



TORONTO, ONT., FEBRUARY, 1900.

THE TRADER, the official organ of the Jewelry trade of Canada, is published on the 1st of every month at 34 Lombard Street, Toronto, Ont., and has a circulation embracing every solvent Jeweler in the Dominion. Price \$1.00 per annum.

Correspondence is invited on topics of interest to the trade, but we do not hold ourselves in any way responsible for the statements or opinions of those using our columns.

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THE TRADER PUBLISHING CO.
OF TORONTO, LIMITED.



PREFERENTIAL TRADE.

NEVER before in the history of the British Empire has the attention of its people been so unanimously directed to the matter of closer relations of all kinds.

The preference given by Canada to the manufactures of the mother country, and the products of several of the colonies, has opened the eyes of the empire to the fact that we are not a disjointed lot of fragments without any cohesion, and that it is quite possible to cultivate an inter-imperial system of trade which will not only be of individual benefit, but serve to draw the empire closer together.

Following close on the heels of this came Imperial Penny Postage, by which the various parts of the empire are enabled to communicate with each other as freely and cheaply as though it was all one solid continent instead of being scattered all over the habitable globe.

To crown all this, on the breaking out of hostilities, between the mother country and the Transvaal Republic and Orange Free States, all of the self-governing colonies have raised troops and sent them to South Africa to assist in prosecuting the war.

Not only has this action on the part of the colonies opened

the eyes of the world to the fact that they are now a source of strength instead of weakness to the empire, but it has evoked a feeling in the hearts of the people of the mother country which must undoubtedly make for closer relations of every kind. The feeling of the British people was well voiced in a speech by the Duke of Devonshire when he said: "This war has brought about a closer union with the colonies, and has revealed to us a source of strength and power for this empire which was scarcely known to ourselves, and certainly was not known by the world at large."

It seems almost certain that, whatever the future may have in store for the British Empire, the relations between the mother country and her colonies can scarcely be the same as they have been heretofore, but must be of a much closer and more intimate character. What they may grow to be we need not discuss here, because no cut and dried programme can be adopted in the matter; on the contrary it is probable that closer union will come about gradually by evolution and force of circumstances.

One of the principal factors, in our opinion, to effect this consolidation of interests, will be preferential trade relations throughout the empire, and the leading statesmen of the various self-governing colonies should lose no time in opening a campaign in order to secure its adoption. The value of such a preference to the colonies in the markets of Great Britain is so self evident as to require no argument. The difficulty will arise, as heretofore, on the part of the mother country, whose people have been wedded to free trade theories so long that they will have to be educated up to the benefits which would accrue to themselves, as well as to the empire at large, by the practical adoption of preferential trade relations.

Our readers are probably aware that another meeting of all the Chambers of Commerce throughout the British Empire has been called at London, for June next. Present conditions are such that this will without doubt be the most important meeting of the kind that has ever taken place in any country, and much good is expected to result from it. As might be expected, one of the questions which is sure to be brought prominently before the meeting, will be that of preferential trade throughout the empire. Not only will it be thoroughly ventilated, but its supporters will endeavor to secure the endorsement of this great and influential body. If this can be done, it will soon be found in the arena of practical politics, where it will be kept until public sentiment can be educated up to the point where it must be put into operation.

Although resolutions of this kind have been brought before the meetings of the Empire Chambers of Commerce on two or three previous occasions they have always failed to carry, owing to the want of harmony amongst the colonial representatives present. In order to overcome this obstacle, a special committee of the Toronto Board of Trade was appointed to draft a resolution upon this matter of preferential trade, and bring it before a general meeting of the board for consideration. This was accordingly done, and the following resolution drafted by the committee unanimously passed the council of the board, and later, a general meeting of the members, called for the special purpose of considering it. The resolution reads as follows: