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THE BLAKE LETTER.

Canada's Future as Forecast by
the Hon. Edward Blake.

THE GREAT TRADE QUESTION DISCUSSED.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.)

The absence of agreement would give to each country power to disturb at will the industrial system of the other; and unrestricted Reciprocity without an agreed assimilation of duties in an substantial dream.

For example, the States could not at present, without destroying their industrial system, admit free our woolen or iron manufactures, the produce of wool or iron freely imported by us from beyond seas; nor could we, without destroying ours, levy on raw materials higher duties than those laid by the States.

At the same time, our revenue necessities would constrain us to call for duties, at the most productive (which of course, does not mean the highest) rate, on whatever imports might remain available to us for revenue purposes.

Again, differing rates of duty on imported goods, of a class also produced here or in the States, would open a wide door to frauds on the transfers of goods of that class between the two countries—a door which could be but imperfectly barred by increased, vexatious and rigorous customs examinations into the country of origin.

16 Since any practicable arrangement does substantially involve, not only differential duties, but a common tariff, Unrestricted Reciprocity becomes, in these its redeeming features, difficult to distinguish from Commercial Union.

And Commercial Union—establishing a common tariff, abolishing international custom houses and dividing the total duties between the two countries in agreed proportions—is the more available, perhaps the only available plan.

It is much more likely to be accepted by the States; and it would also have advantages for Canada, in both the trade and the revenue aspect, over Unrestricted Reciprocity; which, while failing to secure to us substantial control over our tariff, would provide still less adequately for our revenue needs, and would hamper trade by its stringent customs examinations.

17 Permanence in the new relation is of high consequence, both directly and indirectly, to the agricultural interest; and is absolutely essential in order to secure the full development of other great interests, to prevent needless disaster to important industries and to realize many of the benefits of the plan.

Without assured permanence some conservative predictions of evil, else fallacious, would come true; for our unobtainable natural advantages in raw materials, labor, situation and facilities would be unavailably handicapped.

No manufacturer, looking to the continental market, would fix or even enlarge his capital or business in the country of five millions, at the risk of being cut off from the country of sixty-five millions.

Our neighbors, instead of engaging in manufactures here, would take our markets with goods manufactured there.

And our raw materials, instead of being finished on the ground, would be exported to be finished abroad.

Uncertainty would alarm capital and paralyze enterprise; and therefore I repeat that permanence is essential to success.

18 The revenue requirements and other financial conditions of the two countries are not identical; each will change; and each may change diversely from the other.

It might be possible to agree on a tariff for a year or two. It would be impossible for either country to fix its tariff for a long term. Changes in the stipulated tariff must there be provided for.

19 It would not be practicable to remit the decision as to such changes to a joint board.

And whatever shape the arrangement might take it would be necessary to concede to the States, if not a formal, at any rate a practical control in respect of changes.

The latter result would flow from a provision that, in case of difference, either party might terminate the treaty; a stipulation which would in all human probability result in concession by Canada to the States; while its existence would deprive the treaty of that assured permanency whose importance has been demonstrated.

I see no plan for combining the two elements of permanency of the treaty and variability of the tariff which does not involve the practical control of the latter by the States.

And I can readily conceive conditions under which, notwithstanding her right to threaten a withdrawal, Canada would have much less influence in procuring or preventing changes that she would enjoy did she compose several states of the union.

20 Amongst the British people the Canadian preference of the United States over British manufactures would be, perhaps, less unpopular, considered on economic grounds alone, than the alternative scheme of food taxes to which I have referred.

Accompanied, as it ought to be, by a fair settlement of all differences with the States, and by the establishment on a firm basis of cordial relations between all English speaking peoples, it would secure high political advantages to the United Kingdom.

And the greater prosperity of Canada in which the British investor is deeply concerned; and from which, spite of all tariff obstacles, the British manufacturer too must reap some slight advantage; would mitigate hostility to the scheme.

But after all, it would be taken in very bad part, on economic grounds, by the British manufacturing interests, and on Imperial grounds, by other important elements of the population; and it would seriously affect the present tone and feelings in regard to the colonial relation.

