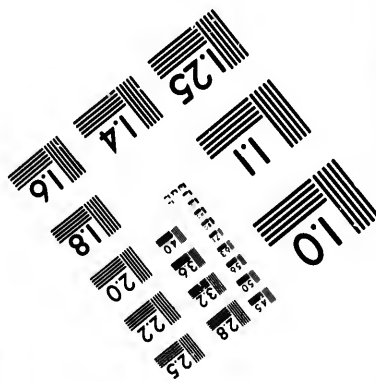
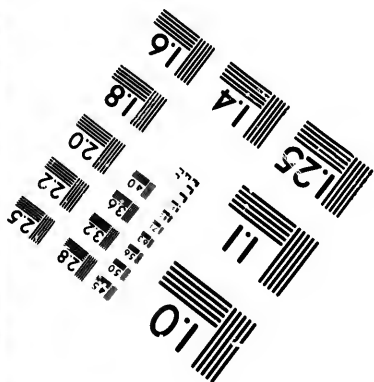
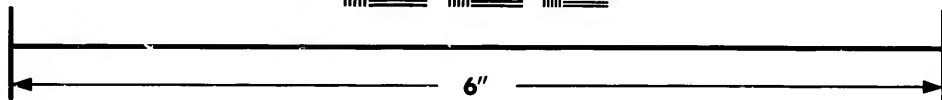
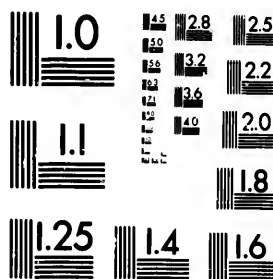


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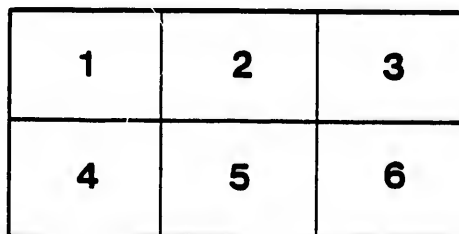
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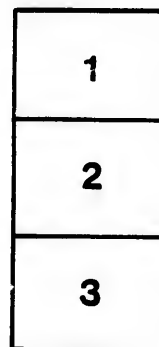
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SPEECH
OF
MR. A. F. FIRTH

PRESIDENT OF THE
HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,
AT THE
FOURTH CONGRESS

OF
Chambers of Commerce of the Empire,

LONDON, JUNE 26-29, 1900.

—:O:—

**Reprinted, by request, from the Official Report
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RESOLUTION.

The proposition of the Toronto Board of Trade was as follows:—

WHEREAS it is generally recognised that an advantageous commercial bond is the strongest link in National Unity, and that the maintenance and strengthening of trade is the keystone of a State's successful development;

AND WHEREAS the existence of an Empire is largely dependent upon the material prosperity of its people;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That in the opinion of this Congress the bonds of the British Empire would be materially strengthened, and the union of the various parts of Her Majesty's Dominion greatly consolidated by the adoption of a commercial policy based upon the principle of mutual benefit, whereby each component part of the Empire would receive a substantial advantage in trade as the result of its national relationship.

FURTHER RESOLVED: That in order to make the foregoing operative, the Chair shall appoint, before this Congress dissolves, a representative and proportionate Committee of Home and Colonial Delegates to devise a scheme of this nature, and report to this or a similar Commercial Congress, and that a copy of this resolution be officially forwarded to the Home and Colonial Governments concerned in the proposition.

The amendment of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce was as follows:—

THIS Congress, rejoicing in the growing evidences of unity between the Colonies and the Mother Country, and recognising the material and political advantages of the largest possible exchange of commodities between the various portions of the Empire, is of opinion that all measures for the promotion of this end should respect the liberty of each portion to purchase in the cheapest market wherever it may exist.

