

Need for making Present British Preferences effective.

We recognize, of course, that Britain has followed up the resolution, but we venture to say she has only followed it to a very modified extent. In the Budgets from 1919 something has been done, and we are indeed grateful that anything has been done, but we also think that the interests of Britain—and I wish to put the case this way—would be advanced if she went even a little farther along the path which she has already set her feet to, and I think that if she would do one thing it would greatly facilitate the solution of the questions we are now considering in Australia.

At the present moment Great Britain has a tariff upon certain items, such as dried fruits, and we have a scheme in Australia which is really the test scheme for the whole of our future migration ideas. The greatest production that will come from that scheme will be dried fruits, and if Britain could see her way to make the present preference effective I think it would solve the problem of this particular scheme which I wish to explain to the Conference. As to whether Britain can see her way to do anything, that, of course, is a matter for British consideration; but may I urge the desirability of bringing this scheme to fruition and of so accomplishing our aims.

The Murray River Scheme.

The scheme I am referring to is one which is known as the Murray River scheme. In that part of the Australian Continent development was really not initiated until about 1887. It progressed very slowly, but gradually an irrigation settlement grew up. In 1915 the Commonwealth Government and the States of Victoria, South Australia, and New South Wales conferred and determined upon a large scheme for the conservation of water, the locking of the river, and the irrigation of a very large extent of country. That scheme is now being pressed onwards, and when it is completed there should be available about 2,000,000 acres of land, and on account of the particular circumstances of the settlement there it is the most desirable form of settlement for British immigrants. It provides the ordinary amenities and decencies of life; it is a life that would be understood by a British migrant, and one to which he would be able to adapt himself very readily. That scheme to-day is in this position: the Commonwealth and State Governments have started it, and have taken it a certain distance. The acreage under cultivation is increasing every year. At present there are about 200,000 acres and, roughly, seventy-five thousand people. By 1928, 1,500,000 acres should be available, and in a few years after that, the whole 2,000,000.

Mr. Chamberlain: What population would that mean?

Mr. Bruce: For the two millions, about seven hundred and fifty thousand people. The principal things produced there would be fruit, dried fruit in particular, and cotton. There would also be a certain amount of dairying, and, as I have said, the settlement enjoys the best possible conditions, and it offers the best amenities of life we have in Australia. Now, the position of the Murray River scheme is this—and that is my reason for stressing this matter so much and for saying that Australia more or less takes it as the test of what she may be able to do in the way of migration and of development generally of the Empire: the production of dried fruit in 1914 was about 12,000 tons, of which Australia herself could take 80 per cent., and about 20 per cent. had to find a market overseas. By 1926, with existing soldier settlement, with our own ordinary land-settlement, with a very little migration, with the actual land that is settled, with the actual trees that are in the ground, and which will come into bearing by that time, we shall be faced with a situation exactly the reverse of what it was. We shall have to find a market for the export of 80 per cent., as we ourselves will be able to consume only 20 per cent. in Australia. Similarly with canned fruits, which would be another great production in that area. To-day the production is about 500,000 cases, of which we have to export about 150,000. By 1926 or 1927 the position will have arisen that we shall have to export about 80 per cent. of our production.

Problem of Migration inseparable from that of Markets.

The Australian Government has been faced with this question in a very intense form, having had to form pools, handle the produce, and lose £600,000 over three years in connection with schemes of a similar character. It is now quite clear that we cannot, in fairness to our own people, go on with the cry, which has been far too prevalent in Australia, of "produce and then produce more," and anybody really seriously interested is concerned as to what we can do with the production. If we can get what we believe will be an outlet for the production in the Murray Valley we are prepared to go on and complete this scheme, and eventually settle a very great number of people, but unless we can obtain a market we shall have to slow down the whole scheme. Instead of going forward and completing it as we contemplated, we shall have to take action to consider how far we can proceed or how we can delay the scheme so that when the production comes there will be a market available. In the circumstances I think that this is a very fair test case for Australia to take. If we can find a solution I am certain that Australia will be able to enter enthusiastically into schemes for absorbing people. We will be encouraged to believe that we have assisted in the great question of marketing, and at the same time we will be helped to populate our country.

Australia's desire above everything else is to populate her country and to advance from her present position of a very small people occupying a very vast territory, the real value of which no man can estimate, but which certainly has the greatest potentialities. Coming from Australia, I believe that they are greater than in any other part of the world.

As far as Australia is concerned—and I stress this even at the risk of wearisome repetition—the whole point turns on markets, and markets mean migration—if we have no markets we cannot have great migration, we cannot have great development in the near future.