

with those commercial questions. Gradually in their discussions national objects and political interests were introduced, and so, from starting as it did on a purely commercial basis and for commercial interests, it developed until it became a bond of unity and the foundation of the German Empire. We have another reason why we should approach this subject from its commercial side, and that is that in regard to this the colonies, to whose feelings we must pay the utmost deference, who must, in fact, in one sense at any rate, take the initiative in any movement, have clearly pointed by their action to commercial union as the point upon which, as they consider, the whole subject is most ripe. Why, what happened at the great conference at Ottawa which was held in 1894? The principal resolution—principal, at all events, in regard to its importance—which was passed at that conference, was in the following terms:—"That this conference records its belief in the advisability of a Customs arrangement between Great Britain and her colonies, by which trade within the Empire may be placed upon a more favourable footing than that which is carried on with foreign countries." (Cheers.) It is quite true that that was the declaration of a general principle, and that no definite plan was submitted to or adopted by the conference, but we have other means of information. We are acquainted with the speeches that were made there, and we know what was in the minds of the delegates. I observed in *The Times* this morning a telegram from Canada which tells us that Mr. McNeill, the gentleman who moved the patriotic resolution to which I have already referred, has moved another resolution in the House of Commons of Canada, by which he proposes to declare that it is desirable in the interests of Great Britain and of the colonies that a moderate *ad valorem* duty, independent of any existing duty, should be imposed both by the colonies and by the mother country upon all imports from foreign countries. (Cheers.) That, therefore, is the suggestion, for I will call it no more, it is not a formal proposition, but it is the suggestion that has been made to us by our colonies for carrying out a system of commercial union. At any rate a proposition of that kind is entitled to respectful consideration, and if we object to it, we ought, I think, to propose an alternative, or we ought—and this is the only other thing for us to do—to say at once that all that we have said, all that we have done, all that we have thought about Imperial unity has been thrown away and that that idea must be abandoned as an empty dream. Now, Sir, do not let us minimize the proposition we are asked to consider. It would involve in the case of the United Kingdom a most serious disturbance of our trade; it would be a great change