

warrant, for the sake of the practical end in view, namely, the great future development of the Empire as a whole, at home and in the colonies. There was a Government which had invited proposals through its Secretary of State for the Colonies, and had sent the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Chancellor Halsbury to Liverpool, who held out the hand of welcome in such a definite way as to call down upon them the animadversions of every Cobdenite in England. What did the Premier of Canada do? More than that, there was to the common-sense British mind the pressure of outside competition and foreign tariffs narrowing their foreign market and impinging on their home market, which was gradually rooting out long settled ideas and causing a revulsion of opinion in favour of a practical business tariff. At that auspicious moment, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his brother colonial Premiers made their entry upon British soil. What did Sir Wilfrid, as the representative of Canada, do? Did he keep the pledge which he gave to the electorate here, that he would favour preferential trade, involving preferential duties by Great Britain and involving a preferential tariff by us? Did he keep his pledge that he would send a delegation to talk this matter over with the Government of Great Britain? Did he, if he had not anything favourable to say of it, keep his mouth sealed until he met Mr. Chamberlain and the members of the British Government? Or did he open his mouth to stimulate, with all the eloquence at his command, that public opinion upon which Mr. Chamberlain must have relied to carry to a practical conclusion that one project which he set so much store by. No, Sir, before he saw Mr. Chamberlain, before the Premiers met in conference, in the face of the invitation of the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Chancellor Halsbury, immediately on landing at Liverpool, he drew on his musty store of old Cobdenism, and declared that as for preferential trade, Canada would have none of it. "Ours is a free gift," he said. "We ask no compensation. Protection has been the curse of Canada. We would not see you come under its baneful influence, for what weakens us must weaken you." Then and there he put the quietus on the movement for preferential trade with Great Britain—against his pledge given to the people of Canada; against every dictate of prudence that a statesman should have been guided by; in advance of the conference to which he and his fellow-Premiers had been invited for the discussion of that very subject, and for the devising of a plan to further this very same preferential trade. Then passed, in a moment, the labour of many years in this Dominion. Then passed, in a short moment, the labours which for the past five years have been unremitting and herculean in Great Britain towards the

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same end. Then passed, the opportunity which the Colonial Secretary had long waited for. No wonder, when that statement was wafted from Great Britain to the world Mr. Chamberlain said:

It would have been hard enough to carry through the idea had all the colonies been persistent and enthusiastic advocates of it, but Canada does not favour it, and New South Wales opposes it. These are the leading colonies, and with them in practical opposition, it becomes impossible, and I would not now touch it with a pair of tongs.

No wonder Lord Rosebery said that:

Mr. Chamberlain had a proposal which had some force and gained some strength, but now, "it must be approached with the reverence due to a corpse," for Canada's Premier has said that "if the British Empire is to be maintained, it can only be on the condition of the most absolute freedom of trade."

So passed for many a year, not only the most auspicious moment for the gaining of this great boon for the colonies, for Canada, for the Empire, but passed for many a year, I fear, any successful hope of bringing British statesmen to the point of again imperilling their influence with their people to educate them towards so great and so far-reaching a project. No wonder Mr. Asquith declared afterwards that Sir Wilfrid Laurier had given a death blow to the heresy that it was wise and opportune, under any circumstances, to deviate one hair's-breadth from absolute free trade, and that it would have been a pity if he and the colonies had gone in favour of asking England to put the least preferential duties on goods from foreign countries.

So to-day the hon. gentleman occupies this unenviable position, of having made a pledge to the people of Canada of having defined the principles on which the pledge was to be carried out, of having bound himself, if a public man ever did bind himself, to have a conference with the Government of Great Britain on the matter, of having gone across the ocean to hold this conference, and then, immediately on landing, before any conference could be held, using his mighty influence—an influence which was temporary, but none the less strong at that moment—against the project he had pledged himself to foster, and which was dear to the hearts of everybody here and becoming dear to the hearts of many of the citizens of the British Isles. Why did my hon. friend do that? Was it through devotion to the interests of Canada? No, Sir; it was due to his devotion to the principles of free trade as laid down by Cobden. In an interview at Birmingham, and on the occasion when he accepted the Cobden medal, he made it plain that the reason why he was against preferential trade was that it involved two things. One was—and that was the chief objection—that it would make England forego free trade and cause her to err into the paths of protection to the extent