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### The Intercolonial Conference.

THE recent conference between the intercolonial delegates may fairly be regarded as an historic one as being the first meeting of official representatives of the colonies for purposes of combined action for common advantage. The event is full of significance for the future of the British Empire and the relations between its several parts. Hitherto the different British dependencies have practically conducted their affairs independently of each other, and without regard to their common interests as parts of that empire of which they form the Greater Britain. The conference was a practical recognition of the responsibilities and privileges of imperial unity, and as such may be considered as the first step towards the realization of that imperial federation which, in the opinion of many, the growing importance of the Colonies will render necessary to integrity in course of time. The subjects discussed and the decisions arrived at were either of imperial importance or involved questions of imperial policy. That the representations of the conference will receive full and proper consideration at the hands of the Home Government and Parliament will be readily believed, but the anomaly of the present relations of the parts to the whole is emphasized by the occasion. The Colonies, although a part of the Empire, have no effective voice in imperial affairs, and the British Government, whilst possessing imperial functions and powers, is not representative of the Empire. Such a basis of government cannot in the nature of things remain permanent, but he would be a presumptuous man who would venture to predict what future form will be developed in its stead. The solution of the difficulty will doubtless appear when necessity absolutely demands it; meantime the Intercolonial Conference may be taken as an indication that "the old order changeth, giving place to the new" in the direction of imperial federation, and a closer union of interests.

### The "business or bust" theory.

It is of course too much to expect the advocates of "assessmentism" to be warm lovers of theory in life assurance, but it has been reserved to the *Insurance and Commercial Magazine* of New York as one of its exponents to prove its case against scientific principles by citing the success of General Grant in its support. Unbiased judges would probably want to know what the career of that illustrious gentleman can have to do with the question; the only relevancy of the quotation to the subject that we can trace lies in the fact that whilst his success consisted in "taking off" as many men as possible, that of life assurance is consulted by the prolongation of life. Letting that pass, however, we quite agree with our contemporary that "the more successful the business, the less the cost," but its statement that the success of a life institution is in proportion to its new business is contrary to common sense and experience. The history of young companies teaches that there is a normal limit to the introduction of "new blood" beyond which an office cannot safely go by reason of the cost of procuring it, whilst the records of such staunch, conservative institutions as the "old" Equitable of England, which never employs a single agent, form a conclusive argument against the fallacy that a large amount of new business is necessary to success. Under present conditions, new business costs more than the first year's premium, and companies have to carry the risk for some time for nothing as well as provide the necessary reserve. If business were all of a permanent quality, these adverse facts would be compensated for in course of time by light mortality, etc.; but, unfortunately it is only too true that from 30 to 50 per cent. of the new assurances effected drop off the books during the first year alone. It is, therefore, obvious that any company might be rendered insolvent if a sufficiently large volume of new blood were introduced under these conditions, and it becomes a question as to how much an office can afford to procure with a due regard to the interests of existing policyholders who have to pay for it. We are quite prepared to admit, however, that the "business or bust" policy, to quote our contemporary's elegant phrase, is the only one to prolong the short-lived career of "assessment" concerns—affairs which finance on the system of paying old debts with the money received from new