

(February 12, 1929)

Relations of Canada to the West Indies

BY SIR JAMES A. M. AIKINS, K.B.

PRESIDENT DALY:—Gentlemen, We have the honour to welcome here to-day a great Canadian who has not only distinguished himself in his own profession, but who has achieved a record for public service which it is given to few of our citizens to accomplish.

To the various important tasks which he has been called upon to undertake he has brought the characteristic energy and devotion and the high conception of citizenship which we have come to associate with his activities.

I am sure we await with interest his views on the relations between Canada and the West Indies which he has developed as a result of an extensive study of conditions in those Islands.

Gentlemen—Sir James Aikins.

SIR JAMES AIKINS:—Mr. President, members of the Canadian Club and friends, because you are good Canadians you are all friends of mine and I feel at home.

When asked to address this Club, I think at the instance of Mr. Phillips, Trade Representative of the Canadian National Steamship Industries and by the Manufacturers' Association, they must have thought that perhaps as a result of my recent visit to the British West Indies, I had attained some transmissible light or inspiration when I inspected them. I consented, though with hesitation—hesitation because I have not come to any clear conclusion in my own mind as to what may be the best relationship to exist between Canada and the British West Indies. They are British as we are British and in no circumstances would Canada be prepared to go into any relationship that

would interfere with Great Britain whom we love, respect and admire. I have had the opportunity of conferring with nearly all the Governors of the British West Indies, some of the Administrators, Colonial Secretaries, Attorneys-General and the Treasurers, also with the business men down there—exporters and producers. They all agree on this: that closer relationship between the British West Indies and Canada is very desirable if wisely brought about, but on no condition must there be a change of King, Kingly Authority or flag. And we all agree.

You know something of the Trade Treaty between the West Indies and Canada—preferential tariffs, subsidies and provisions relating to the two steamship lines—the one on the southeasterly and the other on the southwesterly way. Three steamships have been already put on the southeasterly route and the people of the West Indies are well satisfied with them. This year other steamships will be put on the southwesterly route. For the purpose of that treaty, Bermuda is included in the West Indies. It is a little over seven hundred miles south from Halifax, a little less from New York, three hundred islands, beautiful as emerald and set in a sea of sapphire. This climate is such as to be attractive to all Canadians, and would be more attractive, if we only had the exclusive right to be the guests instead of the tens of thousands of Americans who frequent that place in winter. It has an area of nineteen square miles and a population of about 22,000. Going south about five hundred and ninety miles you come to the Bahamas. The capital is Nassau, situated in a sea of such marvellous beauty that I believe it is not rivalled by any place in the world. It has a wonderful climate—about seventy degrees for the first three months of the year. Of the three thousand islands, twenty-nine are occupied. The area of the Bahamas is 4400 square miles with a population of about 53,000. From there southeasterly you go eight hundred miles to Jamaica which has a population of 904,000 and an area of 42,000 square miles which is over two hundred and three to the square mile. This is the largest, the most profitable, I think the most productive and, if I mistake not, the most attractive of the islands of the British West Indies.

It is not my purpose to describe the beauties of these places for they are all beautiful, but rather only to tell you where these places lie, about their size, their population, their form of government and the trade they are doing with Canada. West of Jamaica lies British Honduras which has a population of about 45,000 and an area of 8600 square miles or 5.3 to the square mile. I did not visit that place and, therefore, cannot speak in respect of the climate. It is rich in mahogany and other fine wood and in the production of bananas, chicale and cocoanuts. It will bring profit to those who engage in that development. When you leave Bermuda and go on the southwestern line, the first island you strike is St. Kitt's or St. Christopher, nine hundred miles from Bermuda. Then following on are Nevis, Antigua, Dominica in the Leewards and the Windward Islands, that chain of islands which form our eastern boundary of the Caribbean Sea and lie there, dividing it from the Atlantic. The chief Windward Islands are St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Barbadoes with Grenada. At a distance of about ninety miles from Grenada is Trinidad with an area of 1954 square miles and a population of 340,000. That is to say one hundred and ninety three to the square mile. The area of the Windward to the Leeward Islands varies from thirty-two in Montserrat to three hundred in Dominica. The density is one hundred and twenty-one in Dominica and about nine hundred and forty in Barbadoes, which I think is about the most thoroughly settled part of the globe. Trinidad is three hundred and sixty miles from British Guiana. Of all the places I visited in British West Indies British Guiana appeals to me because of the opportunities of development there; it appeals because of the possibilities. It is comparatively undeveloped as you can judge from the population. It lies immediately to the east of Venezuela. The land is low and protected from tides by a great sea wall. It is well-drained by sluices and canals and great rice fields are being cultivated in it. Further south and to the east and west lies the interior of British Guiana where you get timbers including balata, greenheart and purpleheart and other such hard timber. Some logs are sixty and seventy feet long and are so heavy that they will not float in water. That

