

members of her Committee of Privy Council the official representatives of the colonies now in London. That is to say, the Council for the Colonies would consist primarily of the High Commissioner for Canada and the Agents-General for the Cape, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and New Zealand. To this Council the Crown might add nominated representatives of the Crown colonies; say, for instance—although Lord Grey does not make this suggestion—one for the West Indies, another for West Africa, and a third for the Eastern Settlements, from Mauritius to Hongkong. That, however, is a detail. The central principle of the proposal is that the Agents of the self-governing colonies should be officially associated with the Colonial Office in their corporate capacity as the representatives of the great and growing England beyond the sea. To some extent we may see how such a scheme would act by the example of the India Council; which, however, has no standing but that given it by the appointment of its members by the Crown, and which represents, not the India of to-day, but the India of yesterday. In both those respects it would differ from the proposed Colonial Council. The Agents-General represent the actualities of colonial life and policy. They have a position, and a great position, entirely independent of the Crown. Their authority, therefore, would be much greater than that of the India Council, and it is an authority that would grow.

Without pledging ourselves to all the details of the proposed scheme, it is obvious that it possesses enormous advantages over all other suggestions yet made public. (1.) In the first place, it could be adopted to-morrow if the Cabinet decided that it would be well to strengthen the Colonial Office by the presence of the accredited representatives of the colonies with which the Secretary of State has to do. (2.) Alone of all projected schemes it can be carried out without an Act of Parliament. (3.) It is a modest proposal, amounting to little more than the formal recognition of existing facts, and a regulation of the present position and functions of the Agents-General. (4.) It is entirely in harmony with the tendency of the time, which year by year has exalted the importance of the Agents-General, and made them more and more influential in the settlement of Imperial questions. (5.) It secures the representation of the colonies at the heart of the Empire by the representatives of the actual Colonial Governments. The High Commissioner for Canada, for instance, or the Agent-General for Victoria is not merely the representative of these great colonies, but he is the responsible delegate of the existing Administrations, which alone can speak in the name of Canada and Victoria. All our self-governing colonies are connected by cable with London, and there is therefore no danger that the members of the Council for the Colonies would lose touch with their respective Governments or fail to represent accurately the views of the political units which together make up Greater Britain. (6.) It would give the representatives of the colonies a *locus standi* in their dealings with the Colonial Office which they at present lack. Agents-General occasionally combine to lay regular siege to the Colonial Office, but they have no footing inside. They have no right to demand official information as to what is going on, say, in relation to the New Hebrides; and they have no more responsibility for the advice they may tender to the Colonial Secretary than if they were so many men in the street. (7.) By giving the representatives of each self-governing colony an official and influential position among the confidential Advisers of the Crown we should confer upon them a privilege far more important and much less exposed to abuse than if every colony were to be directly represented by a dozen members in the House of Commons. (8.) The idea, as we have made it our duty to ascertain, would probably be warmly approved by the colonies; and if it is not vigorously supported by the Agents-General it is because they naturally shrink from what might be misrepresented as a magnifying of their own office.

We might easily multiply the arguments in favour of Lord Grey's suggestion, but we content ourselves for the present with placing the proposal prominently before the public, in order to invite attention and to challenge discussion both at Home and in the colonies.

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS FEDERATION: A SUGGESTION BY EARL GREY.

THE report of our representative's interview with Lord Grey which we published on Wednesday broke off somewhat abruptly with the declaration that he thought "it is unreasonable to expect that in their present advanced condition our more important colonies should be expected to submit to the Imperial authority unless they have some real influence in deciding upon the measures to be adopted by it." The conversation did not stop at that point. Our representative having remarked that in that case some sort of federation was essential to the maintenance of the unity of the Empire, Lord Grey replied: "The difficulty of devising any mode of enabling the colonies to exercise any real influence in the Imperial Government is very great, and I must confess myself quite unable to propose one which would be altogether satisfactory; but, in the absence of any better arrangement, I am still of opinion that a suggestion I threw out in an article I contributed to the *Nineteenth Century* of April, 1879, might be adopted with advantage. What I proposed was that we should revert to what was the practice up to the middle of the last century, of making large use of a Committee of the Privy Council in the management of colonial affairs. The Board of Trade, under the name of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, took an effective part with the Secretary of State in colonial administration. This practice has long fallen into disuse, and the amount of other business now assigned to the Board of Trade makes it undesirable that it should be revived; but I think advantage would be derived from giving the Colonial Secretary the assistance of another Committee appointed for that purpose, which might also be made the means of enabling the most important colonies to exercise the influence they ought to have in directing the policy of the Government in all matters affecting the common interests of the whole Empire. With this view the Queen might be advised to appoint to be members of her Privy Council such of the Agents of the principal colonies as might receive from the Legislatures they represent sufficient salaries to enable them to reside in this country and perform the duties assigned to them. To a Committee composed of these colonists, with such other members of the Privy Council as Her