

No one circumstance, perhaps, indicates the actual condition of public opinion more than the attitude of the press and there were weeks and months during the year when the leading daily and weekly papers, the principal magazines, and the foremost trade and financial journals of the old country devoted more space to Canadian matters and gave greater prominence to the multifarious concerns of the Dominion than to any other subject that came within their world-wide purview. All of which seems to emphasize to an unparalleled degree the position that Canada has sprung to in the councils of the Empire.

The Preferential Tariff.

The year 1898 will be notable in the history of Canada for the fact that it saw the preferential tariff with the empire, which had been inaugurated the previous year, come into full effect. The Liberal party in Canada, following the footsteps of its prototype in the mother country, has always stood for free trade in principle, though the different conditions existing here aggravated by the ultra-protectionist policy of the past two decades made it impossible to give full and immediate effect thereto. Believing without reservation in the fundamental principle that trade, whether between nations or between different sections of the same community, should be as free and untrammelled as possible—following natural lines—the platform upon which the party went to the country in 1896 contained a tariff reform plank as one of its main features. That plank declared that "the customs tariff of the Dominion should be based, not as it is now, upon the protective principle, but upon the requirements of the service," that "the existing tariff is founded upon an unsound principle," which has been "the occasion of great public injury," and that "the higher interests of Canada demand a removal of this obstacle to our country's progress by the adoption of a sound fiscal policy." "To this end," the platform declared, "the tariff should be reduced to the needs of honest, economic and efficient Government; it should be so adjusted and arranged as to make free, or to bear as lightly as possible upon the necessities of life, and to promote free trade with the whole world, more particularly with Great Britain and the United States."

Having been returned to power upon the platform of which this was the most prominent feature, the new Government at once set to work to put

their declaration into effect as far as existing conditions would safely permit; and it was in the budget speech of the session of 1897 that Mr. Fielding made known the proposal of the Government to give a preference in the shape of a reduction of 25 per cent. on all importations of British goods. That the change might not be too sudden, nor injure existing interests, only 12 1-2 per cent. of the reduction was made effective the first year, but on the first of August, 1898, the full 25 per cent. became operative. The proposal, when first made, was received with enthusiasm throughout the empire and will stand in history as the first real and practical step towards actual Imperial federation. Even now it is easy to appreciate the far-reaching effects of this policy; but its effect upon Canadian trade with the Empire, beneficial though that has already shown itself to be, is only a portion of the outcome—for the ties of Empire have been strengthened and tightened, and Canada to-day stands proudly and prominently to the front as the pioneer and example of advanced Imperialism.

The Sister Colonies Coming In.

Moreover, the effect of the Canadian preferential policy reaches beyond the relations of the Dominion with the mother country, for other British colonies have been, almost necessarily, driven into the adoption of a like position. As far back as March, 1898, the Australian Premiers in conference assembled, adopted the following:—"That in the opinion of this Conference any Federal tariff should give a preference to articles, the production or manufacture of the United Kingdom." Our Australian fellow-colonists are hard at work upon a grand federation scheme, but should there be no prospect of quickly arranging a federal tariff, the Premiers will recommend to their respective Cabinets such changes in the tariffs of the different colonies, as will give substantial preference to the United Kingdom, and to such colonies.

The British possessions in "the Dark Continent" too, are reaping a direct benefit, for we have the declaration of Mr. Rhodes that it is to Canada that South Africa owes the removal of obstacles to her tariff adjustments. "The treaties were in the way," he told a Cape Times representative, "but Laurier has got rid of them. 'Canada the pioneer' is more than a pet phrase."

The only shade to the picture was an attempt at reprisal on the part of Germany, that country endeavoring to re-