

ROYAL COLONIAL INSTITUTE'S WORK

Its Empire Trade and Industry Committee Supplies Up-to-Date Commercial Information—Improved Consular Service

It is not a year since the Royal Colonial Institute, which during its four decades of life has done so much to interest home-staying Britons in their magnificent heritage beyond the seas, undertook a new and promising mission by founding its empire trade and industry committee. Till then the institute, though the principal rallying point for imperialists and a focus for all kinds of intelligence concerning what has been so aptly termed Greater Britain, has devoted but little attention to the economic aspect of the British Empire. It is true that its well-furnished library contained many volumes of the greatest value to the British man of business who wished to open up relation with the dominions beyond the seas, with India, or with any of our numerous crown colonies. In the newspaper room were hundreds of papers from every part of the Empire, carefully filed and preserved for future reference in the British Museum reading room. But men of business have little time for research work of any kind.

Something more was Needed.

It was felt that something more was needed if the Institute was to maintain its place as the headquarters of all the vast interests connected with the world-wide British Empire. It was these considerations which brought into existence the institute's empire trade and industry committee, of which it was, and is, the purpose to place at the command of British captains of industry and of British merchants, the most up-to-date information regarding the economic progress of the overseas dominions, of the empire's important eastern dependencies, and of those of the crown colonies.

Another part of the committee's work is to do the same good service for Greater Britain, and to find, as far as possible, suitable avenues for British products in this country. As the Imperial Parliament is the supreme guardian of British Interests throughout the world, it seemed advisable that the committee should pass such resolutions as might appear calculated to further urgent reforms in the commercial system and in official relations with the economic developments of the British Empire. These are all practical and practicable ideas, and it only remains to consider briefly how far the committee has been able to live up to its aspirations.

Information in Accessible Form.

The committee commenced its operations by communicating with all the overseas dominions' trade departments, and by inviting them to forward to the institute all literature and any kind of statistics issued by them. The response to the invitation was most gratifying. The literature so collected is being carefully filed by the institute, and placed in the most accessible form for the instruction of all who are interested in the economic and financial development of the dominions and colonies. At the first meeting held by the committee, on April 5, 1911, the following resolution was unanimously adopted, and copies ordered to be forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the President of the Board of Trade:

"That the attention of the Colonial Office and the Board of Trade be drawn to the necessity of taking some definite action to develop the resources of, and British trade with, the crown colonies and dependencies by the appointment of trade commissioners (for 'groups of Colonies'), as has recently been done in the case of the self-governing dominions, and by issuing detailed reports from time to time on the resources and trade conditions of those territories."

Value of Crown Colonies as Producers of Raw Material.

Few people, perhaps, realize the value of our crown colonies considered merely as purveyors of valuable raw materials for our industries. The crown colonies are necessarily destitute of well-organized local trade departments, such as might advertise their raw products in English markets or give timely warnings of the raids of foreign competitors, who, in the case of certain African British possessions, have, through a better organized and subsidized shipping service, succeeded in drawing away to their markets raw materials which British manufacturing firms have later had to purchase at a smart advance on original cost. It is believed that the government has given sufficient heed to this resolution to have in forward preparation a scheme for the appointment of trade commissioners for groups of our crown colonies, as was suggested by the committee.

At the next meeting of the committee, held on May 10, 1911, the following resolution was passed and ordered to be forwarded to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State

for the Colonies: "That the attention of the imperial conference be called to the growing importance of the question of the uniformity of company law within the empire, owing to the increasing tendency for English firms to establish branches overseas, and the increasing popularity of empire investments."

Codification of Company Law.

The codification of company law throughout the empire is obviously a very big question; but at the imperial conference this subject received a good deal of attention, and was discussed in a broad spirit by the present Lord Chancellor, who promised to do his best to bring British commercial law into harmony, as far as possible, with the legislation obtaining in the self-governing Dominions. Sir Joseph Ward, Sir John Finlay, the late Mr. Batchelor, and other of the overseas delegates, also made sympathetic contributions to the elucidation of this great imperial question.

At the third meeting held by the committee, on June 2, 1911, the question of the work of the British Consular Service in regard to empire trade was considered and the following resolution passed: "That the time has arrived when the British Consular Service should be made equally representative of the overseas dominions and colonies as of the United Kingdom, and that some system should be established of keeping every consular officer fully informed of the resources, market requirements, and general trade interests of the various portions of the empire."

Should be Guardians of Trade Interests.

The efficiency of the British Consular Service is of the utmost importance to the economic well-being of the British Empire. British Consuls and Vice-Consuls, who are appointed by, and are under the direct control of, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, are supposed to be guardians of British trade interests throughout the districts in which they serve. As a matter of fact, some of these gentlemen have a certain amount of commercial knowledge, and the reports which they periodically prepare are sometimes of value. But, on the other hand, some—it is feared many of them—have little or no economic aptitude, and are entirely dependent for trade facts and figures upon their subordinates, consular clerks and unpaid vice-consuls, and such like, who are too frequently foreigners whose personal trade interests are not exactly in harmony with those of British trade.

Citizens of Empire on an Equality.

It may be noted that on this matter being brought to the notice of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Parliament, in the shape of a question so framed as to ask whether any distinction were made between the status of British citizens resident in the United Kingdom and of citizens of any overseas dominions, as regards the services of British consuls, it was stated that the Foreign Office considered both on an entire equality in this respect; and that the office had instructed its diplomatic representatives to urge British consuls to keep them informed of all developments affecting the position of the dominions or colonies as exporters of food products. This assurance is gratifying as far as it goes; but, as the Foreign Office must be well aware, the British Empire extends far and wide, and its products are assuredly the most varied collection which any empire in this world has ever shown. If the consular service is to live up to its great mission, the staff must be strengthened, and, above all, a well-organized system of properly instructing consuls and their clerks in the economic needs of the empire must be devised.

Transportation by Sea and Land.

Several other questions have been asked in parliament which arose out of the resolutions passed at the Royal Colonial Institute.

The following important resolution, passed by the Committee in June 1911, concerned the establishment of through bookings of goods from all parts of the empire:

"That the trend of modern trade being in the direction of bringing the manufacturer into more direct touch with the consumer, it is desirable, in the interests of empire trade, to bring about the establishment of a system of through bookings or through rates for the convenient carriage of empire products by sea and land from one point of the empire to another."

Welcoming Representative Overseas Citizens.

A further important feature of the committee's work is of a social nature. As many leading men from the dominions and other parts of the empire are often within our gates, the policy has been initiated of entertaining from time to time these, and giving them opportunities of discussing in an informal, but not the less authoritative, manner the economic development and general financial conditions of their respective states. The first of the committee's

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