

There are two germ ideas, from either of which the actual organism of Imperial federation may proceed; they are, respectively, commercial union and military union. A conference for the consideration of subjects of mutual interest concerning the great self-governing colonies and the mother country was held in London in the year 1887. No well-wisher to the interests of our race can doubt that great and abiding good has resulted from this first attempt at the convocation of an Imperial deliberative assembly. If the question of closer commercial union was only tentatively discussed, the principle of co-operation between the colonies and the mother country for mutual naval and military defence was certainly advanced more than one stage by the arrangements decided upon at this conference. Not the least important of the proceedings of the conference was the initiation of the principle of consulting an assembly of representatives of the colonies upon matters of an international character which affected colonial interests. This was actually done at five of the sittings reported as confidential.\* On the other important questions which were discussed at this conference, I will not now enter.

The Imperial Federation League is now seeking to bring about another conference of a similar character, but with the object, if possible, of learning the views of the colonies as to some scheme of federation. The London Chamber of Commerce has appointed a committee for the purpose of eliciting information and promoting discussion as to the possibilities of a closer commercial union between Great Britain and her colonies, and this subject will also be brought forward for discussion at a conference of the chambers of commerce of the Empire to be held in London next year, and for which the London chamber has forwarded invitations. Undoubtedly the crux in this problem consists in the divergence in thought and practice between the mother country and the colonies as regards free trade and protection, and the question, to be successfully treated, must be approached in no mere doctrinaire spirit. Commercial relations between the old country and the colonies are becoming of more and more importance as compared with foreign trade, and free trader as I am I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that in one respect the protectionist United States has outstripped free trade England. For the United States has at least established perfect free trade between all portions of her own vast territory.

Without venturing in these pages to prophesy as to the form which the federation of the British Empire may take if it be

\* For a very able report by the Rev. Canon Dalton upon this Conference, I would refer to vol. xix. of the *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*.