

COMMERCIAL RELATIONS.

THE commercial relations of the United Kingdom and the self-governing colonies were first considered, and the following resolutions were unanimously adopted :—

1. That the Premiers of the self-governing colonies unanimously and earnestly recommend the denunciation, at the earliest convenient time, of any treaties which now hamper the commercial relations between Great Britain and her colonies.

2. That in the hope of improving the trade relations between the Mother-country and the colonies the Premiers present undertake to confer with their colleagues with the view to seeing whether such a result can be properly secured by a preference given by the colonies to the products of the United Kingdom.

Her Majesty's Government have already given effect to the first of these resolutions by formally notifying to the Governments concerned their wish to terminate the commercial treaties with Germany and Belgium, which alone of the existing commercial treaties of the United Kingdom are a bar to the establishment of preferential tariff relations between the Mother-country and the colonies. From and after the 30th July, 1898, therefore, there will be nothing in any of Her Majesty's treaty obligations to preclude any action which any of the colonies may see fit to take in pursuance of the second resolution.

It is, however, right to point out that if any colony were to go farther and to grant preferential terms to any foreign country the provisions of the most favoured nation clauses in many treaties between Her Majesty and other powers, in which the colonies are included, would necessitate the concession of similar terms to those countries.

POLITICAL RELATIONS.

On the question of the political relations between the Mother-country and the self-governing colonies, the resolutions adopted were as follows :—

1. The Prime Ministers here assembled are of opinion that the present political relations between the United Kingdom and the self-governing colonies are generally satisfactory under the existing condition of things. [Mr. Seddon and Sir E. N. C. Braddon dissented.]

2. They are also of opinion that it is desirable, whenever and wherever practicable, to group together under a federal union those colonies which are geographically united. [Carried unanimously.]

3. Meanwhile, the Premiers are of opinion that it would be desirable to hold periodical conferences of representatives of the colonies and Great Britain for the discussion of matters of common interest. [Carried unanimously.]

Mr. Seddon and Sir E. N. C. Braddon dissented from the first resolution because they were of opinion that the time had already come when an effort should be made to render more formal the political ties between the United Kingdom and the colonies. The majority of the Premiers were not yet prepared to adopt this position, but there was a strong feeling amongst some of them that with the rapid growth of population in the colonies, the present relations could not continue indefinitely, and that some means would have to be devised for giving the colonies a voice in the control and direction of those questions of Imperial interest in which they are concerned equally with the Mother-country.

It was recognised at the same time that such a share in the direction of Imperial policy would involve a proportionate contribution in aid of Imperial expenditure, for which, at present at any rate, the colonies generally are not prepared.

IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

On the question of Imperial defence, the various points raised in the speech of the Secretary of State were fully discussed. On the most important of them—that of naval defence—some misapprehension had arisen as to the views of Her Majesty's Government in regard to the agreement with the Australasian Colonies, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, accompanied by the Senior Naval Lord, attended the Conference on its fifth and last meeting, and made the following statement of the attitude of Her Majesty's Government :—

NAVAL CONTRIBUTIONS.

“I have been asked to make some statement with reference to the attitude of the Admiralty as to colonial contributions towards naval defence, and in particular as to the agreement with the Australasian Colonies.

“I may say generally that we are content to abide by the existing agreement. The declarations which have been made on one of the earlier days of the Conference by some of the Colonial Premiers have convinced me as to the difficulties which would beset other methods of colonial contribution, and so, I repeat, we are content to abide by the existing agreement. We would be perfectly prepared to hear any argument against it, or for modifying it; but as matters now stand, and in view of what I have learnt of what has passed in this room, we should certainly not propose to give notice for the termination of that agreement, and we should leave it as it is, and administer it as it has been administered hitherto.

“The question may be looked at from three points of view—from the political point of view, from the strategical point of view, and from the purely Admiralty and naval point of view. From the purely Admiralty and naval point of view we can work the agreement, and we should wish to work it on the same lines as those on which we work it at present. From the political point of view, I can, of course, only speak as an individual member of the Government; but as First Lord of the Admiralty and a member of the Government I value the principle which is involved in the contribution of the colonies to the navy which was settled some years ago; and I think it would be