

## UNIFICATION OF THE EMPIRE.

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for the privilege of being members of the British family. But what commercial advantage does their British connection give them to offset this tremendous disadvantage? None whatever.

The Bahama Islands suffer because they are not attached to some great country to whose markets they could have permanent access on favoured terms. The British Empire is great, but it is divided by tariffs, and those tariffs are so arranged that the Bahamas obtain no advantage whatever from their British nationality. Is this fair play? Is this common sense? Is this creditable to the statesmen of the Empire?

## COMMERCIAL ADVANTAGES.

The arguments which apply to the Bahama Islands apply with but a difference of degree and of detail to most parts of the Empire. I repeat, the Empire must be consolidated, not merely to increase our Imperial efficiency, but to increase the prosperity and influence of every part of the Empire.

It is thus not surprising that our West Indian friends should consider the possibility of the admittance of Jamaica, and perhaps of all the Islands, into the Canadian Confederation. If this could be accomplished, the commercial advantages both to Canada and to the Islands would be enormous. Our Canadian farmers, millers, and manufacturers generally, would have a large territory, at present chiefly tributary to New York, added to their special home field. The West Indian Islands, too, would have the markets of the Dominion thrown open to them on equally favourable terms. Canadians and British West Indians would each secure control of markets, which are in each case at present supplied chiefly from the United States and other non-British countries. The mutual benefits would be increased by the fact that northern and tropical productions are not competitive but complementary, each country supplying what the other needs, each needing what the other supplies. Union with Canada would therefore, certainly greatly increase the importance and prosperity of both parties to the arrangement, and correspondingly strengthen the Empire to which both belong.

## SOME DIFFICULTIES.

Attractive, however, as this vision is, there are objections which cannot be ignored. The Dominion and the Islands are widely separated, and lack as yet that close and continuous intercourse which is necessary to produce community of thought on political subjects. The interchange of northern and tropical productions, moreover, involves the relationships of buyer and seller. Their interests can hardly be said to be as nearly identical as is desirable if such widely separated populations are each to have a voice in deciding the destinies of the other. Much of the business that comes before the Canadian Parliament would have no interest for representatives from the West Indies, and there is also much West Indian business with which Canadian members of parliament would not be competent to deal. From the viewpoint of commerce, the advantages from Confederation would be great, but from the viewpoint of local government the case is different. Canadians would assuredly give a most sympathetic hearing to any such suggestion, but we must not close our eyes to the difficulties.

Is it not possible to find a solution which will in a great measure at least give the advantages of Confederation without its disadvantages? Will we not act wisely if for the moment we direct our attention solely to the commercial possibilities? The present methods of governing the British West Indian Islands, although differing considerably in detail, have on the whole worked satisfactorily, and certainly have given vastly better results than the methods which have been applied in some of the Southern States of the American Union. Such developments and improvements in the government of the Islands as may be necessary should, we think, be settled by the people of the Islands themselves. We in Canada are not in a position to legislate on such matters.

## A START MADE.

A splendid start has been made in closer trade relations by the Canadian-West Indian reciprocity agreement, which was an achievement in real Empire building. Jamaica has not yet seen her way to enter that compact, but I sincerely hope that the time is not far distant when Jamaica too will have a reciprocity agreement with the Dominion. Fears have been expressed in the Island that such an agreement might lead to retaliation by the United States. I am convinced, however, that this apprehension is entirely baseless. I well remember that when the first trade preference was granted by Canada to the Mother Country, many years ago, I had the same fear, and fully expected that our great neighbour to the south would introduce retaliatory legislation. Nothing of the kind happened however. In fact, our American brethren realized that it was but natural and proper that the various members of the British Empire should give preference one to the other, and no offence was taken when this course was followed, which to them seemed so natural. On the contrary, it is not unusual to hear Americans express surprise that members of the one Empire should do so little to help each other. They are inclined to look on our independent business policies as unwise, unbusiness-like and un-imperial.

## A CUSTOMS' UNION.

Would it not be possible to establish a Canadian-West Indian Customs Union, which would give to the Islands every trade advantage which they would obtain by actual confederation with the Dominion, and which yet would not introduce elements of political danger? I mean a customs arrangement by which tariff barriers would be completely abolished between Canada and the Islands, and a tariff on a basis to be mutually agreed on applied to all imports from outside countries, with of course full Imperial preferences as already allowed. Would not that give every commercial advantage which would arise from Confederation? Would it not avoid the political difficulties of confederating peoples whose interests are not identical? Would it not be simpler, arouse less opposition, and be easier of accomplishment than actual confederation?

It is true that under such a customs union the problem would arise of raising sufficient revenue to provide for the local requirements of the Island legislatures, but this problem is by no means insoluble. It had to be faced when Canada became a Dominion, for by confederating the various pro-

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