

# THE SATURDAY READER.

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### DEATH OF LORD PALMERSTON.

As we write we have but the simple announcement, per telegraph, of the death of this eminent and veteran statesman, whose wise councils have guided the ship of State through so many dangers. Although from his great age and the repeated attacks of his old enemy, the gout, the event can scarcely be called unexpected, we are sure that the intelligence will enkindle a feeling of deep sorrow throughout the length and breadth of the empire. The very *beau ideal* of an English statesman, rich in wisdom, experienced in all the arts of diplomacy—who shall fill his place? Humanly speaking the empire seldom needed him more than at the present juncture; but he to whose higher wisdom we must all bow, has seen fit to summon him hence, and nought is left us but the memory of his great achievements, and the sad duty of mourning over the grave of the foremost statesman of the age. As we go to press early in the week, (Tuesday) we are unable to do more than thus briefly refer to the most important intelligence which has reached us for many months.

### OUR COMMERCIAL POSITION.

THE important subject of the probable visitation of the cholera to this country next year, and that of our commercial prospects in connection with the threatened repeal of the Reciprocity Treaty with the United States, have lately commanded a large share of public attention; and the ability and spirit displayed in the discussion of both questions are highly creditable to the conductors of the Provincial press. There has not, perhaps, been much research, but then, there has not been much to seek. The facts and merits of the Reciprocity question are plain and evident, when not distorted by passion and party or individual selfishness and interest. The general voice declares that the abrogation of the Treaty would be a disadvantage to us, but we no longer believe that the circumstance would involve the utter ruin of the country, as our commercial and political Jeremiahs told us some months ago. Few, even among our farmers, now suppose that the demand for their produce during the civil war among our neighbours, and at the present moment, can be regarded otherwise than as an exceptional one, which must cease, in a great measure, Reciprocity or no Reciprocity, after the vacuum created by the late contest has been filled up, and the industry, agriculture, and com-

merce of the Union shall resume their normal state. It is only under extraordinary conditions that coals can be sent to Newcastle, or agricultural products to the United States, except within certain limits, and to secure certain profits which the Canadian holder or dealer might pocket himself, were he as wise or adventurous as his American customer. But these points have been so extensively and ably treated by our contemporaries, that we shall not dwell further upon them. There is, however, one fact bearing on our future trade with England and foreign nations which we think has not received the consideration its importance demands; that fact is that the United States can shut us out from communication with the ocean for nearly half of the year. It is a question too, from which there can be no shrinking, but must be met fully in the face. It is true that we have seaports enough in the Lower Provinces, but commercially these would be no more useful to us than would be the same number of ports on the Labrador coast of the Atlantic. The distance from Halifax to Quebec is about 700 miles; from Quebec to Montreal about 160 miles—in all, say 860 miles. The distance from Montreal to Portland is 270 miles. In winter, then, our railroads—supposing the Intercolonial railway built—could not contend successfully with those of the United States, which, even as against the route by Portland through Canada, have an advantage, as regards distances, to say nothing of those arising from climate and a larger traffic. We are aware that this is an argument which will find favour with the annexationists, but, while strong, it is far from conclusive. Many great nations have existed and prospered, and still exist and prosper, although partly or wholly cut off from the sea. Russia once had only one seaport, Archangel; and the greater portion of that empire is now debarred of ocean intercourse for many months every year; as are Prussia, Sweden, and other countries on the Baltic. Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia are all but landlocked, as are several of the minor German states. We are far better off than these are, with our magnificent river and gulf open throughout their entire length from April to December; and, consequently, we need not despair of maintaining our nationality and extending our commerce, in spite of the United States, and all the world, if we make the attempt—as we will—and persevere in it. But there is another question in this connection, which we wish to ask; is the Lower St. Lawrence navigable in winter? If it were found to be so, the fact would in all probability impart a new aspect to the whole future of this Province, and perhaps of all British North America. The history of winter navigation in Lower Canada is somewhat curious. So far as we are aware, the first successful effort of the sort, we owe to Mr. W. H. Coffin, formerly sheriff of Montreal. Mr. Coffin was President of the Lachine Railway some fifteen or twenty years ago, and by his perseverance and tact he suc-

ceeded in placing a steam ferry boat on the St. Lawrence to ply between Lachine and Caughnawaga. A rival company threw every impediment in the way; the project was abused and ridiculed in pamphlets and newspapers.—Mr. Coffin receiving a large share of the abuse and ridicule. He was told that the very idea of keeping a steamboat afloat on the St. Lawrence in winter with the thermometer at 40 below zero, and snow storms the rule and not the exception; he was told that the thing was too absurd to be thought of by any one fit to live out of a lunatic asylum. The result, nevertheless, has been that the boat has been running ever since, summer and winter, with scarcely a day's stoppage. We next come to the story of the great bridge at Montreal. We believe that we owe the selection of the present site to the Hon. John Young, who was at great trouble and expense in advocating the undertaking, long before the Grand Trunk took it in hand. For many years, few would listen to the scheme: no bridge, it was insisted, could withstand the boulders of ice rushing down the Lachine rapids. Many similar objections were urged, but the bridge is there, and to all appearance will continue there when the objectors have gone the way of all foolometers. But we suspect that there is not a man living to whom winter navigation in Lower Canada is more indebted than to Mr. James Tibbets of Quebec. Mr. Tibbets has succeeded in keeping a steamer plying in winter between that city and Point Levi, a feat which could scarcely have been believed possible, considering the violence of the stream there, and the immense fields and masses of ice which sweep and roll along its course. Such are a few of the incidents which have marked the endeavours of those persons amongst us who have laboured at this work. As respects the Lower St. Lawrence, we happen to know that the late Hon. W. H. Merritt, when commissioner of Public Works, in 1848 or 1849, was induced to lay the subject before the Trinity Houses of Quebec and Montreal. But these worthy fossils received the suggestion with shouts of disapproval which silenced Mr. Merritt, if they did not convince him. The question has since been frequently mooted in Quebec Journals. Many of the most experienced pilots and masters of Canadian vessels maintain the affirmative; others the negative. It will be recollected that in the Fall of 1861, when the Guards came to Canada in consequence of the affair of the Trent, the steamer Arabian was deterred from landing a quantity of baggage and munitions of war at Rivière du Loup, owing to the threatening appearance of the river. Nineteen old pilots then signed a document which was published in the newspapers, declaring that the Lower St. Lawrence, up to above the Island of Bic, was open to navigation in the months of January, February, and March. We offer these remarks merely as suggestions, because we do not consider ourselves qualified to speak with authority in the matter. We rely mostly on the opinions of men who have studied the question, and on whose knowledge and judgment we have