

Class B.

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Sapere aude

Show How Far the Foodstuffs of the British Empire
can be supplied within the Empire

The British Empire as we know it today has grown up throughout the centuries more by the results of a series of European Wars than by any planned organisation. The Dominions have been allowed to carry out fiscal policies of their own without any relation to the economic position of the Mother Country or to each other. Their aim was naturally to become self-sufficient, and to do this they adopted policies of a protective character. Although we do not desire stronger political union, the whole nation is really interdependent. It lives by its unity and with an increase of Imperial Trade, we can ^{will} improve our unity. As England is prosperous and content, so ~~are~~ the Dominions ~~be~~prosperous and content, and with Imperial Trade, we spend within the Empire to our own credit.

The varied soils and climates with which our Empire is blessed are such that as there is no restriction on any article of production, what will be the case a hundred years hence? It seems certain that the British Empire, with its titanic resources, will be in a position to supply a large portion of the world with food, if with nothing else. That supply also will be needed by some European countries whose populations are growing beyond the capacity of the land they occupy to produce what they require. We need only to look at the map to realise that this is no exaggeration. The time will probably come when the world cannot supply its needs outside the British Empire.

In cereals we are well off. Already we have a surplus of nearly sixty-six million hundredweights of wheat, and our resources are not yet worked to the full. In oats, we have a surplus of some two million

hundredweights, while we are also self-sufficient in barley. Despite the ~~so~~ immense part played by rice in the Indian diet, we have an Empire surplus of forty-two and a half million hundredweights. Perhaps rice will take a larger part in our own diet. In maize, however, we have at present a deficiency of twenty-six million hundredweights. The climate of the United Kingdom prevents its production, but there is no physical reason why our requirements cannot be met within the Empire. Better methods of cultivation and a more general use of scientific implements would increase the production in South Africa, our chief source of supply. In this way our production could be almost doubled. It is used chiefly as an animal foodstuff, but comes into our diet as maize and cornflower. It is the main support of the pig industry in England.

At present we are self-sufficient in no class of meat. We have a deficit of some eight million hundredweights in beef, and production of this food within the Empire is almost totally impossible. We can supply a large amount, but with an increasing population, we cannot become self-sufficient. But to make up for this, our trade balance with our chief supplier, the Argentine, is moderately favourable and there are possibilities of our making a large market for our surplus manufactures here. In mutton we also fall short but not by so much, for we supply two thirds of our requirements. Taking into consideration the rapidity of breeding and maturing, there is no reason why Britain in a few years should not secure the whole of her needs in mutton & lamb from the Empire. In bacon and ham, however, we supply but one fifth of our requirements. "The Empire farmer at home and overseas can if he will secure by far the greater part of the British market, but if he desires to do so he must make his production at least as efficient as that of his most competent foreign rival and must be true at

least equal attention to organisation." With the rapidity of development and pigs being such prolific breeders, the whole of Britain's requirements should be able to be supplied within the Empire in a few years, but, as I have said before, ^{our} methods must be more scientific and this trade better organised. In fish we could easily, with a little careful organisation, supply our needs, as New Zealand, British Columbia and Newfoundland are capable of a large production in this line. But before New Zealand's supply can be transported to London, better methods of cold storage must be instituted.

Concerning Dairy Produce the position is favourable though difficult. In butter alone there is an Empire shortage of two and a half million hundredweights, even if all the Overseas Empire surplus was sent to Britain, which is not a feasible idea. "That the dominions, with improved organisation, could supply Britain with all her needs in butter is beyond doubt, but it is difficult to estimate what period must elapse, under the most favourable circumstances before that state of affairs could be brought about." The deficit on cheese is small, not being one twentieth of our needs and can be easily remedied. Regarding eggs, however, the position is very questionable. Our dependence on foreign countries with unfavourable trade balances is very marked. Our requirements at present are procurable within the Empire but an increase in the standard of living in Great Britain would increase the demand for eggs, for a very great portion of the population of England is too poor to buy eggs, however much they desire them, and Imperial trade, if it brings the result expected from it, prosperity, would mean that these people would have the money to buy eggs. The position, therefore, is a very grave one.

The prospect in fruit is very promising, but under the most favourable circumstances it would take

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several years to meet the requirements as orchards would take from five to six years to come into bearing. But there is scope for improvement. In dried fruit Australia and South Africa could easily make up the deficit. But for apples, a peculiar situation arises. The difference in season between American and Dominion supplies ~~makes~~ has little effect on competition. The Dominions could not ~~fill~~ the American season but they could lower the deficit to one third the present figure, nearly four million hundredweight.

