

# THE WEEK.

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## THE WEEK:

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REPLYING to the courteous questions put to us by Mr. J. Castell Hopkins, in his letter in another column, we may say frankly that we have not presented the possibilities of closer trade relations with Great Britain, as the result of preferential duties imposed by her in favour of the colonies, in the light of a dawning opportunity which it would be the height of folly for us to neglect, for the simple reason that those possibilities are in our judgment so very remote as to be beyond the boundaries of the practicable. We say this with all respect for the views of our correspondent and others who think with him, and we trust we may do so without lack of modesty, seeing that we are asked to give a reason for our course in this matter. The first two questions asked by Mr. Hopkins are in reality a skilful marshalling of the sayings and events which, in his opinion, point in the direction of a preferential customs arrangement between Great Britain and the colonies. Lord Salisbury's negative statement, which Mr. Hopkins quotes, is effectually disposed of by more recent utterances of Lord Salisbury himself, as when he said a few months ago in the House of Lords, that any form of protection that would increase the price of food in Great Britain would bring about a state of things scarcely distinguishable from civil war; and when, not more than three or four weeks ago, at a meeting of the Associated Chamber of Commerce, he gave occasion to Professor Bryce, a political opponent, to give him public thanks for "the decisive vigour with which he had negatived and extinguished the suggestion that we should attempt an object we all heartily desire—drawing nearer together our colonial brethren with ourselves—by entering on a course which would have been delusive to them and would have encountered invincible opposition at home." Over against the editorial assertion of the *Times* may be set the much more emphatic utterances of the *Saturday Review*, on the other side of the question. "A commercial union with the colonies," said the latter, only a few weeks since, "is only protection writ in another way; and protection means a dear loaf for this country, and we will have none of it." The "United Empire Trade League" has yet to show itself possessed of elements of influence and vitality, personal and potential, such as would enable it to make head-

way against the combination of tremendous forces which it would find arrayed against it, should it at any time reach a point at which it might begin to seem dangerous. The injury wrought to British industry by the increase of the protectionist tariffs of the United States, France, and other countries, is unquestionably serious, but from the British free trade point of view it would, as Mr. Gladstone has pointed out, be the height of folly for the nation to put clogs on the feet of its own workmen in order to help them in the race which is already made increasingly difficult for them by the barriers erected by other nations.

WE abjure pessimism, we admire enthusiasm, but we confess that the best flights of our most ardent moments fall far below the pitch of sanguineness from which our respected correspondent must have been surveying the prospect when he penned his third question. What an array of blessings, and how widely and impartially they are to be distributed throughout the broad Empire! And all these are to be brought down upon every portion of the world-encircling Federation by so simple a process as an adjustment of taxes! It seems almost a pity to subject so charming a picture to cold analysis, or to break in upon so delightful a dream with the chilling tests of logic and matter-of-fact. But our scepticism compels us. Either an Imperial duty on foreign breadstuffs and agricultural products would, or it would not, improve the condition of the British farmer. If it would, is there any conceivable way in which it could do so, other than by raising the prices of his products at home, since he does not export them? Only in the same way, viz., by increase of prices could it fill our North-West with agricultural settlers, seeing that these settlers have free access to the British markets and an unlimited demand at present prices. And so of the Australian ranchman and the East Indian agriculturist, and the West Indian sugar planter. The enhanced prosperity of each and all could, so far as we are able to see, be brought about in no other way, save through increase of prices in Great Britain. But increase of prices must mean dearer food for the British workman, and this in its turn must mean either increase of poverty and privation for the toiling millions who create British wealth, or increased cost of manufactured goods, with corresponding decrease of ability to compete in the world's markets. In fact the latter result must follow to some extent in any case, since the tariff could hardly fail to add to the cost of much of the raw material which enters into these manufactures. But with the increasing poverty of the millions of British workmen, and the increasing inability of the British manufacturer to compete in foreign markets, must come diminished means for purchasing the products of British agriculture. And thus the tariff would in the end react injuriously upon the British farmer. Is this what is hinted at in the modifying clause "for a time at least"? Does Mr. Hopkins think that the prospect of these results is likely to make even the British agriculturist an ardent friend of an Imperial customs union? Or can he deny that, under the circumstances, such results must inevitably follow, an increase in the cost of food in the Mother Country? But, perhaps, our correspondent will choose the other horn of the dilemma, and assume that the differential tax would not raise the price of food to the British consumer. In that case, seeing that there is no lack of an ample market, and that all have now free access to it, we must leave it to the advocates of an Imperial preferential tariff to show how any one could derive benefit from the tax. And that no increase of price would follow, Mr. Hopkins himself seems to admit in his fourth question, though how he can rescue that question from the position of a seeming contradiction of the third, we are unable to conjecture. That the Imperial tax might injure the United States farmer by compelling him to pay the duty on his agricultural exports is possible, but that would be, after all, but a poor consolation.

