

(February 1)

Canada and the West Indies.

BY PRESIDENT R. A. FALCONER.*

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on the subject, "The Relations of Canada and the West Indies," President R. A. Falconer, of the University of Toronto, said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—The report of the Royal Commission which was appointed by His Majesty the King some two years ago, to inquire into the relations between Canada and the West Indies, was issued last September, and those of you who have seen that report and have had the opportunity of studying it, will realize that it is one of the most valuable contributions which has been made to this question. The Commission itself was chosen with great care, and its personnel almost was a guarantee of good results. The Chairman was Lord Balfour of Burleigh, and other members were Sir John Dickson Poynder, now Lord Islington, the present Governor of New Zealand, and Sir Daniel Morris, long and intimately associated with the West Indies. The two Canadian Commissioners were Hon. Mr. Fielding and Hon. Mr. Paterson.

That Report goes fully into the relationship of the various Islands to one another, to Great Britain, to the United States, and to Canada. It has given great attention to the interest of Great Britain in the West Indies. No member of the British Empire, at least none of those interested in the history of the British Empire, can be insensible to the claims of the West Indies upon this Empire. Not only are the Islands of great natural beauty, but that beauty has been invested with romance by deeds of heroism, battles and other events of Imperial history which have been brought to a conclusion in these Islands and in the Caribbean Sea. There have also been worked out in these Islands social conditions: slavery came to an end early in the West Indies, and Britain adopted a

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good way of handling it which shows in strong contrast to that followed on this continent by the United States. As a result of the treatment by Britain and those who have developed the West Indies, there has always been a very strong tie of loyalty between these Islands and the old land. At times the people of these Islands have become restive at what seemed to them the indifference of the mother country to their interests, but that restiveness never reached anything approaching an active outbreak. Britain's real interest was shown in a tangible way more than once. More than one million pounds sterling have been paid out of the Imperial exchequer to relieve distress in the Islands occasioned by trade conditions or physical disasters. That leaves out of account the large subsidy to the steamship company carrying mails between Great Britain and the Islands.

By tradition, then, and inheritance, if I may so say, the West Indies are very powerfully related to the mother country, but by geography and physical and economic conditions more to this country. If you will look for a moment at the geography of the Islands, you will see that their relation to the United States is somewhat closer than to Canada. From New York to Jamaica is a voyage of four or five days, and to St. Thomas perhaps six or seven days; then you work your way down among the Islands. From Canada it requires perhaps two days longer, and then you have the difference of travel from the ports to the interior. Therefore, in order that the West Indies may be brought into closer connection with Canada than with the United States, towards which I see a tendency to turn, it will be necessary for Canada to offer special advantage.

A new factor was introduced when the United States embarked upon a foreign policy. By taking over Porto Rico and the Philippines they changed the aspect of affairs, and the relations with Cuba added to the change. However, Canada took a forward step a few years ago. In 1898 the preference was extended to these Islands, and the sugar trade was directed to our shores.

Let me ask you for a few moments to consider the history of the sugar trade of the West Indies, because that is one of the largest elements in their trade and in their life. When slavery was abolished, the problem of labor faced the sugar planters. They could not command the labor once at their disposal. Ruin seemed to stare them in the face. Those Islands whose people sat down and would not adjust themselves to the new conditions suffered. Among the most seriously affected

was Jamaica. Fortunately there were some outstanding men in Trinidad and British Guiana, as, for example, at Trinidad the Hon. Charles Warner, and through their efforts there was instituted an immigration system, whereby every year a large number of coolies were brought from India. These were to work for a term of years, quarters were provided for them. The result was a supply of labor, and the sugar trade was developed immensely. British Guiana went through the same experience. In those days it was the muscovado sugar that was manufactured, for which there was a large demand, in England particularly. I can remember as a boy that that sugar would bring 27 shillings a hundred, black muscovado, in the years of 1877, '78 and '79.

The islands were prosperous so far as sugar went, and that was the main industry. Gradually, however, a change came about: Germany began to grow beet-root; the sugar trade failed, and as it failed, disaster fell upon Island after Island. Then arose a clamor against bounty-fed sugar. Some of the planters adjusted themselves to the new conditions, and adopted a new method of manufacture, using the vacuum-pan. These obtained better prices for their sugar, and had better returns. Some estates were brought together, and large establishments took the place of small divided ones, thus securing economy in expenditure and management, and on the whole they could make ends meet. However, some of the smaller Islands got worse and worse.

Instead, however, of relying entirely upon sugar, some of the Islands went into other products. Jamaica turned to fruit, I understand largely owing to American influence. Montserrat went into the growing of limes and produced them in great abundance. Some Islands grew cotton. St. Vincent took up the production of arrowroot. But the great industry, second to sugar, is that of cacao, from which cocoa is made. Grenada, for instance, is almost entirely devoted to cacao. In Trinidad it is of far greater importance than sugar. Rubber also has now been introduced into some places.

