

The Newfoundlandander.

St. John's, Thursday, March 2, 1865.

3,643.

MR. A. SHEA'S SPEECH ON CONFEDERATION IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY ON TUESDAY, 21ST FEBRUARY.

Mr. A. SHEA said he did not intend to offer any practical objection to the resolution embodying as it did the views of the public generally on this important subject; but he felt, nevertheless, that in the interest of the public it was in its present shape open to some objection. His opinion was that the resolution the House should adopt was one affirming the principles contained in the Report of the Quebec Conference, but at the same time providing that their decision should be subject to the expression of public opinion at the next general election. He felt this was the course the House should adopt, because on such a resolution there would be a division, and every member of the House would then stand before the constituencies in an intelligible light, while the present Resolution being one on which no division can take place, the public are without that security at the next elections which a clear avowal of the opinions of members would afford and which may now be avoided by any who desire to return to the House under false pretences. He thought therefore for the protection of the public that it would have been desirable to submit a more definite proposition than was contained in the Resolution before them. Before proceeding farther he would refer to a discussion that had been had in another place on this subject in which some very extraordinary assumptions were made the groundwork of the argument. The question had been dealt with as one by which it was designed to set up the Markets of Canada against those of the United States and to impose disabilities on our trade with the latter. He (Mr. Shea) was at a loss to know where the warrant had been found for such a conclusion, which only serves to show how little the subject was comprehended by those who can express themselves. There was nothing in the proposed Confederations by which the ports of the United States would be rendered less open than at present to our commerce, and no one would deprecate more than he (Mr. Shea) any attempt by fiscal regulations to force trade from the channels in which it naturally flowed. Men of business should be left free to resort to those places in which their convenience or their interest was best consulted, and these sound principles were not contravened by any thing contemplated in the Report agreed to at Quebec. No doubt since the time when that Report was adopted, the United States Government have given notice for the repeal of the Reciprocity Treaty, and it may be imagined that the abrogation of that measure would induce a resort to a retaliatory policy by the Government of the Confederation. Now it was believed in well-informed circles that the repeal of that Treaty was not a necessary consequence of the notice that had been given, and he (Mr. Shea) was strongly disposed to share this opinion. The conclusion which that notice expresses was arrived at under the influence of irritation caused by the conduct of the St. Albans' raiders who escaped into Canada, and were believed to have received sympathy there, and it is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that before the expiration of the twelve months to which the notice extends the public mind of America will view the subject in a calmer and more just light, and will see how little of legitimate connexion there is between the transaction at which they have taken unfounded umbrage, and a business treaty which has been an operation for some years past to the mutual advantage of the parties concerned. But should it be otherwise, and that the notice given in petulance is carried into effect by repealing the treaty, then he had authority for asserting that as far as Canada is concerned her leading men in accordance with the approved course of British legislation would deprecate a recourse to a retaliatory policy. It would be seen then how little grounds there were for the apprehensions that our free trade Colonial policy would be disturbed, or our present satisfactory relations be injuriously affected by the operations of the Government of the proposed Confederation. He had listened with much interest to the very able and logical speech of the learned Attorney General yesterday, but he did not entirely agree with his hon and learned friend as to the speculative character of the question they were considering. This measure of Confederation does not belong to the class of untried or novel experiments. All the principal countries of the world are the result of combinations of small states for purposes of defence, security, and common advancement. When we look at England up to the time of the Heptarchy and after the combination of these little kingdoms under one Crown, we have a signal illustration of the effects of Confederation in promoting the power, and general prosperity of a people. In her early days weak and disjointed, the several little States at war with each other, or harassed or overrun by some foreign invader, they made but little progress. But since they became one under a settled Government the result of their combined suffrages, though England has known of those vicissitudes from which no nation can be exempt, her career has been one of steady advancement, culminating at the present day in the proud position she holds, foremost amongst the nations of the earth. Then we have her Union with Scotland from which both countries have derived such signal advantages. The Union of England and Ireland had been referred to as an example of the injurious