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THE FREE TRADE CONGRESS.

(From our London correspondent.)

There is apparently no limit to the list of topics which are thought suitable for discussion at an international congress. The theories of peace and the arts of peace have alike been subjected to sifting processes by the representatives of many nations, and common ground has been found for many substantial aspirations. But one would have thought that on the topic of free trade it would have been impossible to gather together an assembly at once responsible by weight of authority and representative of national interests and aims. There are naturally representative free traders in England just because England happens to be the one country where free trade has actually been a sixty years' experience. But how is it possible that nations which have leapt into prosperity by reason of protection and not of free trade should acknowledge the free trade missionaries who are assembled in London as voicing their true sentiments? Unless an international congress is really representative of large sections of opinion within the nations "represented," it is no more than an extraneous assembly of uninfluential people, and it is then labelled with a more high-sounding title than its character will bear. The present congress is not, therefore, "international" in the true sense of the word. The only official representatives have been the representatives of the British Government, the Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Trade. The congress is, in fact, no more than an effort on the part of the Cobden Club to galvanize into some show of life the decrepit system of free trade. A policy in the full swing of life and popularity, a policy acceptable to the bulk of the nation would scarcely stand in need of retrospective and academic discussions at a time when the Government which is pledged to it heart and soul is in power. If free trade were really free, if free imports into England were reciprocated by free imports into the United States or Germany, we imagine that no one would be found to talk of tariff reform. But that is not the case. Cobden's ideal of a free trade world has not been accepted by the nations whom England was to have led to the millennium. On the contrary, tariff walls have risen and show no signs of disappearing. England maintains herself not because, but in spite, of these grave barriers and in spite of her powerlessness to retaliate. England, it is true, has made vast advances since the time of Cobden, and she is still the first nation in the manufacture of imported raw materials into goods. But, it cannot be repeated too often, she is no longer the only nation. Her progress, great as it has been, has been outstripped by that of other nations, and where she had previously a monopoly she is now fighting against competition, and fighting at a disadvantage. Tariff reformers do not deprecate the fight, but they demand that the fight should be under fair conditions. With what sense of fairness or common-sense can foreign representatives from prosperous protectionist countries come to the Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Trade and applaud their retrospective arguments? With what sense of fitness, or what sense of humour, can Mr. Asquith and Mr. Churchill listen to the enthusiasm of M. Yves Guyot or Dr. Theodor Barth?

The members of the Free Trade Congress appear to have regarded their assembly as a fitting complement to the Peace Congress of the previous week. A great deal of hyperbolic language was used, especially by Mr. Churchill, whose rhetorical outbursts must be a source of constant dread to his colleagues, on the topic of peace—as though any mere commercial ambition, apart from political aims, from schemes of annexation, from intrigue and from national pride, had ever led to war. It was neither shown that peace followed necessarily from free trade nor war from protection. Still less was it shown where healthy commercial rivalries were inconsistent with some measure of retaliation. If a free trade congress professes to move in the same sort of atmosphere as a peace congress, if free trade can be reduced to nothing more than one of those pious aspirations which professedly await an ultimate rather than an immediate solution, we should not quarrel with the things that the members found it fitting to say. But obviously there can be no

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analogy between the idealism that seeks to break down the power of armaments and the idealism which seeks to establish in the face of the lessons of the past a system of trading which calls for sacrifices of present prosperity for the sake of future prosperity. Why should Germany or America do away with duties which, so far from interfering with their trade, have made it what it is? Why should England continue a policy which is out of date and which may be leading to disaster, simply for the sake of what may be false sentiment, when she has the power to fall into line with the other nations of the world? Statistics may prove that here and there England has enjoyed unprecedented periods of prosperity under free trade; but it is undeniable that, on a wide computation, her rivals have advanced and are advancing on her, and that the situation today has no possible analogy to the situation sixty years ago.

