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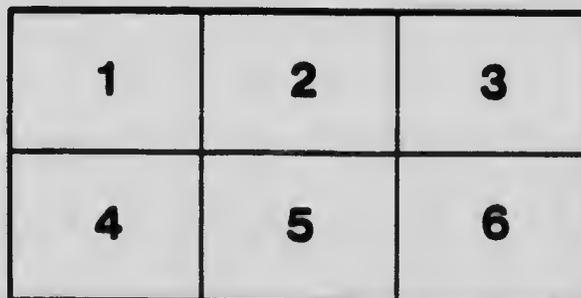
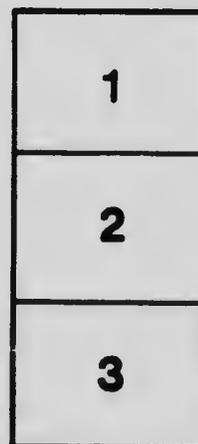
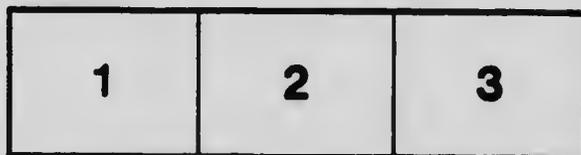
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ADDRESS

BY THE

HONOURABLE GEORGE E. FOSTER

MINISTER OF TRADE AND COMMERCE

TO THE MEMBERS OF

THE MONTREAL BOARD OF TRADE.

Montreal, May 22, 1912.

ADDRESS.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—

I began to think as I heard your Chairman talk that I would be perfectly justified in thinking I was a pretty brave sort of a man, and along with that I could not help but note the admirable manner in which the Chairman covered up my bravery, or audacity, whichever you might name it. Listening to your Chairman you would think I had been invited to come and address this Board this afternoon. What will you think of me when I say I made my own invitation and forced myself upon the Board of Trade? I am glad also to see here some representatives from the French Board of Trade, though not so many as I could wish. I shall take occasion to visit them at some future time.

Well, we are here, and there is not much use my making apologies for having the temerity to ask the business men of Montreal to come together for a few minutes in the busiest part of what must be all busy days, not that I might make a speech or give them an oration—sometime when we have more leisure we may face that possibility—but at the present time I am simply here to have a little talk and become acquainted; to introduce myself, that the members of the Board of Trade of this, one of the foremost if not the foremost city of the Dominion, and a Board that must be very influential may know what my department is doing, and may help in the work.

The object of my asking the members of your Board to meet this afternoon was to see whether or not there was some method by which we could co-operate with each other in attaining a greater measure of success than either could hope for if we were working without that co-operation. To-day the modern boards of trade seem different from the old time boards of trade—they are more practical and they lay more stress upon doing things than on talking about them.

I notice that the boards of trade in the western portion of the Dominion are excessively modern, they are attempting things and doing things that twenty years ago no board of trade would dream of attempting. And as a general thing I think I am right in saying that the modern board of trade is quite a different institution from the old and somewhat academic board of trade of our fathers.

Boards of trade, I suppose we will all agree, are interested in two things. Primarily they are interested in the interchange of commodities—that is what business men are engaged in. But when we think for a single moment that the basis of interchange must be production, and that without production in the first place there could be no interchange, you will conclude that the live board of trade must have just as strong an interest in production as in interchange. the one being the basis of the other.

Singularly enough the Department of Trade and Commerce finds itself in the very same position. Trade and Commerce—the interchange of commodities, either amongst ourselves, one with the other, or between ourselves and foreign countries—that is the interesting question with which the Trade and Commerce department has to deal. But it could not deal with that in the way of interest or in the way of capacity unless it had an equal eye to the primary process of production, without which we should have neither foreign nor interprovincial trade. Arguing out in that way the Department of Trade and Commerce and the boards of trade of this country are at least first cousins, if not brothers, in the matter of trade interest.

I would have you know that the Minister of Trade and Commerce, like every other Minister, when he is sitting in his office at Ottawa is a very important personage—he is supposed to know everything and to be bold enough to tackle anything. That however is I am afraid a great deal more in supposition rather than in reality. The individual member of the board of trade is an important personage as well and so is the collective board of trade, and if I am to get right down to brass tacks, I might find it a truth that many members in many boards of trade have an idea that they could direct the Department of Trade and Commerce or any other department much better than the men who have them in charge at present.

