

Mr. WRIGHT (Wellington South).—Sir Joseph Ward and gentlemen,—I should like to say that as one of the new members of the House I am not used to the forms of the House. I am glad, therefore, that this is not the House in session, and also that you are the Acting-Speaker, because I realise that you are exceedingly kindly in your nature, and not hard on members if they stray from the point. I feel sorry also, Sir, as I am so unused to this sort of business—the talking being on the one side. I had been led to believe before I entered the House that a member on one side would speak, and then a member of the other side would follow. Evidently I was wrongly informed. I say I am sorry that the big guns should be bombarding you like this, without a man on the other side to reply to them. I wish that I could take up the cudgels on your behalf. When I see one man receiving all the blows I feel that I should like to take his part; but I regret that, after listening carefully to what you have said and to the debate that has followed, I cannot do this. I am sorry to detain honourable gentlemen who are anxious to come to a division, but I believe it is the duty, particularly of members for the cities, to take note of this important situation, and to deal with it thoroughly. I want to reply as briefly as I can to some of the remarks that the Right Hon. the Premier has made, and I trust the right honourable gentleman will believe me when I say that I intend no personal reference to himself, because for himself personally I have a strong admiration, as I have for every man who makes his way in the world. But apart from that there is the political aspect, and in this respect, at all events, I differ from him. The right honourable gentleman said that if it had not been for the offer of the Dreadnought we should not have heard of a Naval Conference at all. I think that after listening to the debate the right honourable gentleman will surely agree that this is hardly correct, because the Dreadnought offer was apart altogether from the meeting of the Naval Conference. The evidence is overwhelming that Canada was originally at the bottom of that Naval Conference movement; the Dreadnought offer came in in a secondary way, and naturally the Imperial Government brought everything together, and focussed it in this Conference. I therefore think that the right honourable gentleman, when he comes to revise his speech, will see that the Dreadnought offer was entirely independent of the Naval Conference, and that that Conference originated in another way. The right honourable gentleman also said that the value of the Imperial Conference cannot be overestimated. That is quite right. And I want to say this: that as a member of this House—whether I am in it for one, two, or three years, or wherever I am—I am solidly in favour of the British Empire; and I stand not as a “Little-Englander,” but as one who is prepared to go any length with the right honourable gentleman in the defence of the British Empire. I say this because there are not wanting signs that any man who opposes the right honourable gentleman’s proposition will be branded as a “Little-Englander.” The cry of patriotism will be worked up against him, and the country will be told, “These are the people who are unpatriotic, who want to see the country pass into the hands of a foreign nation.” Why, the argument is unreasonable, because, apart from every degree of patriotism, every man with any common-sense at all knows perfectly well that if Great Britain were conquered by an enemy New Zealand would certainly pass out of her hands; and every man in New Zealand knows perfectly well that, however faulty the Constitution may be, however many mistakes Great Britain may make, yet to be under the British flag is to be under the finest flag that ever floated. Therefore we are not “Little-Englanders.” I will not allow honourable gentlemen on the other side to say that I am a “Little-Englander,” because every time it is said I shall follow it up and deny it. It has become a practice, I have noticed, in the political world to take up a cry, and, if a man sits quietly by, the public assume that the cry is true. But I am not built that way. I have some Irish blood in me, and when such a statement is made I will pull the man up wherever he is. Now, the right honourable gentleman, in pointing out the importance of the Imperial Conference, and with a view to showing the great danger we were in as an Empire, alluded to something that Lord Charles Beresford had said. It was on the 20th of April that Lord Charles Beresford said that “if the truth were known there would be a panic.” Well, unfortunately, that statement is out of date. There is a later one by Lord Charles Beresford which knocks that statement into a cocked hat. Lord Charles was talking about the scare business, and about our being frightened, and he said,—

“What sense is there in working up a panic? As a matter of fact there is no panic, and there will be no panic if fussy politicians and hustling journalists will only use a little restraint and some common-sense. It is nonsense to talk of a scare. We can strengthen our navy without becoming cowards. And because I demand a strong navy there is no reason why I should become a scaremonger.”

Now, this statement by Lord Charles Beresford was made after the one the right honourable gentleman has read to Parliament to-night. This was on the 22nd April. Of course, it is possible that the statement quoted by the Premier was made at an after-dinner speech—and sometimes the speakers are not then responsible for the speeches they make. This speech was made on another occasion, and ought, I think, to have greater weight. Then, the right honourable gentleman said that unless Parliament adjourned he could not represent us. I recognise that there are two distinct questions, and I recognise that the Right Hon. the Premier has a perfect right to please himself if he wishes to go; but that is a totally different issue from the other one, and I think that at the next general election those honourable gentlemen who are now so readily supporting this resolution will find that the people of the country are not so much in favour of it as they think. There is a strong feeling that the business of the House should go on. That is the feeling of the country—at all events, of this part of it—and I should like to know why Parliament should not go on. I say the two questions are distinct, and should be divorced one from the other. That is the attitude the country is taking up, and, to put it in a plain way, is it not a want of confidence in the electors? Is it not saying, in plain English, that they have sent seventy-nine fools to the House and only one wise man? It seems to me, Sir, this is the attitude the people are likely to take up. A remark