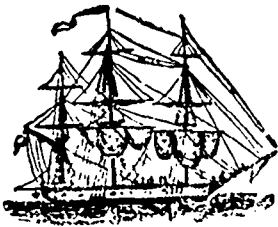


CANADIAN ECONOMIST.



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MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 14TH NOVEMBER, 1846.

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NAVIGATION LAWS.

In our last number we adverted to some of the evils which this Province sustains from the British Navigation Laws, and the restrictions imposed on foreign vessels navigating the St. Lawrence. It is only by considering these two topics concurrently that we become fully alive to their collective importance. Thus, were England to modify her Navigation Laws, so far as to permit foreign vessels to convey to her shores the produce of countries other than those to which such vessels belong, unless she, at the same time, removed all impediments to foreigners navigating our waters, our object would be no nearer attainment than at present; and the only effect would be, to drive, not only the produce of the western part of the United States, but even that of Canada West, to the shipping ports of the Union,—where there would be the advantage in cheapness, which must inevitably flow from an enlarged and free competition amongst the ships of various nations,—rather than our ports, where no such competition could exist. On the other hand, were she alone to concede the free navigation of the St. Lawrence to the foreigner, without at the same time modifying her own Navigation Laws, the inducement to our neighbour to send his produce to a shipping port where he would enjoy the advantage of the competition to which we have just alluded, would act as a counterpoise to the advantage in point of cheapness which the St. Lawrence would probably possess over the other routes.

Attempts have lately been made by some of the press to prove that the average cost of the transmission of produce from this country to Britain is not—taking into consideration the extra expense of the voyage, arising from its greater risk, its longer duration, and its other unavoidable contingencies—materially greater than the cost from the shipping ports of the United States. Admitting for the sake of argument—what we have certainly sufficiently disproved—all that our opponents have asserted on this head, they cannot get rid of this overwhelming fact, that at certain times our freights are extravagantly high, in comparison to those of New York. Take as an instance, and that by no means a solitary one, the months of July and August last; when the cost of transmission from Montreal to Britain was six shillings, and from New York to Britain only one shilling and sixpence, per barrel of Flour. From what cause was the rate of freight so utterly disproportionate? Simply the want of vessels. How could this disproportion have been obviated? By allowing the competition of the foreigner in our ports.

Now, we ask, is not the frequent recurrence of such a disparity in the rates of freight in the two shipping ports a great drawback to the trade via the St. Lawrence, and a sufficient cause for the preference being given to that port which at nearly all times is crowded with ships from all countries? But it has been replied that this evil will to a certain extent correct itself,—that the rates of freight in New York will regulate those in Montreal and Quebec. But

how will this be done? Why, by diverting produce from our waters to those of the United States; thus ensuring competition at the expense of our inland communications, to the great loss to our forwarding merchants, and to the material diminution of our revenue;—for be it ever borne in mind, that to the tolls on the St. Lawrence Canals we look with confidence for a large portion of our national supplies. This is Free Trade with a vengeance! This is a stretch of liberality to which we have never arrived! We are prepared to go the length of encouraging a wholesome and open competition on our waters, and in our own harbours; but we have not yet got the length of seeking to give an advantage to the foreign canals in their competition with ours,—of aggrandizing the foreign revenue at the expense of our own,—or even of driving foreign and domestic produce to foreign harbours, the more successfully to compete with our own! These notable schemes for the advantage of the British shipowner—which, under the plea of protecting him, where he least needs protection, in his own waters, have actually the effect of driving him to foreign waters, to undergo there a competition where he is least able to sustain it—we leave to his *pseudo* advocates. If the British shipowner be not blind to his own interest, he will spurn such hollow protection, “which keeps the word of promise to the ear, and breaks it to the hope.” He will rely on the qualifications he possesses, in his skill, his industry, and his capital, which, free and unfettered, will enable him successfully to compete with any foreigner.

It is doubtless very kind and very patriotic of our Protectionists to take the British shipowner under their fostering care, more especially at a time when the public voice in Britain is making itself so distinctly heard against the continuance of the monopoly which he enjoys, at the expense of the agricultural, the manufacturing, and the commercial classes. It is certainly sufficiently amusing to hear our Protectionist papers accuse the advocates of Free Trade here of desiring nothing short of separation from the mother country, for daring to advocate those principles which day by day are becoming more widely diffused in Britain, and which must inevitably before long prevail there. In this very paper will be found a Memorial from the Chamber of Commerce at Manchester,—that body which formed the cradle of that Anti-Corn-Law League, which produced so wondrous a revolution in the British commercial system,—denouncing the injustice and impolicy of the British Navigation Laws. And is it likely that the efforts of that powerful association will be relaxed, or that they will cease their agitation, even should the British minister shew himself indisposed to yield to their representations? Those who entertain such opinions know little of the spirit which animates that body. Armed with the intelligence of the people of England, they are irresistible; and as the Cobdens, the Brights, and the other leaders of the League, overcame the giant monopoly of the agriculturists, so will the leaders of the new agitation most certainly overcome the monopoly of the shipping interest.

We wait to hear the opinion of our Protectionist contemporaries on this new agitation. They, who have stigmatized us as traitors for daring to ask for a modification of the British Navigation Laws, can scarcely apply milder epithets to those who, in the mother country, are contending for a similar object. Perhaps, however, according to their ideas,

“That in a *Briton's* but a choleric word,
Which in a *Colonist* is rash blasphemy.”

To us, viewing, as we do, the modification of the British Navigation Laws as the most important question of the day for this Colony, we need hardly say, that the attention it is exciting in the mother country is a source of the most heartfelt gratification. The effect, we are convinced, will here be almost miraculous. Those who have hitherto stood aloof from us,—nay, have ranked themselves amongst our opponents,—will ere long be found on our side: indeed, we look for nothing less than the complete conversion, and return to our ranks, of our distinguished contemporary of the *Gazette*. All the difficulties which the ingenuity of his fertile imagination conjured up, like phantoms, to affright us from our onward course, will, we doubt not, dissolve, “like the baseless fabric of a vision,” the instant the *fiat* of the British minister shall have gone forth—or even the opinion of any powerful party in Britain shall have