But there is a basis for mutual help, and that is just what I want to appeal to. The men out in the current of business and trade, down at the very roots of this matter in our country, converse with it day by day, born and brought up in it, ought to have a great deal of experience and very bright and practical ideas, and there ought to be some way by which these bright and practical ideas can be communicated to the Department of Trade and Commerce, and the best of them sifted out and if possible put into practical execution.

I just want to refer to two or three things in a scrappy kind of a way. The Department of Trade and Commerce, looked at from the plane of the business men of the country is supposed to be doing something, and is supposed to be able to do a great deal more than it is doing. Sometimes however I think that it is supposed to be doing a great deal more than there is any possibility of its accomplishing, and I want to outline in a moment what the Department of Trade and Commerce and the Government of which it forms a part is able to do and what it is not able to do in this matter of fostering and extending the commercial interests of the country.

The Government and the Department of Trade and Commerce are able to put tariffs on the Statute Books and make them operative in this country. You may be a free trader or a protectionist, this afternoon we are neither free traders nor protectionists for the purposes of this conference; but whatever you are you must all agree that the fact of a tariff going into operation in this country affects both the production and interchange of commodities.

Very well, that is the first proposition, and it is perfectly clear: a government can by tariffs stimulate and depress, change and alter, the currents of production and the currents of interchange of the country's products. We can go a little further than that and can proceed in the matter of tariffs, and all agreements based on those tariffs up to what we call the preferential interchange of commodities between ourselves and other countries.

When we arrive at that arrangement with any country we put our trade with reference to that country on a different basis from

that which existed before, and, if it is a wise arrangement, we make it possible for our own productions and our own trade to have a favored place as contrasted with others in the markets of that country—we make an opportunity for our business men to do better work and accomplish better results. That is what we are trying to do, and today in the wide world we have given a preference to Great Britain, but have received none in return. We have given a preference to South Africa, and in return we get a preference of an average of about 3 p.c. on Canadian articles going into South Africa, at least on a wide range of our products. We give a preference to New Zealand and get a rather significant preference from New Zealand in return. We have lately arranged for a preferential trade between ourselves and certain portions of the West Indies. When that comes into effect, as I believe it will at an early date, we shall be placed in the position where not only do we give, as we have given for 15 years, a preference in our markets to the West Indian products, but we shall be in position to gain a preferential entrance into their markets.

We shall have thus embraced in one form or another the whole British world in a circle of preference, with the exception of Australia, and at the present my Department is negotiating with Australia, a course which I believe will sooner or later end in preferential arrangements between Australia and ourselves.

When all these things are considered it will be seen that the Government has taken a pretty decided step and done a pretty good measure of work in getting this preferential position in the markets of those countries to which I have alluded. We can do that.

But the Government can do something more. Taking ourselves and the West India Islands for example the Government can, when the opportune moment comes, as I believe it will sooner or later, when traffic arrangements are perfected to a degree that will permit of it, so arrange that preferential goods between the West Indies and ourselves shall find their way to each country by direct shipments, and not have to go through foreign countries. Anyone who thinks of it for a moment will see the advantage to the trade of the country from that circumstance. But we are not prepared to even recommend that until traffic conditions are so favorable that the advantage would be entirely in favor of such a policy.

Governments may do a great deal with regard to gathering information as to general trade matters in foreign countries, and transmitting that information to the business people of our own country. We have been doing that with our trade commissioners and agents. We have not done all that we might have done. I am not here however to criticize the past, but at present and for the future it is a line of policy which my Department will adhere to and pursue with as much vigor as possible, in order that there shall be a system for gathering important and pertinent information regarding trade generally from all countries of the world and making it open and free to the people of our country in as wide and well distributed a form as possible.

Another thing I might well mention in that connection. The British government has the advantage of one of the best consular services in the world. You find British Consuls having diplomatic and trade and commercial powers—chiefly the latter—distributed over every portion of the globe where trade is possible and where there are openings for it. What is the reason why every British country, Canada included, should not have the advantage of the co-operation of that splendid consular and commercial system of Great Britain, established as it is in every great country in the world and in every eligible portion of that country?

We do not know what can be done or what can be brought about, but my own opinion in the matter is strong and the work of my own Department will be equally strong, realizing that if it can be done so that in some way we may have the co-operation of the British consular system in every part of the world and be able to take advantage of it, paying what is right for it, as Canada is always willing to do, but getting the inestimable advantage of the skill and experience of that system in those parts of the world to which we have not already penetrated. I believe it is possible to work out a practical co-operation along that line which will be of great benefit to Canada and no practical disadvantage to the rest of the British Empire.

