

of the negotiations under circumstances much less favorable than before. The opposition of a single government could defeat the common policy of the others, and frustrate all attempts at general co-operation. Besides the undue stress of domestic political affairs prevented a proper consideration of intercolonial questions, or sometimes unfortunately gave them a partisan character. When a Ministry was either battling for existence or pressing on some measure which it was hoped would secure it popular support in an approaching election, there was little time for the sober discussion of the weightier subject of a federal union. With governments as with men, self-preservation is the first law of nature, and no Colonial Secretary however sympathetic towards the principle of federation was desirous at a critical moment of committing himself to an intercolonial policy which would attract no support at home, and at the same time expose him to the criticism of either neglecting more pressing local concerns, or of truckling to the sister colonies. In short the consideration of federal questions had to wait upon the exigencies of local politics, and the convenience and humor of ministerial favor. A new political issue, a parliamentary crisis, a dissolution, or a change of government might at any moment alter the attitude of a colony, and affect the prospect of uniform or co-operative action throughout the colonies. Time and again the wisest schemes and the best strategy of the federal leaders were defeated by the fickleness of Australian public opinion, and the instability of governments.

And finally it was only too manifest that there was no general enthusiasm in favor of a federal union. Even in Victoria, where parliamentary and public sentiment was much more advanced and sympathetic than in the other colonies, there was no real federal movement of popular or spontaneous character.¹ The ability and energy of Mr. Duffy alone kept the question before the legislature, and gave it a factitious prominence and importance. In the other colonies only an occasional apathetic interest was taken in the subject. The question was an entertaining topic of political speculation, which came up for discussion at odd moments when the attention of the people or legislatures was not engrossed in local political affairs or schemes of economic development. The agitation was still largely associated with a few prominent men, and had failed to take a hold on the

¹Garran, *The Coming Commonwealth*, p. 114.