

The Australian Commonwealth and New Zealand.

By G. M. NEWTON.



At a time when the Australian Colonies have almost consummated a federation that will have momentous and far-reaching results, which will largely affect this Colony for good or ill, it is opportune to consider the terms of the proposed union as settled by the Commonwealth Bill, and to give some account of the arguments that have so far been, or may be, advanced for and against New Zealand's becoming a member of the Union.

At the outset it may be said that the federation which the members of the Convention were called upon to frame, is not an amalgamation, a unification of the Colonies. It was not contemplated that the boundaries should be swept away for all purposes; and that each colony should merge in the Commonwealth, and have no separate existence. On the contrary, each colony, while becoming a constituent part of the Commonwealth and sharing its larger powers, will retain its own individuality, preserving its own constitution, having its own parliament, and making, subject to the laws of the Commonwealth, its own laws. The effect of the union will be to make a composite state with a supreme federal government, acting, not only upon the sovereign members of the union, but directly upon all its citizens in their individual and corporate capacities.

The federal constitution is embodied in a Bill called "The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act," which recites that the people of the colonies to be named therein, have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and under the Constitution thereby established.

The following are the principal provisions of the Bill:—

The Parliament.—The legislative power of the Commonwealth is vested in a Parliament consisting of a Governor-General, a Senate composed of six members from each State, directly chosen for a term of six years by the people of the State, voting, until Parliament otherwise provides, as one electorate; and a House of Representatives, directly chosen by the people of the Commonwealth, the number being as nearly as practicable twice the number of Senators, and to be chosen in the several States in proportion to their respective populations, but each original State having at least five members.

The qualification of the electors of both Houses is to be the same in each State as that of electors of the lower House of each State, and each elector must vote only once. Parliament may make a uniform franchise, but so that no citizen who has a vote in any State can be deprived of his right to vote by the Federal Parliament. Thus the uniform franchise when made must be as wide as the widest existing franchise in any of the States, and as at least one of them has already achieved adult suffrage, it will be seen that the franchise must be of the greatest possible liberality. The qualifications for members of either House are (1) twenty-one years of age, (2) an elector entitled to vote, or person entitled to be an elector, (3) three years resident in the Commonwealth, and (4) a subject of the Queen, either natural born or naturalised for five years.

Powers of Parliament.—The Parliament has power to levy taxes, but not so as to discriminate between States; to provide for the general defence and welfare of the Commonwealth; to borrow money on the public credit; to regulate trade and commerce