

SPIRIT OF THE COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PRESS.

VERY UNLIKELY.

(American Agriculturist) From several points some hints that England is likely to announce her Free Trade policy. Despairing of the success of her endeavours to convince the world that the principle of free interchange of commodities between nations can be fashioned into a formula for the creation of illimitable wealth she is now about to change her tactics, and return to the system under which her infant industries were developed. For good and sufficient reasons this might be wise conduct on the part of England, and then, again, for reasons equally good and sufficient, the change would be exceedingly unwise. It would be wise in relation to her agricultural interests. It would not decrease materially her imports of foreign grain and provisions, because her importations of these commodities are a necessity, and a tariff would only raise the price to be paid for food by her industrial, commercial and privileged classes. But this increase of price would benefit the English farmer, and he could possibly pay his rents from the additional income received. But when you go beyond the products of the soil, it would be hard to say what article of foreign production England could tax without aiming a direct blow at the principal sources of her national wealth. England furnishes comparatively little of the raw material of which her manufactured articles are produced. She draws something from her own sheep husbandry, something from her mines, and a little from other sources; but all over the world English ships are engaged in bringing to England the raw material from which the busy fingers of her artisans are to produce the fabrics that form the main sources of her national wealth. To tax this raw material by the imposition of an import duty would be to preclude the possibility of its being returned in its manufactured form on terms that would enable the English manufacturer to compete at advantage with foreign rivals. The great English nation has always shown too much worldly wisdom to be guilty of any such mistake. The blunders of England are mainly political and diplomatic blunders. In finance she is far seeing as the race most celebrated for its acquittiveness, and where she is guilty of an economic mistake she makes sure that it shall only result in the aggrandizement of one class of her own people at the expense of another class. No "biasted" foreigner shall say that he has profited by English lack of judgment. It is very unlikely that England will adopt a protective system, or deviate, in any respect, from the policy which she has pursued during recent years. It has grown to be a superstition in that country that the repeal of the corn laws was a wise and progressive act. If it was a blunder, Englishmen are not made of such flexible material that they will admit the error for the benefit of a class so lightly considered as the farmers, and we are likely to hear considerably more of the Golden Club before we see a long list of English custom houses, ports of entry, and collectors of duty on imports.

PROSPECTS OF THE WHEAT CROP.

(New York Chronicle.)

The prospects of the wheat crop of the United States for the coming season are involved in some doubt, through the possible operation of events that had little or no relation to the two or three great crops which have been gathered in the seasons last passed. In the first place, the winter of 1880-81 was unusually severe and prolonged, coming on early and hanging on late; and more lately the wheat growing sections of the North-West have suffered from floods beyond all precedent. These circumstances can hardly fail to have an important relation to the yield of wheat for the next season; in some cases improving, while in others diminishing, the prospect; and there is, therefore, a good deal of anxious inquiry, even thus early, regarding the matter. Of the present condition, the accounts coming in are very contradictory, and derived, as they mostly are, from partial and local observations, are not very reliable. Winter wheat is, no doubt, rather backward in growth from the effects of the severe winter and late spring, but seems hardy, and now comes forward rapidly, especially in the northern latitudes. In the middle latitudes, where there was less snow, it was to some extent winter killed. The acreage has been extended on new lands, but the comparatively low prices current last autumn undoubtedly restricted the sowing, more or less, in the older sections where winter wheat is grown. Therefore no very important increase in the acreage can be expected. As regards spring wheat, the whole year, from the gathering of the last crop to the present time, has undoubtedly been unpropitious. It is usual to do the ploughing of lands for spring wheat in the autumn; there is little time for this work in the spring; and as soon as the snow disappears the sowing is made upon the lands ploughed in the previous autumn. The winter came on so suddenly and severely last year that farmers had no time to plough to the extent desired, and the floods this spring have overflowed much land, so that it could not be sowed, or, on subsiding, have left many other

