

"You oughtn't to smoke, Sir, (says the Guard),

"So my friends say.

"But you mustn't smoke, Sir,

"So my doctor says.

"But you shan't smoke,

"So my wife says."

You oughtn't to annex, say the Tories. You mustn't annex, say the Whigs. You shan't annex, say the Radicals. But we go on annexing all the same.

Now against these enormous additions to our territories, what have we lost or given up since 1815?

So far as I am aware, only the island of New Caledonia, taken possession of by Captain Cook but never occupied, and in 1853 unfortunately annexed by France with our assent, the Ionian Islands ceded to the then new Kingdom of Greece, and the Orange River and Transvaal Territories in South Africa, each hastily annexed by one ministry and restored to independence by another on further consideration.

Of the four retrocessions, the only one that probably any sensible Englishman would regret is New Caledonia, and that, not on account of any intrinsic value of its own, but because it introduces a rival power to Australian waters, and has, as a French convict establishment, caused some annoyance to our Australian brethren, if however, this annoyance should grow in the future to any serious extent, there can be no doubt but that a federated Australia will know how to deal with it.

When therefore we hear wild talk about abandoning our colonies and so forth, we may do well to remember that such things have been said from time to time during the last fifty years, but nevertheless, the facts so far have been all the other way, and even to the present day, the Empire so far from diminishing continues to swell at a most portentous rate.

Now understand me, I am far from saying that these annexations were necessarily wrong, probably in the most recent cases they have been forced on those in authority and who were responsible, by circumstances, and much against their will. Our Colonial Office from sheer mental slothfulness, if from no better reason, has long done its utmost to discourage annexations, and in this has been well backed up by the Radical party in the country, but we cannot lay down hard and fast rules in such matters, nor adhere through thick and thin to the absolute integrity of every principle