My Department is also trying to work out a more perfect system of statistical work and distribution of statistical information. Canada has done something in that regard but I think it is fair to say she has not done nearly what should have been done, that she has not done

what was possible to have done. We have a certain kind of statistics which are proper and distribute them to a certain extent, but we have not today in Canada a scientific system of gathering statistical information and distributing it.

We have very little of the statistics of production or distribution, and to my mind the statistics of production and distribution are essentially necessary to be known in order that the business of this country may be placed upon the best available basis and our business men have the best information at hand for our trade development.

My Department is essentially charged with that matter, and I bespeak from this Board of Trade and from every board of trade in this country the practical suggestions of men who know the importance of this matter and know something of the methods and means by which it can be gathered, to co-operate with my Department in placing that branch of my Department on a level with that of any other country in the world. I think I rely upon the support of a very excellent medium if I can only get it working with my Department in that respect.

There is another thing a government can do. It can give subsidies to steamship lines and in that way make traffic conditions more favorable with outside countries.

When you have enumerated these things you have mentioned about all a government can properly do.

A government cannot make goods or sell them for any business house; a government cannot represent a commercial house in a foreign country; it cannot make wares and adapt them to the tastes and necessities of the countries in which we want to sell them. This can only and should only be done by the business community, by the makers and dealers of the different articles produced and distributed.

But I am haunted sometimes with the fear that after the Government has done all these things I have mentioned, the business people of this country will fail to take full advantage of them. I wonder

if that fear is well founded or not. I could show you correspondence in my Department from business men in this country, and in scores and scores of cases when the way has been pointed out and co-ordinate action asked on their part the Department has met with the significant answer "We are too busy at home and have no time to spend looking after foreign markets." I have had that answer often and suppose I shall again. I am not wise enough to teach you business men, but I think I shall carry my point when I say that that is not quite the proper answer to be made at this stage in our country's progress, and that the business men, producers and others in this country must not neglect the opportunity of getting into foreign markets until those foreign markets become settled by our competitors and we shall find then that it is very difficult to get a footing after they have entrenched themselves and their products in those markets.

I know that the home markets are in some respects very insistent and call for the most that some of our producing manufacturers are able to make; but at the same time it seems to me of great importance that the foreign field should not be neglected, but that even at the cost of enlarging your plants and adding to your expenses, if you are looking to the future of production in this country and its distribution in foreign markets some effort should be spent in getting a foot hold in these markets now, which are being competed for with tremendous activity and earnestness by every great commercial country in the world. We ought not to neglect them now when they are most easy of access.

I want to give to you just one thought which comes to me with a great deal of force, and I think it will appeal to you. Some of you know what margins are, perhaps have a feeling acquaintance with them on the stock exchange, and what I am going to say to you strikes me as of use whether you agree with it or not. There is too wide a margin today between our exports and our imports. I do not quarrel with imports into this country, still less with exports out of it. But I do say that a country should be alive through its business corporations and business activities to see whether or not the margin is kept within reasonable bounds.

Let me give you two facts from our statistical reports. Go back to 1903. Our imports of merchandise in that year were \$208,000,000 worth, while our exports, home products, in the same year were \$212,000,000 worth. We had a balance of trade as between exports and imports of \$4,000,000 in our favor, and we were none of us sorry for that. Come now to 1912, and how does it stand? Our imports were \$512,000,000 and our exports \$285,000,000—the difference between them was \$227,000,000. That is, there was a \$4,000,000 balance of trade in favor of this country in 1903, and a \$227,000,000 balance of trade adverse to this country in 1912. I think that should give us all some food for thought. It means, leaving aside all refinements and calculations which can be made in favor of or against a balance of trade which you can bring up to offset an adverse balance of trade that there is the relative condition,—\$4,000,000 in our favor in 1903 and \$227,000,000 against us in 1912. I say the margin is too large. It is not necessary for me now to say we are importing too much but I do say we are exporting too little, and that our business men should set their wits to work to diminish this too great margin between our exports and imports.

I will not reason it further, but leave it with you business men who know exactly what it means, and the only plea I make with reference to that is that I think we should as boards of trade and business men in this country try and see whether in the future we cannot enlarge our export trade—enlarge our home production, and if it has the effect of limiting a trifle our imports from abroad that disadvantage will be more than made up to us by the employment of labor in our own country consequent upon any diminished import that results from increased production.

