

Ninth Day.
1 May 1907.

PREFERENTIAL
TRADE.

(Mr. Deakin.)

“an increase of trade within the Empire it is desirable that the Colonies should as far as circumstances permit give substantial preferential treatment to the products and manufactures of the Mother Country.”

The fourth Resolution arrived at in 1902: “That it is desirable that the preferential treatment accorded by the Colonies to the products and manufactures of the United Kingdom be also granted to the products and manufactures of other self-governing Colonies,” has already been given effect to in a certain measure; and proposals are now in course of consideration, or are likely to be soon in course of consideration, which would still further extend this very desirable means of interlocking the several self-governing dominions of the Empire. I shall not repeat it, but of course, the whole tenour of the argument which I have been endeavouring to maintain applies with equal force to arrangements of this character. Owing to the similarity of our circumstances, none of these could have the scope or the value of an arrangement made between any or all of them and the Mother Country if such were possible. But, nevertheless, small as these Imperial reciprocities may be, they are useful. It is perhaps not altogether beyond the horizon of the immediate future to forecast a time when, from year to year, or at short periods, some body or committee of experts will review the trade of the Empire as a whole in order to see if fresh opportunities could not be found for directing population and trade, not only from the Mother Country to the dependencies, but between those dominions themselves, in order to knit us together each and all. At all events, that would be a perfectly proper and wise business transaction. Broadly stated, such a prospect may appear to arouse expectations difficult to realise, but so far as I am acquainted with the history of our Parliaments of the British Empire, they have existed, and continue to exist, by overcoming difficulties. A reversal of a forward policy, by way of surrender to difficulties of this or any other kind would be fatal. I am sure it is not contemplated by either of the parties in argument on this subject. What we would urge in this connection is our obligation at all times to consistently pursue a close examination of the opportunities for inter-Imperial trade. Even if they cannot be found, or cannot be found in such abundance as we would desire, the time which is spent in seeking for them would be far from wasted, and would be greatly appreciated by those whom it was desired to help. I cannot see that any people held together by the many ties which have constituted us the nation we are to-day can lose. It appears to us that there are many directions in which it could gain by a recognition of the high value of the growth of a sense of corporate unity, the growth of a sense of mutual dependence between British peoples, coupled with a recognition of the difference, and sometimes of a great difference, between the demands which may be made upon each of our dominions and the Mother Country between themselves, and those made upon us by foreign countries. There are communities whose strength may at times appear to be intended to become a menace to the whole or parts of this Empire, and surely it cannot be maintained that a trade with them which is one half to their advantage, to which they are parties, and of which they therefore share the advantage, is comparable from a national point of view to the trade with those of your own flesh and blood, under your own flag, with whom it is your interest in the face of such rivals to strengthen yourself by every possible means in your power?

Repeating for the last time that the Commonwealth postulates your absolute independence in the judgment you are to exercise, and adding that we are not pleading for something which is to involve sacrifices, but for a co-operation which is to be mutually beneficial—repeating that for the last time—surely the endeavour to look at this question from what I have termed a corporate point of view, and the endeavour to secure corporate action,