

Imperial Congress of Chambers of Commerce.

The *Canadian Gazette*, of London, England, has the following report of the Imperial Congress.

The sight presented at the opening of the Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire on Tuesday was a most impressive one. The magnificent hall of the Merchant Taylors' Company, in Threadneedle Street, well lends it to a gathering of the kind. It is full of historic memories, and it would have needed little imagination to have pictured the assembly on Tuesday morning as the opening session of the first Imperial Senate. In the chair was the Right Hon. Sir John Lubbock, and supporting him, Lord Knutsford, the colonial secretary, representing the Imperial Government, Sir Reginald Hanson representing the Lord Mayor, Sir Charles Tupper, Sir Saul Samuel, and the other representatives of the self governing colonies, Lord Brassey, Sir Edmund Drummond, Sir Robert Gillespie, Sir Frederick Young and a crowd of other well known friends of the Colonies. The delegates were no fewer than 270 in number, representing 139 chambers, of whom 108 were delegates by associations outside the United Kingdom. Geographically dividing the associations there were eight acceptances from Western and Southern Africa; eighteen from the various colonies of Australasia; five from the West Indies; twenty five from Canada; eight from India and the East, one each from Gibraltar and Malta; and the remainder from all parts of the United Kingdom. The Canadian delegates were placed well to the front. Sir Donald Smith and Mr. Peter Redpath represented the Montreal board of trade, Messrs. J. X. Perrault and C. E. Delorme the Montreal chamber of commerce; Messrs. P. H. Burton, M. C. Ellis and Edgar A. Wills the Toronto board of trade; Mr. Sandford Fleming the Ottawa board of trade; Messrs. A. P. Silver, Geoffrey Marrow and W. Stewart the Halifax board of trade, Messrs. James Booth and L. Clayton the Halifax chamber of commerce, the Hon. James I. Fellows the St. John board of trade; Mr. Robert Ward the Victoria (called the British Columbia) board of trade; Mr. John Hendry the Vancouver and New Westminster boards of trade; the Hon. Thomas Bannatyne the Woodstock board of trade, etc., etc. Ill health, unfortunately, prevented the attendance of the Hon. John Robson, the premier of British Columbia, who had fully intended to take part in the proceedings as a delegate specially appointed by the organising committee.

As became a business gathering the congress lost no time in getting to work at its assembly on Tuesday morning. Sir John Lubbock welcomed the delegates to the heart of the Empire and spoke the feelings of all when he expressed the hope that by coming into close, friendly and personal relations they might do something to knit together those bonds of sympathy and kindly feeling which were the links that held the Empire together. Lord Knutsford was warmly received on rising to give a word of welcome on behalf of the Government, and to express the hope that the discussion at the present congress would lead to results as beneficial as those following from the colonial conference of the Jubilee year. Her Majesty's Government believed with him that such Congresses and Conferences tended materially to strengthen the links between the Mother Country and her dependencies, and to promote that union and that integrity which all those present so earnestly desired. Sir R. Hanson then followed on behalf of the Lord Mayor, who was unavoidably prevented from attending, to welcome the delegates, and then the real business commenced.

Lord Brassey led the way by moving, "That in the opinion of this Congress it is expedient that arrangements should be devised to secure closer commercial union between the Mother Country and her colonies and dependencies," and he made an eloquent and forcible plea for

larger inter Imperial trade on the lines of free trade. The resolution was seconded by Sir Malcolm Fraser, the agent general for Western Australia, in a speech as clearly directed to an Imperial protective policy, and having thus had two partisan speeches of opposite tendencies, the Congress unanimously adopted what was a purely non committal resolution.

The battle royal really began with the second resolution, moved on behalf of the London Chamber by Mr. Neville Lubbock, as follows: "That a commercial union within the British Empire on the basis of free trade would tend to promote its permanence and prosperity." Referring to Canada he admitted that loyalty, sympathy and affection with the Mother Country had ever been shown by that colony, but he asserted that one thing was wanting, and that was material aid and commercial advantage. He evoked loud cheers when he described as heroic the manner in which Canada had refused the offer of the United States of free admission of her products to the markets of the republic at the expense of the Mother Country. But Mr. Lubbock went on to point out that facts and interests were stubborn things, and that what Canada gallantly refused today she might be compelled by the need of self preservation to accept tomorrow. He was mindful of the existence of a strong feeling on the part of the colonies that their liberty to fix their tariffs must not be interfered with, but he reminded the Congress that there was nothing contained in the resolution that would prevent the colonies from levying any customs duty they pleased, provided that the customs duty was levied upon a commodity produced by the colony, and that an equivalent excise duty was also levied.

