

Birth of a New Nation.

Federation of the Australian Colonies. The Leading Delegates at the recent Convention in Melbourne.

(Written for MASSEY'S ILLUSTRATED by our Australian Correspondent.)

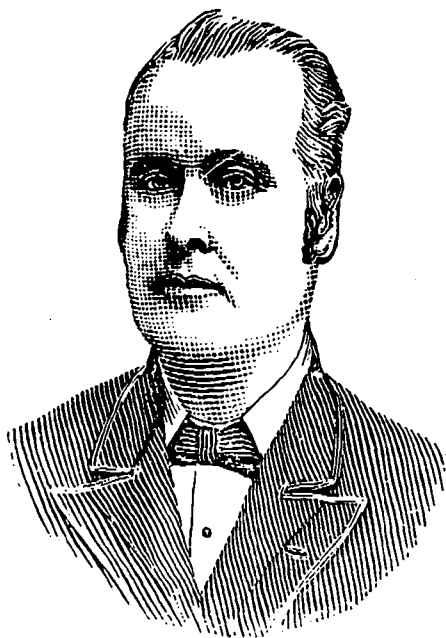
Doubtless many weeks ere this the cable services of the Canadian press have made the people of your Dominion slightly acquainted with the movement that is now going on throughout the Australian Colonies, to bring about their Federation. However, there may be some few facts to be given which, at the present juncture, should prove of the very greatest interest to the Australians' fellow-colonists, the people of Canada. During the week at the end of which this article is being written there has been sitting in Melbourne a convention of delegates from the whole of the colonies in the Australasian group, called at the instance of the patriarchal Premier of New South Wales, Sir Henry Parkes, and the Premier of Victoria, Mr. Duncan Gillies. This convention was comprised of two of the leading representatives of the different Parliaments, and was called to carry a resolution submitted by Sir Henry Parkes, to declare that the progress of the Australian Colonies has been so rapid that the time is now ripe for the whole of them to be brought into one great confederation, and further to propose an immediate convention of gentlemen elected by the different Colonial Parliaments to take into consideration the best scheme of federation for the constitution of Federated Australia to be modelled upon. The movement has naturally received a great deal of attention, but it is a



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fact that the different Parliaments of the Colonies have not until the last few months entered into its discussion with any degree of enthusiasm. One great body to bring the question into its present prominent position is the Australian Natives' Association, comprised solely of native-born Australians, whose object, as set forth in their constitution, is to bring about the early federation of the lands in which they are interested. In every parliament the increase of young members has been very large at every recent election. The truth of this can be ascertained from the fact that twenty new members, all belonging to the Association, were elected at the last general election in Victoria, so that in each colony a powerful and compact body has been formed for the laudable object of promoting the unity of the Australian colonies. During the last few months it has been vigorously declared that the Federation of Australia is necessary, and the sentiment is cheered to the echo, wherever it is uttered, by the people, who have a decided disinclination to keep up the imaginary boundary lines that exist between the different colonies. It has, however, been frequently said that there are very great difficulties in the way of Australian Federation, and considerable stress is laid on the fact that there is an utter absence of any event such as led to the speedy federation of the Provinces in the Dominion of Canada. So far as Australia is concerned, no difficulty will be experienced through climatic influences, but this will prove an obstacle in the way of Australasian Federation, as the people of New Zealand enjoy a totally different climate to that of the island continent. Besides that, New Zealand is, so to speak, "peculiarly built." Its lofty mountains and ranges of hills make it a country easily defended, and as it is 1,200 miles away from the other colonies, the representatives of the two islands declare that for purposes

of defence Australian Federation would be useless to them. Therefore, it is apparent that New Zealand, a country rich in minerals, with soil of almost remarkable fertility, and immense



HON. DUNCAN GILLIES, VICTORIA.

natural resources, will have to live its own life, so far as a complete confederation is concerned. It may be taken for granted that the constitution of the Federal Parliament for the Australasian Colonies will be modelled principally on the lines of the Canadian Federation, and possibly the greatest alteration will be with regard to the powers of the Local Legislatures. It has been frequently remarked by public men here that the small power left in the hands of the Provincial Governments of Canada would not be at all approved of for Australia, and therefore the speeches from every member of the recent conference were in the direction of upholding the necessity of every possible power being left in the hands of the Local Parliaments, while a Federal Government would only deal with such questions as were of national importance.

