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**THE SITUATION.**

ABLY REVIEWED BY SENATOR FERGUSON.

Overwhelming Arrangement of the Government.

(From Hansard.)

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON.—In proposing to offer a few observations on the speech with which we have been favored by His Excellency the Governor General at the opening of this session, I cannot do so without expressing the deep regret which I feel at the absence from his seat of the hon. gentleman who led the house in such a creditable manner for the two last sessions. I believe I am expressing the views of every hon. gentleman in this House that Sir Oliver Mowat during the time he was in this House as its leader acted in a manner that recommended itself to every hon. gentleman here, and that when he was removed from this House to occupy another sphere of usefulness, he carried with him the good wishes of every member of this body; and I may say further that I am not at all sorry when this change was made, and we lost the services of so very able a leader as Sir Oliver Mowat that in making new arrangements the government saw fit to still continue the important portfolio of Justice in this branch of parliament; and I am pleased to find that in filling that office they have selected a gentleman who occupies so good a position in this House and in the country as the hon. gentleman who now leads the government in this House. While I say so, I must express my regret that the government did not avail themselves of this opportunity of carrying out the pledge which they made of reducing the cabinet ministers, so that they would have had the credit of fulfilling one pledge which they made to the people of this country. But there is also a matter that we may note in connection with the vacancies that have occurred in this House, in which the government have fallen short of their duty in another important respect. We have noticed that in addition to Sir Oliver Mowat being removed from us, two other chairs in this House had become vacant by the promotion of their occupants to Lieutenant Governorships. While I have not a word to say against the appointment of these gentlemen yet we must bear in mind that a very strong plank of the platform of the party that is now in power was that members of Parliament should not have such positions dangled before them because it would tend to effect their independence; and one of the members of this government went so far as to introduce a bill in the House of Commons which would remedy what he called a very great evil, and which provided that no member of parliament could accept any office of emolument under the crown until twelve months had elapsed from the time that he vacated his seat in parliament before he accepted the office. The gentleman to whom I refer is no less a personage than the Postmaster General in the present administration. I find these are the remarks that he made an introducing his bill:

"If the government of the day can dangle public offices before their followers and induce a few, and produce perhaps an increasing number, to aspire to those positions, they become mere parasites upon the administration. Not only do they do that, sir, but moving among their colleagues they become as were corrupting agencies amongst their own ranks, and so a small percentage of persons in that position are likely to impair the independence of the whole body. So it has become now, in my opinion, a very crying abuse, and parliament is cast down from its high position, and not only is the will of the people interfered with but all through the country the electorate noticing these things are coming to the conclusion that the highest aim of a man can have in seeking public life is that he may, through parliament, find his way into a comfortable position for life."

I do not endorse these views of the Postmaster General, by any means. I do not say that they are my views; but they are the views of a prominent member of the government and views that were coincided in by other members of the government as well; therefore I wish to draw attention to the fact that, in this respect as well as many others, the government have departed entirely from their policy, the policy they proclaimed before the electors. Hon. gentlemen, in speaking in the interest of the government, especially my hon. friend the leader of the House, referred in glowing terms to the prosperity that exists in this country at the present moment. They did not go quite so far as to claim that that prosperity was altogether due to the actions of the present government since they came into power; it is only a coincidence, they say, but I would say to these hon. gentlemen that it is, perhaps, a little too soon to crow very much about the prosperity connected with their administration. It would be more prudent to wait till nearly the end of the term and then a better estimate can be made as to how much of the prosperity we have in the country can be traced to their legislation or administration. I would just remind these gentlemen that in 1878 when there party were going out of power, there was no such prosperity as this existing in

the country; according to their own statement the country was in a very deplorable condition. I dare say hon. gentlemen have not forgotten the remarks made by Sir Richard Cartwright on the occasion when he said:

"It is not often in the commercial history of any country that we are called upon to chronicle so great a reduction not merely in the total volume of our trade, but also in the revenue derived therefrom as we have seen in the last two or three years. \* \* \* Whereas a few years ago, with a population of 3,600,000 souls, we imported something like \$127,000,000 worth of goods, we found ourselves with a population of 4,000,000 importing a little over \$94,500,000 worth. In other words, the total imports have fallen off from an average of \$35.25 per head to something like \$23.50 per head. There has been an enormous shrinkage in the lumber trade from \$28,000,000 to \$13,000,000. There has been a great shrinkage in bank stock, and one of these institutions has gone altogether. The depression in real estate has been general and long prevailing, and entails an enormous loss. Our imports have fallen off because we have been so poor that we have not been buying much."