Before tariff reform can become a practical policy in England two things must be proved beyond question. First, it must be demonstrated that the Empire is able to supply the mother-country with every raw commodity she is in need of. Secondly, it must be demonstrated that the colonies are willing and able to accord the mother-country preferential treatment in respect of all manufactured imports. Prove these two points, and you render tariff reform an irresistible conclusion with all men who are alive to the possibilities, to the true meaning of British Imperialism. We think that it is possible to prove them; we believe that they are being proved day by day. The ideal of an Empire built on liberty and justice, obedient to a single Crown, showing a united front to the world, and seeking not war, for war could not be its object, but peace and the development of civilization—this ideal is too dear to the majority of the four hundred millions who compose the British population of the world to allow any passing revulsion of feeling or any temporary depression of prosperity to deflect them from their goal. When free trade is bolstered up with every artificial expedient into a semblance of reality, when aims which would retard, if not check, the growth of the Imperial ideal are held out as the only ones which would lead to the peace of the world and its highest development, then it is time that those who see in Imperialism, tariff reform, and international tranquillity an unbroken line of policy should raise their voices in protest. The sooner the Government meet the free trade issue squarely, the sooner will the country have an opportunity of judging whether, when all allowance has been made for the danger of too hasty action, opportunities of action are not being allowed to slip away.

BLIZZARDS AND STOCK-RAISING.

(From our New York correspondent.)

Statistics quite recently published show that in a single year in the United States 2,678,000 head of cattle have perished from cold and hunger. Every severe storm in the West causes thousands of deaths among the live stock, whether from the extreme cold or starvation.

GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

KING EDWARD LEAVES ENGLAND.

London, August 10.

King Edward left London this morning at the commencement of his Continental visit. His Majesty will have a meeting with the German Emperor at Cronberg, and with the Emperor Franz Josef at Ischl, proceeding later to Marienbad. He is accompanied by Sir Charles Hardinge, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria leave London tomorrow for Balmoral, where they will remain for ten or twelve days; after which they will leave for a visit to Copenhagen.

FURTHER DECREASE IN BRITISH TRADE.

(From our own correspondent.)

London, August 9.

The Board of Trade returns for July, which were issued yesterday afternoon, show that the imports and exports for the past month, compared with July, 1907, were as follows:—

	Imports	Exports
July, 1908	£46,773,035	£33,706,725
July, 1907	£52,207,774	£40,452,331
	Decrease £ 5,434,739	Dec. £ 6,746,606

Compared with the first seven months of last year, the imports and exports during the seven months ending July, 1908, show the following enormous decreases:—

Imports	£35,492,658
Exports	£23,070,680

One of the evening papers remarks that on analysing these totals it is found that the decrease in the imports was largely due to a falling-off in British purchases of raw materials. The diminution under this head amounted to £2,475,309, and was most marked in the following articles:—

Iron ore, scrap iron, and steel, and other metallic ores	£587,492
Oil seeds, nuts, oils, fats, and gums	£568,746
Cotton, wool and other textile materials	£471,427
Hides and undressed skins	£244,118

Only one raw material showed any improvement in the imports, namely "materials for paper making," which had increased by £21,992 compared with last year.

The importation of articles wholly or mainly manufactured showed a diminution of £1,578,791. The most notable of the decreases were:—Metals and manufactures thereof, £470,016; yarns and textile fabrics, £433,299.

Turning next to British exports, we find that the total decrease of £6,746,606 was due almost entirely to a diminution in the sale to the foreigner of manufactured articles, the decrease under this head being £6,106,466. The remainder of the decrease is made up of a loss on raw materials of £325,791, on food and drink of £237,947, and miscellaneous £78,402.

As regards manufactured articles, the greatest falling-off in trade was shown in the following:

	Decreases
Yarns and textile fabrics	£3,682,276
Manufactures of iron, steel, and other metals	£1,402,665

The only manufactured articles which showed an increase compared with last year were:—Paper, £8,458, and electrical goods, £52,528.

The greatest decrease among raw materials was under the head of coal, coke, and manufactured fuel, amounting to £129,225.

[In view of the foregoing figures, special interest attaches to our London correspondent's article on the recently concluded Free Trade Congress, which we publish today. Ed.]

MILE END "GRAFTERS" HEAVILY SENTENCED.

London, August 8.

After a trial which had lasted twenty days, at the Old Bailey, each of the ten Mile End guardians and ex-guardians was on Friday night found guilty of one or other of the indictments brought against them. The jury added a recommendation to mercy in the case of the accused Gilson. The Judge thanked the jury for the careful and fearless way in which they had discharged their duty, and relieved them of service for twelve years.

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