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FREE TRADE or PROTECTION.

*"Medio tutissimus ibis."**



In the remarks we are about to make on these important political questions of the day, we wish it to be understood that they are not intended to have any political bearing on Trade Policy or either one side or the other; the country has given such a decided verdict in favor of protection, that we have now to await patiently until two or three years are past before the effect of protective duties will have had a sufficient trial to prove their benefit to Canada, or otherwise. The country has made a complete somersset in the political opinions it held five years since, and it would not be at all surprising if several of these acrobatic exhibi-

tions of oscillating opinions should be exhibited at the termination of every quintennial term of parliamentary rule. But in writing on this subject in a mechanical magazine, we abjure all political theories; we have no axe to grind, nor any selfish object in view; we simply wish to review the question, and exhibit it in other lights than those which either party have shed upon it from the hustings; our readers then may possibly, from our deductions, and now that the effervescence of such political spirit has subsided, form a juster estimate as to whether benefits are likely to accrue from the present policy, or otherwise.

Politicians in discussing these questions are too apt to be carried away by their political feelings, and are not always actuated by truly unselfish motives, or by the force of calm reasoning power. Too many of such men are attracted by the stronger will or magnetic influence of political professionals, and are very apt to grow confused under a flow of insidious argument—which is too often but a superficial gilding over the baser metal—from men who are fluent in words, but totally ignorant of the primary causes of the present depression in our manufactures.

(*) A middle course is the safest.

With respect to the fiat gone forth in Canada in favor of protection, several of the leading English and American journals have spoken of it in a deprecating tone, and consider that it is a retrograde step from prosperity; and advocates of free trade, in this country, point out, as the principal cause of the low ebb to which the manufacturers in United States have fallen, to their high protective tariffs. Now let us first consider the question of a comparison of free trade in Great Britain and free trade in Canada at the present hour.

When England adopted a free trade policy, what was her position compared with all other rival nations competing with her in manufactured goods, when that policy was adopted by her people? and what is the condition of Canada now compared with Great Britain at that time?

Great Britain had arrived at a supremacy in particular lines of manufactured goods far above every other nation of the earth; in fact, she had no rivals that she feared in competition, or needed to be protected against. Her policy was to endeavour to open the ports of all nations to a free entry of her goods, and why? because, at that time, she had machinery the finest in the world, and coal and iron the cheapest. She had a population, trained to mechanical labor, far in excess of any other nation, and it was an important, and even vital object, in a country where the land was held by a few hundreds of nobility, and millionaires, to keep that population in constant employment. If she had rivals in any particular trade, the balance of superiority was pretty equal. She had no adjacent power, like the United States, on her very border, with a population ten times greater than her own. She was then a nation which, at that period, had arrived at the very acme of perfection in many kinds of manufactured goods, and, therefore, when English journals twit us with making a retrograde movement, and attempt to draw a comparison between them then, and our country now, it is almost like comparing the setting up of a child to fight a giant. She had no country to contend against then that had a population ten times greater than her own, that could at any moment flood her markets with bankrupt stock, or with a surplus stock of manufactured goods, and ruin the manufacturers of similar goods in her own land, not only by bringing down the prices, but actually preventing the sale of