

interests of trade is to insinuate a wish to purchase Canada, an loyalty, whilst the possible result of the influence of the United States on Canadian policy in the future receives scant consideration.

Notwithstanding the certainty with which such opinions have been sown broadcast by fleeting visitors to the Dominion, I can only say that I, personally, have found nothing more difficult during my period of six years' office than to form direct conclusions on Canadian public opinion. The country is so vast, local interests are so absorbing, that unless some question assumes a controversial form it is difficult to arrive at the feelings of the country. In non-controversial questions, therefore, I have assumed—I think correctly—that if the opinions of the leading Canadian statesmen of both political parties agree, they can be accepted as fairly representing the opinion of the people. On this question of Imperial preferential trade they do absolutely agree.

Neither have I found, during my intimacy with the wisest men in Canada—if I may take Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Fielding as their representatives—the very slightest nervousness as to the dangerous consequences to be apprehended from tariff bonds. Both of them Free Traders at heart, the position they have invariably put before me has been that, recognising the impossibility of inter-Imperial Free Trade owing to their own system of revenue, and the necessity in the creation of a new country of to some extent guarding certain industries, they are convinced of the possibility of preferential trade arrangements which will foster Imperial sentiment and consolidate the trade and interests of the Empire. (Cheers.)

The present Imperial position is of too vast an importance to allow the unjustifiable conclusions I have referred to to go unchallenged. I will put aside entirely any opinions I may myself have formed. I will rely entirely on Canadian action, on the speeches of leading Canadian statesmen, and on extracts from the Canadian Press. If I am speaking at unwarrantable length for an after-dinner speech, I hope that the importance of present circumstances may be my excuse, even though I feel compelled to repeat much which everyone ought to know already.

As you are aware, the Dominion has already given a preference of 33½ per cent. on British imports. It is unnecessary, I think, to refer to opinions expressed at Colonial Conferences prior to that of 1902; but on that occasion the representatives of the Government of Canada brought forward a resolution, which was unanimously carried, the text of which has always been available to the British public, but which, emanating as it did from a great popular leader, and repre-