Now I want to draw your attention to another point. The West Indian trade, with which this Port of Montreal and the Maritime Province ports and this section of the Dominion are all very widely interested—I hope that before next January that trade agreement will be in operation, and I want our business people to be prepared for it in advance. If there is any possible way by which the Dominion Government and my own Department can so arrange it, the very best methods and the very best quality of steamship connection between Canada and the West Indies, will be brought into operation—

the Government and my Department intend to work in that direction, and if it is possible we shall bring it about.

I believe it is better for a man to expend twice the amount of money and put on a good thing rather than spend half the amount and put on an indifferent or poor thing. That holds equally well, perhaps more so, in steamship communication than in any other more ordinary branch of business development. So that so far as the Government and my Department are concerned we intend if possible to have the best available communication between those Islands and this country.

We pay now inordinate sums for telegraph and cable communication between Canada and the West Indies, we intend if possible to get cheaper and better cable and telegraph communication between the two countries. And these two restrictions being removed as far as possible, or mitigated, there seems to be a possibility that with our preferential arrangement we shall find there a field for the business men of this country, and it is for you to look ahead and find out what will be required from you and what you will have to conquer.

Let me give you a few figures. Take the West Indian countries that are included in the agreement. They have a trade of \$61,000,000—not an insignificant trade, their exports being \$30,000,000 and their imports \$31,000,000. Out of that \$61,000,000 today Canada is a partner in \$10,000,000 worth and the United States in \$16,500,000 worth. We and the United States are competitors in those exports to the West Indies, largely on the same lines of products. Take the parts of the West Indies not included in that arrangement. They have a total trade of \$39,000,000 in which Canada participates to the extent of \$2,700,000 and the United States \$19,600,000.

To put it in another way. In this total trade Canada altogether has a share of about \$4,000,000 and the United States about \$19,500,000 as to exports sent to the West Indies from the United States and Canada. There is a field of large limits, and it is the peculiar privilege of the Dominion of Canada under the advantages we shall have to enter into and possess itself of the majority of

that amount of trade. The Government having done what is has and what it proposes to do it seems to me it is up to the boards of trade and the makers and producers of this country to live up to these privileges and openings and avail themselves of them and enter in and gather the fruit of that trade with our neighbors of the West Indies.

I would like this Board of Trade to do several things. I would like it, if it has not already such committees, to appoint two committees of its more specialized members, one committee upon Export Trade and the other a committee upon Inter-provincial Trade. To have the committee on export trade equipped with the practical knowledge of their daily immersion in this business give us in the Department of Trade and Commerce the benefit of their suggestions and their experience and practical knowledge. Postage is cheap, but everything you have to send to the Department goes free of postage. Maybe I have got myself into a great deal of trouble. I do not think so. So get your committees and let them formulate their plans and suggestions into practical shape and send them on and ask the Department to think them over and put them into execution if it can. If that is not sufficient we will get closer together and instead of using the mails you can come to Ottawa or I can come here, so we can sit down and talk and sift the propositions out and get at what is best. Don't you think there is an opportunity to help each other in that respect? And if this and every other board of trade in the Dominion of Canada will do that kind of thing we can have the best department of trade and commerce that this or any other country has ever had and do more real good to the country than all the other departments of the Government put together.

Having outlived my youth to a certain extent I am dispossessed of vanity. I am not seeking to build a monument to myself, but I have a few years yet I hope for earnest and good work in this country and I want, by co-operation with the business men of this country to put my Department on a basis where after I and perhaps you are gone, it may run on its own trucks along the very lines we have laid down whilst we have been having something to do with the management of affairs.

One last thought. Do not let us imagine that our external trade is the best indication of the progress and prosperity of this country. The first thing a young man has to do, that is if he is normally sensible is to find out what are his real powers, not his fancied powers—you have to reveal him to himself before you get him on the right track and harnessed for his best work—and the same thing is absolutely true of a country. You must reveal the country to itself before you will get it keyed up to the proper line of work and to the energy which is necessary to make that work successful. You do not get at the capacities of a country by confining yourself to statistics as to its foreign trade, you have to go deeper and stay nearer at home for that, and get the statistics of interprovincial production and interprovincial exchange to know what we are doing in this country and how great a thing we are doing.

But information just to satisfy curiosity does not amount to a hill of beans. Information in order to influence and stimulate action and give impulse to endeavor is the thing that counts, and to my mind if we today had a complete revelation of what we are doing on the lines of interprovincial production and interchange we should have a much higher idea of ourselves and our capabilities and be placed on the highroad to the best possible commercial and trade action in this country.

