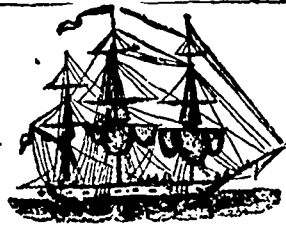


CANADIAN ECONOMIST.



FREE TRADE JOURNAL, AND WEEKLY COMMERCIAL NEWS.

Vol. I.]

MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 1846.

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THE CANADIAN ECONOMIST.

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NAVIGATION LAWS.

At length we may congratulate our readers that the public attention is thoroughly awakened to those important questions which have so fully occupied our columns, since the institution of our journal. Every newspaper which we receive, from one extremity of Canada to the other, teems with articles on the subject of Free Trade. The Differential Duties, to protect the British manufactures, and the restrictions on our commerce in the shape of the Navigation Laws, to protect the British shipowner, are the predominant topics; and although, as might be expected, there is some difference of opinion as to particular details, there is a wonderful approximation in the main result. It is true, that an attempt has been made in some quarters to excite apprehensions that the removal within the Colony of the protection formerly afforded to British manufactures, might lead to a withdrawal, in Britain, of the modicum of protection still afforded to our timber, but, it has been unavailing: the declarations of the British ministry are too precise to admit of a doubt, that their intention is to give unconditionally to our Legislature the power of assimilating the duties on British and foreign products here, without reference to any policy which they may hereafter think proper to adopt towards our products. Any other conclusion derived from the British Possessions Bill, would involve the British minister, either in the folly of entering into an irrevocable compact with the Colony to maintain intact the protective duties now in force, or the guilt of holding out the delusive promise to the Colonial Legislature of a power which he, at the same time, determined they should never use. A sense of policy and a sense of honour would alike deter from such a course of policy. We may, therefore, safely conclude that our Legislature will be, in the broadest sense of the word, free to act as the interest of the country may require in the matter of the Differential Duties; and thus, the main stumbling block to their removal being withdrawn, we may hope that they will be expunged from our commercial code.

One step in the march of Free Trade will thus have been gained, but we must not therefore relax in our exertions. Our next move is to urge sound views on our Legislators! It is not sufficient that they obtain the power, they must have the knowledge and the inclination requisite to redress our grievances. This is a subject on which we shall not dilate at present, but reserve it for another opportunity.

We pass on to the subject of the modification of the British Navigation Laws, which the Free Trade Association, and the Boards of Trade in Montreal and throughout Canada West, have urged on the British Government. Those laws, as already observed, have been lately the engrossing topic of discussion through the public press, and strange to say, whilst there have been found several *quasi* de-

fenders of these principles as regards Imperial interests, we believe there is not one who is hardy enough to deny that they do, to a certain degree, act injuriously on us as Colonists. Under this view of the Navigation Laws, it surely was admissible on the part of those who are the sufferers, to state their complaints; but how much more did it become the duty of those who considered the continuance of those laws, in their integrity, as incompatible with the future prosperity of this Colony, to demonstrate their baneful influence, and urge for their repeal or modification? Yet it seems this exercise of what has been styled the sacred right of petition, is distasteful to the editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, and the Free Trade Association, together with the Board of Trade in Montreal, are honored with his unmeasured censure, for presuming to avail themselves of it.

For the body of whom this paper may be considered as the organ we may venture to state, that the oblique censure attempted to be cast on them, passes over and leaves them unscathed. With all due respect for the profound erudition of the Editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, they deem it no derogation from that "modesty" so "commendable" in his eyes, that merchants should state their opinions on commercial matters. They even fancy that a practical experience of the evils resulting from both the British Navigation Laws and our own vicious commercial system, enables them to place those opinions in such light as to carry conviction to the minds of men who would give little weight to conclusions derived from theory alone.

It is true we have not, like the Editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, when treating of the Navigation Laws, edified our readers with the fact, that "the Canadian French are principally descended from that very Celtic race which was driven into Normandy, and into Brittany by the Teutonic tribes which peopled England." Neither have we, like him, raised the phantom of "Hengist the Saxon," or of "the banner of the White Horse of that chieftain." Our conjurations have been of another character; they are stern realities, which we have endeavoured to teach how to encounter.

"This is the only witchcraft" we "have used."

It has thus, unfortunately for our *confre*, happened that the *Economist*, stating plain facts to plain men, guided by the light of common sense, discarding all prejudices, and using reason alone for the accomplishment of its purposes, has attained a degree of influence throughout the country, which the *Montreal Gazette* apparently no longer possesses.

We doubt if the articles which appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* of the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th instant, on the subject of the Navigation Laws, are calculated to replace the Editor in the high position which he formerly occupied as a leading exponent of the views of the commercial class. We have perused and reperused those articles, and must in candour confess that we are puzzled to know what are the real views and opinions of the writer. On a sudden he waxes very wroth at the presumption of the Free-Trade Association and the Boards of Trade, who coincide in the pursuance of the same object, for daring to urge the modification of the British Navigation Laws, yet their reports, when they first appeared, scarce excited any comment on his part! Why this long silence? Was it that he waited to know what reception the demand on the British Government would have, in order to shape his course accordingly? Finding or fancying that there are difficulties to be encountered, he at length discovers that the report of the Montreal Board of Trade is "very unworthy of a mercantile body," that their demand of the modification of the British Navigation Laws is "preposterous," "unreasonable and absurd," places "Repeal of the Union and of the Navigation Laws" "much in the same category," and finally declares it as his "solemn conviction" that "England will never abandon her Navigation Laws until she has determined to abandon her Colonial system, nor abandon it in any colony until she has determined to abandon that colony." These, as Fiellen says, be "as grave words at the bridge, as you shall see in a summer's day;" and ought, we suppose, in the estimation of the worthy Editor, to be deemed conclusive; but, fortunately, the antidote is to be found in his own admissions, which are by no means few and unimportant, and, in fact, comprehend nearly every point urged by the Board of Trade and the Free-Trade Association.

1st. He admits (see *Gazette* of 9th instant) "that if Great Britain will allow us to free ourselves, unconditionally, from these restrictions, it will be a great boon, though not perhaps so great as