effects of combinations, and efforts had been made to work on the traditional prejudices which that event had justly inspired, to create a hostile feeling to the present measure. They have read the history of that transaction to little purpose who assert that it has any features in common with the just terms on which the Confederation of these colonies is proposed to be formed. At the time of that Union, Ireland was a conquered country, and force and fraud were employed to bring about the so-called Union. Nor were its conditions less unjust than the agencies by which it was effected. The representation given to Ireland in the British Parliament was about one-half of what she was entitled to on fair grounds, and from this representation the Catholics who formed five-sixths of the population were entirely excluded by the continuance of the Penal Laws. It were idle to enumerate the inequalities and injustice which marked this connexion which scarcely established any bond but that which exists between the taskmaster and the slave. Every one acquainted with the history of O'Connell's life knows that his agitation for a Repeal of the Union was grounded on the fact that the conditions of a fair Union were not found in the relations between England and Ireland, and that it was not so much the Repeal of the Union he sought as the acquisition of

equal rights and privileges, the concession of which he hoped to extort from the fears of the British Government which that agitation was more likely than any other to call up. The whole tenor of his speeches shows that a Union with England based on terms of equality and general equity would have found him a willing supporter. What analogy then, said Mr. Shea, can be drawn between a Union such as I have correctly described, and the proposed combination of these British North American Provinces where the just rights of all are alike respected, and the conditions of honorable fellowship upheld. And even as respects the Irish Union, repeal has now no advocates, for the policy of the British Government has of late years become less anti-social, and the efforts of the leading Irishmen is now being directed to the attainment of those practical reforms which would promote the social and material advancement of the country which there is a growing disposition in England to advance. In the history of France we have another example of the power of Confederation to further the greatness and prosperity of a country. The vast Empire which existed in the days of Charlemagne fell to pieces under the rule of his feeble successors who divided the Empire, and granted provinces to the high nobility, completing the feudal system under which the country became so dismembered, that in one hundred years after the death of that great monarch the crown had but two provinces and some small districts remaining under its control. France ceased to be a real European Power until partly by marriages and treaties, and by the accession of the great Henry IV., these fiefs were again united to the central state, and under the policy of Richelieu and Mazarin was brought to be the leading Power of Europe during the reign of Louis XIV. Spain owed her greatness to the union of the several petty kingdoms and countries under the crowns of Aragon and Castile, which became themselves united by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella. From the time of this union Spain increased her power and wealth until she became the Empire of Philip II., which was the greatest and most powerful in the world. It was the dreams of Universal Empire on the part of Charles, followed by the mad ambition of his son Philip, to dominate the seas, that involved the exhausting consequences which ultimately led to the decline of Spanish power and influence. It would be tedious, and to no necessary purpose that I should pursue the history of these examples which shows that Confederation of weak States means security and progress, and the consequent advancement of the people whose interests they embrace. But if we turn to more recent times we find argument no less striking and instructive. We have but to look at the United States to see what Confederation has done there. The fact of the marvellous advancement of the people and the power of the country cannot be denied, nor can it be attributed to any other cause than the Confederation of the States; but then it is said see what the country has come to now, alleging that the civil war is a consequence of Confederation. No reasoning can be more fallacious, nor can we suppose it is offered in seriousness by men of competent judgment. The civil war is a war of Slavery and was long since forboded as the inevitable issue of such an anomaly in a country where free institutions prevail; and even though the North and South should be severed as the result of the civil war the fact will not militate against the principle of Confederation, but is simply an evidence of the incompatibility of Slavery with the working of free Institutions. To prove that combination has failed in the case of the United States it must be shown that the several States are anxious to return to their original separate condition of what is termed "independent" existence. This desire he apprehended it would be somewhat difficult to discover, though proofs of the opposite character were found in the history of that Country. The new communities that grow up in the outskirts of the States have their probationary stage, and become entitled to admission into the Union when that time has passed. Do we ever find them unwilling to enter when the time arrives? On the contrary they avail themselves of what they justly