held unfit for cultivation. Still, as population the last two years has rapidly been pushing further west, and new lands are being opened up constantly, we cannot see any present prospect of a total average below that of last season. On the other hand, it would not be safe, in view of the foregoing facts, to count too surely upon a further great increase from yield of wheat next season. It is probable that there are yet pretty full stocks of wheat in the hands of farmers. Prices have not been high enough to stimulate deliveries, and the accumulations of snow, followed by floods, interrupted transportation greatly by rail, as well as over country roads, for many weeks. The lateness of the season has delayed the reopening of the Erie Canal. The probabilities are, therefore, that unless crop prospects shall be as unpromising as to induce terms to hold back the old stock we shall have very heavy supplies of wheat upon our market from the middle of May to the first of July. But so much will depend upon many conditions yet to be developed that it would be idle to attempt to forecast the course of prices. There is no longer any doubt expressed of the export demand for our wheat, at moderate prices, continuing on a very large scale. At the beginning of the crop year now drawing to a close, it was apprehended that the better yield in Great Britain and the west of Europe would cause a material curtailment of the demands upon us. Such has not proved to be the case. For nine months ending April 1, being three-fourths of the fiscal year ending July 1, the exports of wheat (including flour reduced to wheat) reached the large aggregate of 145,608,000 bushels, against 139,862,000 bushels for the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year, which had greatly exceeded all former years. Thus, in the face of better crops in Great Britain and the West of Europe, our exports of wheat and wheat flour increased. It is true a lower range of prices has prevailed, and the aggregate value for nine months of this year are about 166 million dollars, against 174 million dollars last year; in other words, nearly six million bushels more wheat have been sold for eight million dollars less money. But if this fact has any significance, it is in demonstrating that at moderate prices we can sell our wheat in quantities that a few years since would have been deemed impossible.

THE DECIMAL SYSTEM IN ENGLAND—THE DIFFICULTIES OF ITS INTRODUCTION.

(New York Indicator)

The advisability of adopting the decimal system of coinage, weights and measures has again been under discussion in the English House of Commons, but without any action being taken with a view to its introduction. The subject came up through a resolution offered by Mr. A. Dilke, to the effect that the adoption of the system ought not to be delayed. The motion was lost, and even an amendment which suggested the reference of the matter to a committee to make further inquiry was defeated by a large majority. The plan suggested by Mr Dilke made but little, if any, departure from the plans recommended on previous occasions when the subject has been before Parliament. It contemplated the retention of the pound sterling as the unit in the coinage, the florin as the tenth and the farthing as the 1,000th of the pound, instead of the 900th part as at present. It was admitted that the great difficulty would occur with the copper currency. A penny would become the 250th part of a pound, instead of the 240th. Mr. Gladstone said he never objected to the introduction of the decimal system, per se, but he had always objected to the alteration of the penny, which, he said, formed the basis of nine-tenths of the transactions of the country. Evidently if the decimal system in coinage is ever introduced into England the penny must be the basis, as being the coin of the people. In such an innovation as that proposed, the prejudices and ignorance of the common people are principal factors to be considered, and as little violence as practicable should be done to established customs. New names should be avoided as much as possible. The naming of the two-shilling piece introduced at a recent period into the English coinage as "florin" was a mistake that had much to do with its unpopularity. The same remark is applicable to the more recent introduction into grain measure of the "cental." It is difficult for an American, used to the simplicity of the decimal method, to appreciate the terribly cumbersome system in vogue in England, but let any American merchant try to calculate the cost of say 10 tons 12 hundredweight 3 quarters and 19½ pounds of any commodity, at £11 16s. 10½d per hundredweight, and he will probably gain a faint idea of the mental wear and tear endured by the trading public in Great Britain in the ordinary transactions of business under the present system. No doubt the change in the coinage would be an exceedingly difficult one to make, yet many other countries have accomplished it. France, the United States, Canada, Belgium, Italy, Holland and Russia have all adapted it with more or less completeness. The difficulties should not be insurmountable in Great Britain. The change is capable of being made gradually, and a step in that direction might be made every year. It is, however, in the application of the system to weights and measures that the chief difficulties would arise. There are over sixty different units in use for the measure-

