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THE  
West India Problem.

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A SPEECH

DELIVERED TO THE BUTESHIRE LIBERAL ASSOCIATION  
AND THE BUTE WOMEN'S LIBERAL ASSOCIATION,  
DECEMBER 22ND, 1902,

BY

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YR. OF KNOCKDOW,  
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## THE WEST INDIA PROBLEM.

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Mr Lamont, who on rising was received with loud and prolonged applause, said—When I was last in Rothesay, about ten days ago, someone informed me that two of the local papers were displaying an almost morbid curiosity to learn my views upon the West Indian Question. Now, I do not believe that it is, as a rule, wise to pander to the inquisitive, because theirs is an appetite prone to increase with the eating, and to develop into an altogether unhealthy craving. Still, on the present occasion, I feel impelled to gratify their desire; and, moreover, when you are so kind as to give me this magnificent “send-off” on my departure to the West Indies, I cannot but think it a fitting opportunity for giving you my opinions on a few of the outstanding political problems that affect, or afflict, the colonies to which I am going. (“Hear, hear.”) It must have often struck you as singular that one so seldom hears the West Indies discussed either in the House of Commons or on the platform in the country. That, I think, is due to three causes. In the first place, remarkably few politicians know anything whatever about West Indian affairs; in the second place, the congestion of public business prevents the discussion of this and other important questions; and in the third place, an impression has got abroad that the whole West Indian problem is summed up in the question of sugar bounties, and, that with one’s approval or disapproval of the remedy of countervailing duties, the matter ends. Now, that is altogether a mistake. We are all Imperialists now—(Hear, hear, and applause)—if we are allowed to define the word for ourselves; and the point I wish to bring home to you is this, that the good government and prosperity of our Colonies are just as much matters for the solicitude and attention of the electors of this country, as are the good government and prosperity of this country itself. (Applause.)

And if that is true of our great self-governing Colonies, such as Canada and Australia, it is even more true of our Crown Colonies, which have few or no representative institutions, and therefore no voice whatever in matters deeply concerning their own welfare. It is, therefore, the electors of this country who directly control the government of these Colonies by means of those they send to the Colonial Office, and the policy pursued there. (Hear, hear.) For twenty years past the condition of the West Indies has gone steadily from bad to worse. A Royal Commission was appointed in 1884, which made certain excellent recommendations, but nothing came of them. Another Commission was appointed in 1897, which made various recommendations with regard to the establishment of an Imperial Department of Agriculture for the West Indies, with numerous affiliated botanic stations; loans of money for the erection of central factories; grants for subsidising certain lines of steamers; and doles to the planters. Most of these remedies were applied, and the condition of the West Indies is very little better than before—the West Indies remain, like Ireland and South Africa, a noteworthy exception to the general rule that prosperity follows the British flag, a black blot on the scutcheon of British rule, brought out into stronger relief by its success in Australia, Canada, and, upon different lines, in Egypt and India. The white population is diminishing in ratio to the black, trade languishes, and capital shows remarkable reluctance to flow into the West Indies. That is the state of affairs—now, what are the remedies? I want, first of all, to read you a suggested remedy from a London paper,

#### TO THE EDITOR.

SIR,—As you are opening your columns to letters relative to the means of raising the money required by the country, I would suggest the sale of all our West Indian Possessions, including the Bahamas and Demerara, to our American cousins. It would be to the immense advantage of the Possessions themselves, as the whole of the United States would receive their exports free, and their market would be close at hand. It would relieve our country from a vast expenditure in money, Governors, and Naval and Military Establish-

ments, &c., and rid us of countries perfectly useless for our white population.

We should be only following the wise example of France in selling Louisiana in 1812, and Russia in selling Alaska in 1867.

I am, Sir your obedient servant,

CAPTAIN, R.N.

Now, it would be almost superfluous for me to say that this letter is presumably from a Conservative, even had it not appeared in the columns of the "Standard," the great Tory organ, which few Liberals read, and none indite letters to. (Hear, hear, and laughter.) In spite of all their boasted monopoly of Imperialism, the Tories invariably view our Colonies from the point of £. s. d; and because the West Indies don't happen to pay, this Captain, R.N. would be perfectly ready to scuttle out of them, just as Lord Salisbury scuttled out of Heligoland before—(Hear, hear)—without even consulting the inhabitants. It is perfectly true that prosperity would follow immediately upon the annexation of the British West Indies to the United States; just as it has done in the case of Puerto Rico. Capital is just pouring into Puerto Rico, and perhaps for its size it has made more progress during the last four years than any other country in the world. But in spite of the fact that the British West Indies know that prosperity would follow annexation to the United States, there is absolutely no wish for such a thing—they would not submit to it for a moment—it is a case of "Britain, with all thy faults, we love thee still." (Applause.) And the coloured races know perfectly well that they have infinitely more freedom, and a better position under the Union Jack than they would have under the Stars and Stripes. (Applause.) Further, I hold that prosperity can be equally well attained under our own flag, if only we go the right way about it. First let me explain a little about those islands.