"IS it not evident," asks Mr. Hopkins in his fifth and final question, "in view of recent events, that Canada could not, under any conceivable change within our present scope of vision, maintain her independence apart from Great Britain?" This question is so often

asked and the impossibility of anything but an affirmative answer so confidently assumed, that it may seem to savour of temerity in us to say "No, it is not evident." And yet such must be our answer if our reply is simply honest. We mean, of course, that it is not evident to us, and the word "evident" in this connection can have no meaning save one that is relative to the individual mind. After reading a great deal of what has been said and written upon the subject, and after having given it a good deal of such thought as is within the compass of our poor ability, we are unable to see any conclusive reason why Canada could not maintain or, as we prefer to say, retain her independence apart from Great Britain, in perpetuity, should the time of friendly parting and setting up for herself arrive, as it not improbably may, in the not distant future. We have not space just now to discuss this question at length, nor is it necessary, as it is only incidental to the main point under consideration. We may say, however, that the admission so often made—and it is an admission not wholly creditable to the Canadian spirit—that Canadian independence is an impossible dream, rests mainly or wholly upon the assumption that Canada is beside an aggressive neighbour, who is ready to spring upon her and devour her the moment the protectingegis of the Mother Country is withdrawn. Now, there are many things both in the political system of the United States and in the politicians who administer it which we are unable to admire. Nevertheless, we are persuaded that the assumption in question does the nation injustice. There is nothing in the recent history of the Republic on which such an assumption can be based. That the Munro doctrine has a strong hold on the popular imagination is true, but that doctrine is intimately connected with a belief in manifest destiny, which is rather inconsistent than otherwise with the idea of a forcible annexation. On the other hand, with all its faults, there is in the United States a great body of people who are as fair-minded, as unprejudiced, and as anxious to do that which is just and friendly to other peoples as those of any nation in the world. Though these do not come to the front sufficiently in the ordinary administration of public affairs, they would have to be reckoned with, and would make their influence felt, should their politicians ever attempt to commit a great wrong to a neighbouring nation. We say these things because we believe them to be simply just, not that we would admit that Canada, as an independent nation, need exist upon the sufferance even of the United States. We have faith in Canadian courage and fortitude, backed as these qualities are by superior physique and entrenched in a land whose climate and situation would fight powerfully in aid of a defensive force. We have still stronger faith in those moral forces which constitute the best bulwarks of a people who fear God and work righteousness in their dealings with others, and such a nation Canadians must be or become if they are ever to have a future worth recording. It surely is time for us to cease voting want of confidence in ourselves, and in our ability to take care of ourselves. Nor, if our courage must have bolstering from without, should we forget the million of Canada's sons who are already in the United States, many of them among its most influential and respected citizens, and who may, therefore, be regarded by an inversion of ideas which is nevertheless founded in truth, as so many hostages for the good behaviour of the people amongst whom they dwell. An Independent Canada in friendly alliance both with the Mother Country and with the great Anglo-Saxon nation beside her, would, we venture to think, have attained its "ideal" future. Whether such shall be its actual future may depend, for aught we know, upon our conduct in the crisis which the next few years seem likely to bring.

THE announcement that Sir Charles Tupper, Sir John Thompson and Mr. Foster are shortly to proceed to Washington for the purpose of holding an informal conference with Mr. Blaine on the reciprocity question is so far satisfactory. It may be assumed that the Government has taken means to assure itself that its representatives will meet a friendly reception. Though of course nothing official can be done by commissioners not accredited by the British Government, it is eminently desirable that an