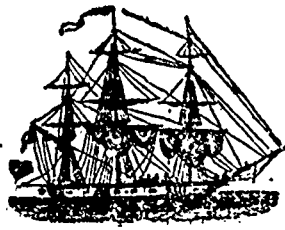


CANADIAN ECONOMIST.



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MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 1st MAY, 1847.

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MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 1st MAY, 1847.

APPROACHING SESSION OF PARLIAMENT.

In our last we briefly recapitulated some of the leading measures connected with commercial reform which must of necessity occupy the attention of our Legislature at the approaching Session. That list might be extended, but we believe it cannot but be admitted that, as it stands, it is sufficiently comprehensive to impress every person who considers it with the magnitude of the duties about to devolve on our representatives. The all-important question which arises is, Are the Provincial Ministry prepared with plans commensurate with the occasion? And, if so, have they sufficient influence in the two Houses of the Legislature to carry those plans into operation?

That the Representative of the Sovereign, constituting in himself—in analogy with the theory of the British Constitution—the first branch of the Legislature, is strongly in favour of Free Trade measures, public rumour universally proclaims; and the replies which His Excellency has been pleased to make to various addresses, countenance this belief. Indeed, we can scarcely imagine that the British Government could be so blind to their own interests as to depute any person imbued with the antiquated doctrines of protection to govern a country, placed as Canada is at present. We are, therefore, quite prepared to expect from His Excellency the Governor-General, the exertion of his influence—so far as it can be constitutionally exerted—in favour of all those measures which are in accordance with Free-Trade principles. His Excellency has now been some months in this country, and has had a fair opportunity of ascertaining the wants of the community: he has had brought before his notice the danger to our commerce of the continuance of the restrictions under which we labour, and the necessity for promptitude of action in their removal. So far, therefore, as the wishes of the Governor-General go, all our anticipations are favourable.

But something more than the favour of the Governor is required to obtain for us the fruition of our views. It is essential that he should be surrounded by Councillors who will labour zealously in the great work, and who will, if necessary, sacrifice the rank and emoluments of office to carry out the principles of Free Trade. Are such the characteristics of the men now in power? We are afraid that an answer must be given in the negative. The course pursued by those gentlemen in relation to the commercial interests of the country is not encouraging. They have not had the boldness to meet changes which they must have foreseen, and which it was their duty to have provided for. Last session when it was obvious that a great revolution in the commercial policy of Great Britain was about to be consummated, and which would necessitate a similar change here,—did they come forward

with any statesmanlike measure to meet the approaching crisis? Did they not, on the contrary, recommend the then Governor-General, Lord CATHERART, to issue a despatch, which set at nought the sound principles of Political Economy, distorted facts, misrepresented public opinion, maligned the character of the people by attributing their attachment to the mother country to the most sordid and mercenary motives, and even shook the foundation of public credit, by hinting at national bankruptcy as “a possible case”? Nay more, when we, on the publication of this famous despatch, administered a gentle castigation, had they not the meanness, through their “organ,” to deny that they are responsible for its contents, although it expressly purports to have been written “at their earnest desire,” and as “a duty of the Executive of this Province”?

If the conduct of the Ministry to the close of the last session of the Provincial Legislature was not such as to inspire confidence, has it since been of a different character? Have we the most distant reason to indulge the hope that they are at length awakened to the critical position of our commerce? The long delay in summoning Parliament together, is the most conclusive answer to this question. In vain have we raised our warning voice to point out the danger. To no effect has it again and again been reiterated in their ears, that unless some active steps were taken to obtain from the British Government—at least so far as regards us—a modification of the British Navigation Laws, the produce of our country and of the Western States would leave their natural channel, the St. Lawrence Canals, to be transported by the United States Canals for foreign ports of shipment. Surely on such an important subject our Legislature ought to have been summoned with the least possible delay, and yet the Ministry deferred its assembling to almost the very latest moment which the letter of the Constitution admitted, thus losing the opportunity of conveying the opinions of the people of this country to the British Parliament during the present session, when a Committee is actually sitting on the subject of the Navigation Laws, and whose decision would probably be considerably affected by the representations which the Legislature of this country might make.

It is true our Board of Trade has presented a Memorial to the Governor-General on this momentous question, and that Memorial has doubtless gone forward to the Imperial Government; but the fact must, nevertheless, not be lost sight of, that representations from such a body can never have equal weight with representations from the Provincial Legislature, and at all events it must not be forgotten that our Provincial Government has abdicated its most important functions, leaving them to be performed by the Montreal Board of Trade.

It will probably be said that this inaction of our Executive Government was occasioned by unavoidable circumstances, some of them beyond their control—such as the change of Governor—and others arising from their uncertain position as a Ministry. We have already, in former articles, answered such arguments, nor do we feel necessary again to go over the same ground. We now seek to urge the attention of the commercial community to facts as they stand, without narrowly investigating their causes; our object is to awaken them from the lethargy in which they are placed, and to caution them against too great a reliance on the Government; and this can only be done by shewing how little the Government has as yet done for their interests.

If no great confidence can be placed on the favourable intentions of the Executive Government, as regards Free Trade, still less cause we fear is there to be satisfied of their power to carry out such views as they may entertain. There is indeed too much reason to apprehend that the weakness of the administration will have an injurious effect on our interests, and that too much of the time of the ensuing session will be taken up in the discussion of party questions, to the exclusion of the great commercial questions which so imperatively call for settlement. This is a danger at which we cannot avoid glancing, but we shall not dwell on it at any length, as we wish to avoid writing anything which may identify this paper with any political party.

If we turn to the composition of the House of Assembly,—of which fully one-half are chosen from amongst the learned professions,—we see little to inspire us with hope. We trust it may not be