

Sir, I have no hesitation in saying, that had the Government of which I had the honour to be the head been sustained, long ere this I should have submitted to Parliament and endeavoured to obtain its sanction to a proposal for the purpose of carrying out this policy of preferential trade between Great Britain and Canada. I have no doubt that such a policy could be formulated in such a way as to show to Her Majesty's Government that they would be consulting, not only the interests of Canada but the interests of the Empire if they gave effect to it.

But, Sir, I was greatly relieved to know that Mr. Chamberlain had followed up his statement, and had shown no lack of interest in this movement by his speech in opening the Third Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire. On that occasion, he used these somewhat memorable words :

And I admit that, if I understand it correctly, I find the germs of such a proposal in a resolution which is to be submitted to you on behalf of the Toronto Board of Trade. What is that resolution? I hope I correctly explain it. That resolution I understand to be one for the creation of a British zollverein or customs union, which would establish at once practically free trade throughout the British Empire, but would leave the contracting parties free to make their own arrangements with regard to duties upon foreign goods ; except that—this is an essential condition of the proposal—that Great Britain shall consent to replace moderate duties upon certain articles which are of large production in the colonies. Now, if I have rightly understood it, these articles would comprise corn, meat, wool and sugar, and perhaps other articles of enormous consumption in this country, which are at present largely produced in the colonies, and which might be, under such an arrangement, wholly produced in the colonies, and wholly produced by British labour. On the other hand, as I have said, the colonies, while maintaining their duties upon foreign imports, would agree to a free interchange of commodities with the rest of the Empire, and would cease to place protective duties upon any product of British labour.

If hon. gentlemen opposite wanted to promote preferential trade with Great Britain, there they had the opportunity. They had the opportunity, not only of obtaining the introduction of British goods into this country at a lower rate of duty, but of approaching Her Majesty's Government with a proposal that would secure an advantage to the great natural products of this country, such as wheat, dairy products, cattle, meats of every kind, and breadstuffs of every kind, in the markets of Great Britain upon terms as would give an impetus to Canada such as nothing else would give. He says further :

I only want to impress upon you my personal conviction that, if a proposal of this kind came to us from the colonies, backed by any considerable support on their part, it would not be met with a blank refusal by the people of this country. I say, gentlemen, if it were proposed to us by the colonies, because I do not consider that it

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would be either wise or practicable that a proposal of this kind should come in the first instance from the United Kingdom. We know how strenuously the colonies cling to their own independence, to their own initiative. If they desire, as we desire, and as we believe they do, this closer union—if they are willing to make some sacrifice of their present arrangements and convictions in order to secure it—let them say so. Let the offer come voluntarily from them, and I believe it will be considered in this country, not in any huckstering spirit, but that it will be entertained as part of a great policy which is intended to unite in the closest bonds of affection and of interest all the communities which are under the British flag and all the subjects of Her Majesty throughout the world.

I invite the attention of hon. gentlemen opposite to that as an invitation of the most pertinent character, coming from Her Majesty's Government to Canada in relation to this important question.

The resolution passed by the Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire was in entire accord with the position of Mr. Chamberlain in that speech. That resolution, which was passed unanimously, was as follows :—

That this Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire is of opinion that the establishment of closer commercial relations between the United Kingdom and the colonies and dependencies is an object which deserves, and demands, prompt and careful consideration. The congress, therefore, respectfully represents to Her Majesty's Government that, if the suggestion should be made on behalf of the colonies, or of some of them, it would be right and expedient to promote such consideration, and the formulation of some practicable plan, by summoning an Imperial conference, thoroughly representative of the interests involved, or by such other means as Her Majesty may be advised to adopt.

I give that as an additional evidence of the position that this question has assumed.

Now, Sir, what took place during the last general election? It is well known that from the time I came out to this country I took every opportunity, when addressing a great meeting of commercial men in the city of Montreal, as well as in the various addresses which I delivered on the floor of this House and throughout the country, of urging the great importance of this question of preferential trade. And what happened? Why, Sir, my hon. friend the Prime Minister outbade me. Not content with going as far as I did, he put himself on record at a dozen places in similar terms to these to which he gave utterance on the 17th of May, 1896 :

In regard to this question of preferential trade, Mr. Laurier desired to say that Sir Charles Tupper was no more favourable to the idea than himself.

He went on to say :—

My hope is—nay, my conviction is—that on the 23rd of June the Liberal party will be at the head of the polls ; and then it will be the Liberal party, with its policy of a revenue tariff, that will send commissioners to London to arrange for a basis of preferential trade.