

SIR ROBERT PEEL AND FREE TRADE.

The inhabitants of the town of Elbing, in Prussia, having some time since addressed a letter of congratulation to Sir Robert Peel, on the successful termination of the efforts of the late Premier for the establishment of Free Trade, have recently received the following reply to their memorial:—

Your address, in which you express your approbation of the great measures of financial and commercial reform which I have considered it my duty to lay before Parliament, I have received with very great pleasure. The object of the income tax was not only to make a good deficit, but also to lay the foundation of a more just system of taxation, by putting an end to duties before levied on raw materials, as well as these vexatious regulations of the Excise—and the duties on many kinds of produce necessary to the comfort of the working classes. The bill having for its object the limitation of the paper currency, has in no way affected public or individual interest, nor has the country been thereby deprived of the advantages of a paper circulation; but in placing the issue of this medium of exchange under certain reasonable restraints, the bill has been the means of checking abuse in times of great critical importance to the commercial interests of the country, as well as of unusual speculation. The bill has given to paper money a settled value in making it always exchangeable with specie. I learn with pleasure that the intent and effect of these measures have been properly appreciated by distinguished politicians of other countries.

That part of your address wherein you admit the principle of commercial legislation, which, by order of Parliament, is now in force, has afforded me above all things the most lively satisfaction. The measures proposed for the diminution of custom-house duties have been brought forward without any similar concessions having been offered by foreign countries; they have been proposed because the general interest of the country demanded it. Their effects are sufficiently advantageous to fully justify the steps we have taken, for it is contrary to the principles of political economy to purchase at a dearer rate articles of inferior value; and the authors of this measure have thought that the principles of their commercial legislation would be adopted by other nations. Difficulties and obstacles may arise; and financial embarrassment, which appears to be the strongest argument in support of the protective system, will, in certain countries, be advanced as a reason for continuing it. Individuals who profit by high duties are favourably listened to by the government; in other cases they form the most numerous part of the population, or at least a powerful party in the legislative assemblies.

Interests are thus represented *en masse*; but this isolated interest cannot long offer resistance to the arguments and manifest interest of the great social body. The public finances labour under a double disadvantage; first, by the prejudice with which they are regarded, and the consequent support offered to smuggling; and, secondly, by the great expenses incurred in its suppression; so that, eventually, it will be seen by those who are responsible for the financial condition of their respective countries, that it is prudent and politic to replace, by such moderate duties as will permit the commerce and revenue of the country to increase, those high duties which either diminish, or altogether prohibit, the importation of foreign produce, and sustain certain branches of trade at the expense of the public finances.

The social condition of that country which maintains with the greatest rigour the protective system, will be opposed to the state of another which has adopted liberal principles, and the conviction of the value of such principles will not obtain, unless by the encouragement of the freedom of exchange amongst all the nations of the world; the well-being of each individual will be increased, and the will of Providence will be fulfilled—that Providence which has given to every country a sun, a climate and a soil; each differing one from the other, not for the purpose of rendering them severally independent of each other; but on the contrary, in order that they may feel their reciprocal dependence by the exchange of their respective produce, thus causing them to enjoy in common the blessings of Providence. It is thus that we find in commerce the means of advancing civilization, of appeasing jealousy and national prejudice, and of bringing about a universal peace, either from national interest or from Christian duty.

I have the honour, &c.

ROBERT PEEL.

Now that the commercial season has finished, we shall be enabled to find more room in the *Economist* for the contributions of our Free Trade friends, whose exertions are more particularly required at this moment against the meeting of Parliament, when the whole commerce of the country will have to be brought under review, in order to take advantage of the invitation of the mother country, to assimilate our policy to the more liberal spirit of the day. We trust, therefore, that we shall receive increased assistance from without. At the same time, we would express our thanks to those correspondents who have already so liberally contributed to our aid, and more particularly to the author of the letters on "Joint-stock Companies," and the writer of the Post-Office communications.

GENERAL, PROVINCIAL, AND LOCAL INTELLIGENCE.