esteem the privilege of merging their weak existence into the strong power of which they then become a part, sharing in the prosperity and protection which the connexion ensures. He (Mr. Shea) would now come to a more familiar case in which the blessings of Confederation had been strikingly exemplified. Since the Union of the Canadas about twenty years since they have more than doubled in wealth and population, they have established their railway system and their other great public works by which the country has been opened up to settlement and cultivation. That union was effected by the influence of the British Government against powerful sectional resistance in the colony, but the result triumphantly established the wisdom of the measure. The Union has no firm supporters than those who most stoutly opposed its initiation, and who now frankly acknowledge the false views which influenced their course. They see a career of progress consequent on the Union which was impossible under their former divided state, and are desirous of extending the principle to the Maritime Provinces in order to enlarge its sphere of operations for the benefit of the whole. In all the cases he had quoted it must be remarked as the result of these several Confederations that nowhere was there a desire to return to the separate existence out of which they sprung. Can any argument so strongly prove the value of the principle as this determination to uphold it, shown by all countries that have tasted its effects—Now, if ever a country was so placed as to require the aid of others, it is this colony. With a population of but 130,000 scattered over many hundred miles of sea coast our condition manifestly points to the necessity of co-operation with others whose alliance will give us a status which in our isolated condition we cannot attain. We have proved our want of power to effect any object above the ordinary routine. We have seen pauperism setting us at defiance, and all our necessarily feeble efforts have been futile for its correction. We have resources fully adequate to the support of the population, and they remain from our inability to place them within the reach of the people, whose condition so loudly calls for increased employment. In this position of affairs we present a strong case for the necessity of combination with those who have the power to aid us, and whose interest it would be to promote our prosperity. But it is said by those who cannot resist the principle in the abstract, and who yet would oppose this measure by any means, that the peculiarities of our circumstances and the want of identity of interest with the other provinces, and our different pursuits render the proposition inapplicable to us. It appeared to him that logically to carry out the views of those who so object that tailors and shoemakers, and all the other trades,

should each form distinct and separate communities apart from those whose pursuits were different. To his mind the variety of pursuits formed the strongest reason why communities should confederate, because this caused the exchange of products and supplying their mutual necessities, the interests of all were concerned by the association. But when we look to other Confederations do we find no difference in their pursuits? what can be more diverse than the trades and avocations of the people in different parts of the United States? Have not the manufacturing and the agricultural and various other interests in England, and even the fisheries of Scotland are combined with these under one Government and we have not found that the difference in the pursuits of the people have militated against their common prosperity. John Stuart Mill, one of the profoundest thinkers of the day, in speaking of the conditions necessary for the beneficial Confederation of States says "the strongest of all identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past." Have we not these essentials in strict accord with those Provinces with whom we propose to confederate, and when we consider the experience on which such views are founded, how small is the weight that should attach to objections that are thus so strikingly rebutted. From a fair and careful consideration of the case presented in the Quebec Resolutions it would be thought be difficult to dispute their beneficial application to this Colony, more especially in the circumstances in which it now stands, when almost any change must be an improvement to the labouring population. But a pregnant question now presents itself, have we the unqualified power to decide our own destiny in this respect. It would be idle to suppose that the meeting at Quebec was not inspired by the Imperial Government. No one who has paid any degree of attention to the tone of British opinion regarding these Colonies for some years past, can have failed to see that a change in the relations held to the Mother Country was surely coming about. It became a mere question of time when we obtained Responsible Government, and with it virtual independence in the Government of these Colonies. We acquired the right to legislate, so that our tariffs became hostile to the commercial interests of England, and with the exercise of independence it was not unnatural that the question should be asked, why should they be called on to sustain those whose legislation for their own selfish ends was marked by this un-friendly spirit. This feeling has been gaining strength for some time, but the events taking place in America for the past few years, seem to have brought it to the mind of the British Government, not only as a question of right and justice, but in regard to the sterner