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FREE TRADE IN COAL.

The principal desideratum in discussing questions of public interest is that there be first of all a correct conception of the issue or issues under consideration. Superficial views, arguments based upon incomplete and inaccurate knowledge, are equally mischievous. And it must always be remembered that we have to deal with things as they are. Neither the weakness of opportunism nor the counsel of perfection is needed. If any situation be fully and fairly presented, it is robbed at once of half its danger.

It is not our intention here to attempt an adequate outline of the question of free trade in coal between the United States and Canada. We hope in later issues to take the subject up in as exhaustive a manner as possible. Just now, however, it is intended merely to indicate a few facts that are apt to be overlooked.

The coal industries of Nova Scotia, as has been mentioned specifically in a former editorial, provide a livelihood, directly and indirectly, for many thousands of people. They furnish almost fifty per cent. of the revenue of the province. They have been built up, under competitive conditions, to supply a Canadian demand with a Canadian article. In developing the St. Lawrence trade large discharging and storage plants have been erected at Quebec and Montreal, and the market has been held with difficulty, in spite of the tax against United States coal.

The trade with the Atlantic States is less than five hundred thousand tons. The St. Lawrence trade is considerably more than two millions of tons per annum. Both markets are competitive.

It is admitted that free trade in coal would force Nova Scotia to abandon the St. Lawrence market and confine her attention to the New England and other Atlantic coast States. Is this exchange fair? What would it mean immediately? What would it mean in the more distant future? And, most vital of questions, to whom would the benefit of the exchange actually accrue?

We shall not attempt to answer these questions finally. It will suffice to point out once more that the United States domestic market is now in a very poor condition, and that United States producers are prepared to swamp their Canadian competitors in both markets. This would mean temporarily cheaper coal to Canada. It would also mean huge permanent loss to investors in Nova Scotian collieries, distress and want to thousands of Canadian citizens, and, probably, the destruction of Nova Scotia's most important industry. Incidentally, the development of New Brunswick's coal fields would be indefinitely postponed. Millions of Canadian money would go to the United States.