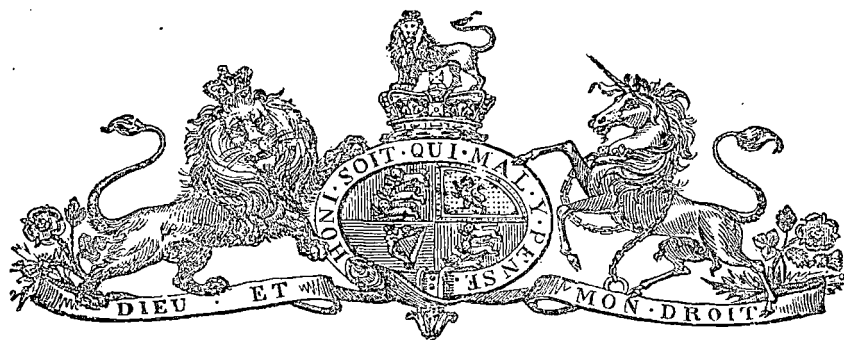
1864.

T A S M A N I A.

DESPATCH FROM SECRETARY OF STATE.

DECISION OF H.M. GOVERNMENT ON TRANSPORTATION
QUESTION.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Colonial Treasurer; and ordered by the House to be
printed, 29 June, 1864.



(Copy.)

TASMANIA.

No. 12.

Downing-street, 26th January, 1864.

SIR,

It has become my duty to convey to you the decision at which Her Majesty's Government have arrived with respect to the Report of the Royal Commission appointed to enquire into the operation of the Acts relating to Transportation and Penal Servitude.

That Report has received from Her Majesty's Government the full and respectful consideration to which the distinguished position, the great ability, and the high character of the Commissioners entitled it.

Of the general value of recommendations proceeding (almost unanimously) from such a body of public men, and founded upon a long and laborious inquiry, it is not for me to speak. I have only to deal with those which refer to the question of Transportation, and they may be shortly stated as follows :—

The Commissioners do not advise the establishment of any new Penal Colony. They recommend that all Male Convicts who are not disqualified for useful labour in a Colony should, during the latter part of their punishment, be sent to Western Australia; and they reckon that the number available for that purpose, in case their other recommendation as to lengthening sentences of Penal Servitude were adopted, would not exceed 1500 annually, and might not amount to nearly so many.

It would be unfair to the Commissioners to suppose that this proposal, which has excited so much alarm in the Eastern Colonies of Australia, was made by them in the interests of the Mother Country alone. On the contrary, they received the strongest evidence as to the almost unanimous desire of the free inhabitants of Western Australia to receive an increased supply of Convict Labour, as well as of the singular adaptation of that Settlement for its reception; while they were convinced, by testimony which appeared to them sufficient, that there was no reason to fear any considerable escape or migration of Convicts or expirees to the other Colonies, and no danger therefore of an increased Transportation to one Colony doing substantial injury to the others.

It is not needful for me to discuss the number of the Convicts who may have made their way to Melbourne or other ports, nor the degree to which it would be hereafter possible to absorb or retain a much larger convict and ex-convict population within the limits of Western Australia. It is enough for me to inform you, that Her Majesty's Government have taken into careful consideration the Addresses which have reached the Queen from the Eastern Colonies, which, from their origin, their earnestness, and their loyalty, they recognize as representing not only the numbers, but also the property, the intelligence, and the character of those communities, and as expressing not mere popular prejudice, but deep feelings and moral convictions.

They desire, indeed, distinctly to guard themselves against giving any apparent sanction to the doctrine (which might seem to be involved in these remonstrances), that the Settlers in certain portions of a vast Territory belonging to the Crown have any general right to dictate what shall or shall not be done throughout the whole of it.

But they are equally anxious, so far as their duty to the Mother Country and the Colony directly interested will permit, to consult the interests and wishes of Her Majesty's Australian Subjects. They have determined, therefore, differing with regret upon this important subject from the Royal Commissioners, not to adopt their recommendation with respect to Transportation to Western

Australia. Upon the other hand, they are not prepared to comply with the desire of some of the Addresses which have been received, that Transportation to that Colony should be at once and altogether discontinued.

Such a change could not be made with justice to those who have reasonably calculated upon a continuance of the policy under which Her Majesty's Government some years ago began to supply them with Convicts. It has, however, been determined to send no more Convicts to Western Australia than the limited number which has, in practice, been going there of late. They go by ship-loads, and it would be impossible, therefore, to specify with exactness the number which would be sent under this arrangement. I may state, however, that two Convict Ships, containing about 270 or 280 prisoners each, have been usually despatched in each year to Western Australia, and that the number will not be increased. I have also to inform you, that Her Majesty's Government have decided to put an end to the system of "Conditional Pardons,"—so that in future no Convict will be entitled, or it is hoped permitted, to leave the penal Colony before the expiration of his original sentence. This rule will be applied to all Convicts sent from this Country from and after the beginning of the present year.

In conclusion, I have to express my earnest hope, and that of my colleagues, that the spirit in which the representations of the Australian Colonists, upon a subject in which their desires might seem to be opposed to the interests of the people of this Country, has been met by Her Majesty's Government, may tend to draw more closely than ever the bonds of loyalty and good-will which unite them to the Crown and the Empire.

I have, &c.,

(Signed) NEWCASTLE.

Governor T. GORE BROWNE, C.B.