

be said that their attitude towards the colonies generally was, if not altogether one of negligence, at least one of apathy. And this attitude, whilst it gave the tone to British thought on the subject of colonial possessions, at the same time did much to deaden the sensibilities and destroy the enthusiasm which family ties—with a nation of whose history all must be proud—would otherwise have evoked.

The narrow and anti-Imperial views, or perhaps the absence of any views on the subject at all, which characterized the general bearing of the English people towards us was, under the circumstances above mentioned, possibly somewhat pardonable. As a mass, they knew little about colonial matters, so they very naturally accepted the expressions of their leaders as a guide to their line of thought or conduct. But other conditions conduced to that uninterested state of the public mind. A long period of almost universal prosperity had fostered a sense of security in their insular strength. Trade with countries outside the bounds of the Empire had not only expanded beyond all previous experience, but it had also assumed a more than usually profitable character. Inspired by the idea that England was to be the permanent workshop of the world, her people became permeated with a complete insensibility to the value of national prestige in other directions. There was no contemplation of a time when—the tide of trade receding—features of a very different character would present themselves. The weapons of industry have been largely taken hold of by those industrious races who once were regarded as permanent contributors to British employment. But a restricted field of operations in countries which are now themselves competitors in the world's trade has set in motion a current of inquiring thought as to the ways and means necessary for the maintenance of British supremacy.

The magnitude, resources, and strategic value of the colonial dependencies have come into view. Their attractive features in this respect are becoming seductive to many who once disregarded their claims to admiration. The sentiment of Imperial power and the self-interest of materialism alike are bending to a reconsideration of the potentialities of influence and business enterprise which they possess. Hence it is that the British Press have almost unanimously come round to wider and more comprehensive views on colonial questions; their attitude towards the Ottawa Conference being one of general approval. These facts have not been unnoticed by colonial observers, and they have naturally done much to smooth over the feelings of estrangement which a neglected past had produced. But, again, there have arisen other factors in the work of mutual reconciliation of interest. The "sullen interval of war," with its threatening aspect, that has so long brooded over Europe, has naturally brought into notice the question of defence. Any reference to the dangers that surround the colonies in the case of a European complication in which England should be engaged are needless. They have already been fully recognised in a material form by the steps that have been taken to provide a joint Imperial and colonial fleet.

The allusion is here made for the purpose of pointing to motives which, deriving their origin from the risk of a common danger, have done much to consolidate ideas on Imperial unity. In reality Europe's warlike condition is promoting our confederation, and, whether to our own immediate advancement or not, must continue to do so the more imminent war appears. Further, the results of our own enterprise are, in many forms, making a deep impression on the imagination of the British population. New Zealand frozen mutton, cheese, and butter are invading the markets of every town and hamlet in Great Britain. Steamers of large capacity constantly arriving with colonial produce, raised by a mere handful of population from the fringes of territories almost as large as Europe, have caused an intelligent interest to be taken in our industrial movements. As a result, the yearly stream of travel throughout the British dominions is constantly expanding, and carrying away with it material for wider conceptions of national duties and interest. Finally, and not to step within the boundary of contentious ground, it may be legitimately asserted that the progressive spirit which marks the legislation of the colonies generally is having the effect of bringing them into a political prominence that invests their proceedings with considerable interest in the eyes of the British public.

The foregoing remarks seem to have an appropriate bearing upon the subjects to be dealt with in this report. They have been made with a view to furnish the reader with such general and preparatory matter as will, it is hoped, present the case of the Conference in a light favourable to an appreciative consideration of its objects. The immediate and material aspects of those objects are, however, of small concern compared with the value they possess as an expression of the growth and vitality of a momentous question. They are but the finger-posts that indicate the direction in which British thoughts and aspirations point, and whither Imperial interests will find their best and most permanent expansion.

THE OBJECTS OF THE CONFERENCE: ITS INITIATORY STAGES.

During the past few years it has gradually become a leading theory with many prominent thinkers on colonial questions that the first steps to obtain a popular recognition of the advantages which a closer bond would confer must be in the direction of trade reciprocity. It is felt that self-interest is the only basis on which any movement of this nature can safely and permanently rest. Unfortunately the necessity of providing sufficient revenue, added to the untoward spirit of jealousy which pervaded most of the colonies, has kept out of view some very real advantages that might otherwise have been obtained. The chief object of the Conference was to endeavour to find out whether there were any barriers in the way of commercial interchange which can be dispensed with to the profit of both buyer and seller. Commercial reciprocity is no new idea. It has been tried between communities of strange blood under circumstances that gave little hope of success. But hitherto there has been no effort made to examine the widely-varying commercial and industrial conditions that exist throughout the British dependencies, with a view to discover whether such can be made available to mutual advantage. Later on the various phases which this subject