

BRITISH CONNECTION AND CANADIAN POLICY.

No. VII.

What a host of objectors start up with their shouts of No! no! whenever Canada appears to be asserting for herself, even in quite moderate and reasonable degree, what Burns calls "the glorious privilege of being independent." "Take any shape but that," they say, in effect, to this new nationality of ours. Try Federation of the Empire, limited representation of Canadian interests in London, or—if you will have it—annexation to the United States: anything, in short, except this dreadful last resort of Canada actually attempting to do for herself. Something else may do, but that—never! Sydney Smith thought that by a surgical operation a joke might possibly be got into the head of a Scotchman; but there are those here, in England, and in the United States, of whom we may say that not even by such heroic treatment could there be introduced into their heads the conception of Canada setting up in business for herself. Deep rooted in their minds is this fixed idea, of which they cannot quit themselves, that for Canada there is no destiny which does not include, as one of its main conditions, commercial vassalage and subjection either to England or the United States. It goes beyond them even to imagine that the Dominion can take and keep a commercial standing of its own; the idea is one that does not come within their mental vision to contemplate as among the possibilities. The thing positively cannot be got into their heads; their stretch of conception appears to be too limited to take it in. In this matter their case is literally one of *prepossession*; seldom is the bottom meaning of the word more strikingly exemplified. So thoroughly are they possessed with the idea that Canada must inevitably be and remain in a state of commercial subservience, either to her nearest neighbour or the mother country, or to both, that they have no room in their minds for any other conception of what our future is to be. And so, while some of them look forward to a Federation of the Empire, under which the Free Trade system of the mother country would be to a considerable extent imposed upon the Colonies, others fix their eyes upon Annexation, or at least a Customs Union with the States, as the one thing needful and inevitable, to which we must come at last. One enthusiastic contributor to the CANADIAN SPECTATOR has our destiny already in sight, and pretty near at hand, too, and thus pictures what is to be by the date of July 1, 1881:—"Our commercial relations with the United States are all we can desire. Through an assimilation of seaboard tariffs, and removal of frontier custom-houses, we have the fullest reciprocity, untrammelled by any restriction. With a boundless field for the energies and enterprise of our people, we have now the spur to an honourable competition, which must tend to the development of every latent capacity." Then we are treated to some glittering generalities concerning the wonderful beneficial results flowing from our political separation from Great Britain, and the setting up of a Canadian Republic, commercially annexed to the United States. As a consequence of our fisheries being open to our neighbours—they are open enough already, surely—"immense additions have taken place to the population on our coasts," shipbuilding and the lumber trade have revived, and our ocean tonnage has doubled. It would be difficult to put in any shorter space as many fancies so utterly at variance with all that we can learn from known facts. "The fullest reciprocity, untrammelled by any restriction," sounds well, but what does it actually mean? It means, when we come down to the hard, realistic truth of the matter, that the rising manufactures of Canada, now just beginning under the new policy to recover from a very trying time of depression, are to be summarily extinguished—crushed out—by exposure to the unchecked competition of the larger and longer established American concerns. By the customs returns of the last five or six years, quoted in this journal two weeks ago, it is proved that in certain important branches American goods have been driving British goods out of the neutral Canadian market, which is open to both on the same terms. The change is neither trifling in extent nor temporary in character, it has been going steadily on these five years, and a difference of many millions in favour of the United States, and against Great Britain, has grown up. And from those who know we have the further assurance that, but for the very long credits given by British houses, as against the cash or third credit terms which are the rule over the border, the gain of our custom by American from British traders would be very much greater than what we have yet seen. Only the long oft-renewed credits granted in England to our importers, fetters which bind them to continue dealing where their indebtedness lies, prevents even a still more extensive substitution of American for English goods in our warehouses. The abolition of frontier custom houses, and the establishment of reciprocity untrammelled, means simply the ruin of Canadian manufactures,

