

against the foreigners, or giving a fresh bounty to her own producers every year. There is hardly one of our colonies which does not live under the shelter of a high tariff; and the solitary fragment of consolation the British Cobdenite can find is that a Conservative and defiantly protectionist ministry in Canada has recently been beaten at the polls by Liberal opponents, who, however, have shown no disposition whatever to become free traders in the English understanding of the term. So much for that "civilized world" which Manchester was to have converted long ago. And in Britain itself, the Protectionists are no longer a party obscure, discredited, half disgraced. It has ceased to be a mark of mere intellectual obtuseness for a man to profess a liking for import duties on other articles besides wine, spirits, dried fruits, cocoa and tea. On the contrary, protection raises its head again, open and unabashed; it is vocal on the platform, it is felt at elections, and in Lancashire itself—nay, even in Manchester, which was the Mecca of free trade, and in Birmingham, which may be called its Medina, it is probable that if a popular vote could be taken, the free traders would be left in a minority. To crown all, one of the most able and popular party leaders of the day, a minister holding the seals of a Secretary of State, has publicly and emphatically given encouragement to the scheme of a Customs Union for the British Empire. Mr. Chamberlain's great speech at the Chamber of Commerce dinner on the 9th of June last, following on his previous speech to the Canada Club earlier in the year, shows the rate at which we are advancing—or retrograding, as some angry critics may prefer to say. The Colonial Secretary disclaims any liking for protection; on the contrary, his aim is to break down tariff barriers within the Empire. But we have certainly moved far from the hide-bound Cobdenite era, when a minister of the Crown can talk to an applauding audience of merchants and traders, of Great Britain placing moderate duties upon corn, meat, wool, sugar and perhaps other articles of large consumption when sent in by foreigners.

Mr. Low says that the Englishmen of the present generation, brought up as most of them have been, on the orthodox economics, may be quite ready to admit the validity of many of the generalizations of his teachers, but he turns to experience to enquire whether they have worked out for his benefit. He asks himself, more and more anxiously every year, whether facts do really bear out the contention that free trade at home (coupled with protection everywhere else) has made him more prosperous than he might have been without it. The old-fashioned Cobdenite gives him the old-fashioned answer, "Are not you," he says, "a great deal wealthier than you were in the forties, don't you own more ships, more railway trains, more steam-engines, more blast-furnaces, more looms and spindles than you did fifty years ago? Have you not got more money in the bank, and don't you receive more interest from your investments held abroad? Then what

and imports—and attributes it all to the beneficial operations of free trade. His catalogue suggests the inevitable question: Have not other nations, which are not free traders, grown in wealth and civilization and commerce? We know very well that they have. The benefits of mechanical science, of easier communication, of improved means of production, of education, of sanitation, of a progressive civilization generally, have not been withheld from States which tax their imports. Mr. Villiers credits free trade with that cheapening of food which is mainly due to the opening up of virgin territory and the lowering of freights, and with that expansion of foreign trade which is the result of a long effort of industrial activity that that has not been confined to Britain. He might almost as well say that it is owing to free trade that young ladies ride bicycles, and old gentlemen no longer get drunk after dinner.

We have shared in the industrial and commercial activity of an era of astonishing material progress. That is true. But the question which Englishmen ask themselves, with an ever-growing anxiety, is whether we have had our fair share, and whether we are now advancing as fast as our rivals. They know that in the protected period, before Cobdenism was by law established, they had a commanding superiority. Mr. Villiers gives figures to show how small, compared with what it is now, was the foreign trade of Britain in the earlier half of this century. Small—yes—but how vast compared to that of our rivals! Not in one great trade, but in many, we had an unchallenged and, as it appeared, unchallengeable lead. In shipping, in cottons, in metals, in cutlery, in hardware, in machinery, England seemed beyond competition. Great is the change to-day. The competitors, who have deliberately rejected what Mr. Villiers calls "the inestimable blessings of freedom of trade" are overtaking us with long strides; nay, in some vital cases have caught and passed us already. Already Germany is abreast of us in the production of iron and steel; America has long since passed us; little Belgium is gaining on us rapidly. The German export of iron and steel rose from 957,000 tons in 1890, to 1,439,000 in 1894; the English export trade in the same period fell from 2,700,000 to 1,735,000 tons. Even our carrying trade is menaced. We no longer own the first shipping port in Europe. Liverpool has been passed by Hamburg, and it looks as if it would presently be passed by Antwerp. These are the figures of the last few years:—

	1885. Tons.	1895. Tons.
Hamburg	3,704,312	6,256,000
Antwerp	3,422,172	5,340,247
Rotterdam	2,120,347	4,038,017
Bremen	1,289,399	2,184,274
Total	10,536,230	17,818,538
Liverpool	4,278,881	5,965,959

Ten years ago Liverpool was the first port in Europe. Now she is the second—soon, apparently to be the third. In 1872, the total declared value of British and Irish produce exported from the United Kingdom was £256,257,347; in 1895 it had sunk to £226,169,174; and in the meantime the population of Great Britain and Ireland had grown from 31,835,757 to 39,134,166. The market is bigger, the ability to supply the market is greater; but whereas the proportion per head of exported British produce was £8 1s. 0d., in 1872, it had sunk to £5 11s. 3d. in 1894.

"Such facts as these go a long way to explain the luke-