

and individual interests, but I would rather follow, what I think is really the more significant course, of taking all this for granted.

You will have a long programme of business before you, and I do not propose to do more—I do not think I am called upon to do more—than just to glance at some of the matters which have brought you together; but I should like to observe at this point—and there is sometimes, apparently, in the minds of men a mistake on this subject—that this is not a conference between the Premiers and the Colonial Secretary, but between the Premiers and members of the Imperial Government under the presidency of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, which is a very different matter. In regard to questions of military defence, for instance, the Secretary of State for War will come and confer with you, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, in the same way, will be present when naval questions are discussed. On this I may say, that I think the views sometimes taken of the proper relations of the Colonies to the Mother Country with respect to expenditure on armaments have been, of late, somewhat modified. We do not meet you to-day as claimants for money, although we cordially recognise the spirit in which contributions have been made in the past, and will, no doubt, be made in the future. It is, of course, possible to over-estimate the importance of the requirements of the over-sea dominions as a factor in our expenditure; but however this may be, the cost of naval defence and the responsibility for the conduct of foreign affairs hang together. On the question of emigration, a matter which is of the utmost moment to you as well as to the Mother Country, Mr. John Burns, the President of the Local Government Board, will join in your councils; and if any question should arise with regard to India, you will have the advice of a most distinguished Member of Council, Sir James Mackay; and I am sure that you will be glad to see my Right Hon. friend, Mr. John Morley, amongst us this morning.

Then, when you come to discuss matters of finance, trade, and commerce, my colleagues, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the President of the Board of Trade, will be present to state the views which His Majesty's Government entertain on these important matters. Amongst them the question of Preference must hold a prominent position, and I am sure you will find that my Right Hon. friends are prepared fully to recognise the friendly action which has been taken by some of the Colonies, and to enter upon this subject in the fullest and frankest manner.

I hope that an agreement may be arrived at as to many of these points, and if in regard to others you are compelled to differ amongst yourselves, or to differ from us, you will agree to differ not merely in a perfectly friendly way (so much may be assumed) but with mutual respect for the grounds and motives on which differences of opinion may be founded. You in common with us are representatives of self-governing communities. We have no power here in this room, as you know, to arrive at any binding decisions. His Majesty's Government cannot go behind the declared opinions of this country and of our Parliament. No more can you go behind the opinions and wishes of your communities and Parliaments; but, subject to this governing limitation, there remains, as I have said, and as I firmly believe, many matters of great moment in which there is room for arrangement and advance.

These Conferences were formerly more or less identified with great ceremonial occasions. This is, I believe, the first that has been specifically summoned for the purpose of business. I wish to say a word here about a desire that has been felt with regard to the period between the Conferences that there should be greater means than at present to continue in the interval the definite communications which the Conferences make necessary. We shall hope to find some method of meeting this desire. I am not going to enumerate, still less discuss and criticize, the various schemes more or less

First Day.
15 April 1907.

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(Sir H.
CAMPBELL-
BANNERMAN.)