

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, JUNE 2, 1885.

THE EXEMPTION ACT.

Our morning contemporary the *Free Press* has at last let its voice be heard upon the iniquitous exemption law. For weeks past it has been hammering away at Sir John A. MacDonald and every body, who dares to say that there is a white spot in all his character, and belaboring everything in the way of political opposition to its own creed, but overlooking a matter, that struck at the very root of the prosperity of our own province, until now the howl of the eastern press of every shade of politics has forced its protest against the rascally piece of legislation. Why the *Free Press* should be so long silent is a conundrum to many, unless it is that the Exemption Act of last session was not a party measure, claiming its paternity from Mr. Norquay and his Government, but one which received unflinching support from leaders of the opposition, and consequently furnished no special loophole through which fire could be opened upon the Premier and his supporters. To be plain, the *Free Press* has given a striking instance of its eagerness to guard provincial interests, where such work is associated with party tactics, but by no means quick to attend to them where no chance of party advantage could be secured. But we are pleased, now that our contemporary has been shamed into an expression of opinion, that such opinion is ranged against confiscation and robbery. From its editorial on the question we cull the following.

"The measure is retroactive, applying to debts incurred before its passage as well as to liabilities that may hereafter be contracted. This is simply iniquitous. We believe in a liberal exemption law, but we do not approve of Legislative confiscation without compensation any more than we approve of highway robbery or petty larceny. If it had been provided that the act in question should not come into operation for six months after its passage, instead of declaring it immediately in force and making it retroactive, very few in all probability would have been heard complaining. No one would have been wronged by it. All would have had ample warning that in giving credit the character of the person trusted would mainly have to be relied upon. If after that risks were taken but little sympathy would be due to the loser."

Our contemporary evidently approves of an Exemption Act but does not approve of the one passed last session, and further declares that an Act of that sort would favorably affect the whole body commercial.

With all due deference to the great wisdom of the *Free Press* we beg to dissent from its arguments. When society or a government puts in force any exemption law, beyond what is necessary to prevent actual oppression, it is elevating on pure grounds of alleged expediency dishonesty above honesty, and no matter what social philosophers of the stamp of our contemporary may tell us, we are satisfied that any seeming good accomplished will be succeeded by a reaction which will more than counterbalance it. This talk about curtailing credit by making a shelter for rascality is nonsense of the most unmitigated kind. It starts from the assumption that purchasers of goods are fools, and must be prevented by an Exemption Act and curtailed credit from buying beyond their means, while sellers are equally foolish in their actions and will supply goods unlimited to those who ask them; and then the cure proposed for this double folly is that an act be passed which would necessitate infallibility of judgment on the part of the seller if he gave any credit and kept safe, or he must calculate upon all customers as dishonest knaves and treat them as such. There is many a roundabout way of treating evils, and the one proposed by the *Free Press* is almost as direct in its action as the blister applied to the big toe for the cure of toothache. Curtail credit and stop it entirely if possible is the creed preached by the *Press* and other supporters of exemptions, and yet the development of this and every other new country has been accomplished almost entirely on the strength of credit.

A BRIGHTER TRADE PROSPECT.

When the Saskatchewan troubles first broke out THE COMMERCIAL took the stand that the injury to trade would be of a temporary character, although it might be very demoralizing while it lasted. Our reason for stating so was that previous to the outbreak, trade had been gradually working itself on to a safe foundation and was giving every indication of being healthy and even moderately active during this summer. The outbreak of the rebellion was sudden and unexpected, and its effects on trade naturally showed them-

selves with suddenness. The country was only recovering from a two years tug through the depths of depression, and it was in consequence very sensitive and susceptible of impressions. The effect of the first rebellion news was to unsettle everything and thoroughly disarrange the season for the whole business community. Had the outbreak occurred in the middle of a season instead of at the beginning of one its evil effects would not have been so much felt. But after all its effects were merely to unsettle and not to demoralize trade. Men stopped short in their undertakings for the season, and yet if asked why they did so, they could scarcely have given a reasonable answer, unless we consider they had one in the fact that a rebellion existed hundreds of miles away in a section of country of very little commercial importance.

But the rebellion is evidently drawing very near a close, although it is not ten days since there was any clear prospect of such a desirable turn in events. The good news has had equally sudden effect upon trade, and it is now pretty certain that its recovery into a state of healthy activity will be rapid, and it may safely be said will be as unaccountable as its collapse. The first sight of buyers from the lately troubled districts in the Winnipeg wholesale markets during the past week has had a wonderful effect, and has given a hopeful tone to business generally. There is now a prospect of a heavy trade in supplies for the coming fall and winter, for goods must be had to replace those destroyed and pillaged during the rebellion. Then there has been a season for agricultural operations, such as has not been enjoyed for years, so that the first start towards a good harvest has been successfully made. We have no doubt suffered greatly during the past two months, in a trade sense, not to mention the sorrow that has been sent on many homes by the misfortune of war. But there is reason to believe that we are about to bid good bye to our trade troubles, and that we shall soon be able to forget them. Once peace is thoroughly restored in our land, we shall have a settlement of the relations of whites, half-breeds and Indians which will save many a squabble in the future and prevent many a misunderstanding which might be a serious obstacle. Then the fact that Manitoba has sent out some fifteen hundred of the troops in the field quelling rebellion, with the addition that