Now, having run over that, let me show how Canada stepped into the breach at the crucial period and rendered a great service not only to the West Indies, but to the Empire as well. In 1897, 11,000 tons of sugar were exported from the West Indies to Canada. Then came in 1898 the preference, which in 1900 was increased to 33 per cent. In 1903 there was held the Convention at Brussels for the removal of the sugar bounties that remained. About the same time there came the surtax on German goods coming to Canada,

and also the large development of the consumption of sugar in Canada owing to immigration. Canada thus opened a market to the West Indies, the like of which they never had before, with the consequence that the exportation of sugar to Canada jumped from 11,000 tons in 1897 to 133,000 tons of sugar in 1908. That is, out of 185,000 tons of sugar that we in this Dominion can consume, over 70 per cent. came from these West Indies. And this is a rapidly growing market, because our home consumption will increase as time goes on. That leads me to emphasize the fact that Canada, as she realizes the value of these Islands, is benefiting herself, and benefiting the Empire as well.

Let me turn now to ask you to consider the Islands themselves as being a part of the Empire with which we should cultivate more intimate relations, which are very much worth cultivating. Consider first their size. Jamaica has about 4,500 square miles, British Guiana about 90,000 square miles; all the British possessions about 100,000 square miles; about half the land area of Ontario, or the same area as New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba,—no insignificant territory itself. Part of this has been well developed, and part is not developed,—merely the fringe of British Guiana has been cultivated, and there are great stretches reaching back into the interior. In these Islands and on the mainland there is a population of about 2,000,000, most of them of course blacks, and most of the agricultural and laboring classes. There are perhaps 260,000 East Indians, Hindus chiefly, with a large number of whites in official positions, or leaders in commercial as well as public life. But I want to make this remark, Mr. Chairman, that the black population of the West Indies is not to be estimated in the terms of the colored population of the United States; they are a different class of people, they have been treated differently from the beginning, and they are economically, socially and educationally of a different class, and their prospects I believe are far better. They are people whose economic worth is increasing day by day, whose purchasing power is growing fast.

Let me ask you to bear in mind that the actual trade of these people to-day is no insignificant matter. Their export trade in 1898 was over £7,000,000 or \$35,000,000, and their import trade £9,100,000, or about \$46,000,000—no insignificant trade. It is, however, worth our while considering the proportion of that trade that comes to Canada. Of their exports, 42 per cent. went to Great Britain, 24 per cent. to Canada, almost entirely sugar, and 23 per cent. to the United

States. Of their imports, 43 per cent. came from Great Britain, 34 per cent. from the United States, and 7 per cent. is put down as from Canada. But I believe that many of their imports came from Canada through the United States; so that the amount of trade originating in Canada was probably much greater than 7 per cent. But considering the amount of their total trade, the amount we get is lamentably small. I believe we can remedy this, because we want their goods, and we have the things that they need. Take fish, for instance, we ought to supply them; flour—it would be to their advantage that they should get it from us; lumber—where else can they get it?—boots and shoes—where else could they get them better made?—machinery, condensed milk, oats, and a few other things,—these are the very things we can provide them with, and they can give us what we require.

Secondly, you cannot estimate the value of the West Indies to Canada and the Empire by what they are to-day. They stand at the gateway of the greatest undeveloped country in the world, South America. From Trinidad you can see the mountains of South America. The current from the Orinoco always flows north through the gulf of Paria into the Caribbean, some nine miles from Port of Spain. British Guiana itself is in South America, with 90,000 square miles of almost virgin soil. It is said that diamonds have been discovered there, and we know that there is gold very possibly in deposits of great value. You have the mighty, broad Orinoco passing through Venezuela. I myself have seen, three hundred miles from the mouth, boats that came there from the heart of the Amazon country, one of the vastest stretches of country in the world opened up by a magnificent network of rivers. That trade has to be transhipped, and these Islands are the native ports for transhipment. You can't afford then to neglect places of such strategic importance. When you think of what the Americans are doing in cutting the Panama Canal, and of what it will mean when that is opened, the Islands assume great potential importance. They may be made the points for transhipment. Trade may bifurcate, some going north and some south. I am told that it is the intention of the British Admiralty to fortify Trinidad, partly as a naval base, and partly because petroleum has been discovered which can be used for fuel for their engines. The cutting of the Panama canal will put the Islands entirely in a different position from what they hold to-day.

If then I have made my point, both because of their past, their present value, and their future possibilities, these Islands

are worth retaining. The next thing to consider is, what should be our action in the premises? How can we reach out to help them? Canada must take the first step, has already taken it. But we must approach them not in the sense of bargaining, offering a preference to receive in turn some equivalent in dollars and cents. We must go to them with a large and generous attitude, willing to share what we have, not because we shall get so much back, but because as the strongest member of this Empire we may serve another important member of our Empire.

