

he is in a position to lay on the Table the papers with reference to it to substantiate it; if he is not in a position to lay the papers substantiating it before the House, he is not in a position to quote information from that proposition and from those papers. Now, Sir, the right hon. gentleman can take whichever of those positions he pleases. In either case somebody has leaked, somebody has made an announcement that he had no right to make, or there is no such announcement to be made—one or the other. Now, as we can get no categorical answer, let us argue the point. In the first place, let us call the right hon. gentleman himself. The right hon. gentleman himself, in London and Toronto, declared that a condition of this preferential trade was, not that there should be absolute free trade, no customs duties amongst the different parts of the Empire, but that there should be no protective duties; that is, a revenue tariff must be the basis on which it could be framed, and that only. That is the hon. gentleman's statement in those places. The hon. gentleman's statement goes to prove that at that time, at least, there was no such proposition, and he did not understand Mr. Chamberlain's words uttered at that time as having such tendency. We go one step further. Mr. Chamberlain, in 1896, made a statement in London, at the Canada Club, or before the assembled chambers of commerce—I do not know which—it makes no difference. It is not possible, in reading what Mr. Chamberlain said, to torture his words uttered at that time into an absolute and unconditional statement of a basis upon which this must proceed, namely, that there should be no customs duties, but absolute free trade, between the different parts of the Zollverein. More than that, I read from the hon. gentleman's own speech on Friday a quotation from Mr. Chamberlain, speaking in 1896, in which that gentleman said:

But the principle which I claim must be accepted if we are to make any, even the slightest, progress, is that within the different parts of the Empire protection must disappear—

Not a revenue tariff, not a customs tariff.

—and that the duties must be revenue duties, and not protective duties in the sense of protection for the products of one part of the Empire against those of another part.

That, Sir, is the sensible view of the case, that is the view the London "Times" took, for no sooner had the "Globe's" semi-official statement been cabled to England, than the London "Times," in an editorial, stated that it could not believe it, that Mr. Chamberlain was a practical man, and it could not believe that he had ever laid down hard and fast lines of that kind. More than that, Sir. By the circular of June 28, 1897, calling the Premiers of the colonies to a conference with Mr. Chamberlain and other members of the Government during the Jubilee period, Mr. Chamberlain invites

them, not to discuss a hard and fast proposition, but to discuss the question of commercial union. They went to England, they met Mr. Chamberlain, and the latest utterance we have from Mr. Chamberlain is in the official reports of that conference, so far as it has been made public, where Mr. Chamberlain speaks to the assembled Premiers and outlines the subjects which they are to take up. After outlining certain other subjects, he takes up the one of commercial relations, and says:

I pass on, then, to another question, and that is as to the future commercial relations between this country and her colonies. How far is it possible to make the relations closer and more intimate? I have said that I believe in sentiment as the greatest of all the forces in the general government of the world, but at the same time I should like to bring to the reinforcement of sentiment the motives which are derived from material and personal interests. Undoubtedly the fiscal arrangements of the different colonies differ so much among themselves, and all differ so much from those of the mother country, that it would be a matter of the greatest complication and difficulty to arrive at any conclusion which would unite us commercially in the same sense in which the Zollverein united the Empire of Germany.

That is not the statement of a man who had reduced his ideas to a hard and fast proposition and flung it as a sine qua non amongst the Premiers of the colonies. It is the statement of a broad-minded business man, permeated by a strong purpose, and willing to give and take and confer as to how that great purpose may be brought about. He goes on:

But this is a matter upon which at the present time, rather than suggest any proposals of my own, I desire to hear the views of the gentlemen present.

Can anything be clearer than that Mr. Chamberlain was not in a position to make any hard and fast proposition to the colonial Premiers? "Meanwhile," said Mr. Chamberlain, as though unwilling to let the least possible chance for an understanding on this matter to escape him:

Meanwhile, however, I note a resolution which appears to have been passed unanimously at the meeting of the Premiers in Hobart, in which the desire was expressed for closer commercial arrangements with the Empire, and I think it was suggested that a commission of inquiry should be created in order to see in what way practical effect might be given to that aspiration.

Gentlemen, said the right hon. Secretary of the Colonies, I have no hard and fast proposition. This subject is surrounded with difficulties, and I do not want to present such a one to you. I ask you to think it over and confer with me here and now. But if you think it is best to take more time to consider it, follow out the suggestion, if you will, of the Hobart Conference, and have a commission, and I will appoint some one to act with you on that commission; and in that way take time, which is a fac-