That was the state of things when these gentlemen and their friends gave up the reins of office in 1878. That is their own version of what the state of the country was at that time, and the glowing things they say now regarding the state of the country at the present time is rather a compliment to their predecessors, because the prosperity has come when the labors of the previous administration were beginning to bear fruit.

Hon. Mr. Mills—Fourteen years.

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON—I hope when my hon. friend has been in power even less than fourteen years he can point to the country going forward in a state of prosperity such as he says Canada enjoys at the present moment. The hon. gentleman had a peculiar manner of showing that the people's burden would be lessened in a few years, viz., by increase of population. It would be very much more assuring to the House and to the country if my hon. friend would tell us that the public burdens were to be lessened by a strict policy of economy and reduction of expenditure on the part of himself and his colleagues. I think that is what we have a right to expect from my hon. friend instead of this assurance that when there comes a very large population into this country the burden will be lessened because there will be more shoulders to bear it. It is quite true when the population is increased there will be more shoulders to bear the burdens, but if the policy of my hon. friend and his colleagues, as shown in the last two budgets brought down in this parliament is continued, they will at least in the matter of public expenditure, keep pace with any increase that may occur in the population of the country. My hon. friend the leader of the House expressed himself to the effect that our position now was a very happy one from the fact that Canada had secured the friendship of England through the efforts of the Laurier administration. In reply to that I would say we have had the friendship of England for a long time in quite as great a degree as at the present moment. It is not a new thing for Canada to enjoy the friendship of the mother country; but my hon. friend is wrong in his views as to our receiving the friendship of England now for almost the first time—one would infer that was the state of things to which he was referring—I have, in answer to him, to say that in my humble opinion the conduct of the government of which he is a member, and particularly the leader of the administration, has been to minimize the advantages we had a right to expect to arise from that friendship for Canada. We have had a great desire in Canada for a number of years to obtain a preference for the products of Canada in the British market. On that question a great deal of

discussion has taken place, and there was a consensus of opinion in Canada that that was a very important question were fraught with great benefit to us. I thought there was but one opinion in Canada on that subject. Not very long ago the only doubt we had was whether we could impress or had impressed the public mind of Great Britain on that question to such a degree as would lead them to look at the subject as we were looking at it. But very fortunately within the last few years, an important change has taken place in the minds of many of the public men of England on the commercial relations of Great Britain towards the colonies. The first really notable instance of that change of sentiment on that question is found in the very remarkable speech delivered before the Canada Club in England by the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in March, 1893. On that occasion—I have the speech in my hands—The Right Hon. gentleman indicated that, speaking for himself, as he said, and it was found later on that he spoke for many prominent men as well as himself—he declared himself willing to depart from the strict principles of free trade in order to meet any desire that may exist in the colonies to establish some closer relations between the Mother Country and the Colonies. As far as I could hear him the hon. Secretary of State purported to read from that speech and claimed that the Hon. Mr. Chamberlain had on that occasion expressed himself very strongly against any such proposition as commercial union or anything of that kind with the colonies. My hon. friend must either have failed to read the speech attentively or he read it with a view of extracting from its contents something that would serve the purposes of his friends.

Hon. Mr. Scott—The speech from which I have read was delivered some months afterwards at the conference of the boards of trade.