MR. FIRTH'S SPEECH.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—We have had many speeches from this end of the room this morning, but almost all of them on one side. I think it would be a pity if our Colonial friends went away from this hall with the idea that a large proportion of England, or of Yorkshire at all events, sympathised entirely with the Manchester School—(hear, hear). We have had the opposite side represented by speakers on behalf of the shipping interests, the merchanting interests, and the spinning interests of this country. I now want to say a few words from the point of view of the British manufacturer. I am a manufacturer of goods, both in England and in America, and I claim, in spite of my American experience, that I am a Free Trader. I am not in favour of free imports only, however. That is what the Manchester School recommends, and always has recommended, and I say it is the biggest mistake we have made, to allow the absolutely free import into this country of manufactured goods. The question is—What do we get out of all our trade? It is not only the amount of trade we do, but what it yields us. I contend that the Board of Trade returns as they are published at present are misleading—(hear, hear). We have big figures; we pile them up year after year, and we are perfectly satisfied if each year reveals an increase on what was done the year before. We altogether overlook the difference between the export of one million pounds' worth of wool, and one million pounds' worth of worsted coatings. One may be only a re-export upon which only a commission is earned plus carriage, or, if home-grown wool, it would be better if it were manufactured

at home; upon the other the wage-earners of this country receive their employment, and the return to labour and capital therefrom would amount to at least 25 or 30 per cent. of the value—possibly considerably more. The same applies to the export of bar iron or anything of that sort. There is a great difference between exporting goods which carry very little labour, and exporting such things as steam engines or steamships, upon which the labour is the largest portion of the cost; and in considering the question of trade relations, we need to look into the facts and see what we get out of the articles, whether as capitalists or in the shape of labour, and not only look at the gross amount of turnover. If you will take the import and export trade and analyse the figures for yourselves, you will see that the imports from our Colonies are chiefly made up of raw materials and food products, and that our exports to the Colonies are principally manufactured goods. There is a very different state of affairs revealed in respect of foreign countries. I will give you some figures. Our total exports to the Colonies and our possessions were £90,000,000. Of this 83 millions were for goods into which labour enters largely. The principal of them are:—

	£
Apparel	4,092,000
Arms and Ammunition	1,040,000
Cotton Yarns	2,003,000
Cotton Manufactures	26,184,000
Carriages, Cycles, &c.	1,826,000
Iron and Steel Manufactures	7,888,000
Machinery	5,242,000
Millinery... ..	1,266,000
Leather Manufactures	1,406,000
Paper Hangings... ..	1,456,000
Woollen Manufactures	4,800,000
	<hr/>
	57,143,000
Other Manufactures, amounts under one million	25,857,000
	<hr/>
Total	£88,000,000
	<hr/>

Now take the figures of France and the United States.

Those of the United States present a very significant instance. We need their food products. But while our imports from the United States have grown from 89 millions in 1894 to 126 millions in 1898, our exports have fallen from 31 millions in 1894 to 28½ millions in 1898. Of these 28½ millions half only are British produce, 14 millions being Colonial and foreign goods re-exported to those countries. Therefore in this country we are obtaining a trade with America of 14 millions. against a trade of 126 millions, which we are giving them. The following are the figures of our total Imports and Exports from 1894 to 1898. and the principal articles imported and exported :

Year.	Total Imports.	Total Exports.	Of which—	
	£	£	British. £	Foreign & Col. £
1894	89,606,000	30,775,000	18,799,000	11,976,000
1895	86,548,000	44,067,000	27,948,000	16,119,000
1896	106,346,000	32,085,000	20,424,000	11,611,000
1897	118,041,000	37,984,000	20,994,000	16,989,000
1898	126,062,000	28,584,000	14,716,000	13,818,000

Principal Imports, 1898.

	£
Live Animals ...	7,257,000
Bacon & Pork ...	7,219,000
Meat ...	5,820,000
Cheese ...	1,020,000
Copper ...	2,628,000
Corn ...	36,450,000
Cotton ...	27,838,000
Fruit ...	818,000
Hams ...	3,651,000
Lard ...	2,884,000
Leather ...	3,131,000
Oil ...	1,119,000
Petroleum ...	3,024,000
Sugar ...	978,000
Tobacco ...	2,877,000
Wood ...	3,380,000
Machinery ...	3,375,000
	<hr/>
	£113,470,000

SUMMARY:—

	£
Food ...	66,097,000
Raw Materials ...	41,121,000
Tobacco ...	2,877,000
Machinery ...	3,375,000

£113,470,000

Principal Exports, British.

