

portance of the British dependencies as factors in the maintenance of the Empire's progress and stability. Nothing could have been more appropriate to the subject in view than the manner in which he dealt with all sides of the question whether preferable trade relations would be advantageous or otherwise. In the course of his address Mr. Foster laid great emphasis on the growing importance of the colonial trade to Great Britain, and the fact that it was increasing, whilst that of most foreign countries was relatively diminishing. He argued therefrom that it was to the interest of Great Britain to make preferential tariff arrangements with her colonies from the point of view that it would be wise to set about encouraging and stimulating a policy of commercial interchange of a preferential nature throughout the Empire. The conception of so far-reaching and comprehensive an idea is, no doubt, extremely patriotic; but its realisation seems far off, as in the opinion of many there are considerations that suggest cogent reasons against the immediate adoption of Mr. Foster's measures for its fulfilment.

These considerations require some examination, in order that the reader may be placed in a position to judge of their character, and also of their sufficiency to warrant a minority of the Conference—in which the writer was included—in opposing one of Mr. Foster's resolutions. The first of these was objected to on the grounds that it implied that Great Britain should enter into a Customs arrangement with her colonies, which of course really meant that she should give preferential terms as against other countries. From the point of view of the writer this was a perfectly untenable position to take up, and in this view he was supported by two other delegates—those of New South Wales and Queensland—particularly so by the latter. Before deciding upon the question your representative distinctly stated that if by the terms of the resolution England was to give preferential terms in consideration of any the colonies might give her, then he could not support that proposition. A moment's reflection will show what such a step taken by her would really mean. In all raw products England is a free-trade country. The question as to the wisdom or otherwise of such a policy is not here a matter of argument or concern. The point is this: British trade with the self-governing colonies is only 15 per cent. of the whole value of her trade. To expect, therefore, that, in return for a preference which the colonies might give her in duties on goods sent to them, she should give the colonies an equivalent is, under present conditions, to ignore what should be very apparent difficulties lying in the way of such a response. Any concessions which these colonies could afford to make on imported British goods would be insufficient to warrant a request for any similar preferential treatment of the products they send in return. Taking the case of wheat, which is an article that these colonies export to Great Britain, any differential duty in their favour would mean the reversal of a settled British policy, and a taxation of eight hundred thousand per annum, if fixed at the rate of one penny per bushel. There are not many things that we export to England but what would have a similar effect if a preference were given them, and therefore these considerations, in the writer's view, render the proposition to ask the British Government to tax raw products—for the colonies' exports are mainly such—quite unthinkable, and certain of instant rejection should it be put forward. Mr. Foster, as an ardent Imperialist, with highly Protectionist proclivities, is no doubt influenced by aspirations that, patriotic and loyal as they are, somewhat obscure his perception of these difficulties. As before mentioned, the representatives of New South Wales and Queensland coincided with the views of the writer; but this resolution was ultimately carried by a majority of five to three.

The second resolution was then voted upon and unanimously carried. On reference to its terms, it will be seen that the Mother-country is excluded; the purpose of arranging a more favoured Customs basis only applying to trade between the colonies. This is an object that meets with the writer's hearty sympathy and approval. In the first place—a paramount consideration—it is possible and immediately feasible, whereas in the former case no such condition at present exists, however promising its ultimate fulfilment may appear. Secondly, it is desirable in the interests of the colonies as a whole, both from the narrow and self-interested commercial view and also from the broader one of promoting national strength and unity. It seems almost impossible not to recognise that many opportunities exist for the profitable interchange of colonial products, were there to be a readjustment of the tariffs on such lines as would take into consideration the effect of natural conditions. To ignore these in the future, as completely as they have been ignored in the past, is to divert the industrial current from its most fruitful course. If there be any force in this contention—and probably most people will agree that there is—there should be little in the way of an early fruition to the unanimous vote of the Conference. Of course, vested interests will appear in opposition, and present obstacles that may be difficult of removal; but if colonial opinion is in harmony with the voice of its Ottawa representatives, the private must give way to the public advantage.

The question as to the desirability of intercolonial trade reciprocity being settled in the affirmative, it appeared to your representative that some definite progress could be made by setting about an examination of the various tariffs in order to discover in what direction the commencement of such a policy could be made. He therefore brought forward the following motion: "That this Conference proceed to examine the respective Customs tariffs of the various colonies here represented, with a view to acquire such information as will enable the members to determine in what direction reciprocity may be profitably arranged, and thus place themselves in a position to advise their Governments accordingly." No seconder could be found for this motion. Mr. Hoffmeyer, one of the Cape delegates, followed the mover; but declined to support it on the ground that the members of the Conference possessed no powers to commit their colonies. It will be seen from the terms in which the motion is couched that there was no such intention implied, but that it was simply a step towards the collection of material for guidance when reporting to our respective Governments. It seemed to the writer a most proper and necessary sequence to what had been previously done that the delegates should discuss such items of the tariffs as seemed to them to be capable of profitable readjustment. How otherwise were they to be in a position on their arrival