

THE WEEK.

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COMMERCIAL UNION.

It is a pleasure to find that advocates of commercial union with the United States are frankly facing the fact that enlarged intercourse cannot take place without affecting Canada in other than an economic way. The disavowal of Annexation as a necessary sequence of the proposed treaty may be conceded, without accepting the view that the effect of the measure would be in the best interests of this country politically any more than commercially. The economic arguments as a whole would apply more properly to universal Free Trade, because then the evils of discrimination would not have to be weighed. Just now the more violent advocates of the new departure, who see in it a sure and speedy means of redressing all our country's wrongs, may be passed lightly by. Argument will be lost on those who entrench themselves behind vague and sonorous phrases, and who believe that Nature has, all at once, become a partisan of their cause. Fatalism is out of place here, in this age. We are enjoined to "bow to the decrees of Nature," to "obey the natural law of development," and to choose our "natural markets." This is simply trampling on those weaker brethren who think that a natural market is not one where the same articles are produced, who have not seen the decrees referred to, and who believe that all development worthy of the name, either in an individual or a community, must arise by an act of genesis from within. A treaty would not induce a leopard to change his spots, though it might make Newcastle a good market to take coal to.

Less extreme champions of the cause, who have much to say on economic grounds that is entitled to respectful consideration, are content to dismiss other aspects of the case as sentimental merely. This comfortable plea has its drawbacks, the chief of which is that it is impossible to arrive at a true view of the case on the narrower basis. When past history is put into the witness box it may be relied upon to speak the truth. All we have to do is to see that the evidence is relevant, or how much of it is so. The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 has been used very much in the rural districts; for several reasons great caution is necessary in accepting conclusions drawn from this source. Not only was its scope more limited, and the feature of discrimination absent from it, but during the existence of that treaty two great wars happened, both of which led to a condition of affairs materially favourable to Canada. The Crimean War cut off from the markets of Western Europe the chief competitor of this continent in breadstuffs, and led to high prices for our main articles of export. The same degree of prosperity would not again be brought about by even a larger war, because Europe is now less dependent on a few sources of supply than then. The lavish expenditure of the United States during their civil war was even more advantageous to Canada commercially. These abnormal conditions prevailed during the greater part of the time the treaty was in operation, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to say now just what the result would have been in ordinary circumstances. Another hardly less important factor further interferes with arguments based upon that period. In 1854 Canada was without manufactures, and

so continued during the early years of Confederation; since then a vigorous policy has been at work, having for its object the fostering of native industries. To such an extent has this been carried that manufacturing enterprises have not only been protected, they have been coddled perhaps into premature maturity in many cases. Municipalities, by means of the bonus system, have vied with the Ottawa Government in bringing about this changed condition of affairs. The wisdom or unwisdom of this policy it is unnecessary to deal with; its results, however, demand recognition at the present time. It is true that the mercantile and agricultural interests of Canada suffered very much from the abrogation of the Reciprocity Treaty, and the question is, how much of the inconvenience felt was due to the absence of the conditions which have since arisen. It must be also borne in mind that the mere change in the current of trade is sufficient to account for much loss even when such change is certain to be of future benefit.

The Union of England and Scotland has been instanced as illustrating the benefit Commercial Union would confer upon us. Again the cases are not parallel ones. For a century before the Union the two countries had been under one crown. Both had agreed to the substitution of William and Mary for James; but the Scottish Act of Security of 1703-4 awoke England to the possibility of Scotland adopting a different policy on the demise of Anne, and the feeling in Scotland was such that a league with France was not unlikely to be brought about. So far as England was concerned the Union was agreed to upon high political grounds. The terrible struggle with Louis XIV. was actually going on at the time. Gibraltar was taken; the Battles of Blenheim and Ramilies had been won, but the end no man could foresee. The Union proved indeed a happy event, and commercial considerations largely influenced Scotland, but they do her an injustice who say it was mere trade with England she sought; that had been declined in the reign of Edward I., and many times in the intervening four centuries. What Scotland asked and got was equal opportunities in those larger fields which the army and fleet of England were giving her access to in Asia and America. Scottish energy, courage, administrative capacity, and commercial enterprise have shone as brightly in India as in Canada. That union encouraged the exodus from Scotland, and it has never been regarded as an injury to her. How different is the case of Commercial Union. It is to stop our exodus. It would establish more intimate relations with a Power that has never been friendly with us, whose government and policy we have no reason to esteem, and at the same time it would discriminate against a people whose government and policy we have every reason to love, and who defended us in our hour of need. It would be a crime to revive past mistakes, for which we are probably as much to blame as our neighbours; we have few

Wrongs unredressed or insults unavenged;

and they may be sentimental people who say that the possible enemies of Great Britain cannot be preferred by us to her. They are sentimental who say that we should not forsake the morally great and choose the morally little for no better reason than that we may trade our fish, flesh, and fowl, our vegetables and our minerals, for certain manufactured goods that we ought to be able to produce in our midst.

The success of the Free Trade agitation formed an epoch in British history, and entirely different as are all the surrounding circumstances from our own, some features of it may merit our attention at this juncture. If ever an agitation had the appearance of being utterly selfish, that against the Corn Laws did so appear. It was forced on the country by a particular class in one district, which supplied the immense sums needed to ensure success. The soul of the movement was a journalist, who for eight years gave to the cause more space in his newspaper than has ever been given to a single subject. He and the able men who supported, and afterwards overshadowed, him laboured to show that the interest of the district and of the nation at large were identical. They succeeded so well that the leader of the party most bitterly opposed to the movement became its champion; and the principles advocated were afterwards elevated into a sort of national religion. Four years before his conversion, Sir Robert Peel made this remarkable admission: "The prosperity of manufactures in this country is of more importance to the interests of this country than any system of corn laws whatever." One conclusion we venture to draw from this is, that in national movements of wide scope personal and