

or survive as graceful ornaments in the Colonial protective systems.

In the second place, it is made manifest that, while the Colonies will welcome any conference or council of a deliberative nature, in which free discussion of matters of common interest takes place between Government and Government, and while they are prepared for further co-operation in the furtherance of commerce or defence, they will not lay down in any formal contract any shred of legislative or administrative liberty they already possess. As free agents they will discuss and negotiate and, as far as possible, co-operate for the common good of the Empire, but in every matter they will retain the right of initiation and of ratification for their peoples and their Governments. Not merely do they recognise the paramountcy of their interest in preserving in their own hands the guidance of their political destiny as individual Colonies and as Colonial aggregates, but they now understand, as they did not in the first flush of Imperial sentiment attendant on the Boer War, that any formal political union upon closer terms with the Mother Country, such as has been suggested, must involve not merely a diminution of their Colonial liberties but the assumption of an unknown and an uncontrolled quantity of new Imperial burdens. Mr. Chamberlain's words, so often quoted, remain as true as ever, and may be deemed the expression of a final truth: "The link which unites us, almost invisible as it is, sentimental in its character, is one which we would gladly strengthen; but, at the same time, it has proved itself to be so strong that certainly we would not wish to substitute for it a chain which might be galling in its incidence."*

* Cd. 1,299, page 3.