With the exception of Jamaica and Trinidad, which are about equal in area to Inverness-shire and Sutherland, with populations of roughly three-quarters and one-quarter of a million respectively; each of our other islands, is on an average, just about equal in size to this County of Bute, with about three times its population; save

Barbados, which is very densely populated. But instead of being under the mild and benignant sway of a Sheriff, a Provost, and a Convener, each unfortunate island, or group of islands, is saddled with the upkeep of a Governor, Chief Justice, Attorney-General, Solicitor General, Receiver General, and an untold host of minor officials, whose combined salaries mount up to anything from £25,000 to £125,000 a year. Not only that, but the West Indian islands have all surrounded themselves with a wall of tariffs, imposed quite impartially against foreign countries, against the United Kingdom, and against one another. As the extreme ends of the chain of islands are not 400 miles apart, you can imagine the absurdity of it. If you here in Bute were to impose a customs-tariff upon almost every conceivable article of commerce, whether from abroad . from the mainland, or from Arran and Cumbræ, do you suppose that the honour and glory of any number of governors and attorney-generals would compensate you for the injury that that would do to your trade? Then the system of grants and doles going on for the last few years is utterly wrong—you will never set the sugar industry, or any other industry, on its feet by grants and doles; they only pauperise it, and do no permanent good whatever. (Hear, hear and applause.) And you will never have the West Indies effectively served with a good service of steamers until you pay for the carriage of mails as you pay for any other freight, viz.: by bulk and by weight: and withdraw all this costly system of mail-subsidies. The Royal Mail Steam Packet Company get a subsidy of £80,000 a year from this country, the Canadian line £27,000, and the new line from Bristol £40,000, the only result being that the lines neglect their freight, neglect their passengers, and keep unsubsidised lines out of the field altogether.

I should like to warn you against the rubbish we have been reading in the papers lately about our shipping being driven out of the market by foreign subsidies. That is precisely the reverse of the truth. With the solitary exception of France, we are ourselves the worst offenders in this matter. The following figures are from the recent bluebook on shipping subsidies:—France gives annually for such subsidies £1,787,000;

Great Britain, £1,003,000; Germany, £440,000; United States, £346,000. And note this, that almost the whole of the small German subsidies are paid to their lines to the East, to Australia, China, and East Africa; and not to their lines on the Atlantic, where we are feeling their keen competition. The medicine that the West Indies need is a good dose of Free-Trade: free-trade at once among themselves, and as soon as may be with the great sister colony to the north—the Dominion of Canada. But you will never get this so long as almost every islet is an independent unit. They must be united into one great Colony, with a Cromer or a Curzon at the head of it, advised by a Council of the best men we can send out. (Applause). Sweep away these hosts of minor posts, so dear to the heart of the Colonial Office, for the purposes of patronage, and you will be able to pay better salaries and attract better men. (Hear, hear.) Sweep away the doles and grants, and arrange a common tariff for the whole group. That is at present precluded by local jealousies. Trade would then increase, and the federated Colony would be big enough to arrange reciprocity treaties with Canada or the United States, which is now impossible for a score of separate little islands. And the voice of a Unified West India would carry far more weight in the Councils of the Empire.

In such a system the Governor-General in Council should have control of all matters common to the whole group; while there would be this advantage, that it might be possible to delegate the local matters of each island to local elective assemblies. This is impossible without some supervising central authority, for with a high franchise, power would be in the hands of an oligarchy of planters and merchants, while a low franchise would enable the coloured vote to swamp the whites by at least eleven to one.

And do you know what is the usual objection to this scheme of unification? This, that it is not feasible, because the islands are scattered over a considerable expanse of sea, and that it would therefore be necessary to provide the Governor-General with a yacht! (Laughter.) I should have thought that to the first maritime power in the world the calm, tropical sea would not so much separate the islands, as provide a cheap and

easy means of communication among them. We are told that Britannia rules the waves, but those who put forth his argument believe that the waves rule Britannia. (Laughter.) Another point should be noticed in dealing with the requirements for West Indian prosperity—there is an absolute lack of sound commercial, technical, or agricultural education. Somebody said to me the other day that I had agricultural education on the brain (laughter), but if I haven't it on the brain I do not know on what other part of my person I could carry it. The present colleges there are very good in their way, but they devote themselves almost entirely to the literary and classical side of education, with the result that their pupils inevitably become lawyers or doctors, the consequence being that these professions are absolutely glutted. Most of the doctors in addition to their practice get salaries from the state—the others eke out a precarious existence by physicking one another. Well, it is dawning gradually upon the authorities that some sort of technical education is necessary, and in the elementary schools they are teaching the children to spell words, and write copybook-headings bearing on agricultural subjects. Quite right: by all means let us endeavour to raise up agricultural labourers who will work with their heads as well as with their hands. But it will take centuries to raise up experts in this way, and meanwhile Rome is burning. We must have a proper system of technical education: not only in secondary schools but also in a West Indian University. There must be a sound system of agricultural and commercial education from top to bottom of the educational ladder, for in the larger development of agriculture and commerce alone lies the salvation of the West Indies. (Hear, hear.) I have kept you far too long, but the point I wish to impress upon you is that Liberal principles are applicable all the world over—(applause)—and that it is only by the application of those principles to the West Indian problem, modified as circumstances require, that those Colonies will ever be made a strength instead of a weakness to the Empire. (Loud applause.)

















