

terests and welfare. They were prepared to co-operate if necessary, but not to subordinate themselves to a federal assembly for fear of losing their status as independent communities and of being reduced to the rank of dignified municipalities. The smaller colonies instinctively preferred a policy of united or co-operative action to any scheme of a federal union. This feeling of independence was intensified with the growth of the several colonies in wealth and population, which far from drawing them closer together politically, served rather to develop a self-reliant temper and a sense of their own strength which was far from compatible with a spirit of federalism, or of mutual co-operation.

During the early years of colonial separation, it almost appeared as though the policy of legislative co-operation would be crowned with success, and that there would be no need of a federal union. The natural course of events had driven the several states into a loose form of partnership or alliance, which had expressed itself in a series of agreements on various matters of minor interest, which promised to be a prelude to a more ambitious program of intercolonial action. By means of commissions or negotiations the questions of intercolonial light-houses, overland telegraphs, border customs, and intercolonial postage were temporarily adjusted on a more or less satisfactory basis. Besides the abolition of *ad valorem* duties in South Australia had brought that colony into a general agreement with the fiscal systems of the other states, so that in 1856 partly by accident and partly by design something approaching an assimilation of tariffs was temporarily effected in all the colonies.¹ The settlement or partial accommodation of several of these intercolonial questions not only diminished the pressure of the demand for an immediate federal union, but also afforded evidence in support of the growing feeling that the relations of the colonies could be satisfactorily adjusted by mutual agreement and intercolonial co-operation. The provincialist was always able to refer to these facts as conclusive proof that a federation was not required. The conference of 1863 marks the triumph of the policy of a consultative conference over the conception of a federal Australia.

Nor can we overlook the fact that the movement for the decentralization of the vast unwieldy colonies had not yet spent its

¹Westgarth, *Victoria late Australia Felix*, p. 81.