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON—I will come to that speech. The remarks I have applied to the speech before the Canada Club will have to apply my hon. friend's comments and extracts from the other speech delivered before the congress of boards of trade of the different parts of the empire a few months later. In the speech before the Canada Club, the Right Hon. Mr. Chamberlain discussed this question, and while he said then, as he did in other speeches, that an absolute federation of the empire politically and commercially was not practicable at the present time, he expressed the strong conviction that the day was coming and not far off, when it would be regarded as practicable; and he went on to comment on the speech made by Mr. McNeill in the House of Commons, and the motion made by that hon. gentleman, which attracted a good deal of attention at the time; and Mr. Chamberlain showed that the proposal would not meet the views of the British people. It is true that he went that far; but what is the conclusion he arrived at after having reached this point? Was it that the whole question was one not open for discussion? Nothing of the kind. It was that the colonies should better their offer, and he went on to speak of a despatch which has been referred to also by the Secretary of State, that of the Marquis of Ripon, of the previous year, 1895, concerning resolutions passed, in this very room by the great colonial conference of 1894 with reference to improving trade relations within the empire, and he, Mr. Chamberlain, pointed out that even Lord Ripon's despatch was not an absolute negation of the whole question of improving the trade relations of the empire or even of a Zollverein of the empire. And he laid down four propositions: the first was that there is a universal desire for closer union. The second was that such union can be best approached on the commercial side. He said we should reach the question on the line of the least resistance. The third proposition was that proposals already made by the colonies were not sufficiently favorable to Great Britain, and the fourth proposition was that a true Zollverein is a proper subject for discussion. He went even further and he pointed to the fact that it need not be on a strictly free trade basis; that it could be on a basis of a revenue tariff, and he pointed to the fact that Great Britain, although strongly free trade in her policy, imposed heavy duties on articles which he enumerated for revenue purposes, and the different colonies might be allowed to select articles on which they could collect duty for such purposes. He furnished ground on which such an arrangement could be made. He went further and said that although he was a disciple of Cobden he had not such a pedantic admiration for the doctrines of free trade, that he was not willing to depart from such principles for a substantial consideration. He wanted a quid pro quo, and he said that was what Cobden did when he negotiated the French treaty and added "surely we are not expected to be greater free traders than Cobden himself." But my hon. friend says that he referred to another speech, made by Mr. Chamberlain when addressing the Chambers of Commerce for the empire some three months later than his speech before the Canada Club, and it was from this speech my hon. friend claimed he found such comfort in addressing the House as furnishing an absolute negative of the doctrine of preferential trade. I have the speech in my hands and I shall read a few extracts from it. He said:

"The establishment of commercial union throughout the empire would not only be the first step, but it would be the main step, the decisive step towards the realization of the most inspiring idea that has entered the minds of British statesmen."

That does not look like a negation of the whole principle and he spoke of several propositions before the public on this question. He said:

"The first of them is a proposal that the colonies should abandon their own fiscal system and should accept ours; that they should carry out fully the doctrines of

free trade; that they should open their markets not only to us but to all the world; and that they should abandon entirely the protective duties upon which now they rest very largely for the revenues which they collect. This is a proposal which is supported by the Cobden Club by extreme—I suppose I ought to say orthodox—free traders, and there is, no doubt, a great deal to be said for it. I do not deny that possibly it might be, for all concerned, the best solution. (Hear, here.) At the same time, I am bound to point out that would not bring about commercial union in the sense in which we have generally understood the word, because that it would be in the direction of cosmopolitan union, but it would offer no peculiar advantage to the trade of the empire as such. But, to my mind, a much more fatal objection is the fact that, speaking generally, the colonies will not adopt this proposal. We must consider it, therefore, as counsel of perfection, and if we are to wait until the colonies generally are converted to our views in regard to the advantage of free trade, let us recognize the fact that in that case we must postpone the hope of a commercial union to the Greek Kalends. (Laughter and hear, hear.) Gentlemen, free trade in this country has been developed, no doubt, to the great advantage of this country for the period of half a century (hear, hear) but, in spite of that, it has made no converts. We do not find, and again I am speaking generally because I know there are exceptions, we do not find that there is any considerable approach to our system on the part of the colonies, and there is no approach at all to it on the part of foreign countries. (Hear.)

It is very remarkable that my hon. friend the Secretary of State, with this speech in his hand did not see any of this I am reading from the speech just as it comes before me. It is very remarkable that my hon. friend's eye never happened to strike this part of the speech of the Hon. Mr. Chamberlain.

Hon. Mr. Scott—I read the specific statement, not the sentimental parts.

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON—He is now dealing with specific propositions. There is no sentiment at all in what I have read. He had discussed one proposition which came from the orthodox school of free traders in England, and he dismissed it. He now comes to speak of another proposition, and that is the one which the colonies are making. He says:

I pass on then to the second proposal which has been laid before a similar congress to this, which found expression at the great congress held at Ottawa a year or so ago. This is a proposal which has been advocated with great force and eloquence by colonists and is the very reverse—in spirit at any rate—to the proposal which I have just been considering. For whereas the first requires that the colonies should abandon their system in favor of ours, this proposal requires that we should abandon our system in favor of theirs; and it is in effect that, while the colonies should be left absolutely free to impose what protective duties they please both upon foreign countries and upon British commerce, that they should be required to make a small discrimination in favour of British trade in return for which we are expected to change our whole system and to impose duties on food and on raw material (hear, hear.) Well, gentlemen, I express again my own opinion when I say there is not the slightest chance that within any reasonable time this country, or the parliament of this country, would adopt so one-sided an agreement. The foreign trade of this country is so large and the foreign trade of the colony is comparatively so small that the small preference given to us would make so small a difference would be so small a benefit to the total volume of our trade that I do not believe the working classes of this country would consent to make a revolutionary change for what they would think to be an infinitesimal gain. (hear, hear.) Well then, gentlemen, you will see that so far we have only arrived at a dead lock. We have a proposal by British free traders which is rejected by the colony and we have a proposal by colonial protectionists which is rejected by Great Britain. We have, therefore if we are to make any progress at all;

