

THE TARIFF ENQUIRY.

THE DRY GOODS MEN HAVE THEIR SAY TO THE FEDERAL MINISTERS.

A MOST representative deputation of the Montreal Dry Goods Association waited upon the Tariff Commission on Wednesday afternoon, December 16, Messrs. Greenshields, Thibaudeau and Slessor being the spokesmen. The other wholesale men present were: Messrs. R. Macdougall, C. A. Smyth, P. Black, R. N. Smith, James A. Cantlie, B. Tooke, Jonathan Hodgson, — Wolff and W. Reid.

Mr. Greenshields was the first to speak. He said: As president of the Wholesale Dry Goods Association I have been asked, with Mr. Thibaudeau, the president of last year, and Mr. Slessor, to lay before you the views of the association regarding the tariff.

Before doing so, we wish to thank you for your courtesy in allowing us to discuss the matter with you, and we feel sure the same courtesy will always be extended to us whenever we may have to go to Ottawa to see you about any matters connected with the tariff.

In talking over the matter at the annual meeting of the association the general feeling expressed was that we should not ask the Ministry for any serious reduction in the tariff. The rate of duties must be determined by the Ministry, who are responsible to the country, and we are sure, from the course already taken to arrive at correct information, that the Ministers will give the most careful attention to all the needs of the various trade interests.

In our line of business the chief thing to be desired is persistence of the conditions under which the business of the country is done. Unless we know that these conditions will remain the same from year to year, it is impossible to satisfactorily arrange our plans and make the necessary purchases in advance for the needs of the country. The best and most carefully thought-out arrangements may be shattered by any sudden blow that changes the wished-for permanence in business relations. Next to this, we wish to see the tariff on each distinct class of goods the same, so that all articles in each class may pay the same rate of duty, and all merchants, in whatever part of the country they may be, charged the same rate. I need only mention one article.—buttons. There are seven different classifications for these in the present tariff. We want all these articles that come under one head to be classed as one, and we want the merchants to pay the same duty on all the goods all through the country.

He then submitted the following resolution passed at a meeting of the Wholesale Dry Goods Association on Dec. 15th:

Resolved, That the Montreal Wholesale Dry Goods Association, desiring to see corrected some of the anomalies and difficulties which at present exist owing to the various rates of duty imposed on the same class of goods, hereby recommends that the tariff be so altered as to make the duty the same on all the different articles which go to make up classes of goods such as cotton goods, woolen dress goods, woolen goods for men's wear, linen and jute goods, silk goods, notions, haberdashery, carpets of all kinds, knitted goods of all kinds, caps and bonnets, clothing of all kinds.

And also, That this association place itself on record as being opposed to any proposition looking to a general uniformity of tariff.

These two resolutions might look as if they were opposed to one another, but the difficulty which they had to contend with was that the same goods, although of a slightly different material, had to pay so many different rates of duty. In the old tariff, hooks and eyes, if made of iron, were 27½, if of brass, 30; muslins, white, 25, and colored linens, 30; plain, 20; white damasks, 25; colored, 30; belts, 25 and 30 per cent. As he had already mentioned, there were seven different duties on buttons. If made of

bone, 20; pearl, 8 and 20; rubber buttons, 4 and 20; if made of gold, 25 per cent. Boot buttons were free; agate buttons, 25 per cent., and if not elsewhere specified shoe buttons 20 per cent. That meant a most extraordinary tariff, and it was almost impossible for anyone to do business under those circumstances. The point which they wished to get at was that the Ministry should satisfy themselves as to what rate of duty should be charged upon each particular class and then make that class all the same. They did not want a uniform tariff on everything, as they would much prefer a diversified tariff, but that each should be classified and the duty be the same.

Resolved, That this association recommends that specific duties be done away with, making the tariff purely ad valorem. Continuing, Mr. Greenshields said that the large majority of the association voted in favor of this, but a manufacturer and manufacturers' agent wished it to be understood that they did not agree with this resolution.

Resolved, That in the opinion of this association no goods which have gone through a process of manufacture should be permitted to come into Canada free of duty. This was a point on which they felt very strongly.

In answer to Mr. Fielding, as to whether he meant that these goods were imported for manufacturing purposes and then applied to ordinary business, Mr. Greenshields said it was so, and the only remedy for this was not to allow manufactured goods in as raw material. The only other way out of the difficulty was for the Government to devise some action whereby these goods would not be out of their hands until cut up. If these goods are entered as raw material the Government should see that they are used as such, and not come into competition with the goods which the merchant had paid duty on.

The last resolution was: That, in order to obtain a more uniform appraisement for duty, the number of ports of entry should be materially reduced.

They did not know positively about those things, but they were told that some ports of entry did not collect enough duties to pay the salaries of the officials attached. They had to have Custom houses at all lake and sea ports, but they did not see why small inland places should have ports of entry. These were the different matters he was asked to bring before them, and he would ask Mr. Thibaudeau and Mr. Slessor to follow him.

Mr. Thibaudeau said he had not much more to say, after the statement of Mr. Greenshields. He could submit a good many examples of different rates of duty for the same class of goods. Mr. Thibaudeau, in answer to a question, said he was in favor of a uniform rate of duty for the different classes. Continuing, he said there would be no difficulty in making up a list of these classes.

Mr. Slessor next addressed the Ministers. He said there was quite a number of lines that had three or four rates of duty, which were not touched upon by Mr. Greenshields. In bed quilts alone they had four, viz.: White, 25, colored, 30, if made with the needle, that is to say hemmed, 32½ was the duty, and if knitted, 35 per cent. Then take collars. Lace collars, 30, paper collars, 35; linen and cotton, 24 cents per dozen and 25 per cent. Stockings were another article which varied. Stockings of all kinds were 10 cents a dozen and 35 per cent., and silk hosiery 35 per cent. The appraisers, he said, seemed to apply the tariff just as they liked. A knitted shawl came in at 35 per cent., but a knitted bootee made by the same manufacturer was charged 10 cents per dozen and 35 per cent. as a stocking, although it was not a stocking.

On tapes there were three duties. They had to pay 15 cents and 25 per cent. if there was any printing on them; but white tape was 25 and colored 30 per cent. With regard to muslins: Some time ago they went to Ottawa upon this question to interview the