

the two years which have passed since the Conference last met. Although the destinies of these great dependencies of the Crown are the immediate responsibility and trust of the British Government, it would be wrong if it were to be supposed that the moral and material progress and development of these large areas were not of increasing importance to all the partners of the British Empire, and it is the constant aim and endeavour of the Colonial Office to foster the interest of the oversea Dominions in these great territories and so to stimulate inter-Imperial trade.

I do not propose to attempt to deal in any detail with the economic aspects of the Colonial Empire. These aspects, important as they are, come more properly within the purview of the Economic Conference, on which the special interests of the colonies and protectorates will be represented and advocated by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Mr. Ormsby-Gore, who will have associated with him Sir James Stevenson and Sir Gilbert Grindle, aided by an Advisory Committee composed of persons possessed of special and practical experience of the industrial life of the several colonies and groups of colonies concerned.

Economic Depression slowly lifting.

In the statement which my predecessor, Mr. Churchill, made to the Conference of 1921 about the colonies and protectorates, he referred to the creeping paralysis which had overtaken almost all their industries after the artificial prosperity of the war period. They still suffer under the general depression of trade, but I think I may say that, taken as a whole, the colonies are "pulling through." The financial position of some of the smaller colonies is a constant source of anxiety to their Governments and to us, but there are indications that the larger tropical areas for which we are responsible are recovering. Much, however, remains to be done before the trade of the colonies can be said to be in a satisfactory position, and it is to trade within the Empire that we must look to regain at least part of the ground that has been lost during recent years. Proposals will be placed before the Economic Conference with the object of increasing inter-Imperial trade with our tropical possessions and of fostering their development. But action by Governments alone, however beneficial if rightly directed, is not in itself sufficient, and needs to be aided and reinforced by private capital and private enterprise; and this all-important aspect of the question is being explored by an expert committee under the chairmanship of Lord Ronaldshay, the late Governor of Bengal.

British Empire Exhibition.

It may not be thought inappropriate if I refer in passing to the British Empire Exhibition, with which I am associated in an unofficial capacity as chairman of its Council. In common with the Dominion Governments, the Colonial Governments are taking a considerable share in promoting the success of the Exhibition, and my anticipations will be disappointed if the Exhibition does not achieve the results expected of it and if it does not open the eyes of the world to the tremendous material resources contained within the ambit of the British Empire. I am looking forward to meeting members of the Conference at Wembley next Saturday, when they will be enabled to see for themselves the scale and scope of this great enterprise.

Extent of Colonial Empire.

With this brief preface I now propose to touch upon certain aspects of the progress which has taken place in the political and industrial life of the colonies since last their affairs were under review at a meeting of the Governments of the Empire. The British Colonial Empire, with its two million square miles and a population of fifty millions, distributed in every quarter of the globe, presents a panorama of ever-varying interest and romance; and I must emphasize what was said by my predecessor two years ago, that it is impossible in the time at our disposal to attempt to do justice to this theme.

West Indies.

I will turn first to the oldest group of British colonies—the West Indies.

The visit to the West Indies and British Guiana in 1922 of the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Edward Wood), who was accompanied by Mr. Ormsby-Gore, gave an impetus to the movement in progress there, as in other parts of the Empire, for constitutional development. At the same time it enabled the Secretary of State to deal with West Indian problems with the aid of the sure knowledge which comes from personal touch with the representatives of every shade of opinion on the spot. I feel confident that I carry the members of this Conference with me when I say that the written and cabled word is no substitute for direct personal contact. It is the fixed policy of the Colonial Office to follow the precedent so successfully established and to take every opportunity of repeating in other parts of the Colonial Empire similar official visits. I have already invited Mr. Ormsby-Gore to pay a visit to the British West African colonies this forthcoming winter, and I hope that he will be leaving in the middle of December.

As a result of Mr. Wood's visit constitutional reforms are in the course of being carried out in Jamaica, Trinidad, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and Dominica.

The economic position of the West Indian colonies is far from satisfactory. It has been necessary for several Colonial Governments to come to the assistance of their staple industries in order to enable them to tide over a period of grave depression. Both the sugar and the cocoa industries have experienced great difficulties, and the oil industry of Trinidad, from which so much was hoped, has not hitherto come up to the expectations that were formed in regard to it.