timber is very desirable for furniture construction or where you require some timber that will not easily rot.

In addition to that there are diamond areas from which one year very recently they exported about one million sterling. They have also fields of bauxite, gold and power falls. The Kaietur cataract has a head of eight hundred and twenty feet and a perpendicular fall of seven hundred and forty feet, about five times as high as the Niagara we boast of. You can understand, therefore, what power could be developed there. So if any of our Canadians wish to make investments, I would say, that is the place they ought to go. You cannot expect white men to do laboring work immediately beside the Equator. They have to get a different population. For that purpose they have the East Indians who can stand the sun and are suitable workers. I shall not dwell any more upon that.

All these places I have mentioned are separate and independent colonies under the form of government of the British Crown Colonies. You say "what does that mean?" It means this, that they are under the direct supervision of the Colonial Secretary in Britain. Of course, he acts for the Government. The Crown appoints Governors to these places and appoints also Colony Secretaries, Attorneys-General and Treasurers and sometimes some of the other officers. These officers and a few others form the Executive Council. These same officers plus eight or ten, those selected by the Crown, some of them elected by the people, form the Legislative Council. In Bermuda the Government consists of thirty-six members; in the Bahamas twenty-nine; in the Barbadoes twenty-four. In British Guiana, where they got into economic difficulties, a change was made very recently by which the Crown officers got more control. The franchise was very low, nearly manhood, with the result they have men who have not very much judgment and very little experience in Government. However, that Government still exists and there may be some changes there as some of the Governors are not satisfied with the policy of representation. Of the total population of the British West Indies about 1,912,000 are colored, from brown to black. The infant mortality is very great and one can understand that, when one is told, for instance,

that 45% of the infants born in British Honduras are illegitimate. About 70% of the infants born in some other places are born out of wedlock. The infant mortality is very great and home life practically absent. It is thought a safe policy to leave the form of government with the Crown Colony and, if any change were made looking to a greater relationship toward Canada, this one thing ought to be certain, to leave that form of government alone until Canada knows more about it. The experience of Great Britain has shown that to be a wise form.

Now coming to another thing: the question of trade. They can produce all tropical foods that we can consume. These foods consist of sugar, cocoa, cocoa products, fruits, bananas and spices. I am very sorry to say that Canada does not take as much of those as Canada should take. Let me give you some figures that you may have an idea of the trade between the West Indies and Canada. Bermuda imports from Canada 20%; 50% from the United States; 25% from the United Kingdom; in St. Kitts and Nevis, small places, 40% from Canada; 22% from the United States; 25% from the United Kingdom; in Barbadoes, 22% from Canada; 24% from the United States; 30% from the United Kingdom; by Trinidad, 19% from Canada; 25% from the United States and 25% from the United Kingdom. In that connection I received, just yesterday morning, a letter from the Treasurer of Trinidad which, with your permission if I am not taking too much time I will read. It is dated January 25. "Dear Sir James: I am enclosing as promised a memo on the trade of the Colony and hope that you will find it of some use. The main points are that owing to the development of our oil fields our trade both in imports and exports is rapidly increasing and our market for Canadian goods will shortly be the most valuable one in the British West Indies. The preference granted by the Colony to Canada," says the Treasurer, Mr. Walcote, "in 1925 should allow of her capturing a much larger share of our import trade than she has at present. This will, however, depend on your business men getting more into touch with our requirements and studying local conditions. The position as regards our exports to Canada is not so promising, particularly in the case of

