

"Then, Mr. Laurier, you stand for a free trading British Empire, and have shown by your tariff proposal how it may be brought about?"

And the answer comes :

"At one time I might have thought something of a Zollverein, but when I reflect, it is not good policy, and England will not adopt it."

The same principle comes up both in the address on the presentation of the Cobden medal and in the reply by the right hon. gentleman when he accepted it. The keynote of the condition upon which the Cobden medal was presented to the right hon. gentleman was that he was believed to be a representative of that unflinching Cobdenism which in England is totally and generically opposed to anything like the imposition of discriminating or preferential duties because they savour of protection, and which, while it welcomes as much trade as possible with the colonies will not care for that trade and does not want it, if it has to take it on the condition of imposing even the lightest duties upon foreign goods, as that would admit the principle of protection. The acceptor of the Cobden medal in his answer repeated almost the very words and duplicated exactly the meaning of Lord Farrer who presented the Cobden medal to him, and therefore sealed the terms which I have stated, that he himself was so much of a free trader that he could subscribe to the Cobden idea, and take the Cobden medal, because he believed that it would not be for the benefit of England first, or for Canada afterwards, that the slightest deviation should be made in England from the absolute free trade ideas.

Now, while I have no quarrel with the hon. gentleman because he holds these ideas privately and as strongly as he may, I do say that he had no mandate from the Dominion of Canada or from the people of Canada to present these private and strongly-held ideas of his, however right they may have been, as the views and the wishes of Canada in this matter, because they most certainly were not. Now, Sir, what is the excuse the right hon. gentleman has given for his action, for taking the first opportunity at the Liverpool meeting, to wholly deny and negative any idea of preferential trade? What is his excuse for not having waited for the conference? What is his excuse for not having carried out the pledge that he gave in Toronto, in London and Montreal? The excuse is given first in his absence by the Toronto "Globe," and afterwards by himself when he returned to this country. And what said the Toronto "Globe?" at a very critical point in the Centre Toronto canvass, if I mistake not, where the question of preferential trade was being warmly discussed. Suddenly one morning the Toronto "Globe" came out with what appeared to be an official or semi-official statement of the case, which made every reader look

with both eyes and which caused very serious thought to all throughout that city. This is the "Globe's" statement :

Conservative newspapers keep up a constant fire of criticism on Sir Wilfrid Laurier because, as they allege, he refused to agree to a preferential tariff between Britain and Canada, as proposed by Mr. Chamberlain.

It is just as well that the real facts of the matter should be known. During the visit of the colonial Premiers to Great Britain, Mr. Chamberlain made the proposition that there should be absolute free trade between Britain and her colonies, on condition that Britain placed a small customs tax on commodities from foreign countries.

Now, Sir, I think I have a right to ask, and I think this House has the right to the answer. I would ask my hon. friend if that statement in the Toronto "Globe" was true, and if after he landed at Liverpool and between that and the conference, or at the conference, any such proposition was made to him categorically by Mr. Chamberlain as is stated here in the Toronto "Globe," namely, a proposition that on the condition of there being absolutely free trade between Great Britain and her colonies, Great Britain would place a preferential duty upon some of the great products of Canada? I think we have a right to that answer, and I hope my right hon. friend will give the House an answer to that question.

The PRIME MINISTER (Sir Wilfrid Laurier). Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman knows as well as I do that the conference which took place between Mr. Chamberlain and the Colonial Premiers was confidential. A report has been made of everything that took place in those conferences, but so far no authority has been given to publish it, though it is probable that at some future date, not very remote, the conference will be given to the public. But the hon. gentleman knows as well as I do that, until I have authority to publish it, I am not at liberty to say what took place there.

Mr. FOSTER. Then, Mr. Speaker, I take two positions: first, that if these papers are yet confidential and cannot be brought down to this House, how was it that the "Globe" newspaper, at a critical moment, made a semi-official announcement in categorical language as to the proposition that had been made and the reply of the Premier? That is one question, but there is another, Sir, which is stronger yet. If these papers are not in a position to be laid before the House, what right had my hon. friend to state to this House, last Friday night, that the only condition upon which preferential trade could be discussed was the condition that there should be absolute free trade and no customs duties between the different parts of the Empire? Is he in a position to state that authoritatively because Mr. Chamberlain made that proposition to him? He is, or he is not. If he is in a position to state it before this House,