

THE OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

The interest taken in the question of Free Trade by the press and public of this Colony, continues, as we desire it should, advancing with steady progress. Scarcely a paper reaches us from the Western section of the Province without an article on this important topic. It is handled by some with ability and knowledge; while others display in the discussion the most childish ignorance of the whole subject. But there is one feature common to all the journals that come under our notice from that quarter of the country, viz.: the idea, that the Free-traders of Montreal have the interests of this city *exclusively in view*. A more erroneous impression could not exist; in proof of which assertion we may point to every document that has emanated from them up to the present moment, either directly from their association or from the articles that have appeared in this journal. They have repudiated sectional purposes, and class interests, from the commencement of their career; relying on the singleness and comprehensiveness of their principles, and the liberality of their views, for the ultimate conversion of the public mind from one end of the Province to the other.

They advocate changes which they conceive would be for the common benefit of every individual in the Colony, opposing a certain class of duties and restrictions, which they find in existence, because they believe them to be injurious to the general welfare, as promoting the interests of certain classes at the expense of all the rest.

We, for instance, as the organ of this numerous and growing party, oppose the differential duties because they prevent our going to the cheapest market for the articles we require to import; and some of the Upper Canada journals, particularly the *Patriot*, retort upon us, "What has Montreal to gain by the removal of the differential duties?" and, then, the latter goes on to state, that "if these duties were removed, Canada West would draw the whole of her supplies from New York, to the positive injury of Montreal."

The Free-traders of Montreal look at the general effects of these differential duties, and therefore oppose them. Seeing that they absorb upwards of £250,000 per annum from the pockets of the people, they wish to save that amount, by allowing them to go to the *cheapest market* for their supplies, by which means trade will be extended and the comforts of the people greatly augmented. Montreal desires nothing but a fair field and no favour; at least the Free Trade party do not. There are some old men, or rather *old women*, in the community, it is true, who would not hesitate to sacrifice the best interests of the Colony, and those of the Mother Country included, to obtain some paltry advantage by *restrictive laws* for the City of Montreal; but with these selfish, narrow-minded men, the Free Trade party have no sympathy; on the contrary, they entertain for such views an unbounded contempt.

Let Government hasten the completion of the Canals, and the deepening of Lake St. Peter; and let private enterprise push forward the Portland Railway, and the building of a class of vessels better suited for the navigation of the St. Lawrence than have hitherto been in use, and then Montreal, the Free Trade party think, need feel no alarm for the future. It must not be concealed, however—nay, it must be proclaimed with a voice of earnest warning, that it is on these great ameliorations alone that Montreal can hope to retain not only what she has hitherto enjoyed, but any portion whatever, of the great and lucrative trade of the West. If our fellow-citizens, however, slumber and brood over these improvements instead of seeing them carried out with vigour in order that they may all be complete before 1849, then we venture to foretel them that this noble city will dwindle into insignificance, that the wharves will be allowed to rot for want of use, and that property throughout the length and breadth of the city will not command half the money which it is now worth.

Awake then, ye torpid land-owners, to the realities of your situation. Examine what gives value to your property, and learn that it is the commerce of the city, and further that that commerce must rely in future mainly on the Portland Railway for its success, nay for its very existence. Up, then, and be stirring. The stock of this Railway is as yet not more than half taken up, and the probability is that the enterprise will be entirely abandoned unless the whole amount is taken up within this month. Remember, the question which you have to solve is not, will the stock pay? but what will your property be worth in three years if this road is not then in operation? The answer is obvious, your property will be depreciated fully 50 per cent. Ponder, and act ere it be too late to remedy the fatal effects of your insane supineness.

We intended before closing this article to have drawn attention to the class of sea going vessels hitherto in use on the St. Lawrence, showing how utterly unsuited they have been for our trade, and how easy as well as profitable it would be to construct vessels of

500 to 600 tons burden, which would not draw when loaded over 12 to 13 feet water, and would consequently with trifling exceptions be able at all seasons of the year, during open navigation, to come up to this city and depart with their cargoes on board complete; but we find that we must defer the consideration of this important subject to our next.

EFFECT OF FREE TRADE UPON PRICES—FOREIGN COMPETITION.

We believe that very few of those who have at all looked into the question entertain any serious idea that the price of wheat is likely to be materially affected by the application of Free Trade principles to commerce. The ability of other European countries to supply England with bread-stuffs at greatly reduced rates, has, it has been proved, been grossly exaggerated. The advantages some of these countries enjoy in a low rate of wages and the absence of public burthens on land, are more than counter-balanced by the superior climate, more steady command of labour, superior skill, and vastly improved agriculture of the English farmer. It has been proved by enquires instituted by the British Government that the largest quantity of wheat which could annually, under favourable circumstances, be supplied to that country from the whole of the usual shipping ports of Europe would be 2,222,461 quarters, at a price averaging 40s. 6d. per quarter free on board, and at a freight averaging 4s. 9d. per quarter, to which would have to be added insurance, merchant's profits, portorage, waste, and damage not covered by insurance. The *League* very reasonably supposes that the price of wheat under Free Trade will not be far from that which has been the average in the Channel Islands, viz.:—47s. per quarter, and adds—"We have no doubt that when the trade in Corn becomes free there will be a sufficient and constant importation to prevent the price rising to an exorbitant rate; but if the price be much reduced it will be effected by the increased growth of wheat in this country, the result of the stimulus to husbandry given by Free Trade. The tale about the unlimited foreign supply is a mere buggaboo story, which nobody believes, not even those who tell it."

In the same spirit, Mr. McCulloch years ago wrote—"The landlords and farmers may take courage. Their prosperity does not depend on restrictive regulations, but is the effect of the fertility of the soil which belongs to them, of the absence of all oppressive feudal privileges, and of the number and wealth of the consumers of their produce. The unbounded freedom of the Corn Trade would not render it necessary to abandon any but the most worthless soils, which ought never to have been broken up; and would, consequently, have but a very slight effect on rent; while it would be in other respects supremely advantageous to the landlords, whose interests are closely identified with those of the other classes."

It is necessary that these facts should be well known, as they must serve to allay many of the fears entertained in this Colony respecting the effect of the new policy on the trade of the country. People generally, indeed, attach far too much importance to the ability of foreign countries to supply England with wheat. Mr. Porter, in his "Progress of the Nation," goes into this question, and shows, on the contrary, how little Great Britain is dependent on foreign countries to make up her own deficiency. His calculation of imports per head for the whole population, from 1801 to 1835, stands thus:—

- 1801 to 1810, about a peck per head.
- 1811 to 1821, not quite one gallon and a half per head.
- 1821 to 1831, about the same.
- 1831 to 1835, a gallon per head.

And it is very doubtful whether, at all events for many years to come, this amount could be much increased. It must be borne in mind that most of the countries from which England now draws supplies are themselves making some, though slow, progress, and that in proportion as they do advance, they will become greater consumers, and will find markets for their produce nearer home instead of sending it away.

Those who watch the variations of the market at home, know very well what it is that affects prices. If the prospects of the harvest are good, prices rule low; but a few showers of rain send them up again, and that with but little reference to the state of things in foreign countries. Under a system of Free Trade, it is true that the fluctuations will be less sudden and frequent than they have been, but still the rule itself will hold good, that the English farmer will himself fix the price—that the larger quantity will govern the value of the lesser,—and that the greatest importation it is within reason to conceive, will not sink down the value of wheat below the level of what is at present considered a fair remuneration for the English agriculturist.