sugar. This industry is at present in very low water and unless steps are taken by Canada or the United Kingdom, or by both, to assist it, I am afraid the plantations will gradually go out of cultivation. In this connection, I may mention that at their recent meeting in Barbadoes, the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the West Indies passed a resolution praying the United Kingdom to increase her preference to the same amount as that granted by Canada in 1925, the effect of which, if granted, will still further divert the trade to the United Kingdom. The extension of the preference granted by Canada on West Indian raw sugar to the British sugars, (see my memo), should I think be enquired into, not only as to the effect it has had on the trade, but as to whether it is strictly in accord with the 1925 agreement."

He sends a memorandum. In respect of imports of Trinidad from Canada the figures for 1927 were: 31.8% from the United Kingdom; 27.7% from the United States; 19.5% from Canada. I wish you to note these figures. Then he goes on to say: "From the above figures, it will be seen that the value of the import trade of the Colony in 1927 was double that of 1912, the year of the first Trade Agreement with Canada, and that the preference granted by the Colony to the Dominion in that year and again under the Agreements of 1920 and 1925 has resulted in largely diverting the trade from the United States and other foreign countries to Canada and the United Kingdom. There are, however, a number of commodities now obtained from foreign countries which can, and should, be supplied by Canada, and there is every reason that the excellent steamship service recently inaugurated by the Canadian National Steamship Company will result in Canada capturing a larger share of the rapidly increasing import trade of the Colony." I attach a diagram which shows at a glance the value of the imports of the year 1927. I wonder if you can see it? You will see the pink there (1) represents imports from the United Kingdom; (2) which is the next largest represents imports from the United States and (3) represents imports from Canada. I am not going to further discuss that for the moment but will refer to exports which he mentions. The exports to the United

Kingdom in 1927 amounted to 26%; to the United States 28%; to Canada in 1912 9.2% and in 1927 7%. Then he says, "In view of the fact that Canada's exports to the Colony increased from 7% in 1912 to 19% in 1927, these figures prove conclusively that the several Trade Agreements have been more beneficial to Canada than to this Colony." From which it will be seen the introduction of reciprocity has resulted in this Colony increasing imports from Canada from 5% to 17% in 1927. The proportion of imports taken by Canada during the same period fell from 9% to 7%. Gentlemen, should that be? You can think over that and ask the question: why? Reference is made a little further on to sugar which will be interesting.

"The reason for the difference in the preference granted on sugar below and above the Dutch colour standard was to protect the Canadian sugar refiner, and it has had the desired effect of restricting the Canadian market to West Indian raw sugars. In view of the fact that the preference granted by the West Indies to Canada applies to all articles whether manufactured or not, this restriction is viewed with great disfavor in the West Indian Colonies, but as we had hoped to obtain in Canada a market for all of our raw sugars the matter was not pressed as far as it might have been. This hope, however, has not been realized for the reason that Canada has, I am informed, as in the case of cocoa, previous to the 1925 Agreement, extended the preference of \$1.00 the 100 lbs. on West Indian raws to other British sugar producing countries which do not grant a preference to Canada. If this is correct, the effect will be to divert more of our sugars to the United Kingdom, where the preference is granted on all sugars, and so deprive the new steamships of full cargoes back to Canada. The question also arises as to whether the extension of preference on raws to other British sugars is in keeping with the 1925 Agreement." Is it gentlemen? They gave to Canadian goods the preference on practically all Canadian goods. We give them equal preference on raw sugars, but since that time Canada has given to some other British possessions the same preference they get from those countries on Canadian goods.