21 The tendency in Canada of unrestricted free trade with the States, high duties being maintained against the United Kingdom, would be toward political union; and the more successful the plan the stronger the tendency, both by reason of the community of interests, the intermingling of populations, the more intimate business and social connexions, and the trade and fiscal relations, amounting to dependency, which it would create with the States; and of the greater isolation and divergency from Britain which it would produce; and also, and especially, through inconveniences experienced in the maintenance, and apprehensions entertained as to the termination of the treaty.

Our hopes and our fears alike would draw one way.

We would then indeed be "looking to Washington."

Nor is there any fair comparison, in this respect, between the new and the old reciprocal arrangements.

22 It is not absolutely certain that the States would, under existing circumstances, enter into a treaty for Unrestricted Reciprocity.

Though the benefits would be in truth far more widely diffused, yet it is only our neighbor's northern fringe that actually realizes the existence of a material interest in free trade with Canada, and even there, protectionist fallacies greatly obscure the judgment; various events have excited in many quarters unfavorable feelings, and there is a strong prejudice against lasting treaty arrangements.

But the dominating fact is that perhaps fifty millions of their population know little, care less, about free trade with Canada.

Thus it happens that mutually beneficial business relations between the two countries, on principles fair to each are yet of far more obvious and pressing importance to us as a whole than to them as a whole. And it is this fact which perhaps most strongly emphasizes the supreme folly of a Canadian retaliatory policy.

The national sentiment, which is essential to secure their assent to the arrangement, cannot then be evoked by its business element alone.

The advantage of adjusting, by a comprehensive settlement, all causes of difference between the two countries would be very great to both, and might advance the plan; but, on the same reasoning, this advantage is also clearer and greater to us than to them, and cannot therefore be safely reckoned on to evoke the desired sentiment.

An underlying feeling, however, there is—latent it may be and inactive, half unconscious and unformulated; disguised in some quarters, doubted, deprecated or repudiated in others; likely perhaps (should party lines be drawn) to be favored rather by Republicans than by Democrats—yet real, deep seated and wide spread, and eminently calculated so to attract the popular imagination and fire the popular heart as to transcend all party lines, and to become indeed a truly national sentiment.

This feeling is that some day, sooner or later, a political re-organization of the continent should and must take place, not by force, but by the consent of its inhabitants.

This sentiment, I believe, will largely color opinion as to the plan, which, accordingly, may, on the other hand, be favored as the best step in the direction of political re-organization; or, on the other, discounted upon the mistaken theory that its rejection would be the best step in the same direction.

And there are obvious forces and methods in our neighbor's as in all popular politics which forbid us altogether to disregard the latter contingency.

The treaty once made, the vantage ground it gave would naturally be used for the accomplishment of its ulterior purpose; and this political end would be a great factor in the consideration by the States of Canadian views upon changes in the joint tariff, or as to the maintenance or termination of the treaty.

23 The reorganization to which our neighbors look is, of course, the unification of the continent.

But next to, though much less warmly than, political union, they would favor Canadian independence; and it is quite possible that, in connexion with such a policy, advantageous international arrangements on various most important points, not here brought into discussion, might be secured.

24 Without needless lengthy recapitulation, you will see, by contrasting my views with those of the present advocates of free trade with the States, several serious questions of difficulty and difference—for example, uniformity of tariff, and its control; deficiency of revenue, and its supply—on which I am unable to adopt their opinions.

25 But one large topic remains, arising out of or rather underlying the whole statement, the bearing of which I had hoped, until the news of dissolution, to reserve for oral discussion.

You will doubtless have inferred my opinion that the policy of absolute free trade with the States is intimately connected with, and cannot be properly divorced from, the question of our political future, which therefore it must force into the party field.

While not disguising my view that events have already greatly narrowed our apparent range, and impeded our apparent freedom of action, I hold by the suggestion that our future should not be settled (as we have allowed it to be settled in the past, perhaps much further than we yet realize), by accident or unwittingly, by side winds or the inglorious policy of drift.

It should rather be determined, so far as it remains within our own control, of fixed purpose, after due discussion and deliberation, as becomes a free people resolving on their lot.

This large problem, involving in our case various suggested plans to which others must be parties, demanded the anxious weighing of conflicting considerations, and a long course of courageous and independent, but calm and dispassionate handling, before it could be advantageously introduced into a party field like ours.

