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COMMERCIAL DISABILITIES.

Canada occupies an anomalous and disadvantageous commercial position with reference to other countries. The mutual preferences which formerly belonged to the colonial condition have passed away; and Canada is treated by the nations of Europe and America as a foreign country. But as a foreign country, she lies under the disability of being unable to negotiate commercial treaties. She is a dependency of England, and yet she is excluded from the benefits of the commercial treaties which England enters into. A notable instance may be found in the treaty which Cobden negotiated with France. And, at the present time, sixteen different articles which, when of European origin, are admitted into France, at varying rates of duty, are, when they are the produce of Canada, prohibited. A country subject to such conditions of commercial existence must in time come to present to more than the imagination the blighted aspect of Sir Francis Head's girdled tree.

It is understood that Sir A. T. Galt has visited France, on behalf of our government, with a view of making some sort of commercial arrangement with that country. He is not clothed with authority to negotiate a treaty; for the treaty-making power resides elsewhere, and when it is called into exercise Canada is forgotten. One treaty, and one only, has been negotiated, on behalf of Canada, in the name and through the agency of England; and an unsuccessful attempt was made to repeat the operation. The late premier declared his intention to demand for Canada the right to negotiate treaties, in the name of England, through the instrumentality of Canadians. Such a plan would necessarily have a very limited range of success. The desirability of making a treaty may be determined by Canada; but the real power to negotiate is in England. England might permit a Canadian representative to take part in the negotiations; but the most that

would be expected of him would be that he should tell the English negotiators what was wanted and supply information on points of detail. Whether negotiations should be opened at all would depend on the fiat of England. If they originated in Imperial motives, they might end, as in the case of the Cobden treaty, by a discrimination against Canada. It is probable that Mr. Mackenzie found that nothing could be done in pursuance of what he announced as the distinct policy of his government—the negotiation of commercial treaties through the instrumentality of Canadians—for beyond the essay made at Washington nothing was attempted, though the anomalies in our relations with France were greater than even those with the United States.

There remains the resource of reciprocal legislation. Once something was done, in this way, with France, and possibly something may be done again. But upon the shifting sands of reciprocal legislation no permanent structure can be reared. It is impossible to bind the legislature of a country for any definite length of time. What is concluded one year may be reversed the next. A party change is all that is wanted to effect the revolution. Financial necessity may compel a raising of the tariff. Even the success of prohibition, in Canada, would put an end to any arrangement for the admission, on any terms whatever, much less with light duties, of the produce of French vineyards. These considerations do not justify us in concluding that much can reasonably be expected from the resource of reciprocal legislation.

Commercial treaties are thought not to be in favor in France, just now. But we must not adopt this conclusion from her refusal to renew the Cobden treaty, when we know that she has recently concluded a commercial treaty with Spain. The natural inference is that all depends on the nature of the treaty which it is possible or is deemed desirable to make. Well founded objections may be urged against commercial treaties, in the abstract; but they afford the benefit of arrangements in time of peace which formerly came at the end of a war. Formerly almost every treaty of peace contained some commercial articles, unless, as is the case of Utrecht, there was a separate commercial treaty. If nations can now get, in time of peace, what they formerly obtained only at the close of a war, a great step has been made. But from this advantage Canada is practically shut out. From the shadow of a treaty-making power, which she might obtain, she could never expect to get the substance.

The motive for founding colonies was the monopoly of commerce. They were forbidden to trade with any other nation than the mother country. But the monopoly was not one-sided. Colonial produce enjoyed a preference in the home market. Down to a period within the memory of middle-aged men, colonial timber had the benefit of a differential preference of from five hundred to one thousand per cent. duty. But in the natural course of things, the corn laws were swept away, and the last shred of the old colonial system, in the shape of differential timber duties followed. On the other hand, the colonies obtained the right of trading with all these ports of the world that were willing to trade with them. But the anomaly of exceptional exclusions does exist. The mother country has taken no pains to remove them, and she has not invested Canada with the power of doing so.

Here is a wrong to be righted. If the National Policy means anything, it will not neglect so ample and inviting a field for its exercise.

PROSPECTIVE LEGISLATION.

Not less than a dozen applications are being made to the coming Parliament of the Dominion for railway legislation. Many of these are to amend existing charters. Among the new enterprises seeking corporate powers are the Atlantic and North-West Railway, with power to construct a line from some point on the Atlantic coast to a port on Lake Superior. The Selkirk and South Saskatchewan applies for incorporation, with power to build and operate a line from Selkirk in a westerly direction. A line is also wanted—The Manitoba & Southern—to run from Emerson north-westerly through the Menonite settlement at Pembina Mountain to the western boundary of the prairie province. The Manitoba Central is intended to start from the crossing of the Canadian Pacific Railway on Red River, westward and southward of Lake Manitoba and eastward of Riding's Mountains to the valley of Swan River. The Manitoba & North-West is intended to start from Winnipeg and run westward to the Rocky Mountains, passing Westbourne and Palestine, and thence west to the Little Saskatchewan and Assiniboine in the direction of Fort Ellice. The proposed list for the north-west is completed by the Saskatchewan & Colonization Road from Winnipeg to some point on the South Saskatchewan River, with branch lines. Nearly all these companies require power to build telegraph lines along their track.