

MR. GAMBLE'S SPEECH

ON THE

COMMERCIAL POLICY OF THE COUNTRY,

IN THE

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1852.

Mr. Gamble congratulated the hon. Inspector General upon the rapid progress he was making towards protection principles, as regarded the commercial policy of the country. He had that night made admissions, and repeated them over and over again, so that there might be no misunderstanding, and which admissions he had only to follow out to their legitimate conclusions to become a sound protectionist. He had declared that "it was idle to lay down general rules and apply them in every case"—that the farmers of Canada were on a worse footing than the farmers of the United States—and that the consumers in the United States, who were producers of other articles, were in a better position than the producers of similar articles in Canada—and that that superiority of position was the consequence of the protection which they enjoyed." Now that application of general rules, often inadequately supported by experience, and a love of reducing everything to system, was the fertile source of error with the free trade theories, and therefore the admission of the hon. Inspector General—that it was idle to lay down general rules, and apply them in every case—amounted virtually to a surrender of the outwork of the whole position. He (Mr. G.) heartily concurred in the truth of the admissions made by the hon. gentleman, but there the concurrence ended, for he was utterly opposed to the retaliatory policy the hon. gentleman had declared the Government were determined to carry out. The question now under consideration was unquestionably the most important one upon which Parliament had deliberated during the present session; it affected, in a greater or less degree, every interest of our country—every class of our community, whether producer, fashioner or exchanger, or in common parlance, farmer, mechanic or merchant, and every individual in each class—yes, even that numerous body of men belonging to the learned professions whose entire income is derived from the producing classes. Standing there as an humble advocate for his country's industry, he felt the responsibility which attached to him as a member of the Legislature, and deeply lamented the want of that mental capacity which alone could enable him to place before the House those great truths, those great facts which bear upon this question, with the perspicuity and force necessary to exhibit to the people of this country how intimately this question is connected with their welfare, with their growth in wealth, greatness and power.

He regretted not having been present in his place when the hon. member for Montreal had explained to the House his reasons for leaving the administration, because upon that occasion, in the statements made in the newspapers were true, the honourable Inspector General had gone more into the details of the proposed retaliatory policy than he had thought proper to do, during any of the subsequent discussions that had taken place. He had upon that occasion mentioned particular articles, and if he (Mr. G.) mistook not, particular rates to which certain duties were to be reduced; to-night he had only mentioned the article of sugar. The Government, however, were fully committed to the principle of a retaliatory policy; "they were determined upon it" were the words of the honourable Inspector General. Now in that policy he could not concur, neither could he assent to the resolution now before the Committee. He would therefore move an amendment to the following effect:—

"Resolved—That it is expedient to revise the duties now imposed upon goods, wares, and merchandise imported into this Province, in order that the Revenue derivable therefrom may be raised in such a manner as to foster and encourage those branches of native industry for which this country possesses natural advantages."

In conversing with many persons upon this question, he found an erroneous impression very prevalent, viz: that a retaliatory policy was equivalent, or, in fact, the same thing with a protective policy. The former, indeed, would to a certain extent, so far as importations from the United States were concerned, be protective; nevertheless, as he proposed to show, it left the great evil untouched—in fact, by partially re-enacting the differential duties, it renewed the system which had prevailed from the first conquest of Canada, and which, he believed, had been highly prejudicial to Canadian interests. It was proposed to re-enact, to a certain extent, those differential duties, which would necessarily be confined to the direct trade with the United States, for the purpose of forcing the up trade back into the channel of the St. Lawrence; thus its operation was limited to the commerce with the United States. Then that policy had a declared definite object—the coercing the United States to grant us reciprocity—and that object attained, it would of course end. Now, what in truth is this much coveted reciprocity?