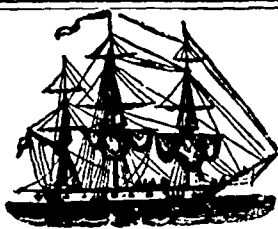


# CANADIAN ECONOMIST.



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MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 20TH JUNE, 1846.

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## THE CANADIAN ECONOMIST.

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### APATHY OF THE PUBLIC MIND.

The apparent apathy of the public mind in the present important epoch of our national history, is a fact calculated to excite our most serious apprehension for the future destinies of this country. Turn our attention in what direction we may—from the highest functionary of state, who, Palinurus-like, slumbers at the helm of affairs, to the merchant, the agriculturist, or the mechanic—the same lethargy prevails.

And yet a cursory glance at our political and commercial prospects will suffice to impress every thinking person with the necessity which exists for the utmost vigilance and capacity on the part of our rulers, joined to the most untiring energy and the most determined public spirit of every other class of the community. In every direction, dangers threaten. That system of Protection, under which as Colonies we have been reared, is about to be broken up, and a new one substituted, the ultimate effects of which are as yet unknown. We are, commercially speaking, about to enter on a new state of existence, and to be subjected to competition with one of the most enterprising nations on the earth. Surely, then, it behoves us, before we enter on such a campaign, to examine our actual condition, to ascertain the extent of our power and resources, and to use every means to render them available. This is the course, evidently dictated alike by reason and necessity, and yet, such, we repeat it, is the inertness of our community, that the very discussion of the question of our future commercial relations, both with the mother country and with foreign nations, is deprecated as fraught with danger, and positively injurious; and we, who ought to be considered as sentinels stationed to give notice of the approaching peril, are received as having created the evil against which we would guard. We shall not, however, be deterred by the odium which at all times attaches to those who run counter to the stream of popular opinion, but shall continue fearlessly to raise our warning voice to point out the means by which the dangers which beset us can alone, in our opinion, be averted.

We earnestly invite the attention of our readers to the condition of the commerce of the country at this juncture; and we believe that the result of the examination will be the admission, that the state of depression in which the manufacturer, the merchant, and the agriculturist, are alike involved, is, if not mainly caused, at all events greatly exaggerated, by the artificial, impolitic, and unjust system which prevails, of protection to classes, instead of freedom of trade to all.

Take, for instance, the article of Corn. What induced the merchant last winter to pay the farmer on the Canada side of the Lake 20 per centum more for his wheat than the value of the article on the United States side? The expectation of protection in the British market. Now that protection is about to be withdrawn, and the result of its withdrawal at a low estimate will be a loss of £100,000 to the Canadian merchant! Nor does the loss end here: British and Colonial shipping must be protected! Foreigners must not be allowed to navigate our waters! The natural consequences, in a country not abounding with capital, follow. The carrying trade becomes the monopoly of a few powerful companies, who combine and levy an exorbitant rate, altogether disproportionate to

the cost of transportation; and not only do they exact their own terms of freight, but not being adequately furnished with craft for the increase of trade, they retard the conveyance of produce so long as materially to inconvenience the proprietor, who suffers both from loss of interest, and outlay of capital.

Arrived at a shipping port, the same curse of protection hangs over the produce. There is not a sufficiency of British ships in port for its conveyance; of course, freights rise in consequence, and a further loss is entailed on the proprietor.

We have thus briefly noticed the consequences of the Protection system as applied to Breadstuffs, and our remarks are mainly applicable to the other staple exports of the country. To some of those articles, other evils are superinduced. The cost of Timber is greatly enhanced by the duties levied on foreign agricultural productions, which are largely consumed in the lumbering districts. These duties are so enormous as materially to diminish the ability of our lumbermen to compete with the former in the British markets. The Provision Trade of this country is also severely injured by this same Agricultural Act, as the impediments and obstacles interposed by the bonding system are so great, as more than to counterbalance any local advantages which we possess.

Do we direct the attention of our readers to those facts in a spirit of despondency? Such is far from our intention. Our object is to raise them from a state of inaction, which, if persisted in, must be productive of the most serious evils to the community. We do not seek to disguise that there are serious difficulties to contend against. The rivalry of our neighbours on the other side of the lines, although formidable, we think may be met and successfully combated through the means of our natural and acquired advantages; but the vices of our own legislation, which press as an incubus on the rising energies of the country, it will indeed be a matter of difficulty to overcome. *Hoc opus, hic labor est!* Yet even on this point we look with some degree of hope to the effects of the wholesome exercise of public opinion, fortified as it will infallibly be, by the financial necessities of the country, which will force on our rulers a more comprehensive and enlarged policy. But we are sensible of the difficulty in a Colony of acting on public opinion, and fear that the observation of Lorginus may be found applicable to us. "In the same manner," says he, "as some children always remain pigmies, whose infant limbs have been too closely confined; thus our minds, fettered by the prejudices and habits of a just servitude, are unable to expand themselves, or to attain a well-proportioned greatness."

### THE COURSE TO BE PURSUED.

Canada, in adjusting her commercial system to the altered policy of the Mother Country, which must ere long be the policy of nations, should act, in our opinion, as if she were already an independent state. Let not the reader start: we are not going to advocate separation; nor have we any fears that Free Trade will shorten the natural period for which our existence as a Colony is destined to endure. The question of separation, as affected by the new commercial policy of England, has been already fully discussed in our columns, and we trust that the arguments which we have advanced have satisfied our readers that the fears entertained on that head by a certain class of the community are perfectly nugatory and unfounded. We hold that Free Trade and Prosperity will go hand in hand; that contentment and happiness will be the necessary effects; and, on these grounds, we entertain the belief that the people of Canada will seek for no political change, no new political connexion, as they will see nothing to envy in the social condition of the neighbouring republic. Relieving ourselves, then, from every apprehension on that score, we ask, What is the course which this Colony ought to pursue? It is, as we have already stated, that we should act as if we were an independent state; and the first step to be taken is to overthrow the pernicious system of differential duties. The Canadian agriculturist cries out against the admission of United States produce for consumption, because the United States will not reciprocate, will not admit Canadian agricultural produce on the same terms into their markets. A more absurd outcry could