The Empire supplies nearly half its requirements in sugar, and there is no climatic reason why the remainder could not be produced in the various British countries where beet or cane sugar can be so successfully cultivated with a little encouragement the industry could be lived up. Cane sugar is produced largely in the British West Indies and exported from Jamaica in large quantities while South Africa and Australia are almost self-supplying, and in a few years should have a considerable export. Cane sugar is also the chief product of Fiji, but from here it is taken to Auckland and refined for New Zealand use. If the Dominion of New Zealand can be supplied by a small island like Fiji, why cannot the rest of the Empire be supplied by the other waste sugar-producing colonies. Beet is also used largely in the preparation of sugar, and we should soon be self-sufficient.

We can already supply our own tea, as we have an Empire surplus of nearly half a million hundredweight. As our population grows, certainly the demand for tea will increase but why cannot our production increase also? Our plantations, especially in Ceylon are not producing their full yield. But recently two events have contributed to make the market easier for foreign teas. One is the refusal of the Merchandise Marks Act Committee to grant a marking order which would enable the purchaser in Britain to distinguish Empire teas from foreign. The other is the removal in the 1929 Budget of all duty on tea which, of course,

Tea is our
main
import
from
Ceylon

automatically destroyed the preference Empire teas formerly enjoyed. The East and Central African companies have done all in their power to introduce tea production into Africa, and in recent years Africa has exported an ever increasing amount of tea. In coffee and cocoa we can supply our needs with comparative ease.

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These surveys of the Empire as a producer of foodstuffs reveal the fact that in the respect of many commodities the Empire is "not merely self-supporting, but on balance is a large exporter to the rest of the world." Where the Empire is practically self-sustaining it should be easy to direct the sources of supply into Empire channels and take full advantage of the possession of food. To produce these results may mean alterations in or the creation of new customs duties; it need not necessarily mean an increase in price to the consumer. The effect of a tariff depends economically on the results of untaxed to taxed supply, and where the former is sufficiently large, experience has shown that any rise in the cost is negligible. The stimulation of inter-Imperial trade in a foodstuff like meat is of a nature merely requiring scientific research. Whereas in lamb, mutton and bacon the Empire could within a relatively short time be made self-supporting, beef in present circumstances presents greater difficulties, owing to the great distance from its market of the most potential supply, namely Australia, and the technical difficulties of refrigeration, in which ^{connection} ~~connection~~ the chief competitor is the Argentine. Such difficulties, being of a scientific and technical nature, will probably be overcome by sufficient application of research methods. The best way of stimulating such a course is obviously one that requires expert and detailed investigation.

But it is impossible to do everything at once. There are budget difficulties to be overcome. This is illustrated by the words of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister of Canada, to the Imperial conference in 1907. "Though I hold as the ideal policy a policy of Free Trade within the Empire, even

Sir Wilfrid Laurier

Dr. Wilfrid Laurier

if at this moment the British Government were to tell us 'Yes, we are prepared to give you a preference, that is to say Free Trade all over the Empire' for my part I should have to say for Canada that we are not prepared to do that because we must insist upon our system of customs duties in order to raise our revenue."

Dr. C. Brondone

"Disregarding jingoism, it seems quite natural that in so far as trade begets prosperity, we should wish to trade, to mutual advantage, among those with whom we have so many points in common. Such an attitude does not betoken any ill-will towards other countries, on the contrary it should be to the advantage of the world at large if the latent resources of the British Empire were developed. We have a great Imperial heritage to serve."

Mr. James Long

Writing in the "People's Year Book", Mr. James Long writes, "What we cannot produce, we can deal with more capably than any other nation. As our population increases and our land area diminishes, so will our colleagues as children of Greater Britain increase, and supply all our deficiencies."

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We are still dependent on the old saying, which brought England to victory under Alfred the Great - "United we stand, Divided we fall." To conclude, I shall quote the words of Lord Melchett. "There is plenty of room within the great family. There is plenty to share out now, and there will be a great deal more in the future. If such a policy is not seriously attempted and carried to success, while sentiment may still bind together parts of the Empire, and possibly will for a considerable time, the foundations will lack that stability and certainty which are essential and necessary to the greatest and most beneficent of Empire creations in history." There are some who hold to the view that the Empire, being a spiritual unity standing for great ideals in life, should not look to material bonds for its safety. But there is no antagonism between sentimental and economic ties of unity. They are complementary to each other. But sentimentalism is not enough, idealism is not enough, only in economic unity lies our safety.

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