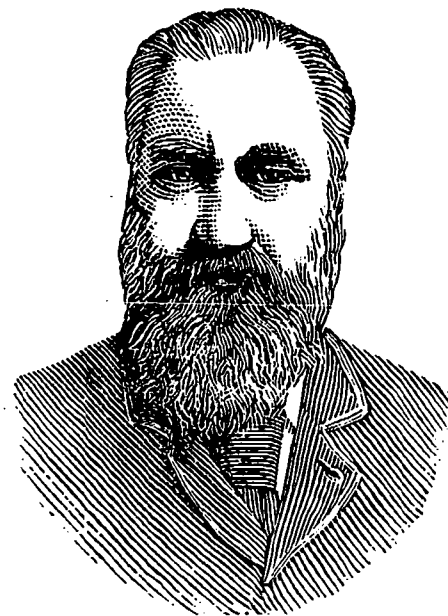
Probably no difficulty will be harder to overcome than that of the customs tariffs. At the present time bitter feeling has been engendered by the heavy taxes levied on the natural products of adjoining colonies, and the consequent retaliation. It is apparent that every addition to the tariff on inter-colonial products raises the barrier that is being built up, and it has frequently been said that in Victoria, at least, protection has gone mad, and more so when a tax is passed on the live stock coming into the colony from New South Wales and South Australia, and even on fruit and dairy produce. Almost every nameable article that it would be possible to grow in Victoria, whether being grown or not, has been subjected to a tax, and consequently the higher the obstacle is being built, the harder it will be to pull it down. Federation has been preached, but the practice of the Victorian Government has been in an entirely opposite direction, until now the people have taken hold of the matter, and will never be satisfied until federation has



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become an absolute fact. There is not the slightest doubt that the first thing to be brought about will be inter-colonial free trade. New South Wales, a free trade colony, Victoria,

Queensland, Western Australia, and Tasmania are ready to adopt this almost immediately, while New Zealand, although unable to federate, will join a customs' union. South Australia, however, says: "You must give us a few years for our industries to grow," and they point to the fact, as is natural, that Victoria should be anxious for inter-colonial free trade, as her protectionist policy has made her a large manufacturing country, so that she has no need to fear any competition. The difficulty, every member of the conference believed, could be overcome, and it certainly seems ridiculous that between a people all in one land, of the one national type, and with the same aspirations, restrictions should have been placed on their commercial relations, quite as heavy, if not heavier, than any restriction placed on a purely foreign country. It is agreed that the federation will take some time, and that in the meanwhile compromises could be effected, and duties which now exist removed from natural products, so that the first step towards the aim of the federationists would be taken. The petty jealousy, not the friendly rivalry, between the different colonies is almost laughable. Everything Victorian in New South Wales is sneered at, while the feeling is freely reciprocated on this side of the Murray. A better feeling has to be introduced between the leaders of the people, and the generous attitude of Sir Henry Parkes at the present juncture will promote it more than anything else that could be conceived. Of all colonies, New South Wales is rich in its resources. Her mineral wealth is even fabulous, while her large extent of country will be rich in agriculture, and natural products will be fostered to a much more considerable extent than at present, when no restriction is placed on their introduction to the other colonies. Still what will after all prove the greatest factor for federation, is the fact that in Victoria



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lies the energy and enterprise, together with the capital, that has sent her people into the very centre of all the other colonies, until I firmly believe that, in three of the colonies at least, the interest of Victorians, resident in Victoria, is larger than the people of the colonies themselves. The interests of every colony are identical, and therefore the customs' tariff, which at present in many cases is absurd in the extreme, may not be allowed to prove such a formidable obstacle as it is represented to be. It has already been agreed that the colonies should federate for defence, and they have federated in their action against the introduction of the Chinese. Uniform marriage laws are required, as now the colonies are entirely different in their provisions for divorce. The same thing could have been said a little while ago with regard to the law relating to debts, and it was a fact that an absconding debtor from South Australia, or any other colony, could not be arrested after he had passed the imaginary boundary line that runs between them. Considerable attention is also to be paid to the question of coining. The Australian colonies have their silver and copper mines, the former being the most extensive of any at the present time. The silver and copper are sent from Australia, coined in England, and returned. At what cost? Simply this, that at the present time the shilling in use has only seven pence, three farthings, to eight pence, half-penny of silver in it, so that at the lowest more than a fourth of the value of every shilling sent to the colonies goes into the treasury of the British Government. The same thing is noticeable with the copper, and Australians urge that as they mint their gold coin, it is unjust for the profitable coinage to be taken from them. There is no uniform railway gauge in Australia, which causes considerably more expense in the carriage of goods, and so far as a Court of Appeal is concerned,