Another public dinner was given to Mr. Baldwin, on the 16th ultimo, by the electors of the County of Norfolk. The report of the Honble. Gentleman's speech occupies five columns of the local newspapers, and refers principally to political topics, the allusion to the commerce of the country being very slight and unimportant.—The *Montreal Gazette* states that Mr. Keefer, the engineer in charge of the Welland Canal, was in the confident hope of so far completing the repairs on that work, as to commence passing fifty vessels on Saturday last.—Mr. Shepherd, agent of the Montreal Mining Company, has published his Report. It gives a general description of the features of the mining, with a more particular account of each locality. In the course of his remarks, Mr. Shepherd speaks of this locality as likely to rival Swansea, in South Wales, and to maintain the superiority of Great Britain as a mineral kingdom. He also draws a flattering picture of the progress made by the American companies. Factories, foundries, and furnaces, he says, are springing up along the sea-board to meet the increasing demand for this important metal. In the small State of Massachusetts, two millions and five hundred thousand pounds are annually manufactured; and in the smaller State of Connecticut, one house alone, in a small village, manufactures four hundred and sixty-nine thousand five hundred pounds annually, into brass wire. Mr. Shepherd also acknowledges the services of Mr. Logan, the Provincial Geologist, whose incessant and arduous labors in this immense field for investigation will not only, he says, enhance the value of the public domain, but secure for him, in the scientific world, a well-earned reputation "as enduring as the rocks and waters."—The Court of Queen's Bench of Montreal, have decided against the right of Mr. J. E. Mills to exercise the office of Mayor, on the ground that his election was decided by the vote of a person not legally eligible, and who has been since unseated as a Common Council-man. There seems to be a difference of opinion as to the effect of this decision—whether it restores Mr. Forrier, or leaves the office altogether subject to a new election.—We regret to learn that there have been some losses at sea, consequent on the late gale. The ship *Mersy*, and the ship *Reliance*, both went ashore on the 24th ult., at Grand Ance, three miles above Matane. The *Empire*, it is said, experienced a similar fate at Little Matane, and the *Harland* is in the same situation, at Pislet. Fears are also entertained for the whole fleet of 23 or 24 vessels, that were in company when the gale came on. On the Upper Lakes, also, there have been a great many disasters, accompanied with loss of life. But the most serious occurrence yet known, is the loss of the steamer *Atlantic*, from Boston to New York, which was driven ashore near New London, in the gale of the 26th; and as far as is yet ascertained, twenty-nine lives were lost.—The last vessel to sail from Quebec, this fall, the brig *Marquis of Normandy*, got under way on Monday evening at a little after 5 o'clock, with a fine westerly breeze.—Mr. Isaac Buchanan has published another letter. It is addressed to Lord Egin, and prophesies the loss of the Colony in consequence of Free Trade.—The weather has again moderated, and the river is as yet free of ice. The *Prince Albert* is still making daily trips to Laprairie, but the Quebec boats have been all laid up for the season.—There is no later news from Monterey. It is understood that the American Government is preparing an expedition, under General Scott, to take possession of Tampico as a new basis of operations. A kind of negotiation for peace had commenced between Mr. Buchanan and a Mexican agent. The President, it was rumoured, would make a large demand on Congress for money and men. He seems to have confirmed the "annexation" of North Mexico, by appointing civil administrators of justice.

STATISTICS OF SHIPPING AT QUEBEC.

During the season of navigation which has just closed, there have arrived at Quebec, from sea, 1,439 vessels, forming an aggregate of 573,208 tons; the crews of these vessels average about 15 men each, making 21,585 seamen. Of these—including new vessels—1,362 have cleared at Quebec, 90 of which were from Montreal, having partly loaded there, and had to have the remainder of their cargoes brought down in lighters, owing to the shallowness of Lake St. Peter, and consequently had to re-clear here; thus leaving 1,272 that have loaded at Quebec.

There were 30 vessels built at Quebec, during the year ended 1st ult., forming an aggregate of 19,751 tons, of these 24 were square-rigged, forming 19,369 tons, which, added to the tonnage of arrivals this year, 573,208 tons, makes 592,577 tons of shipping that have loaded in the ports of Quebec and Montreal, this year.

The number of arrivals at this port, from sea, is 36 less this year than last—but the tonnage this year exceeds that of last by 13,496 tons.

The number of arrivals at Montreal were, in 1845—202 vessels, tonnage 51,295; and in 1846—221 vessels, tonnage 55,968.