	£
Chemicals ...	548,000
Cotton Goods ...	2,062,000
China ...	540,000
Linens ...	2,164,000
Jute Manufactures	845,000
Metals ...	1,359,000
Skins and Furs ...	709,000
Woollen & Worsted	1,191,000

£9,418,000

Colonial & Foreign.

	£
Caoutchouc ...	1,419,000
Cotton ...	982,000
Hides ...	885,000
Jute Manufactures	767,000
Leather ...	653,000
Metals ...	1,032,000
Skins and Furs ...	1,337,000
Wool ...	1,352,000

£8,427,000

Of the goods we export to them the only ones which carry much advantage to labour in this country are about £1,191,000 worth of worsteds; £845,000 jute manufactures; £2,164,000 linen; £540,000 China and earthenware; £2,062,000 cotton goods; or £6,802,000 in all. That is nearly all we get to the advantage of our labour population in this country.

Now take the case of France, which is more glaring still. From France we took in 1894 £43,000,000 of imports, and we are now taking £51,000,000. Our exports to France are about stationary—about £20,000,000. Of those £20,000,000 worth which we sent out to them in 1898, only £13,000,000 were British goods and £7,000,000 were Colonial and foreign produce. Therefore, whilst we are buying from them 51 millions of goods, we are only selling them £13,000,000 of British productions. The following figures show what this trade consists of principally:—

Year.	Total Imports.	Total Exports.	Of which—	
			British.	Foreign & Col.
1894	48,450,000	19,751,000	18,526,000	6,225,000
1895	47,470,000	20,824,000	18,870,000	6,454,000
1896	50,104,000	20,657,000	14,151,000	6,506,000
1897	58,846,000	19,517,000	18,818,000	5,699,000
1898	51,896,000	20,518,000	18,706,000	6,807,000

Principal Imports, 1898.

	£
Wine	3,560,000
Brandy	1,080,000
Sugar	2,422,000
Vegetables	498,000
Milk	628,000
Potatoes	457,000
Fruit	1,820,000
Butter	2,184,000
Eggs	817,000
Cotton Mfrs.	620,000
Leather „	1,715,000
Watches	772,000
Woollen Yarn	490,000
Woollen Mfrs.	5,542,000
Silk „	18,848,000
Laces	901,000

£86,839,000

Principal Exports.

	£
Wool	3,558,000
Skins	505,000
Coal	2,641,000
Jute	512,000
Machinery	1,888,000
Metals	1,062,000
Woollen & Worsted	1,881,000

£10,992,000

SUMMARY:

	£
Food	12,956,000
Manufactures	28,888,000

The only exports which our labouring population get much out of are:—Machinery £1,338,000, and woollen goods £1,381,000, so that in return for the £20,000,000 worth of manufactured goods we buy from them, we only sell them £3,000,000 worth on which there is any considerable advantage to labour.

A similar instance is the business with Germany. Our imports have grown from £26,874,000 to £28,534,000, but whilst the imports largely consist of goods into which the element of labour enters very considerably, it is different with the exports. Out of the total of exports of £33,331,000, the only amounts in which labour is much interested are:—

	£
Cotton Manufactures	1,762,000
Woollen & Worsted Manufactures	985,000
Machinery, Steam Engines, &c ...	2,091,000
	<hr/>
	£4,788,000

The balance is not of very great value to our labouring population.

As to Belgium, our imports have grown from £17,052,000 in 1894, to £21,534,000 in 1898, being an increase of £4,481,000, whilst our exports to Belgium have only increased from £13,041,000 in 1894 to £13,850,000 in 1898, being an increase of £809,000. Then again, our imports are principally manufactures which bring great advantage to their working classes, and our exports consist chiefly of wool, yarn, coal, &c., whilst the manufactures are as follows:—

	£
Cotton	1,557,000
Machinery, Steam Engines, &c ...	828,000
Woollen Manufactures	982,000
	<hr/>
Total ...	£3,367,000

That, I think, shows the absurdity of our policy of admitting foreign manufactures absolutely free—(cheers). The argument has been advanced by Manchester that the duty is always paid by the consumer. I deny it—(hear, hear). It may be in some instances, but it is not altogether. I will give you an instance. Before the Dingley tariff was imposed in America, we had free wool under the Wilson Bill. Certain wool cost laid down in the United States $17\frac{1}{2}$ to 18 cents, and under the Dingley tariff the duty was 4 cents per lb. A friend of mine said, "Don't speculate too far in that wool; it will be down in 12 to 18 months, and then you will have it at nearly the same price as to-day." That duty was imposed, and in 18 months it could be landed with the duty paid, at the same price

as it cost under free wool. The duty thus in that case came off the price of the wool at the port of export, and was lost by the producer. That is a clear instance, and I could show you in many cases that the duty has come off the price of goods sent from this country and that those goods are not costing the Americans any more, notwithstanding the Dingley tariff.

