

they have no legal status, nor can they commit the colonies to the several matters brought forward without the sanction of their respective Parliaments. At the same time, the periodical meetings of the heads of the several Governments in Australasia, the interchange of thought on matters of grave importance, must prove beneficial, uniformity in respect to many matters being of the greatest importance. A full report of the resolutions arrived at will be laid upon the table, and at the conclusion of the Conference the Right Honourable Sir Edward Braddon expressed the wish that the next Conference should take place in New Zealand.

CONFERENCE WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

In respect to the advantages derivable from the holding of this Conference, the despatch from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, which His Excellency the Governor referred to in his Speech from the Throne, conveys the mind of the Imperial authorities upon this subject. The Secretary of State says:—

“Her Majesty’s Government desire to put on record their strong sense of the loyal and patriotic spirit which was shown by all the representatives of the colonies in the course of their discussions, and hope that their colonial colleagues are satisfied that their visit has been productive of great advantage to the Empire, and that the conferences which have been held have resulted in such a free interchange of views as will have a lasting and beneficial effect in securing a complete mutual understanding between the colonies and the Mother-country.”

As to the commercial relations with the United Kingdom and the Australasian Colonies, the Premiers unanimously recommended the denunciation, at the earliest convenient time, of any treaties which now hamper the commercial relations between Great Britain and her colonies, and undertook to confer with their colleagues with the view of seeing whether such a result can be properly secured by a preference being given by the colonies to the products of the United Kingdom.

The treaties have been denounced. It will, however, be twelve months from the date of denunciation before the treaties cease to have effect. During the recess a careful analysis will be made of the existing tariff, and it may be found that the revenue from the Customs duties may permit of reduction, and, if an alteration can be made in favour of goods manufactured in the United Kingdom without prejudice to our own industries, it would be advisable to differentiate, and leave the tariff on foreign goods as at present. A Bill extending the Reciprocity Act to the United Kingdom and foreign nations will be introduced. I may here state, in reference to the denunciation of the treaties, that self-governing colonies are placed at a disadvantage as compared with the Crown colonies. In more recent years proposed treaties have been referred to the colonies, as in the case of the treaty with Japan.

In respect to political relations, it was resolved that the present political relations between the United Kingdom and the self-governing colonies were generally satisfactory under the existing condition of things.

From this the Premier of Tasmania and I dissented, on the ground that we were of opinion that the opportunity had then been given to make an effort to more firmly secure the political ties between the United Kingdom and the colonies. The majority of the Premiers were not prepared to adopt this position, alleging that to take such a share in Imperial reciprocity would involve a contribution in aid of Imperial expenditure, for which the colonies generally were not prepared. I did not, however, admit for a moment that this contention was sound, or that such a responsibility would attach to it.

In respect to the question of Imperial defence, it was resolved to continue the Australian squadron under the terms of the existing agreement. We were unanimous in our support of this resolution, with the exception of the Premier of South Australia, who favoured a scheme for the establishment of a branch of the Royal Naval Reserve in Australasia.