

No. 3.

(No. 113.)

SIR,—

Government House, Wellington, 26th September, 1885.

I have the honour to state that the question of Federation has again been under discussion in the House of Representatives.

2. I transmit herewith a copy of *Hansard* containing the debate. It will be observed that the majority of the speakers expressed themselves strongly of opinion that Federation in some shape or other was not only to be desired, but also to be regarded as possible. The three possible forms which were discussed were—(1) a federation of the Australian Colonies, including probably some of the Pacific Islands; (2) a federation of the Empire; and (3) a federation of all English-speaking people. The great difference of opinion was as to the form which Federation ought to take; and, even with regard to the first and most directly practical heading—Australian Federation—the question arose whether it was advisable that New Zealand should come under the existing Federal Act, or should distinctly refuse to do so, or should postpone making any final decision on the matter. The Premier (Mr. Stout), whilst favouring the idea of Australasian Federation, objected to certain details of the arrangement proposed, especially to the proviso in the 31st clause of the Act with reference to Acts of the Council remaining in force in a colony which has ceased to form part of the Federal Union until repealed by the Council itself, and to the power given to the Council to pass enactments which would be binding without the assent of the respective Colonial Legislatures, and moved that it was not advisable for this colony to join the Federal Council under the existing Act. Major Atkinson, the late Premier, who has long taken a deep interest in the question of Federation, did not feel the same objections to this colony coming under the Act which had been expressed by Mr. Stout, and pointed out that, in the event of New South Wales joining the Union, it might become impossible for New Zealand to hold aloof. Considering, however, the comparatively slight attention that has been as yet bestowed upon the subject in the country generally, he was of opinion that it was not advisable at present to take any steps for bringing New Zealand within the Federal Council. Mr. Conolly, who has held the office of Attorney-General under the late Administration, expressed regret that the motion had not been for joining the Confederation at once; but, seeing the evident opinion of the majority, proposed no resolution. On the other hand, some members—notably Mr. Ballance, Minister of Defence—objected altogether to Australian Federation, and regarded any wider form of Federation as, for the present at all events, visionary.

3. Mr. Stout proposed the following resolution: “That, in the opinion of this House, it is inadvisable for this colony to join the Federal Council of Australasia under the existing Federal Council Act.”

4. For this Major Atkinson proposed that the following words be substituted; and the amendment was accepted by Mr. Stout: “That, in the opinion of this House, it is inadvisable during the present session, and pending further consideration by the people of the colony of the important issues involved, to adopt legislation having for its object to join New Zealand in the Federal Council of Australasia.”

5. Mr. Beetham proposed a series of resolutions as follows: “(1.) That, in order to secure the permanent unity of the Empire, some form of Federation is essential. (2.) That no scheme of Federation should interfere with the existing rights of local Parliaments as regards local affairs. (3.) That any scheme of Imperial Federation should combine on an equitable basis the resources of the Empire for the maintenance of common interests and adequately provide for an organized defence of common rights.”

6. Mr. Macandrew proposed the following additional resolution: “That, in the opinion of this House, the time has come when efforts should be made to unite the whole English-speaking people throughout the world in one grand political confederation or alliance, having for its object mutual defence against foreign aggression, the maintenance of peace, and the promotion of the brotherhood of nations. That a respectful address be presented to His Excellency the Governor, requesting that he may be pleased to transmit this resolution to the