

The Hon. Mr. ALSTON, Registrar-General, said:—Sir, I should not have risen to attempt to make a speech at this late hour, had it not been from the peculiar position which I occupy in this Council, and I feel that I ought to apologise for detaining the House, even for a few minutes, after the very exhaustive arguments on both sides have been heard with such patient attention.

As I am neither one of the Executive, nor a Representative Member of this House, I have to satisfy my own conscience, and as it is probable I may not have another opportunity of expressing my opinion on the principle of Confederation with Canada, I must beg leave to say a few words.

It will be unnecessary to follow up the subject at any length, as I believe that the principle of Confederation has been virtually conceded. I give the Hon. Member for Victoria District all the credit that may be due for the consistent way in which he has agitated this question for years past, and probably the reason why the matter was not earlier brought to a successful issue through that agitation, was that either he did the right thing in the wrong way, or that he lived before his time. From 1867 to the present time, the question has been discussed in successive sessions of the Council, and it has been declared in effect that, at some future time, Confederation would be of advantage to this Colony. The Imperial Government have now spoken out unmistakably in the matter, and have decided that Confederation shall take place. It seems that those who have the power to shape the destinies of this Colony have decided that it is to take a part in the great scheme of Confederation of the British North American Colonies, and have not hesitated to throw the whole weight of their enormous influence in the scale to effect this object; the Canadian Parliament manifestly urge this matter as a necessary part of the scheme; and last, though not least, a large portion of the people of this Colony cry aloud for it, as a panacea for all their ills. Downing Street has not hesitated to guide and control the opinions of Her Majesty's servants in this Colony. Whether this be wise or prudent on the part of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in view of the present constitution of this Colony, it is not for me to say, but it is of no use blinding our eyes to the fact that they who have the power will—and for aught I know should—exercise it.

It was fitting, then, that the Executive of this Colony should take the initiative and undertake the responsibility of placing the matter before the country in a tangible shape. I rejoice that they have done so, and that the working out of the basis of arrangements has fallen into so able hands, for what other party have the power to do so? If they had not preoccupied the ground, who is there? What party is there in this small community commanding sufficient general respect, that could have undertaken this important duty, with any chance of success?

Now, Sir, the Resolutions before us form no final measure, no unavoidable and perfected conditions. I look upon them simply as the basis of arrangement—the initial step in the negotiation of the business. If it had been otherwise—if these were proposed as final conditions upon which the people of the Colony would be allowed to pass no vote, over which they would exercise no control; if the Government had said to this Council, you shall have these terms or none, I would have voted against them, or retired from this Assembly. But the Governor has declared that they shall be submitted to a popular vote, and ratified by a really representative and reconstructed Council.

That being so, I can give them my conscientious support, not only because I deem it to be my duty to support every well-considered Government measure, but because I believe them to be, as far as they go, reasonable, fair, and advantageous. Before now, a Government measure has claimed a support, but a reluctant one; in this case it is not so. I trust I may be allowed to render my small tribute of thanks to the Hon. Member for Victoria City, who with great self-denial has undertaken an unenviable position, one which, of necessity, would lay himself open to attack and misrepresentation; but one in which he has done and can do great service to his country. I think I can see, in the Resolutions before me, evidences of this service; traces of his handiwork; and although he cannot give the measure his support, I feel sure, though I desire not to penetrate the secrets of that mysterious chamber, that he has done all in his power to render them as beneficial, or rather, as the Hon. Member himself would say, as little hurtful as he could to the best interests of the Colony.

When this subject came up for discussion, in the last Session of this Council, I joined those who were supposed to form the Confederate party, and moved the following Resolution:—

“That however desirable Confederation with Canada may hereafter become, this Council believes that until the great Territory intervening between this Colony and the Dominion is transferred to the Crown, and contains a larger and more settled population, it would be premature to express any definite opinion on the subject.”