There is the question of sentiment which has to be taken into consideration. Our experience of the last two years has shown us where our friends are, and where our enemies are. Is that to count for nothing?—(cheers). I do not believe entirely in sentiment in business, but believe in taking a rational, common-sense view of matters. The figures of our import and export trade, comparing 1893 and 1898, are as follows:—

IMPORT TRADE.

		Millions of £'s.	
		1893.	1898.
To United Kingdom	404	...	470
From Foreign Countries alone...	818	...	871
Percentage equals ...	77½	...	79%

EXPORT TRADE.

From United Kingdom... ..	277	...	294
To Foreign Countries alone ...	198	...	204
Percentage equals ...	71½	...	69½

These show that whilst the percentage of imports from foreign countries has increased, the percentage of exports has decreased.

As to the percentage of our exports to foreign countries compared with those to our Colonies and India, I give you the following figures:—

In 1870 to 1874 the average annual export of British and Irish produce to Foreign Countries was	1¼
In 1898 it was	150

A decrease of 14 per cent.

In 1870 to 1874, average annual export of British and Irish produce to Colonies and India	60
(or 26 per cent. of total exports).	
1898, export to Colonies and India	89½
(or 86 per cent. of total exports).	
1870 to 1874, average annual export to Colonies alone	40
(or 17 per cent. of total exports.)	
1898, it was	58½
(or 23 per cent. of total exports).	

Those figures show that our exports to foreign countries have decreased 14 per cent., and to the Colonies and India together have increased 10 per cent.

The value of the total Exports of produce and manufactures of the United Kingdom and of Foreign and Colonial Merchandise to Foreign Countries and British Possessions (including Protectorates), is as follows:—

Year.	To		To		Total Exports.	
	Foreign Countries.		British Possessions.			
1898	...	199,071,069	...	78,067,201	...	277,138,270
1894	...	195,199,909	...	78,585,959	...	273,785,867
1895	...	209,760,256	...	76,072,151	...	285,832,407
1896	...	205,729,218	...	90,650,001	...	296,379,214
1897	...	207,209,749	...	86,964,369	...	294,174,118
1898	...	208,908,252	...	90,110,736	...	294,018,988

In deference to the Chairman's bell, I will draw my remarks to a conclusion by saying I hope neither of these resolutions will be carried. I think the question could be far better dealt with if a Royal Commission were appointed to undertake the proposed enquiry. I think a first-rate case has been made out for an enquiry into the whole subject by as good men as can be chosen in the country, with a view of putting all the facts bearing upon the trade of the Empire before its inhabitants. People do not realise these figures which I have mentioned, nor the meaning of them. Our friends from the Colonies could appear before the Royal Commission and state how they would be affected by any proposed change, and the inhabitants of the mother country would have the whole thing put before them on a comprehensive basis, and would be able no longer to plead ignorance of the interests of each portion of the Empire; the whole case could then be treated fully. I shall be pleased to move a resolution in favour of a Royal Commission on this subject, which would have a great deal more power and weight than any committee of this Congress, if the idea is supported by our Toronto and Manchester friends—(cheers).

After considerable further discussion, it was unanimously resolved by the Congress, on the proposition of the Toronto Chamber, seconded by the Halifax Chamber, supported by the Manchester Chamber, and other representatives of each Colony, that a deputation be appointed to wait upon Lord Salisbury, Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Ritchie, to urge the appointment of a Royal Commission to consider the possibility of increasing trade relations between the different portions of the Empire.

A reply has since been received from each of the Cabinet Ministers mentioned that they consider the moment inopportune for discussion of this subject, and therefore could not receive the Deputation at present; it is hoped, however, that this only means a postponement.

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