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Soldier Replies to Parsons

Shows how Free Trade will Develop Manufacturing Industry

JOHN W. Ward, former associate editor of The Guide, and now a soldier in France, has sent the following letter of comment on the address of Mr. Parsons, at the convention of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association:—

No. 13 Convalescent Depot,
B.E.F., France.

An open letter to
S. R. Parsons,
Past President,
Canadian Manufacturers' Ass'n.

Dear Sir:—

I am writing to thank you and the association which you represent, for the pleasure which I have had in reading in The Grain Growers' Guide, the full text of the speech which you made before the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, at Montreal on June 15th last. Like you, I am deeply and sincerely interested in the welfare of Canada. Unfortunately, however, I cannot boast as you do of the amount of money which I or my associates have invested in war loans or the number of men that I have contributed to the colors. I do not, indeed, quite understand how one man, even though he be a manufacturer, can contribute other men to the colors, but at any rate I have contributed myself, and perhaps it may interest you to know that I was one of the Canadians who helped to drive the Germans from in front of Amiens, and that I owe the leisure which permits me to write this letter, to the fact that I got in the way of a German bullet on the third day of that historic battle. I am interested in Canada because I have given that country more than two-and-a-half years of my life, and because if I am fortunate enough to be alive and well when victory has crowned our efforts in the war, I intend to return there to earn my living. It is within the bounds of possibility that I may in the future raise a family in Canada, and I want to see Canada become, even more than in the past, a country in which not only I and my family, but every useful citizen may be able to earn a good living and enjoy the full fruits of his and her labor under conditions of the greatest possible freedom and enlightenment.

Need for Missionaries

Your letter has convinced me of what I have for some time suspected, namely, that the greatest need of Canada just now, commercially, is the sending of missionaries to the manufacturing districts of the country to convert them to Free Trade. You, yourself, in your speech have provided them with several excellent texts. You tell us yourself that the tariff is a burden on manufacturing industries, and mention that one Toronto concern manufacturing machinery has paid an average rate of duty on its raw material amounting to 25 per cent. I presume this concern also paid duty on its own plant when it was established, and from time to time enlarged it, or if it bought its machinery in Canada it had to pay for it prices which were higher than they would have been in the absence of a tariff. The workmen and all employees of that concern, also, must pay more for their food, clothing and homes because of the tariff, and must therefore have bigger wages in order to live in the same degree of comfort. In every way the cost of manufacturing is increased by the tariff, and still you call the tariff "protective."

And then you speak of export trade and you quote Sir Albert Stanley, M.P., president of the British Board of Trade as asking:—

"Unless industries would be carried on with an equal degree of efficiency, unless they could produce their manufactured products at prices that would compare favorably with those of their great foreign competitors, what chance had the country of succeeding in establishing its place with the other nations

of the world?" Then you say "There is only one way to pay off our accumulated war debts, and that is by producing in field, forest, mine and factory all that we possibly can, and selling these products at as high a margin over the cost of production as we are able to secure."

Free Import Essential

Quite so. And how can we do that, when the cost of production of every thing we produce in Canada is artificially raised by the so-called "protective" tariff. So far as export trade is concerned at least, I think you will agree with me that the tariff is "destructive" rather than "protective." The price which Canadian goods can command abroad is largely dependent upon the prices at which competing goods are offered, and is therefore beyond the control of the Canadian producer, but the cost of production can certainly be reduced and the margin of profit correspondingly increased by the removal of the Canadian tariff. The farmers fully realize this fact, but it applies just as strongly to mining, lumbering and manufacturing as it does to agriculture. Canada's financial position, not only her war debt, but her national, provincial, municipal and industrial debts erected before the war, demand a great increase in her exports after the war as compared with pre-war times, and I ask you if you can deny that free import would be of the greatest possible assistance to all producers for export.

One part of your address was unpleasant reading, and that was the passage in which you say "the history of the past generation shows thousands of abandoned industrial enterprises in which men have lost their all, just as there have been abandoned farms that were not made to pay." And again after giving figures of industrial failure in the United States you say, "It is the same thing in Canada; the few succeed whom we all hear about from the house-top, and the many either just get along, or languish and die."

Few Live; Many Die

What tragedies are suggested by the system of protection! Is it in order that the few may succeed while the many either just get along or languish and die, that the whole people of Canada are burdened with a tariff system that takes at least four times as much from their pockets as it places in the treasury of the country? I say to you, Mr. Parsons, and to the members of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, be a man, be men. Throw away the crutches on which you have been hobbling around and stand on your own feet. The crutches of protection have enabled a few of you to prosper, and have caused many more who sought to do the same to get stuck in the mud of disaster. But crutches are poor things to run a race with. Fling them aside, and if you are any good you will run the more swiftly without them. A self-respecting able-bodied man should be ashamed to take up a collection for his own benefit, even though the parliament of the land passes a law to enable him to do it, and calls it a customs act.

So far I have accepted everything which you have said as being true, but there is one sentence which I would like to amend. You say "Speaking broadly, Canada must choose between the tariff with manufacturers on the one hand, or Free Trade without manufacturers on the other." I would say "Canada must choose between the tariff with some manufacturers on the one hand, or Free Trade with more and better manufacturers on the other." I have given reasons for my version, you have given none for yours.

Yours very truly,

John W. Ward,
No. 234015, Pte, 44th Battalion,
Canadians, France.

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