

I should like to think the spring season that is now opening in New Zealand will be as good as the last two. I sincerely hope it will be. There are two or three causes for the development that has taken place, the suitability of the climate and the fact that we are developing hydro-electricity in many parts of the Dominion. Farmers, local bodies, and private enterprise are utilizing the hydro-electricity. The farmers are making use of it, and now there are many hundreds of dairy-farmers the motor-power for whose operations is supplied by hydro-electricity. Naturally, of course, we want as much encouragement as we can possibly get. Now I come to other matters.

Effect on Empire Production of Preference granted by Great Britain.

I have been connected with the movement for Empire preference for quite a long time past. The subject was discussed at great length at the first Imperial Conference at which I was present in 1917. The proposals then met with favourable consideration from Ministers who were in office. The result was that the principle of Empire preference was affirmed, and brought before Parliament, I think, by Mr. Bonar Law, who at that time was Chancellor of the Exchequer. The principle was agreed to, and Empire preference has been given in the case of certain very important commodities. I am glad that the principle was affirmed and that these industries are benefiting by what took place. I am thinking particularly of sugar. Now, I do not need to remind the members present of what the position was so far as the sugar-supply was concerned at the time war broke out. The price of sugar soared, and it was almost impossible to obtain. I was in England for some months at that time, but there was practically no sugar, and what little was obtainable was of very poor quality. The British people have had their lesson so far as the production of sugar is concerned, and now I am glad to think that our planters in the West Indies have again taken up their old calling, and that the output of sugar from the sugar-producing countries of the Empire has very greatly increased. In consequence the importation of sugar from foreign countries has fallen off. The same with tea. The British Parliament have given a preference on tea. They have also given a preference on wines and some other commodities. I am thinking only of the more important matters, and in each case the result has been exceedingly satisfactory. A beginning has been made, and it will be for this Conference to advise the British Government as to what we think should be done. We are not going to suggest anything unreasonable. I speak for myself, and I believe I express the opinion of my colleagues from overseas when I say that. It is for the British Government to take the initiative, and I hope they will do so; but I want to say here that we do not want, and do not intend in any proposal that we may make, to increase the price of food to the consumers in Britain. If so, then there must be a compensating interest in the opposite direction.

Empire Sugar Requirements can be met from Empire Sources.

I have had to deal with the supply of sugar for New Zealand in my capacity as Finance Minister, and I know that sugar can be produced in a number of countries, even in the South Pacific. For a number of years, certainly ever since the war broke out, New Zealand has purchased from the Colonial Sugar Company sugar produced on their lands at Fiji to the extent of 60,000 tons per annum. There has been some trouble at Fiji, I am sorry to say, though, I think, only temporary. The labour for sugar-production at Fiji is obtained from India, and there has been trouble among the Indian labourers. A good many of them went back to their own country; but I have heard from Fiji that many of these men are coming back to their old occupation, and there is no reason why they should not be paid fair wages for their work. I think that the people at Fiji and the company—it is an Australian company largely—I think they are quite satisfied to pay them ordinary wages for ordinary labour. I have mentioned Fiji because it is one of our neighbours in the Pacific. It is practically the nearest British country to New Zealand. There are other countries, of course—Tahiti, for instance, which belongs to France—but they are producing sugar there, and much of the capital is found by British capitalists. I was rather interested in that. I am not finding fault with it, because I believe in enterprise, even if it is not in a British country, so long as British people are associated with it. I was informed that the capital was being found by British people. New Zealand controls some islands in the Pacific; whether they can produce sugar I am not in a position to say, but there is an instance of what can be done. There is no question about it, to my mind, but that we can produce within the Empire all and a great deal more than the quantity of sugar required by the population of the Empire.

Empire Cotton-growing.

Cotton has been referred to, but I am not actually clear about what our position is in Egypt. I will say this: that, so far as it is possible for me to judge matters from an outside point of view, the cultivation of cotton in Egypt is increasing, and increasing very rapidly. There are other places in the Empire where cotton can be grown. They are commencing to grow cotton in northern Australia and in Queensland, and the reports are very good indeed. If we can grow cotton in sufficient quantities for our own population it will be a very fine thing to do. I have given some instances of what is possible.

Land-settlement in New Zealand.

There are the lands waiting to be cultivated by industrious people, lands already occupied to some extent by our own people, and where, in most cases, emigrants from the United Kingdom will be welcome. I have indicated that in New Zealand we have not huge areas of unoccupied land as in other countries, and therefore we are not able to offer lands on the same terms; but I will say this for New Zealand: we are never going to turn our backs upon our fellow-citizens from the British Isles. I would just like to add this: I have lived practically all my life in New Zealand, all my connections