My hon. friend the leader of the House says hear, hear, when he hears the statement that the British proposal is rejected by the colonial protectionists; surely my hon. friend will not say that Canada is now represented by the protectionist, but my hon. friend must consent to put himself in the position of colonial protectionist since he applauds the rejection of the British proposal. Mr. Chamberlain goes on to say:

"We have, therefore, if we are to make any progress at all, to seek a third course, a course in which there shall be give and take on both sides in which neither will pedantically adhere to preconceived conclusions, in which the good of the whole shall subordinate the separate interests of the parts. I admit that, if I understand it correctly, I find the germ of such a proposal in a resolution which is to be submitted to you on behalf of the Toronto Board of Trade."

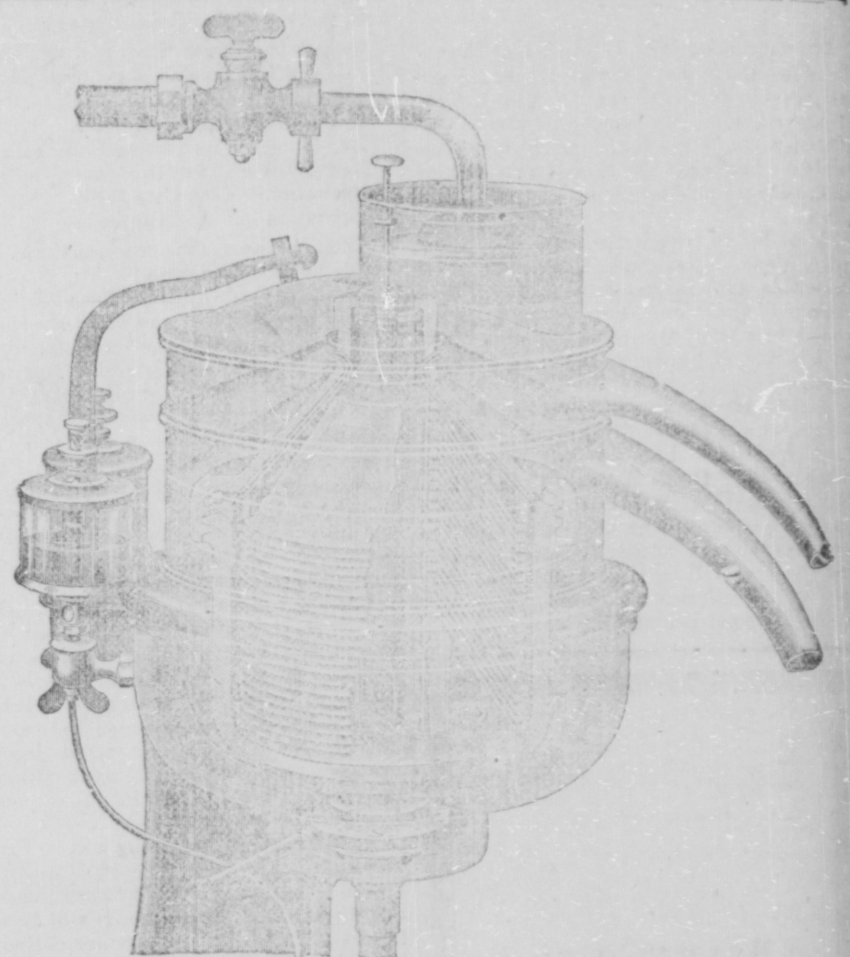
Now, what was the resolution of the Toronto Board of Trade? We will thus get at what was meant by Mr. Chamberlain when he found what he thought was the germ of a practical proposition on which this great problem could be worked out. Here is what the Toronto Board of Trade says:

Resolved that in the opinion of this conference the advantage to be obtained by a closer union between the various parts of the British empire are so great as to justify an arrangement as nearly as possible of the nature of a Zollverein based upon the principles of the freest exchange of commodities within the empire, consistent with the tariff requirements incidental to the maintenance of the local government of each kingdom, dominion, province or

colony, now forming part of the British family of nations."  
We have the distinct declaration of Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, that he saw the germ of a practical proposition in this resolution of the Toronto Board of Trade. Hon. Mr. Scott—What became of the resolution? It had so poor a reception that it had to be withdrawn.

(To be Continued.)

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