In respect of trade with the British West Indies, with

the exception of two islands, they have not wharves where steamships can load and unload. That, as you can well understand, is inconvenient and expensive and uncomfortable for passengers, particularly in bad weather when they prefer to stay on board and fail to see these beautiful places and business people do not get the tourist trade. Another point which was mentioned by my friend was that they had no suitable hotels for Canadians to go there. We do not want expensive hotels, you can get plenty of them on this side of the ocean. What is really required is a comfortable place which is well-protected from the sun. One of my family relations went to Jamaica at the beginning of the winter. A letter I received from her indicated that she was so comfortable that she says she is constantly purring like a pussy. Men who spend your time on this continent in south countries, why not take advantage of the splendid steamship service and go by the C.P. or C.N. and spend some of your time in a country that belongs to you? I say advisedly that belongs to you. Why the British West Indies are thoroughly British—British to the core. They sent during the war, out of a small and comparatively ignorant population, about 16,000 and contributed to the war expenses of Great Britain £3,250,000. Jamaica alone pledged itself to a budget of £60,000,000 sterling to Great Britain for forty years to help liquidate its debts. Are not these fellow-citizens of whom we ought to be proud? Are these not Britishers whom we ought to help and toward whom we ought to feel kindly disposed? Remember this one thing, gentlemen, we are members of the British Empire—our British North America Act, our Constitutional Act. The one reason of Confederation was that Confederation would promote the interest of the British Empire, and that is one of our first duties.

We are part of the Empire, and they are part of the Empire. Gentlemen, they are British; so are we. Their inclination is absolutely Canadian. Assuming also as a fact what is not a fact, that the people of those places are in spirit Canadian, assuming that fact, what ought to be our duty in that connection? One of the first things, gentlemen, Canadians and all Canadians, I would say, become acquainted with the British West Indies, by visiting

and by studying and then, not only that, but let our people so far as possible carry out the spirit of our treaty and, in their purchases of these goods which are produced in the British West Indies, give preference to the British West Indies. Next we have a large number of young men who think this climate of Canada is a little cold—adventuresome spirits who may desire sunnier climates. Where can they get a better place than the British West Indies? If Canadian young men will apply for Colonial service, many of them will be appointed and the result will be when they get occupation there, Canadians will be looking after some of their own affairs. If they wish to go in for investments or agriculture there, they can find one of the most up-to-date colleges of tropical agriculture established anywhere, that is the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad. Then again, so far as trade is concerned, I think we ought to send engineers down to study the feasibility, economic and physical, of constructing convenient wharves. Another thing that comes home to you is this. It is all very well to have trade commissions appointed, but that won't solve the problem of trade. Merchants and exporters should send down representatives to study the conditions. Not only that but to take samples that they could show the people what goods we have, because American goods have got in there. Why do people hang on to them? They have become accustomed to them. Agents of the United States are very active. Why should not Canada be the same? When Canadians go down there for trade it is important they should get so far as possible the productions from the West Indies and bring them to Canada because we should have a return cargo for our Canadian National Steamships. If we had that it will be profitable in two ways. In addition to that there is another thing so far as philanthropies are concerned. Canadians could go down to our own people in British West Indies and try to lift them up because they are people with longings for good. Will we not try to help these people not only in a sanitary way but in developing their moral, Christian and home life so that Canada will be carrying the White Man's burden in helping others in some useful way?

Just in conclusion. Is Canada too young, too inexperienced, too undeveloped to take part in the great race and conflict and desire for trade? It is not sufficient, gentlemen, that we should have a surplus export of agriculture, forest, mines and fisheries. We require more than that. You know perfectly well, it is an age-long movement, and very natural, of people from the country to the cities and towns. You cannot stop it. Gentlemen, let the movement be to the Canadian towns and Canadian cities and not to the towns and cities of the United States. How are you going to do that? In order to do that you must have factories and commerce, in order that the people may get employment and in order that our country may prosper. You will never get it until you go after it in earnestness. They have done it in the United States. I have no quarrel with them. They have set a splendid example. Let us out-race them and get there first. Now is the accepted time. We are of the Empire; let us act imperially.