

Her Majesty's Government have already given effect to the first of these resolutions by formally notifying to the Governments concerned their wish to terminate the commercial treaties with Germany and Belgium, which alone of the existing commercial treaties of the United Kingdom are a bar to the establishment of preferential tariff relations between the mother country and the Colonies. From and after the 30th July 1898, therefore, there will be nothing in any of Her Majesty's treaty obligations to preclude any action which any of the Colonies may see fit to take in pursuance of the second resolution.

It is, however, right to point out that if any Colony were to go farther and to grant preferential terms to any Foreign Country, the provisions of the most favoured nation clauses in many treaties between Her Majesty and other powers, in which the Colonies are included, would necessitate the concession of similar terms to those countries.

On the question of the political relations between the mother country and the self-governing Colonies, the resolutions adopted were as follows :—

POLITICAL
RELATIONS.

1. The Prime Ministers here assembled are of opinion that the present political relations between the United Kingdom and the self-governing Colonies are generally satisfactory under the existing condition of things.

Mr. Seddon and Sir E. N. C. Braddon dissented.

2. They are also of opinion that it is desirable, whenever and wherever practicable, to group together under a federal union those colonies which are geographically united.

Carried unanimously.

3. Meanwhile, the Premiers are of opinion that it would be desirable to hold periodical conferences of representatives of the Colonies and Great Britain for the discussion of matters of common interest.

Carried unanimously.

Mr. Seddon and Sir E. N. C. Braddon dissented from the first resolution because they were of opinion that the time had already come when an effort should be made to render more formal the political ties between the United Kingdom and the Colonies. The majority of the Premiers were not yet prepared to adopt this position, but there was a strong feeling amongst some of them that with the rapid growth of population in the Colonies, the present relations could not continue indefinitely, and that some means would have to be devised for giving the Colonies a voice in the control and direction of those questions of Imperial interest in which they are concerned equally with the mother country.

It was recognised at the same time that such a share in the direction of Imperial policy would involve a proportionate contribution in aid of Imperial expenditure, for which at present, at any rate, the Colonies generally are not prepared.

On the question of Imperial defence, the various points raised in the speech of the Secretary of State were fully discussed. On the most important of them, that of Naval Defence, some misapprehension had arisen as to the views of Her Majesty's Government in regard to the agreement with the Australasian Colonies, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, accompanied by the Senior Naval Lord, attended the conference on its fifth and last meeting, and made the following statement of the attitude of Her Majesty's Government.

IMPERIAL
DEFENCE.

"I have been asked to make some statement with reference to the attitude of the Admiralty as to Colonial contributions towards Naval Defence, and in particular as to the agreement with the Australasian Colonies.

Naval
Contributions.