One of the essentials is the development of a satisfactory system of communication between Canada and these Islands. The people have known what good steamships are, for the Royal Mail line has for years sailed to them from Southampton. If Canada is to get the respect of the West Indies, she must be represented by a steamship line worthy of the Dominion. That line must be so developed as to serve the West Indies, as well as ourselves, in the best way possible. If you will read the report issued you will observe suggestions as to how this should be done. We have to subsidize that line. What next? The line should be used. I do not mean by this that the holds should be filled with cargoes, but that the cabins and state-rooms of those steamers should be filled by travellers. The strongest links of Empire, and of trade also I believe, though I am not a business man, are personal links. As you get to know one another, and study the conditions, you develop business relationships.

When a very large number of Canadians have seen these Islands for themselves, a much larger traffic between north and south will follow. The merchants and producers of this country must recognize that they have to study conditions, and not simply impose their trade upon the people of other places, as so often Canadians do. The Canadian in his superiority says: "Here are my goods, you may take them or leave them." The American, or the man from the United States—we must give him that name, I don't know what else to give him—sends an agent to study the conditions. The Canadian says: "This flour is what I have to offer." But the West Indian says: "I don't want that kind, I want this brand, this mixture." The Canadian replies: "I don't deal in that inferior kind, you may take this or none." But the American says: "Very well," and he sends to the Northwest and brings in the flour. Now that illustrates a great deal of the trade of Canada with the West Indies, and you don't need to ask why it is so small. We need to wake up. Our attention has all

been given to the West; that has been important, but within two thousand miles of our gates are these Islands and South America, and you can't afford to neglect them simply because the West looms so large.

There is one other way in which we should show our interest: socially and educationally. People are brought together not merely by trade; social interests are immensely important. One of the churches of this Dominion has for over a generation conducted a very large and important mission in Trinidad and British Guiana, and thousands of children are in the schools. That has been entirely a work of benevolence. Trinidad and Demerara are reaping the benefits. In addition, these Islands have their own school systems, which are good. In Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, and British Guiana, boys can prepare to enter Oxford or Cambridge University almost on a level with those from any school in Britain itself. You will find in the Inns of London young lawyers from these Islands, colored, who can hold their own with any, and in London hospitals and those of Edinburgh are young men from the West Indies, who acquit themselves creditably. We in Canada can surely do something for these people. We should say to them: "We, as a member of the Empire, can help you educationally; we hope you will send some of your boys to us." That would be a good thing, and any interest we can show them will redound to the interest of Canada, of Ontario, and even of Toronto.

How can we help them politically? Here I come to very delicate ground. Is it possible, or how is it possible to bring them closer constitutionally and politically? Many people speak as if at Ottawa the Islands should have representation. I cannot think that is at all feasible, even in the distant future; it seems to me impossible to have a relationship of that kind. But let us look at the situation at present, and we may find some suggestion. At present the Islands are over-governed: each small Island has its Governor from Britain, several of these Governors being paid a salary of £5,000 sterling. Then there are officials in charge of the public works, the colonial secretary, and staff, all well and even highly paid. The civil list makes such a heavy demand on the revenue that it is almost impossible for them to reciprocate as Canada would expect in the way of lowering of duties. This is a serious economic problem: the very expense of carrying on government among the Islands debars further intercourse in trade.

And yet is there not a way out? Attempts have been made at confederation several times, but they have come to nothing.

However, a Department has been formed by the Imperial Government in Agriculture, and Sir Daniel Morris was placed at the head, in control of the agricultural interests of all the Islands. That was a splendid step. If it were possible to develop the idea and have a Minister of Public Works, that would lessen the expense. And if it were possible further to have a system not of full Governorships, but of Lieutenant-Governorships, with smaller salaries, under a Governor-in-Chief, there might be a further reduction in expense.

I am going to make a suggestion; there may be nothing in it—one is almost thinking aloud as one goes on; but it has occurred to me more than once, that if there were a system of Lieutenant-Governorships, and intercolonial offices, as now for example the Department of Agriculture, it might be brought under our Governor-General,—if we in Canada would allow our Governor-General to be also Governor-General of the West Indies, provided they also were willing. Our Governor-General might have associated with him at Ottawa a small Council of men acquainted with the West Indies. There would thus be a co-ordinating government of the Islands directed from Ottawa. This Council would be under the direction of our Governor-General, and not at all under the Canadian Parliament. Thereby, however, the relations of the West Indies to Canada would be emphasized as they are not to-day. That is a mere suggestion, however, and it may be taken for what is worth.

But at least we should aim at throwing out threads towards these Islands, making them stronger and stronger, year after year, so that instead of being drawn away by strong ties as Jamaica is to the United States, they may be drawn with ties to this country. If this connection is maintained, and their interest in us cultivated, then in the future it will be discovered that they will be by no means an insignificant part in our Empire.