and the transfer of business now done in our own cities to New York, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago and St. Paul. As I have before ventured to affirm, the idea of our finding a market for Canadian manufactures in a country which boasts of its New England, New York and Pennsylvania, is one of the most foolish that unpractical, visionary mortals ever entertained. The talk of there being opened to us a boundless field for our enterprise, and about the spur to an honourable competition, is utterly fallacious and misleading. The "honourable competition" would consist of the summary shutting up of many of our mills and factories; and the "boundless field" is one that we might tramp over from June to January without being able to sell as much of our manufactures as would buy salt for our porridge. I think I may assert, without much fear of contradiction, that our practical business men no longer entertain the illusion that we could at present compete on even terms with the States in any of the *larger* manufactures. That foolish belief is now confined to fanciful people, whose minds are possessed of notions of "boundless fields" and "reciprocity untrammelled," but who really know nothing at all of the hard facts of business competition.

Although looking from a different standpoint, the objectors abroad have the same prepossessions, and so take the same ignoble view of Canada's destiny that is taken by objectors at home. The London *Examiner* sees in the existing connection something that disturbs and hinders Canada, while Canada, on the other hand, is a pregnant source of disquietude and a perennial expense to the mother country. We don't know exactly where the "expense" comes in; but the facts are so little known in the old country that it need not be deemed extraordinary should even reputed well-informed English journals be found labouring under the misapprehension that Canada's government expenses are paid out of the Imperial revenue. Canadian railways are a source of danger—to English interests, that is—says the *Examiner*. We may ask whether the Erie, the Atlantic and Great Western, and some other American roads that might be named, are sources of profit and delight to British bondholders. No, indeed; but, you see, over the water it is considered "the thing" to speak softly of American delinquencies, while nothing is too rough to say about Canada. The *Examiner* quotes approvingly the late Mr. McGee's presentation of three possible courses for these Provinces,—closer connections between themselves; annexation to the United States; and guaranteed neutrality under the protection of the Powers. The first has been tried, in the shape of Confederation, and, in the *Examiner's* opinion, has failed. The third is too impracticable to be discussed; and there remains only the second, to which the London Radical journal very much off-hand and "with a light heart" commends us.

The New York *Tribune* takes up the song, puts in some cheerful cadences of its own, and with well-affected indifference backs up the English irreconcilables in the view that annexation is the sure and only destiny of Canada—at last. But there is to be no compulsion in the matter,—oh! no, not even the shadow of it; that would never do. Nor is there to be any unseemly hurry about it either. Our colossal neighbour simply takes on a patronizing, but still overawing attitude of dignified neutrality and says: "Just as you like, my little dear; you takes your choice. The Union is here for you to drop into any time you are so disposed." With a unanimity which is quite remarkable enough to be suspicious, English Free Traders and American Protectionists agree in thinking that for Canada to try to be commercially independent is nonsense. Both these conflicting schools agree that for that we must submit ourselves either to the British or the American system; and that for us to presume to have one of our own is something too audacious to be contemplated.

But this is just what we are going to try, nevertheless. Leaving Mexico to its own devices and destiny, we beg to advise the world that there are going to be at least two nations on this North American Continent, and not one only. We declare ourselves commercially independent, but we profess political allegiance to the Crown, and for peace or war we hold ourselves in alliance with the mother country—part and parcel of the Empire—to share its fortunes as a Power in the world. Will this offer of our allegiance and alliance be rejected, because for economical reasons we think it good policy to develop manufactures? We think not; we feel quite sure that neither John Bright nor the London *Examiner* speaks the voice of the British people in this matter. If through Protection Canada prospers, then surely the Empire gains by the prosperity of this part of it; if not, let us find it out for ourselves, and do after a while what the mother country did thirty years ago. But, as even people "at home" seem to be getting doubtful these days as to the wisdom of their then headlong course, taken under the inspiration of prophets whose predictions have, in some important respects, been remarkably falsified by events, it appears as if a tone less dogmatic and more considerate might befit our transatlantic instructors. Are they really out of the wood themselves, that they should lecture us so confidently? We propose to keep before them, until such time as they can manage to "take in" the new situation, the idea of Canada, commercially independent, but still under political allegiance to the Crown, and still in military alliance with the rest of the Empire. Let it be hoped that for the introduction of this idea into their pre-occupied heads a surgical operation will not be necessary after all.

Argus.