consideration of the practicability of existing means for the defence of the British North American Provinces. They evidently see that so many disjointed States with each its separated organization and right of independent action, could not offer the necessary effective resistance to attack from the American States which in the course of event might probably arise, and they have concluded that in order to the effective application of Imperial aid, these Provinces should combine and be au hority under the direction of which the combined strength, backed by the influence of England, would present an imposing front, and induce an invader to pause in his aggressive designs. The Government feel that the combination of these Provinces is the condition alone on which they can be upheld in connexion with the mother country, and in view of all the considerations that surround this grave question, shall we be told it must be dealt with by regard to its effects in adding a half-penny a yard to the price of calico. Can we doubt that the proposed Confederation is the expression of the settled views of British policy, and we may be thankful that when its advent is inevitable, the arrangement itself is one that has the approving testimony of experience. But this is evidently but a part of a more extended application of the principles of Confederation which has forced itself on the attention of the British Government. In the fall of 1863, a number of Russian ships were stationed at New York the mission of which was not then known. It has since come to light that at that time the interference of England in Polish affairs was not thought improbable, these ships were held in readiness to proceed to Australia and destroy the principal towns of these colonies, if that interference took place. The circumstances bring into strong light the necessity of giving to the outlying dependencies of the Crown a greater degree of inherent strength, and the measures now proposed for the B. N. A. Provinces will doubtless also be carried out for the Australian group, which are also warned of the danger of relying solely on England for their protection. But he had heard the strange argument advanced, that if we in this colony refuse to unite we shall become a poor Province and the seat of a Naval Station. We had not heard the reasoning by which this conclusion was arrived at, but it was somewhat novel to find reward waiting on those who pursued a course of senseless contumacy and resistance. Will our refusal to confederate make Halifax less eligible than before in point of geographical position? Will its harbor, at all times accessible, be then divested of its attractions in our favor? It was strange that such groundless assertions could receive any countenance amongst even the least enlightened; but they show the nature of the opposition got up against the proposal for Union. We deceive ourselves in supposing that we have any value in the eyes of Great Britain that would induce a favorable exceptional policy in our case. It is not with us now as in times of old, when this colony was a nursery for seamen for the British navy, and when it was valuable on that account. England has now no need for us in that respect, and our people being resident, have no great desire to try their fortunes in the naval service of the country. But it is asserted that the British Government never intended that this island should form part of the Confederation and that our movements are entirely gratuitous. The evidence, however, is clear on this point against those who offer this objection. In 1862 when the other colonies passed Resolutions for the consideration of the question of Confederation, we had not moved in the matter at all, and yet a copy of these Resolutions was forwarded here by the Secretary of State, and our attention invited to them, showing clearly the intention of the Imperial Government that we should not remain outside of any plan that might be agreed on for the Union of these Colonies. Their intentions in this respect are therefore not left to conjecture, while it might easily have been supposed that a uniform policy for these Provinces would be insisted on. He hoped he had shown that the principle itself was desirable and tended to progress; that even if less desirable, it was in view of all fair reasoning, the inevitable destiny of the Provinces; and that it was the evident design of the Imperial Government that this colony should form part of the proposed Confederation. He would now go into the consideration of the leading objections urged against the scheme, and most prominent amongst these is the question of Taxation. There is no word more vague in its significance than that of taxation. In the sense it is used by those who employ it to get up a hostile cry in the present case, it is an abstraction from the means of the people for which they receive no return. Against taxation of this character people naturally rebelled, and the Legislature should also set its face with equal resolution. But there was another kind of taxation which signified not oppression, but progress and public advantage, and which nurtured and promoted the prosperity of the people. We see high rates of taxation in many prosperous countries, as in England for example, and in Canada, whose taxes had been so much spoken of, there was to his mind no part of the administration of affairs in that country which spoke more highly of the statesmanlike sagacity of her public men than the system of taxation by which the resources of the country have been brought into life, and their value enhanced, giving to the people ten-fold means for paying the taxes imposed upon them. As