

purported to read from that speech and claimed that the Hon. Mr. Chamberlain had on that occasion expressed himself very strongly against any such proposition as commercial union or anything of that kind with the colonies. My hon. friend must either have failed to read the speech attentively, or he read it with a view of extracting from its contents something that would serve the purposes of his friends.

Hon. Mr. SCOTT—The speech from which I have read was delivered some months afterwards at the conference at the boards of trade.

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON—I will come to that speech. The remarks I have applied to the speech before the Canada club will have to apply to my hon. friend's comments and extracts from the other speech delivered before the congress of boards of trade of the different parts of the empire a few months later. In the speech before the Canada club, the Hon. Mr. Chamberlain discussed this question, and while he held then, as he did in other speeches, that an absolute federation of the empire politically and commercially was not practicable at the present time, he expressed the strong conviction that the day was coming and not far off when it would be regarded as practicable, and he went on to comment on the speech made by Mr. McNeill in the House of Commons, and the motion made by that hon. gentleman, which attracted a good deal of attention at the time, and Mr. Chamberlain showed that that proposal would not meet the views of the British people. It is true he went that far, but what is the conclusion he arrived at after having reached this point? Was it that the whole question was one not open for discussion? Nothing of the kind. It was that the colonies should better their offer and he went on to speak of a despatch which has been referred to also by the Secretary of State that of the Marquis of Ripon of the previous year, 1895, concerning resolutions passed in this very room by the great colonial conference of 1894 with reference to improving trade relations within the empire and he, Mr. Chamberlain, pointed out that even Lord Ripon's despatch was not an absolute negation of the whole question of improving the trade relations of the empire or even of a zollverein of the empire.

And he laid down four propositions. The first was that there is a universal desire for closer union. The second was that such union can be best approached on the commercial side. He said we should reach the question on the line of the least resistance. The third proposition was that proposals already made by the colonies were not sufficiently favourable to Great Britain, and the fourth proposition was that a true Zollverein is a proper subject for discussion. He went even further and he pointed to the fact that it need not be on a strictly free trade basis; that it could be on a basis of a revenue tariff, and he pointed to the fact that Great Britain although strongly free trade in her policy, imposed heavy duties on articles which he enumerated for revenue purposes, and the different colonies might be allowed to select articles on which they could collect duty for such purposes. He furnished ground on which such an arrangement could be made. He went further and said that although he was a disciple of Cobden he had not such a pedantic admiration for the doctrines of free trade, that he was not willing to depart from such principles for a substantial consideration. He wanted a *quid pro quo*, and he said that was what Cobden did when he negotiated the French treaty and added surely we are not expected to be greater free traders than Cobden himself. But my hon. friend says that he referred to another speech, to a speech made by Mr. Chamberlain when addressing the Chambers of Commerce for the empire some three months later than his speech before the Canada Club, and it was from this speech my hon. friend claimed he found such comfort in addressing the House as furnishing an absolute negative of the doctrine of preferential trade. I have the speech in my hands and I shall read a few extracts from it. He said:

The establishment of a commercial union throughout the empire would not only be the first step, but it would be the main step, the decisive step towards the realization of the most inspiring idea that has entered the minds of British statesmen.

That does not look like a negation of the whole principle and he spoke of several propositions before the public on this question. He said:

The first of them is a proposal that the colonies should abandon their own fiscal system and should accept ours; that they should carry out fully the doctrines of free trade; that they should open their markets not only to us but to all the world; and that