

THE COLONIAL CONFERENCE.

The Cobden Club's Reply to the Preferential Proposals.

CHAPTER I.

THE EARLY MOVEMENT TOWARDS FEDERATION.

WHAT light does the Colonial Conference of 1907 throw upon the future of the British Empire, especially as regards the relations between the Mother Country and the self-governing Colonies? Before endeavouring to answer this question by examining the Report of the Conference, it is desirable to present a brief account of the official circumstances which led to this Conference. The movement for a closer organisation of the parts of the Empire for common purposes of government, defence, and trade, had long been occupying the attention of politicians both in Great Britain and the Colonies before the advent of Mr. Chamberlain to the office of Colonial Secretary in 1895 gave practical importance to the proposals. Not only had private associations in this country been educating public opinion upon the advisability of Imperial Federation, but as far back as 1874 Lord Carnarvon, on entering the Colonial Office, had definitely set himself to promote the federation of Colonial groups as a step towards the fuller federation.

When Mr. Chamberlain became Colonial Secretary in 1895 he directed all his energy to the promotion of this object. Events in Australia and, as he thought, in South Africa, were moving rapidly towards local federation, and the association of these groups in one great federal union appeared to him quite practicable.