compared with our wretched system, under which but a fractional part is devoted to purposes of public usefulness, the taxation of Canada stands out in remarkable contrast. He would be too glad to see the way clear for a very large increase of our present taxation. He regretted that there was no public undertaking similar to those on which public money had been expended in Canada—undertakings which opened up their resources and permanently enlarged the means for the employment of their industry. This fruitful expenditure was what we stood so much in need of and taxation for such a purpose instead of being the hindrance as it is often popularly and ignorantly regarded, would be beneficial and invigorating in its results. If the nature of our resources were such as would justify the application of fifty thousand pounds in this manner in the present year, an immediate stimulus would be given to the labour of the people besides bringing within reach permanent sources of employment which would make the payment of the consequent taxation a much lighter burthen than is now imposed. But there are many taxes applying to us at the present time which we apparently treat with unconcern, and which are far more oppressive than those to which the hostility of some members of the house is directed. Who can measure the taxes imposed by privation and want which so many of our people are suffering, the waste of physical and mental vigour, and of the general powers of life, with the sure prospect of decrepitude and imbecility in the coming generation, if the settled physiological laws are not to be set aside in our case. The escape from such taxes might well engage the attention we bestow on our very minor and imaginary ills. We then have the taxes which poverty in our midst must necessarily entail on every one who has a shilling to spare for the relief of the distressed. We have the taxes which owners of property feel in times like the present, when empty houses and bad tenants are unfortunately too well known, operating far more severely than any taxation which Confederation could cause. The Canadian Tariff is assumed to be that which would be applied to the future Confederation. He (Mr. Shea) would admit for the sake of argument that such was to be the case as far as its general provisions could apply, though those whose authority was better than his thought a reduced scale of duties would bring sufficient revenue for the wants of the new Government. In 1864 an increase had been made in the Canadian Tariff on certain articles, but as this had been done for special purposes, and as these new taxes would be remitted in the present Session, the delegates had not dealt with this exceptional Tariff, but had adopted that of 1862 as a basis of calculation. The duties in Canada on ready made clothing, leatherware, &c., are higher than those imposed by our Tariff. It would be remebered that two years ago a Petition was presented to the House under very imposing circumstances, calling attention to the necessity of increasing the duties on these descriptions of goods for the protection of our artisans. Very great stress was laid on the subject and its importance urged by hon. members of the House, as a proposal from which much public benefit must arise. These hon. gentlemen had now the opportunity presented by the Canadian Tariff of giving effect to their views, and yet strangely enough they are now most loud in condemning the terms of that Tariff in this respect. Was it merely for some temporary purpose the views of the Petition were advocated, or how is it that we have the singular spectacle of men repudiating their own opinions on the first occasion that gets off red of carrying them into effect? Mr. (Mr. Shea) had no faith in the views on which that petition was based, nor did he believe that any legislation of the House could afford the petitioner the relief they sought for, and he referred to the circumstances only to show the inconsistency of hon. members and the small amount of reliance that can be placed on those who do not act on fixed principles and settled habits of thought and action. But though duties on some articles are higher in Canada than here, the tariff of Canada is not protective in its objects as has been asserted. Mr. Howe in writing to Mr. Adderly, Dec. 1862, says:—"In none of the Provinces have protective or discriminating duties ever been imposed. It is true that the import duties of Canada are rather high, but it can be shown that all the duty raised is actually required to pay the interest on the debts of the Province, to carry out public improvements and provide for its Civil List." Mr. Howe is an impartial authority, though the facts in these Provinces are plain enough and need no voucher. It had been already shown that the aggregate amount of the revenues of the several provinces, calculated by their present tariff, would be sufficient for the wants of the Confederation, and in assuming the Canadian Tariff of 1863 as a ground-work of calculation for the whole, it was evident that he was putting the case in its worst aspect for the purpose he had in view. This Canadian Tariff would give, in the first instance, a larger Revenue than we had at present, but a fair examination of it would show that we should receive a full equivalent for the increased amount. By our own Tariff in 1863, we received £94,413, and the imports of that year would give £135,000 if the Canadian Tariff were in force, being an increase of a little over £40,000. But from this amount there would be a considerable sum to deduct for account of goods that would come in free from Canada and the other Provinces if Confederation