

are such as you would like to consider more formally and in detail, in which case I hope we may arrange for subsequent interviews with that object; but to-day I will state for your consideration a list of subjects, and I will ask you to give me your views as to the way in which they should subsequently be dealt with.

POLITICAL RELATIONS.

Now, gentlemen, undoubtedly the greatest, the most important, and at the same time the most difficult of all the subjects which we could consider is the question of the future relations, political and commercial, between the self-governing Colonies and the United Kingdom. I do not think that it is necessary for me to argue at all upon the advantages of such closer union. Strong as is the bond of sentiment, and impossible as it would be to establish any kind of relations unless that bond of sentiment existed, I believe we all feel that it would be desirable to take advantage of it, and to still further tighten the ties which bind us together. In this country, at all events, I may truly say that the idea of federation is in the air. Whether with you it has gone as far, it is for you to say, and it is also for you to consider whether we can give any practical application to the principle. It may well be that the time is hardly ripe for anything definite in this regard. It is quite true that our own constitution and your constitutions have all been the subject of very slow growth and that they are all the stronger because they have been gradually consolidated, and so perhaps with Imperial Federation: if it is ever to be accomplished it will be only after the lapse of a considerable time and only by gradual steps.

And undoubtedly one of those steps to which we must all attach very great importance is the grouping of the Colonies. We rejoice in this country that Canada has already shown the way, with results which everyone has seen have conduced greatly to her strength and to her prosperity. We observe, with the most lively interest, the proceedings which are taking place in Australia with the same view. We know that in South African politics the same idea has bulked very largely in the past, and probably will come to the front again. In regard to all these matters it is not for us to offer advice; it is not for us to press upon you in any shape our interference or our assistance. If it be possible for us in any way to help you to give effect to your own desires, I need not say that we are entirely at your service; but, in the meanwhile, I can assure you, on behalf, I am sure, of the people of this country that we most heartily wish success to your efforts, believing, as I have said, that it will in your case, as it has already done in the case of Canada, conduce to your prosperity and to your power. But as regards the larger question, and anything in the nature of a federation of the Empire, the subject seems to me to depend entirely upon the feeling which exists in the Colonies themselves. Here you will be met half way. The question is whether up to the present time there is such a genuine popular demand for closer union as would justify us in considering practical proposals to give it shape.

I feel that there is a real necessity for some better machinery of consultation between the self-governing Colonies and the mother country, and it has sometimes struck me—I offer it now merely as a personal suggestion—that it might be feasible to create a great council of the Empire to which the Colonies would send representative plenipotentiaries,—not mere delegates who were unable to speak in their name, without further reference to their respective Governments, but persons who by their position in the Colonies, by their representative character, and by their close touch with Colonial feeling, would

POLITICAL
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