ment of grain in various parts of England. For these the substitution of the cental was proposed. But the almost endless variety of weights and measures applicable to different trades, and in use in different localities, present difficulties to a substitution of a uniform system with which the average British trader does not care to cope. Could the change be made, however, the advantages that would result are admitted to be great. It was stated in the course of the debate that the trade with countries that used the metric system increased more rapidly than with countries that did not use it, that schoolmasters who had been consulted testified that on an average a child was three times as long learning the present system of weights and measures as he would be learning the metric system, the merchants in the London trade had testified that business was not infrequently lost through the inability of foreigners to cope with the difficulties of the present cumbersome system than which there was none more puzzling on the face of the earth. One of the members taking part in the debate said it would be easier to do away with the House of Lords, and to disestablish the Church of England, than to introduce the decimal system! He also pointed out that the change would involve enormous expense and inconvenience, that, in 1869, evidence was given to the effect that no fewer than 50,000,000 separate weights and measures existed in the country; that this number had, no doubt, since been doubled. The cost of replacing all these weights and measures would probably be between £5,000,000 and £10,000,000. That, however, would only be a mere fraction of the total expense. Every machine would have to be altered, as well as the thousands of mechanical contrivances whose construction was based upon the present system of measurement. Immense sums would have to be expended by every dealer in printing and advertising, so as to educate his customers to the new system. Dealers would take advantage of the change, and the poor would undoubtedly be made to suffer by it. From the tenor of the discussion it would seem as if the proposed change was a work of such stupendous magnitude and difficulty as to deter entrance upon it, and that the idea had better be abandoned as hopeless. And yet this plan of decimal gradation in weights and measures is the only rational one, because it is in accordance with the universally adopted decimal notation. If thoroughly carried out, the facilities it would afford in every department of life are scarcely calculable. For one thing, it is not too much to say that one-half the time now spent in learning arithmetic would be saved, to say nothing of the saving of time in the calculations necessary in all branches of business.

TRADE THROUGH CANADA.

(Montreal Shareholder.)

The Harbour Commissioners and the Dominion Government have done a good thing in removing the greater part of the tolls from the St. Lawrence and Welland Canals. The reduction is rather a sweeping one, as our readers will have seen by the daily papers. We stand now a fair chance of competing for the trade of the great West. An English writer has recently said that "Canada can never do the carrying trade of the West because trade always seeks the most direct route." Our English friend is correct (as he always is) in his logic, but entirely astray as to facts. With a knowledge of the facts his argument would read thus: "Canada must always do the carrying trade of the west because trade always seeks the most direct routes," and not only the western trade, but the south-western also, as any one who examines a globe map of the world can easily perceive. The "most direct" route from California, Mexico and some of the Gulf States to England is through Canada; much more than the great west and south-west. But although English writers and map makers generally are ignorant of this fact, Canadians are not, and the Harbour Commissioners of this city and the Government of the Dominion have shown by their recent action in the matter of canal tolls that they also are alive to the enormous advantages we possess.

THE COLONIAL TRADE DELEGATES.

(New York Journal of Commerce.)

We are at last in possession of the resolutions, five in number, which were agreed to after conference held at the Westminster, Palace Hotel, London, by the delegates from the various dependencies of the British Crown. We are not aware whether the delegates were all present, but certainly the resolutions will cause a great deal of disappointment to those of our people, if, indeed, there are any such, as may have anticipated any beneficial result from the conference. For our own part, as we intimated more than a month ago, we felt convinced that no such result would ensue, and we are therefore not disappointed. Fortunately the country will not be put to any expense in connection with the late conference, the gentlemen who took part in them having been in England on other business. The first resolution expresses the opinion that hereafter "in all matters of Imperial or International treaties, where Colonial interests are directly or indirectly involved, an endeavour should be made to ascertain the views of the Colonies, and that proper weight be attached to their opinions." The only

