

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 8, 1867

The Speaker took the chair at three o'clock.

THE ADDRESS

Sir John A. Macdonald moved that the House proceed to take into consideration His Excellency's Speech at the opening of the session, which was agreed to.

Hon. Charles Fisher, member for York, N.B., then moved that the House do agree in an humble address to His Excellency the Governor-General, in reply to His Excellency's speech at the opening of the session. Mr. Fisher spoke for about an hour, commenting seriatim on the paragraphs of the Address—which was, as usual, an echo of the Speech from the Throne—referring to His Excellency's expression of gratification that he had been able to assist at every step taken in the creation of this Confederation. He alluded to the fact that not only as Governor-General of Canada, but in the House of Lords, as Peer of the Realm, Lord Monck had given valuable aid in carrying the measure of Colonial Union to its consummation. He then glanced briefly at the history of the measure, from its inception in the reports of a committee of the Canadian Assembly, in favour of Confederation, down to the passage of the Imperial Act. He remarked, however, that long before these recent steps were taken, the Union of the British Provinces had been a favourite project of many public men in all the Colonies. It had been a day-dream of his own from the time when he first entered public life. Although he little expected then that he would occupy his present position of addressing the assembled wisdom of Canada and calling upon his fellow representatives from the different portions of the Dominion to join in congratulations on the accomplishment of the Union, he had pleasure in adding his personal testimony to the reference made in the speech to the freedom allowed by the Imperial authorities to the provincial authorities in arranging the mode in which the principle of union should be applied. The only point on which any differences arose was as to the composition of the Senate. Although he had always belonged to the great party of progress, he had looked upon it

as important that there should be an immediate body between the Crown and the people, which should restrain the progress of public opinion until that opinion became settled, clear and defined. At the same time, he had felt that the constitution of the Senate as agreed upon at the Quebec conference was deficient in the elasticity which formed an essential feature of the British Constitution. Mr. Cardwell made this an objection to the Quebec resolutions, and it became a point of controversy between the delegates and the British Ministers; but after a good deal of discussion, a mode of meeting the difficulty received the assent of the Imperial Government and of the Colonial representatives, and was embodied in the Act of Union. Referring to the paragraph which acknowledged the respect shown for our privileges as a free and self-governing people by the British Government, Mr. Fisher said that if there was any one feeling which predominated among the whole people of these Colonies, it was one of loyalty to the Queen of these realms. It was most desirable that the people of these lands, appreciating the privileges we enjoyed as part of an empire greater than Rome in its palmiest days, should so construct our constitutional system as to perpetuate to the end of time those institutions and privileges which had secured to the Mother Country its position among the nations of the world. In this connection, he alluded briefly to the struggles for responsible government which had taken place in various colonies, and to the honourable part taken in those struggles by the member for Hants, Hon. Joseph Howe, and others. Referring to the different questions on which legislation was promised, he said it would give general satisfaction to know that something was to be done about the currency. In the Lower Provinces, at least, the currency was very scarce, and any means which might be devised to increase it should have his support. An idea had got abroad there that a great monetary institution in Montreal had been allowed to bring under its control the whole of the banking institutions of the country. In the arrangement of the customs, excise and revenue, he trusted a due regard would be had to the principles of free trade, while attention was paid at the same time, to benefiting the productive industry of our