Show how far the Foodstuffs of the British Empire can be supplied within the Empire.

The British Empire as we knew 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. Theream was naturally to become self-sufficient, and as this they adopted policies of a protective character. Although we do not desire stronger political union, the whole nations are really interdependent. It lives by its unity and with an increase of Imperial Trade, we can improve our unity. As England is prosperous and content, so are the Dominions, prosperous and content. And with Imperial Trade, we spend within the Empire to our own extent.

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 fertile 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-five 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 enormous 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 comflower. 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 hundredweight 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 suppliers, 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 or 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 meat better 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, the methods must be more scientific
and the trade better organised. In which, 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
domains 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
dozen 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. As 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
results 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
several years to meet the requirements as orchards would
take from five to ten years to come into bearing. But
there is scope for improvement. In areas of 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
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
would not be produced in the various British colonies where
but a cane sugar can be so successfully cultivated with a
little encouragement. The industry could be turned up.
Some 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. Some sugar is also the
chief product of New Zealand, but grown here it is taken to Auckland
and refined for other Zealand use. If the Dominions and
New Zealand can be supplied by a small island like Fiji,
why cannot the rest of the Empire be supplied by the
other vast sugar-producing colonies. But so also used
largely in the preparation of sugar, and we should soon be
self-sufficing.

We can already supply our own tea, as we
have an Empire surplus of nearly half a million hundredweights.
As our population grows, certainly the demand for tea will
increase, but why cannot our production increase also? Our
plantations, especially in Assam, 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
merchants' trade 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,
automatically destroyed the preference Empire tea formerly enjoyed. The East and Central African companies have done all in their power to introduce tea production into Africa, and in recent years coffee has exported an ever-increasing amount of tea. In coffee and cocoa we can supply our needs with comparative ease.

These surveys of the Empire as a producer of foodstuffs reveal the fact that in the case 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 any increase in price to the consumer. The effect of a tariff depends economically on the result of increased tax revenue supply, and where the former is sufficiently large, experience has shown that any rise in the cost is negligible. The stimulation of intra-Imperial trade in a foodstuff like meat, so far as 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 the market of the most potential supply, namely Australia, and the technical difficulties of refrigeration, in which 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 resource 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. From an illustration by the words of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister of Canada, at the Imperial conference in 1907: "Though I hold the ideal policy, a policy of Free Trade within the Empire, even
At this moment the British Government were to tell us, 'Yes, we are prepared to give you a preference, so to say. The 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.'

"Disregarding jingoism, it seems quite natural that in so far as trade beheld 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 bode well to other countries, on the contrary it should be to the advantage of the world at large, of the latent resources of the British Empire were developed. We have a great Imperial heritage to serve."

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. Our population increases and our land area diminishes, so well our colleagues as children of Greater Britain increase and supply all our deficiencies."

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 Kellett. "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 beneficial Empire creations in history" There are some who hold 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 sentimentation is not enough. Idealism is not enough, only in economic unity lies our safety.
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