objection that strikes us to this resolution is that it implies that the present policy of the Imperial Government is to conclude commercial treaties with foreign countries, whereby Colonial interests are deeply affected, without such consultation. Is there any ground for such an implication? Has the Imperial Government during the last forty years ever refused to listen to the reasonable representations of the Canadian Government? The course taken regarding commercial treaties with the United States on more than one occasion and the readiness extended to establish High Commissions in its negotiations with France and Spain are sufficient evidence that we are in the enjoyment at the present time of all the benefits likely to be derived from the acceptance of the first resolution. We had occasion to refer very recently to a charge made against the Imperial Government nearly thirty years ago by a Nova Scotia statesman on the ground of want of consultation, and to state that, on the occasion of the negotiation of the first reciprocity treaty, not only was the Governor General of Canada appointed an Ambassador Extraordinary, expressly to negotiate the treaty, but his first act was to invite the Maritime Provinces through their Lieutenant Governors to send representatives to Washington with whom he could consult. Now Sir Warwick sent the late Lieutenant Governor Chandler, while Nova Scotia on the other hand refused to comply with Lord Elgin's request, and was consequently unrepresented. The second resolution expresses the opinion that it is desirable to form an association in London, to be called the British and Colonial Union, for the consideration and furtherance of inter-colonial trade and trade between the Colonies and Great Britain. We confess that we view this proposition with alarm. The resolution was adopted by delegates, fourteen in number, four of whom were taken from London, and two each from Canada, Australasia, India, the West Indies, and the Cape. We would infinitely prefer that all commercial matters in which Canada may be interested should be referred for advice to the Canadian Government, which is now and is likely to be represented in London. As regards India, it is very fully represented already in the Government, there being a Secretary of State for India having a seat in the Cabinet. In the absence of representative institutions, no better representative could be devised. If we are not mistaken, more than one of the Australian Colonies has a representative in London as Canada has. The West India Colonies are numerous, and it might be difficult to get them to act together, but the principal ones have always had persons in London specially charged to look after their affairs. We are not aware whether the South African Colonies are represented in London, and we doubt the possibility just at present of any harmonious action between the Cape and Natal. The third resolution is intended to provide for the future government of the projected association, which is by means of an elected council, two-thirds of which shall be nominated by the commercial bodies of the Colonies and India, the Union appointing the remainder. The nominated members must almost necessarily reside in London, so that the commercial bodies would really be confined in their choice to the members of the Union living in London. It ought to be noted that "in the representation on the council of the several Colonies and India, their staple industries as well as their import and export trades ought to be taken into consideration." The fourth resolution has for its object the appointment of a deputation to wait on the Secretary of State for the Colonies and for India, to urge upon Her Majesty's Government either the enlargement of the powers of the Royal Commission, or the appointment of another "with the view to taking evidence on the subject of the trade and commercial tariffs existing and in force between Great Britain and her Colonies and dependencies." This is the very point that it was expected the conference would deal with, and it would seem that it is to be relegated to a Royal Commission. What the object is of taking evidence as to the existing tariffs we own that we are unable to conceive. Nothing is more easy than to ascertain what the commercial tariffs are at the present time, and the evidence which it is proposed to procure would be simply the opinions of such persons as might offer themselves for examination to a committee sitting in London. The proposition is simply absurd. The fifth resolution is an expression of opinion in favour of a scheme that the English Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade have been urging for years, and which is a Minister for Commerce and Agriculture in addition to the President of the Board of Trade, which is the title of the Minister specially charged with commercial questions. Nothing is more improbable than the creation of a new Imperial department, such as is contemplated by the resolution. We are not of opinion that it is desirable in the interest of the colonies that there should be any Imperial interference with the action of our Parliament and Government, but if a case could be made out there would be no difficulty whatever in confiding to the existing board of trade the discharge of any new duties that it might be desirable to impose on it. The resolutions which have emanated from the conference have fully convinced us that this projected association would be likely to interfere in matters which are properly and necessarily under the control of the Parliament of Canada. Even in days long since gone by, when there was necessarily considerable delay in

communicating with the Imperial Government, such an association as is contemplated would not have been created, and still less will it be so now. Government is able to give its orders in cases of emergency, not only in a day, but from hour to hour, and it should be desirable to obtain information from the other dependencies of the empire, the Secretary of State for Colonies is an infinitely better mode of communication than such a "National Union" as is contemplated by self-appointed delegates, who have not committed themselves to any course we feel assured will never be sanctioned by the Parliament of Canada.

