

kind which Mr. Churchill depicted as not in these Dominions it is impossible to guess. Consequently, I venture to submit that his view of parliamentary proceedings is as abstract as his view of the economic considerations which he afterwards urged. In that field, I do not propose to follow him, because I have already indicated that our own experience teaches us that the field of abstract economics is as far from the actual practical considerations which operate in the daily working of our financial and legislative expedients as are the principles of pure mathematics from the daily labours of a carpenter or joiner. It is true that those principles are all implied in his handling if you search for them far enough. In all he does, and in every motion his body makes, he obeys what we are pleased to call the laws of nature. But doctrines collected into an abstract system, whether of political economy or mathematics, really apply only outside this world of limitations, of sense and experience. Undoubtedly they have a certain application within it if you can get your theory to exactly agree with all the conditions of a particular set of circumstances; as a matter of practice, to dwell upon them leads to confusion and beating the air, while the study of the actual consequences of our own acts, in our own surroundings, or for their action and re-action as discovered in facts and experience, is, so far as we can judge, the only method which it is safe for politicians with business, and practical men of every calling to employ.

Really when the Under Secretary went on to speak of the possibility of sullen hatred (a phrase he repeated on more occasions than one), being aroused by the existence of preferences if they were found to be burdensome, and of darkly revolutionary proceedings which were to ensue, he again entirely ignores our own experience. There were oscillations in the opinions of the public of my country before they settled down finally to our accepted policy, oscillations which we frequently witnessed in Australia while we had six States all pursuing much the same experiments—fiscally now in favour of higher Protection and then in favour of lower duties towards Free Trade. I do not think that the temperature of politics is any lower in the Commonwealth and its States than elsewhere. I might even be prepared to maintain the contrary from my own personal experience. But in the bitterest struggles that we have ever had upon exactly the matters on which Mr. Churchill dwelt so strenuously, when we were charged with taxing the food of the people and taxing the raw materials of manufacture, and particularly the implements of agriculturists, all these contentions though fought out with the greatest bitterness politically at the moment, have vanished and will leave not a trace behind. There was no time at which they severed the ordinary relations that obtained between Members of Parliament who held the most absolutely diverse views. At no time have our factions shown more than the usual amount of resentment which accompanies differences of opinion. We have been through the precise experience which the Under Secretary of State has had to imagine for himself as occurring in this country in the future under the application of preference. The reality bears no resemblance to his nightmare. Our tariff has been handled, and it has been handled a great deal; when we had six States, some State or States were always “tinkering” with their tariffs. We have had experience of pretty well every kind of fiscal experiment that can be devised, and every kind of strife that can arise out of it, but we have found nothing whatever in our own actual experience to justify Mr. Churchill’s morbid anticipations. I venture to say that in a country of this kind, with its more established institutions and greater population, with a power of more easily resisting relatively small sections greater than we possess, although it seems almost an offensive thing to say, I have absolute confidence in the House of Commons and of its capacity to sustain quite as much strain as we have so long experienced, and probably a very great deal more.

Twelfth Day.

7 May 1907.

PREFERENTIAL
TRADE.

(Mr. Deakin.)