

from their Legislatures, from their Governments, to the Imperial War Cabinet, it was one of the most important events that had ever taken place in the history of the British Empire, and I am confident that posterity will look upon it from that point of view."¹

Very great progress has been made since 1887. At first the colonial representatives came to the conferences as inferiors who were summoned occasionally by their superior, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Now the Dominion representatives go to London at regular intervals to sit as equals in conference with the British representatives. The question of preferential trade was debated for thirty years, and at last in 1917 the representatives of Great Britain voted in favour of the principle of preferential trade within the Empire. Colonial help in defence was repeatedly sought, and sometimes given in small measure, but now the Dominions, the Crown Colonies, and India are giving generously of men and money for the present great struggle. India was long unrepresented in the councils of the Empire; but in the future she is to be represented, and her citizens are to be treated in some measure at least as the equals of other British citizens. It long seemed that no progress was being made in finding a better constitution for the Empire. At the first Conference the Marquis of Salisbury said the discussion of Imperial Federation was premature. In 1897 and 1902 Mr. Chamberlain urged the creation of an Imperial Council, but accomplished nothing. In 1911 Sir Joseph Ward laid before the Conference his scheme for an Imperial Parliament, but failed to win any support. And yet all this time the Conference itself was developing into a recognized and highly useful instrument of government, which with the Imperial Cabinet will perhaps give the British Commonwealth all the central machinery it will require for a long time to come. Thirty years ago the British Empire consisted of a parent state, a number of self-governing colonies, and a large number of crown colonies and dependencies, loosely bound together by ties of sentiment. To-day it consists of a group of self-governing nations with colonies and dependencies, still held together by the strongest ties of sentiment, and possessing in addition a highly efficient means of consultation and concerted action.

¹Minutes, p. 51.