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THE NEGOTIATION WITH FRANCE.

Should the negotiation which Sir A. T. Galt has been authorised to undertake, in connection with the British ambassador at Paris, with a view to a commercial arrangement between Canada and France be successful, it will be on the basis of a reciprocal admission at low duties of Canadian vessels on the one side and French wines on the other. The French marine is divided into two parts; one of which, consisting of steamers, is supported by large postal subventions; the other, consisting of sailing vessels, complains that it is the only interest in the country that has been subjected to unchecked foreign competition. This latter interest demands a revival of the discriminating charges against foreign vessels which were abolished ten years ago. But there is no sign that its wishes in this respect will be granted, though there is a disposition to abolish certain vexatious charges to which it is subject. It does not appear, however, that the relief it could get in this way would be considerable; for by treaties with different countries France has bound herself not to exact higher charges on their vessels than on her own. These charges are perhaps in the aggregate too considerable to admit of their being abolished altogether, as that measure would involve a loss of over 10,050,000 francs of revenue every year. In one way the French marine can obtain a measure of real relief, and that is by the free admission, or the admission at a low duty, of Canadian built vessels.

The dues payable by French and foreign vessels alike in French ports include dock, sanitary and visiting charges. Formerly foreign vessels paid heavier duties than French, but for ten years the discrimination has been abolished, and the French vessel-owners complain that they have suffered severely in consequence. In proof of this, their organs point to the relative decline in French ports of national vessels as compared with foreign. The

Journal du Commerce Maritime points out that in 1868, the tonnage employed in French commerce was 10,258,270 tons. In 1878, it had risen to 14,405,999 tons; an increase of about forty per cent. But during this time, foreign tonnage had increased at the expense of the national. The official tonnage of French sailing vessels, which was 1,058,714 tons, including small fishing vessels, which in most computations are rejected; and that at the late date it had sunk to 989,128 tons; a loss of nearly seven per cent.

It is sometimes said that the French steam marine is gaining on the sailing vessels so rapidly that what the one loses the other gains, and that in fact the marine of France, as a whole, maintains its old position. But this appears to be an overstatement of the fact. Steamers have gained largely on sailing craft; and this is not surprising when we reflect that the former are favored by postal subventions which amount to something like twenty-five millions of francs a year. Under these circumstances, the transformation is easily understood. That this transformation is due largely to this cause, hardly admits of question; for in England, where the same cause does not operate to the same extent, the relative diminution of steamers to sailing vessels has been very marked for several years past. The tonnage of sailing vessels and steamers respectively built in England, from 1870 to the end of 1877, will show this:

	Tons, sailing vessels.	Tons, steamers.
1870	99,598	219,435
1871	56,545	279,816
1872	54,719	388,004
1873	88,552	282,134
1874	187,313	336,896
1876	251,438	221,155
1877	216,261	263,280

These figures ought, perhaps, to afford some hope for the future of our ship-building interest; but, it is nevertheless true that this reversed action has taken place during a period in which, especially the latter part, our ship-building industry has been in a depressed and declining condition. Still, in any case, our chance lies in an increase of sailing vessels relative to steamers. In France, as we have seen, the movement is in the other direction; and the question is whether that movement approaches its limit. It is not the charges to which the sailing vessels are subject that makes the difference; for these fall with greater weight on steamers which make short voyages and come frequently into port. The difference is in the fact that the postal subventions give the steamers advantages which sailing vessels cannot share. If too much is paid under this head, it is not improbable that the fact

will in time be discovered and the remedy applied.

The complaint that French steamers are exceptionally favored, compared with sailing vessels, appears to be well founded. The remedy, as already mentioned, which the vessel owners wish to supply is to remove the discriminating charges against foreign vessels. But this is impossible in the face of existing treaties with different countries. Certain casual charges to which French vessels are subject, the government wisely proposes to abolish. For instance, all vessels now pay two and a half per cent registration each time they change owners; a charge which it is proposed to abolish altogether. A number of other similar charges, which do not, however, amount to much, it is also proposed to abolish. But this will not give much relief, and it will still be necessary for the French merchant marine to obtain cheap vessels; though French vessel owners have been so much in the habit of looking for benefits from monopolies that they are slow to put faith in any other.

Since English and French vessels were placed on a common footing in French ports, the increase of the former has outstripped the latter. Since 1868, the increase of English vessels has been fifty-two per cent.; while those of France, sail and steam, has increased only twenty-six per cent. If England can build cheaper than France, that is a reason why the latter should put herself in a position to compete by purchasing cheap Canadian vessels. It is said, and probably with truth, that England can man her sailing vessels on better terms than France can, under the restrictive laws of the latter country. But France has the remedy in her own hands, which is to abolish the injurious restrictions. The English merchantman gets sailors wherever he can; while his French competitor is not permitted to have more than one-fourth foreigners among his crew. What the French merchantman wants is freedom, not monopoly; and it is strange that he is more apt to mistake his real interest than is the government to which he looks so imploringly.

Last year, 9,513 national sailing vessels entered French ports, with an aggregate tonnage of 2,959,722 tons; which is 248 vessels less and 18,429 tons more than in 1877. The foreign tonnage, which is five times as large, rose from 5,724,035, in 1876, to 6,966,857 tons in 1878. In one year, on a movement of 9,926,579 tons, there was a reduction of 30.18 per cent. in those that sailed under the national flag, and the year before it was 33.18 per cent., but of every ten vessels that enter French harbors seven are