

progress would be made in the way of tariff revision there. I believe it, Sir, because it was my good fortune in the month of January, 1893, more than a year ago, to be present at the dinner of the Board of Trade in Toronto and there I heard those words from my right hon. friend the Prime Minister. Speaking of the changes in public opinion which had taken place in the United States he continued in this way :

It may be that changes have taken place in the public mind since, and that far greater progress in the direction of tariff reform will be made, but let us wait and see the measure which is to be the result of the great change of opinion and the great change of parties. We are not driven to seek our example and our guidance in the statesmen of that country, but I should be foolish if I did not admit that every country is bound to take lessons by the experience of its neighbours and to be controlled to some extent in the formation of its tariff and regulation of its trade by the condition of the tariff and of trade in other countries.

Some hon. MEMBERS. Hear, hear.

Mr. LAURIER. Gentlemen opposite cheer the statement, and from that I understand that that was the reason. Then why has not the statement been openly made? Last year some reason had to be given by gentlemen opposite why the revision of the tariff was not proceeded with. The Prime Minister had occasion to speak, yet he never repeated that language before the House. He took a back seat on that occasion, and then my hon. friend the Minister of Finance came forward and stated: That indeed the tariff could not be proceeded with with regard to the revision of the same; not because it was wise to take the example from our neighbours, as had been stated by the Prime Minister in Toronto, but because he was not sure that there was a necessity for a revision of the tariff, because he did not know that there had been such an expression of opinion in the country, and he wanted to know from the people themselves what was their opinion upon that subject. He decided that he and his colleagues, during recess would go from place to place, meet the people and the various business interests, and see what was their opinion and their wish with regard to the tariff; whether it should be kept entire; whether it should be reformed, or whether it should be simply modified. That was the reason given last year, and when Parliament rose it was well understood that the Ministers were to go from place to place to interview the people and to ascertain their views with regard to the modification of the tariff. As it was natural to expect (and it is nothing extraordinary) there has been a great curiosity amongst the people to read, and to hear from the representatives of the various business interests themselves what was their opinion in regard to modifications in the tariff. Great, therefore, was the astonishment of

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the people, when on the 24th of April, at the first of these meetings in the city of Montreal, it was found that the conferences, instead of taking place in the light of day, were to take place in camera obscura. There was to be no publicity. Great was the astonishment, greater was the disappointment, and greater yet the indignation, because, Sir, in this democratic country of ours, the people have a natural aversion to, and suspicion of everything, whatever it may be, which does not come out in the light of day. The people were suspicious, and protests were loud and general; indeed the protests were so loud and so general, that my hon. friend, the Minister of Finance, could not ignore them, and had to refer to them. He had to take some notice of them and he had to do the best he could to explain his own position with regard to the same. This he did at a banquet tendered him in the city of St. John. Then, Sir, the reason he gave why these meetings were held in secret, was this: That if the meetings had been public he would have had to listen to set speeches upon free trade and protection, and by having the meetings in secret, he would get more information. Well, I am bound to say to my hon. friend that this excuse deceives no one but himself. He knows, as well as I do, that when he was having these interviews with the different business interests of the Dominion, he was not doing his own business, but he was carrying on the business of the country at large. He had to pass judgment upon his own judgment; and to tell us simply, that these meetings did not take place in the light of day because he was averse to be lectured on protection or free trade, is to tell us that which he may believe, but that perhaps others may take with a grain of salt. I do not question, however, the sincerity of my hon. friend when he made the statement that the sole reason which he had, not to meet the people in open day, was his aversion to set speeches on free trade and protection; but, Sir, if my hon. friend convinced himself on that, I may tell him that he did not know his own mind. He did not know his own mind as fully as his followers; he did not know his own mind as fully as the reporter of the Montreal 'Gazette' who gave some account, as far as he could give, of what took place at these meetings. The reporter of the Montreal 'Gazette' was at the first of these meetings at Montreal. He could not go in, but he was at the door and he saw the various persons who went in, and he informed the public through the paper that the Ministers had been interviewed by delegates from the following business interests: "Boots and shoes, leather shoe findings, tanners, wall paper manufacturers, dry goods importers, wines and liquors, spruce lumber, and pulp." The reporter could not report what was going on but still he guessed pretty accurately what was going on, as we may judge by the heading which he put on his article. And what was the heading? It was a very