THE TELEGRAPH MONOPOLY.

The telegraph monopoly, perhaps known as the Post Office, is proving any proof were needed, that no Government can be trusted. Tory, Conservative, Liberal, or Radical, are all alike when the law gives them, or leads them to believe that it has given them, unlimited powers as traders. The so-called post office having made a bad and imprudent bargain with the telegraph companies is determined to burk invention and earn an evil reputation as to the champion of everlasting stagnation. The impertinent inventors of the telephone have been made aware of this in a court of law, and are now made even more bitterly aware of it in their subsequent negotiations with the Government.

In the first place they are told they must be taxed, and this is a communication they can hardly be astonished at. Nearly every living thing in this country is taxed except vermin—the child in the cradle, the dying man in his bed. The only thing practically exempt is the corpse in its coffin. However sluggish the Government may be, the tax-gatherer is superhumanly active. A Government that once taxed the light of heaven can see no injustice in taxing a telephone wire. In the second place, impertinent inventors are told that their rights must be limited.

Because the Government wanted millions of public money in 1866, the Telephone Company may carry their wires to Styke-Foggs and no further. The cock-a-doodle-do policy is the department of Government necessitated by a money grabbing policy in another. If this Government, that Government, any Government had bought the water companies half of the kingdom would have been dying of thirst, and if they had bought the stagecoach interest railways would never have been built, if built, would have been allowed no further than Hampstead or Cambridge. London Punch.

A NEW ILLUMINATING FLUID.

Highly interesting experiments with a newly discovered mineral essence took place a few evenings ago at the laboratory of the eminent Parisian analytical chemist, M. Wurtz. In the presence of several members of the Academie des Sciences. Having filled the lamp with the liquid in question, and ignited the wick, M. Cordig, the discoverer of the essence, tossed the lighted lamp up against the ceiling, besprinkling the bystanders as well as himself with the flaming fluid, which, however, to the astonishment of all present, proved utterly devoid of heat or burning capacity. He then soaked his pocket handkerchief in the essence, and set it on fire; the essence burnt itself out, but the handkerchief remained unharmed, as did his hat after a subjection to a similar trial. Then M. Wurtz, Damas and Friedel plunged their hands into a pan filled with the burning liquid, withdrawing them with fingers all aight, like so many thick jets of gas. They experienced no sensation of heat whatever upon the skin surface thus apparently in a state of active combustion. Other experiments followed of an equally wonderful nature, conclusively demonstrating that the "Kordig Essence" is capable of producing light without heat. All that is at present known of its special physical characteristics seems to be that it is a thin and colourless oil, evaporating with great rapidity. Its discoverer proposes to adapt it to general domestic use for lighting purposes, its chief recommendation being absolute harmlessness, for it is altogether incapable of exploding, and may be poured while burning upon the most delicate textile fabrics without the least risk of igniting the substance. London Telegraph.

At the annual meeting on Monday of the stockholders of the Bank of New Brunswick, the old board of directors were re-elected. The bank declared a dividend of four per cent. from the 1st of April, at which time the profits amounted to \$341,893.

A device for warming bedrooms, offices, etc., by gas, has been brought out by Messrs. Billing & Co., High Holborn, London, in the form of a new portable gas fire, intended to take the place of the ordinary coal fire baskets, but is made of a different material, so that it is said a really good effect is obtained with a small consumption of gas. Each fire is supplied complete with asbestos fuel, elbow, connector, or, nose piece, etc., and being portable the fire is easily adjusted to any grate. They are made in two sizes, the smaller which sells for \$2, consuming 12 feet of gas per hour, and the largest size, \$3, requiring a consumption of 16 feet of gas per hour. This description of fire is both cleanly and economical.