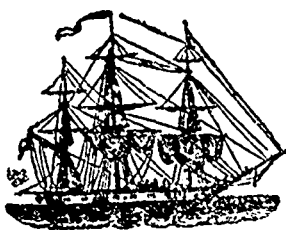


CANADIAN ECONOMIST.



FREE TRADE JOURNAL, AND WEEKLY COMMERCIAL NEWS.

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MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 24TH APRIL, 1847.

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CONTENTS.

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1.—Approaching Session of Parliament. | 6.—The Quebec Board of Trade. |
| 2.—Banking and the Usury Laws. | 7.—Cultivation of Flax. |
| 3.—The Navigation Laws.—Opinions of British Manufacturers. | 8.—Miscellaneous Articles. |
| 4.—Lake St. Peter. | 9.—Intelligence—General and Local. |
| 5.—‘Times change, but Man remains the same.’ | 10.—The Markets. |
| | 11.—Advertisements. |

THE CANADIAN ECONOMIST.

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APPROACHING SESSION OF PARLIAMENT.

At length the Provincial Parliament is summoned to meet on the 2nd of June, “for despatch of business.” Almost the latest moment to which the prorogation could possibly be extended will have elapsed before the collective wisdom of the country will be assembled. This, we have had occasion in several numbers of this paper to shew, is, under the pressing circumstances of our commerce, a serious evil; and we moreover fear that at the inconvenient season of the year at which the Legislature will meet, it will be difficult to secure the full attendance of the members for such a length of time as the adequate consideration of the various important subjects which must be laid before them will require. Our apprehensions, however, may turn out to be unfounded, and we sincerely hope that the ministry will make amends for the protracted delay which they have interposed, by the vigour and comprehensiveness of the measures which they will introduce at the ensuing Session.

That the next Session of the Provincial Parliament is destined to form an important epoch in our history, seems now generally to be admitted, and the public eye, in expectation of great events, is anxiously directed to the course which our public men may pursue on that occasion. The event will go far to prove how far our statesmen of all parties are qualified for the position in which both the constitution and the sufferings of the country have placed them. On them we may with truth say our destinies depend: it is for them now to decide, whether, hedged round by restrictions, our commerce is to continue in sickly and stunted vegetation; or whether, exposed to the bracing air of freedom, the feeble sapling is to expand until it becomes a mighty tree.

Although, protesting as we must ever do against the unpardonable delay in the assembling of our Legislature, we must admit that one benefit has sprung from it. Our Ministry have had full opportunity both to make up their own minds and to ascertain the sentiments and opinions of the country. During the last year—especially within the last six months—all the prominent topics of commercial legislation have been amply and freely discussed in all their bearings through the public journals. The interest with which these discussions have been read is a significant index to the ministry of the interest with which their proceedings will be watched, and must convince them, we should imagine, that their stability in office will, in a great measure, depend on their proving themselves equal to the emergency.

That, on many of the subjects connected with Free Trade, there is a considerable divergence of sentiment, cannot be denied; but we apprehend that every dispassionate observer will admit that there is a growing bias towards it: a conviction that,

however local or temporary circumstances may render difficult its immediate adoption, its principles are sound, and must ultimately prevail. The bitterest opponents of Free Trade cannot but admit that the whole spirit of the age is in its favor; that its victories are extending on every hand; that antiquated systems, which but recently were considered as the concentration of wisdom, are now viewed as the offspring of folly and ignorance; and that not only the nations which have ever been foremost in the work of reform, but even those which are most conservative in character—whose maxim is, *stare super antiquas vias*—are, to a greater or less extent, embodying the principles of Free Trade in their commercial policy. These are facts that cannot be denied, nor can our statesmen lose sight of them without the most wilful blindness.

We have frankly admitted that on many of the details connected with Free Trade, there is considerable difference of opinion; but on examination it will be found that that difference generally arises from a desire in each particular class to retain a protection for itself, at the expense of the community. Selfishness is the grand obstacle which the Free-Traders have to encounter. This is the rock on which there is danger of the national ship foundering. It is to counteract the influence which class interests possess on the Legislature, that a high degree of public virtue in our statesmen will be required; and here is the main ground of our apprehension. There are but few men who, like the late premier of Great Britain, Sir R. PEEL, will immolate themselves at the altar of their country in order to secure the triumph of any principle, however salutary. Such a holocaust we can scarcely look for amongst Canadian politicians. Nor do we believe that such a sacrifice would be requisite; on the contrary, we are convinced that the support of the majority of the House of Assembly would easily be obtained for liberal Free-Trade measures, if well digested and zealously advocated; and we are convinced that the statesman who shall be the vehicle of their introduction, will make for himself an enduring reputation, and strengthen the political party with which he may be connected. But there must be no half-measures—no trimming to catch stray votes—no pandering to sectional or class interests or prejudices. The Differential Duties must be abolished *in toto*: the Duty on Foreign Wheat, and the Agricultural Duties, must be repealed: the full influence of our Legislature over the Imperial Government must be invoked to obtain the rescinding of the restrictions on the Navigation of the St. Lawrence, and the repeal—at least so far as regards us—of the British Navigation Laws: a Tariff of Taxation must be framed, just in its principle, and equal in its pressure: a Scale of Tolls on the Canals must be adopted, with a view to encourage the transport both of foreign and colonial products on our waters, in preference to those of the United States. the Usury Laws must be repealed, or at least so modified as to place money in the same category with other merchandise for mercantile purposes: and such internal improvements must be made as may be requisite to give full efficiency to those great public works, constructed or constructing at the expense of the country, to develop its resources. These, with the measures tending to make the commerce of the country “free as the air we breathe,” must be passed this session, if we are to reap the full advantages to arise from the adoption of our commercial system to our altered relations with the mother country.

These various and important subjects will of necessity call for more than ordinary assiduity on the part of the members of the Legislature, whom we would therefore, with all respect, address in the words of Lord Chancellor Bacon, to the Commons of England:

“For the time, if our parliament was to be measured by the hour-glass, it is thus; in regard of the instant occasion flying away irrecoverably. Therefore let your speeches in the house be the speeches of counsellors, and not of orators; let your committees tend to despatch, not to dispute, and so marshal the times as the public business, especially the proper business of the parliament, be put first, and private bills be put last, as time shall give leave or within the spaces of the public.”