That is a difficult thing but I believe it can be accomplished and I shall not rest until in co-operation with you business men of this Board of Trade and the other centres of activity in this country we have evolved a system which will give us a very close approximation to the figures and volume and importance of our interprovincial trade interchange. What an illumination it would be to some of our provinces if they found out just exactly how far they came short of supplying their own natural necessities and needs when it would be quite possible for them within their own limits to have done that, and have saved just so much of their own money in the process of so doing.

It would open the eyes of this country, as it opened my eyes, to get a few hints and know just the amount of production in this Eastern portion of Canada which is finding its market today in our

middle and far West. But you do not get a hint of that from the figures of external trade as between ourselves and foreign lands. How it would change our efforts and stimulate our hopes and give us confidence in this country if we just knew what was going on in that respect. So I say what we want to do, and what I believe we should be able to do, is to arrange for a system of gathering this information and make it open and useful to the people of this country.

You as a Board of Trade, wholesalers, manufacturers, retail dealers, transport men, every kind of business men can assist my Department very much in that respect. You know the trade currents, the methods of distribution, and I shall have some of my officers commissioned especially for that purpose, and have them wait upon you in this and other boards of trade and get from you the information we believe you possess and which will enable us to lay down and carry out our system—not perhaps to get at the absolute exact figures, but to aim for that approximation which shall make them really valuable, and which is about all that can be hoped for in any system you may inaugurate.

Now, I have said some few things to you with reference to my Department and the relations which I think may exist between that department and the different boards of trade. I feel that sitting in my office at Ottawa there is after all opportunity to know only a small proportion of the business men of this country. There is many a chance to make a mistake and many an opportunity lost for avoiding the making of mistakes, and I want as far as possible by communication and intercourse in the way I have outlined to get at what will be the best, the most sensible and the most practical conclusions and put them into execution as far as the Government and my Department find it practicable so to do.

I thank you for turning out in large numbers to listen so attentively to what I have had to say. I shall come before you again if you do not do something along the lines I have mentioned. If you do not help me I shall keep you in mind of it and keep after you until in some way I twist out of you the things my Department are after.

This city of Montreal, in one respect is at the gateway of our great Dominion. Through it passes in and out a vast proportion of

the trade of Canada. From it will pass in and out a much vaster proportion of the trade of Canada if your business men are alive to their opportunities and make the most of their advantages. Gentlemen, I am jealous of every bushel of wheat and every cargo of traffic from our great West, near or far, which fails to pass out through these great Canadian ports and this great Canadian gateway.

I am not here to say we shall ever see the day when we shall control the whole of that trade, but I do not want to see a retrograde movement even relatively. And there is a retrograde movement. You are not sending out of Montreal, relatively to two years ago, the amount of products of the West you should be sending out. It is seeking southern ports, and as a Board of Trade you should be putting interrogation marks all around this Harbour Commission, and harbour and the men of affairs, and studying as to why it is. Is it because you are not able for the work? Perish the thought. Is it because the Government has not lavished money in expenditure and loans? You have got all you could spend and more too and that is a very wonderful thing. There is money in the Treasury today you are supposed to spend and you have not yet spent it. There is no lack there. There is no lack in business ability. Have you the equipment in the harbour you ought to have? If you have not you should be putting interrogation marks all around and wanting to know why you have not.

Have you as much tonnage in this river as you ought to have? Is it a fact that every year your men of business have to turn hundreds of thousands of tons to southern ports when you are asked to provide for it here? If so it is a fact that ought to be remedied, that sort of business ought to be changed. What is the reason you have not sufficient tonnage in this mighty river, with all the expenditures that have been lavished upon it? The Government is doing all it can. You will soon have a dock in operation here and another one at Quebec, both of which you need very much. You now have a wrecking plant on a permanent basis, and a good one it is. What else do you want? Seek, find out and ask for it and get your people to put it into operation.

19/9/66 5.00

B Amtmann

But I am told, the tonnage does not come to your port because of the high insurance rates. Is that a fact? If so how can it be remedied. Is it possible of remedy? Everything is possible of remedy. A geographical position cannot be altogether ignored, you must have some disadvantages in that direction. But geographical disadvantages can be offset by mechanical appliances to overcome them. That is what we did in building the Transcontinental railways, and what we can do with reference to this great route of the St. Lawrence. If it is an overcharge of the insurance rates that keeps the tonnage from the port let us co-operate in order to offset that disadvantage. The Government is willing to co-operate with the business men interested in this great route on this insurance matter. Let us have your plans. First let us get at the facts, and I invite you business men of the Board of Trade to sit right down and face these facts and find if there is not a solution for that difficulty that stands in your way.