Such handling it has not yet received. Nor, indeed, could that have been deemed in the least degree necessary by those promoters of free trade with the States, who advance their plan in the belief that it by no means involves our political future; and that it tends, not to the weakening of existing or the creation of new political relation, but rather to the strengthening of the present connexion.

Thus it has come to pass that the public mind is in one sense even more unready than formerly, and is at any rate quite unprepared for the intelligent decision, and hardly disposed even for the fair and candid discussion of the question.

26 It would not be possible here even to epitomize the many points which occur on the several projects for federation with the United Kingdom, for independence, and for political union with the States, all of which are thought to have once been, or still to remain, open in some sense to our choice.

Were it possible it would yet be absurd to employ the critical moment of an election in the preliminaries of such a wide debate.

Nor do I believe, as I have said, that a wise solution is to be advanced by bringing the discussion into the party field to-day.

And at any rate I am anxious that you should have the opportunity, if you think it worth your while, of considering what I have been obliged to set before you, unprejudiced by any further intimation of my views on this point.

Thus I do not add to the many matters with which you have been necessarily troubled among my own as to our future.

27 It is not needless that I should, whatever you or I may think on that head; whether we like or dislike, believe or disbelieve in political union; must we not agree that the subject is one of great moment, toward the practical settlement of which we should take no serious step without reflection, or in ignorance of what we are doing?

Assuming that absolute free trade with the States, best described as Commercial Union, may and ought to come, I believe that it can and should come only as an incident, or at any rate as a well understood precursor of political union; for which, indeed, we should be able to make better terms before than after the surrender of our commercial independence.

Then, so believing—believing that the decision of the trade question involves that of the constitutional issue, for which you are unprepared, and with which you do not even conceive yourself to be dealing—how can I properly recommend you now to decide on Commercial Union?

28 Do not suppose that these are, with me, questions of yesterday.

Long ago, while leader of the Liberal party, it became my duty to examine into a similar design, submitted by a political architect of some reputation.

I thought the foundations insecure, the lines defective and the estimates of cost inadequate.

It seemed to me that the proposed structure could be erected only on that different foundation, those other lines, and that larger cost which has been described.

For this it was conceded that the people were not then prepared.

And I was unable to propose the design for adoption as a party plan.

My views remain unchanged to-day.

29 It has caused me deep distress to differ from my political friends.

Gravely distrusting my judgment as to opinions unshared, difficulties unmet, and consequences unforeseen by them, I sincerely wish to be found—as I have earnestly striven to find myself—in error.

30 But it is to our own convictions, right or wrong, that we must, after all be true.

To put forward opinions we do not hold, or ignore difficulties we cannot solve, or deny or conceal the tendencies and results of policies we undertake to 87f.

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propound, would be dishonest and unworthy.

And therefore I could not address the electors of West Durham without speaking my mind freely on the points I have advanced.

31 Had the elections been deferred to the usual and expected time, I should probably have felt it right within a short space so to address them.

But I do not find myself free to-day to speak my mind.

Without being so presumptuous as to imagine that my judgment is entitled to weight when unconfirmed by that of my political friends, I yet recognize the extensive and effective use, too commonly made by the adversary, of the slightest divergent expression of opinion from the humblest member of an opposing organization.

My late relation to the party emphasizes the present application of this remark.

And I have come to the conclusion, confirmed by the judgment of leading men, that the publication of these opinions would inflict much more damage on my friends than the slight injury which may result from my silent withdrawal.

32 Now, while unable to fight under false colors, neither can I endure, at the very height and crisis of the battle into which a wrongful dissolution has unexpectedly plunged the Liberal party, to take a different tack, or to turn one's hostile gun against the well-loved friends, in whose company, whether as comrade or commander, I have sailed so many stormy seas, and fought so many hot engagements; whose general course I approve, and whose ships I wish, not wrecked, but safe in port.

33 What then is left for me to do?

This only. Since I cannot help, to hurt as little as I may; and, therefore, to go down, with my own little ship, in silence, bearing for the moment all consequent misconstruction, and leaving, till the Ides of March be past, the explanation of my action.

34 May I beg you then to treat my statement, made now to you alone, or given for the time in sacred confidence; to accept my heartfelt thanks and undying gratitude for your past kindness, and to let me bid you, with emotion deeper than I can express, an affectionate farewell.

Your faithful servant,
EDWARD BLAKE.

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