With the advent to power of the Disraeli ministry in 1874 the nascent Imperial spirit grew in strength. Lord Carnarvon (the 4th earl), when under-secretary for the colonies in 1858-1859, had regarded Grey’s federation proposal with disfavour, but later, as secretary of state, he had introduced the bill for the federation of the Canadian provinces. He now returned to the Colonial Office filled with the idea of doing for South Africa what had been done in British North America.@@1 Recent events in South Africa had appeared for a brief period to favour a union of its various colonies and states. The intimation of the impending grant of self-government to Cape Colony was regarded by both Boer republics as bringing nearer the prospect of their union with the British colonies. But just at that time differences arose between Great Britain and the republics as to the ownership of the Kimberley diamond fields which estranged the Boers (see Griqualand and Transvaal). In the Transvaal Pretorius was succeeded by T. F. Burgers, a man totally unfitted to govern a country distracted by factions, harassed by wars with natives, and with an almost depleted exchequer. Yet in the condition of the Transvaal Lord Carnarvon found another argument in favour of federation. Union with the neighbouring states would, he thought, cure its ills and promote the general welfare of South Africa. As a preliminary step he accepted an offer from J. A. Froude to visit South Africa unofficially, and by travelling through its different states find out what were the obstacles to confederation and the means by which such obstacles could be removed. Froude landed at Cape Town on the 21st of September 1874, and having visited Natal, the Free State and Pretoria as well as Cape Colony, sailed for England on the 10th of January 1875. In the three and a half months he had spent in the country he had reached the conclusion expressed by the duke of Newcastle nearly twenty years previously, namely, that all England needed there was Table Bay—or the Cape peninsula—as a naval and military station. The South African states, he believed, might be left in internal affairs to work out their own future. These views coincided with those of Lord Carnarvon, who looked to federation as a means of relieving the Imperial government of some of the heavy responsibilities pressing upon it in South Africa, and he asked Froude to return to the Cape to take part in a conference in South Africa on the federation scheme. The offer was accepted, and Froude reached Cape Town again in June 1875. Lord Carnarvon’s despatch (May 4, 1875), indicating his views, had preceded the arrival of Froude, and had incensed J. C. Molteno, the Cape premier, by its disregard of the colony’s self-governing powers. A motion was carried in the Cape parliament affirming that any movement for federation should originate in South Africa and not in England. Froude on his arrival was much chagrined at the attitude taken by the Cape parliament, and conducted an oratorical campaign throughout the country in favour of federation. His speeches were lacking in judgment and tact, and created an unfavourable impression, The conference was not held, and Froude returned to England in the autumn.@@2

Lord Carnarvon was far from abandoning his plan. The Transvaal was now in a condition bordering on anarchy, and numbers of its inhabitants were supposed to be looking to Great Britain for help. Another party in the Transvaal was seeking alliances with Germany and Portugal, and this danger of foreign interference was a further cause for action. In August 1876 the colonial secretary assembled a conference on South African affairs in London, nominating Froude as representative of Griqualand West. President Brand represented the Free State. Another member of the conference was Sir Theophilus Shepstone, *(q.v.)* Neither Cape Colony nor the Transvaal was represented,

and the conference was abortive, President Brand having no permission from his state to consider federation. That subject was, in fact, not discussed by the delegates. In view of the troubles in the Transvaal, and in furtherance of Carnarvon’s federation scheme, Shepstone was, on the 5th of October following, given a dormant commission to annex the republic “ if it was desired by the inhabitants and in his judgment necessary.” The secretary of state sought the aid of Sir Bartle Frere as his chief agent in carrying through confederation, the then governor of Cape Colony and high commissioner for South Africa, Sir Henry Barkly, sharing the views of the Cape ministry that the time was inopportune to force such a step upon South Africa. In a letter dated the 13th of October, offering Frere the post Barkly was about to vacate, Lord Carnarvon wrote:—

. . . The war between the Transvaal republic and the natives has had this further effect, it rapidly ripened all South African policy. . . . It brings us near to the object and end for which I have now for two years been steadily labouring—the union of the South African colonies and states. I am indeed now considering the details of a bill for their confederation, which I desire to introduce next session, and I propose to press, by all means in my power, my confederation policy in South Africa.

The time required for the work of confederating and of con­solidating the confederated states Lord Carnarvon estimated at not more than two years, and he was sanguine enough to hope that Frere would stay on at the Cape for two or three years “ as the first governor-general of the South African dominion. ” Frere accepted the offer, but did not leave England until March 1877. Shep­stone preceded him, and in January 1877 had gone to Pretoria. His conferences with the leading men in the Transvaal and a consideration of the dangers which threatened it and the grave disorders within its borders satisfied Shepstone that he had no choice except to act upon his commission, and on the 12th of April he issued a proclamation annexing the country to the British Crown. During the interval between Shepstone’s arrival in the country and the annexation the Volksraad had rejected the proposals for confederation laid before them in accordance with Lord Carnarvon’s permissive bill, and had made no real attempt at reform. The annexation was acquiesced in by a considerable number of the white inhabitants. Shep- stone was convinced that it was the only step which could save the country from ruin. The subject is discussed at greater length under Transvaal. Frere, who had reached Cape Town on the 31st of March, learnt on the 16th of April that the annexation had taken place. He was inclined to regard Shepstone’s act as premature, and he realized that it stirred very deeply Dutch national feeling throughout South Africa. Though anxious to promote Carnarvon’s policy, Frere found that native affairs called for immediate attention. The Basuto and Kaffir tribes were giving trouble, and the 40,000 trained Zulu warriors under Cetywayo threatened the peace both of Natal and the Trans­vaal. In the same month (Aug. 1877) in which the British parliament passed the act, foreshadowed by the secretary of state, “ for the union under one government of such of the South African colonies and states as may agree thereto, ” another war with the Kaffirs broke out. This conflict lasted until May 1878, and largely absorbed the energies of Sir Bartle Frere.@@3 In the meantime a scheme of unification, as opposed to federation, put forward by the Molteno ministry—a scheme which in its essence anticipated the form of government established in 1910— had met with no support from Frere or the home ministry. In January 1878 Lord Carnarvon resigned, and the driving force of the federation scheme thus disappeared. It was not, however, finally dropped until 1880. In July of that year proposals for a confederation conference were submitted to the Cape parliament. At that time Paul Kruger and Piet Joubert, delegates from the Transvaal Boers, were in Cape Town, and they used their influence to prevent the acceptance of the proposals, which were shelved by the ministry accepting “ the

@@@1 At Sir Henry Barkly’s request Lord Carnarvon’s predecessor, Lord Kimberley, had in November 1871 given him (Sir Henry) authority to summon a meeting of representatives of the states and colonies to consider the “ conditions of union,” but the annexation of the diamond fields had occurred meantime and Sir Henry thought the occasion inopportune for such a conference.

@@@2 For Froude’s views and actions, see especially the blue book C. 1399 (1876), containing his report to Lord Carnarvon.

@@@3 Serious troubles with the Basutos which began in 1879 reacted on the situation in the Transvaal and Natal. These troubles were finally ended in 1884, when the country was given up by the Cape and became a crown colony (see Basutoland).