

CANADA.

No. 2.  
Governor  
Earl Cathcart  
to  
Mr. Secretary  
Gladstone,  
27th July 1846.

No. 2.

(No. 100.)

COPY of a DESPATCH from Governor the Earl CATHCART, K.C.B.  
to Mr. Secretary GLADSTONE.

Sir,

Government House, Montreal, 27th July 1846.

At the request of the Council and Members of the Free Trade Association of Montreal, I have the honour to submit a petition, which they have addressed to you, praying the removal of all differential duties and restrictions at present imposed for the regulation of the trade of this colony.

I have, &amp;c.

(Signed) CATHCART.

Encl. in No. 2.

Enclosure in No. 2.

To the Right Honourable W. E. GLADSTONE, one of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State for the Colonies.

The Petition of the Council and Members of the Montreal Free Trade Association,

Respectfully sheweth,

That whereas the intelligence received by the last English steamer, of the adoption in all its integrity, by the House of Lords, of the Corn Bill introduced by Sir Robert Peel, renders its final passage, which for some months past has been, to a certain degree, a subject of speculation, a matter of certainty, it now becomes the duty of the members of the Free Trade Association to point out the consequences of that measure to the trade of this province, the means by which the evils, if any, likely to flow from it may be mitigated or averted, and the benefits which may be educed from it may be secured.

It can scarcely be denied, that under the protective system of Great Britain, and more especially under the Imperial Act of 1843, the application of the capital of the country to the growth and manufacture of breadstuffs for export to the mother country has been artificially encouraged, and that the sudden and almost total withdrawal of the protection conferred on Canadian wheat and flour has occasioned considerable losses to many, who, calculating on its continuance, were induced during the past winter to pay higher prices to the Canadian farmer than a prudent estimation of the prospects of the British markets would otherwise have warranted.

The members of this Association, in making this statement, are not actuated by any desire to impugn the conduct of the British ministry, or to question this exercise of the right of legislation which the Imperial Parliament undoubtedly possesses. They acknowledge that the paramount duty of the Government is to provide for the happiness and prosperity of the whole people, and they are sensible that such results can often only be obtained at the expense of much individual sacrifice. To the consequences of the fluctuations in the commercial system of Great Britain, they must, as colonists, submit; and on this occasion they feel bound to state their conviction of the soundness of the principles on which her new commercial policy is based, and of their applicability not only to the trade of Britain, but to that of the whole world.

But whilst the members of this Association acquiesce on general grounds in the right and the expediency of the British Government withdrawing from this her colony the exclusive privileges she has hitherto enjoyed, they must, as a consequence, claim the removal of all restrictions on our trade with foreign nations, in the shape of discriminating duties, with a view to protect British manufactures; in other words, that we may be free "to buy in the cheapest, and sell in the dearest markets."

That the British Government is prepared to concede, nay invites this freedom of trade, may be fairly inferred from the whole tenor of the observations of the ministry in the recent debates in the Imperial Parliament, and more especially from the following passage in the despatch from the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Gladstone, to the Governor-general, dated 3d March last, and reiterated in his despatch to the same of 3d June:—

"The desire of Her Majesty's Government is, that the trade of Canada may, in all respects, approach as nearly to perfect freedom as the dispositions of its inhabitants, and the exigencies of the public revenue there, may permit."

Even without such a declaration, this Association would have relied with confidence for the concession of this our claim, on the sense, not only of justice, but of liberality, which characterizes

For Mr. Secretary Gladstone's Despatches, 3d March and 3d June 1846, vide Papers ordered by H. C. to be printed, 18th May 1846, No. 321., and 10th June 1846, No. 374.