

Ninth Day.
1 May 1907.

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PREFERENTIAL
TRADE.

(Sir Joseph
Ward.)

your representative was, say, in Auckland, he would be 1,200 miles away from a business centre at the other end of the Colony. A man requiring information cannot wait until he meets the trade correspondent in the place in which he is. I put it forward with all respect for the consideration of the Board of Trade, which is such a valuable portion of the fabric of Government. In my opinion it is worthy of consideration whether we should not, in order not to be behind the competitors of England and of our Colonies, appoint representatives to the duty of obtaining and disseminating trade information which is so valuable in all parts of the Empire.

I want to say a word upon another important point. I am deeply in earnest in my desire to see the possibility of drift of any kind, so far as the Colonies are concerned, prevented. I am positive in my own mind that unless both England and the Colonies progress, if they are allowed to stand still, in the aspect of their sentimental connection with the Old Country being sufficient, and in the aspect of the ties of kinship keeping them together, and all that sort of thing, that to stand still means retrogression, and retrogression means drift. Apart altogether from this question of preferential trade, the people of the Colonies wish to feel that they are in closer touch with the people of the Old Country, and I am very earnest in my advocacy, which I have publicly expressed for many years, of a hope that the British Government may coalesce with the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, and in one respect, if not in all, with the Government of the Great Dominion of Canada, in bringing our peoples closer together. There is one practical way in which it can be done, and, in my opinion, it is the only practical way in which it can be done, that is, by taking a lesson out of the books of some of our adversaries, and not merely giving a subsidy for a line of mail steamers to carry a mail at a very rapid rate, which is most important, but seeing that in some form or another the traders of the Old World and of the New World are put in a position of equal competition against their foreign competitors, who are doing so much in assisting their merchants by their own steamships. I will not name the crowned head in one of the countries who takes an active personal interest in the ramifications of that country's trade; but they play the game so thoroughly and effectively, that, unless we take similar methods, my opinion is that, to a certain extent, the position of drift will arise. I believe we ought at this Conference, without going into the intertwining difficulties surrounding trade, to consider in one or two respects its practical application. I say there is nothing that would do our countries of New Zealand and Australia more good than an alteration in the conduct of the Suez Canal. I introduce that without any reservation. I say it from the Imperial point of view, and I ask the Conference to put its *imprimatur* in the course of this discussion upon improving what is one of the highways of the world. The country—France—which has a large share with England in that Canal would naturally have the same treatment extended to it as we wish to extend to ourselves; but my own belief is that it would pay Great Britain, and it would certainly pay our Colonies, to join in it, and I believe it would pay the French Government handsomely to make that Suez Canal free for our and their own ships, and to allow our respective countries to pay to the shareholders the whole of the interest they are getting on their capital now. To-day our cargo steamers which are trying to keep in touch with England have to take a 45 or 50 days trip to get here with our perishable goods. Here is a highway of the world which is used by large steamship lines, and there are some magnificent ships trading to Australia which use it; but unless you get some powerfully organised wealthy corporate body, whose people pay the enormous dues upon ships, passengers, and cargo going through the Canal, you do not get it used generally, I mean by