Mr. R. R. Dobell (Quebec Chamber) seconded the resolution, and said the time was past when any consideration of the position of Great Britain would be complete which did not embrace also the relative position of her colonies, and all future treaties could only be entered into after due reference to the interests of the colonies also. The colonies were, therefore, necessarily warranted in criticising the past policy of Great Britain, and they were also obligated to guard jealously not only their own interests but also the interests of Great Britain in all future negotiations involving changes in our common trade and our navigation laws. Continuing, Mr. Dobell said: "It is not generally known that at the time when Canada felt herself forced to adopt protection she would have discriminated in favour of Great Britain by placing higher duties on the manufactures from other countries, but this course was prevented by Great Britain herself. Therefore, when the press of Great Britain charged Canada with taxing British manufactures, they wrote often in ignorance of this fact. He asked, Might it not be expedient for Great Britain to make some change with the object of drawing closer the trade relations with the colonies? Would it not also strengthen the efforts of countries desirous of adopting free trade? Would it not bring some pressure on those countries who now take advantage of the free trade of Great Britain but deny her all reciprocal return? Would it not increase the settlement of our colonies and, therefore, extend their buying power, and in some measure recoup the temporary sacrifice which might have to be made? Should some sacrifice be involved in a change, would it not be merely temporary and result in a universal and lasting benefit to all, and would it not offer such advantages to our West India and Australian colonies as would compensate them for all loss which they might experience by stopping their special agreement with the United States. Lastly, would it not disarm the advocates in Canada of unrestricted reciprocity with the United States, and make the Empire more united, contented, and permanent?"

Mr. P. H. Burton (Toronto board of trade) made a vigorous fair trade speech, and may be said to have been the first speaker in the whole congress who infused anything like life into the

proceedings. He ridiculed the idea of a commercial union between Great Britain and Canada. It would, he insisted, be impracticable, because Canada raised her revenues in a different way. Great Britain raised £30,000,000 by stamps and dues and taxes, but how much poorer would she be if, instead of that £30,000,000 being raised in that way, it were raised by small imposts upon those manufactured goods which competed with their own, or upon agricultural products which competed with their own agricultural classes. He disclaimed any desire to merely voice the claims of the Toronto board or of Canada generally, but with considerable warmth he declared that he was there to pronounce his personal conviction that the best policy of the Empire as a whole, and the policy which would keep it together, would be a preferential trade arrangement within the Empire—so that they could trade upon better terms amongst themselves than they would with outside people. It was not by a *laissez faire* policy, but only by a policy inspired by the old British pluck that they could hope to succeed. Concluding Mr. Burton said: "I think the time has come for a change, and we in Canada perhaps because we are alongside of the United States we get rubbed up more vigorously on this point than you at home do—feel perfectly strongly on this point. We cannot remain as we are; and we feel there must be some arrangement between these little islands and the colonies by which we shall trade upon better terms amongst ourselves. But at the back of all, there is the national feeling—that we are proud of belonging to the British Empire. The policy we enunciate can alone have the effect of perpetuating the union of which we are proud."

Mr. Perrault (Montreal Chamber), amid expressions of general sympathy from the Colonial delegates, said he thought it would simplify the discussion if those in favor of the preferential tariff should at once move in opposition to motion, because he thought if a resolution favoring free trade were passed, they in Canada who are unanimously in favor of a preferential tariff would be deprived of their chance of discussing their resolution.

The chairman endeavored to satisfy the Canadian delegates, but without effect, that their resolution would be discussed later on, and at length, and that the present motion only dealt with the relations between the colonies and the mother country, not with foreign powers.

Sir Charles Tupper here intervened and reminded the congress that the consideration propounded in the resolution was a simple proposal of free trade within the Empire. But he believed that it would be found utterly impracticable to deal with the merits of that resolution without travelling over the whole ground.

Lord Brassey admitted that there seemed to be a general desire for a broad discussion of the subject at once. He suggested that the resolution should be passed and that the debate on the colonial question should take place upon the next resolution.

Sir Charles Tupper, with considerable emphasis, said there is not a gentleman in this room from the Colonies who is not interested in saying "No" to this resolution, and I will in a few words, without going into the colonial question at all, say why. It is not that we would not be glad, if it were possible to have free trade for the British Empire, but, Sir, it is fatal to the growth, it is fatal to the progress, it is fatal to the prosperity of every colony in the Empire to adopt a policy of free trade. Then I say that there is no gentleman in England who regards the progress and prosperity of the Empire who is not interested in saying "No" to this resolution if I am right in stating that it means that the stability of those colonies—whose credit now stands so high, and upon whose credit the interests of Englishmen who have expended their millions to develop those colonies, very largely depend—rests upon the negativing of this proposal of free trade within the Empire—not that we would not desire it as ardently as the mover and seconder,