

The Commercial

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BRITISH TRADE POLICY.

The British people at home may be as strong believers in free trade now as they were ten years ago, but at the same time there seems to be a growing dissatisfaction with their present trade policy. Ominous mutterings have come from leading men and from leading trade centres and commercial bodies, which show that there is much unrest in the public mind upon this question. It is a prevailing belief that public opinion in Great Britain is moulded very slowly, and we do not look there for such rapid changes in public policy as we have been accustomed to on this continent. Nevertheless, this feeling of dissatisfaction with the trade policy of the country seems to have spread abroad in a remarkable short time. A most remarkable event has recently transpired in England, which has brought this feeling prominently to the surface. We refer to the action of the tariff committee of the chamber of commerce of the important city of Birmingham, in recommending that the government be urged to increase the duties on Spanish productions imported into the United Kingdom. This resolution did not go any further than the committee with whom it originated, as it was not concurred in by the council of the chamber, but at the same time it shows the new trend of opinion. It is a number of such occurrences as these which show a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the present trade policy of the country. Birmingham has heretofore been known as a free trade stronghold, and now a special meeting of the chamber of commerce is to be held to discuss the whole tariff question, growing out of the resolution of the tariff committee. Incidents of this nature two or three years ago would have taken all England by surprise, and the people would have been wondering if a lunatic asylum had been let loose. Now they are of quite common occurrence.

The direct cause of the discussion brought about in the Birmingham chamber, is the termination of the commercial treaty with Spain and her colonies. Until the first of July last, Great Britain and colonies traded with the Spanish dominions under as favorable terms as any other country. It will be understood that most European countries have varying tariffs, and British products were admitted into Spanish dominions under what is known as the most favored nation clause. This treaty terminated on the first of July, and British agents who went to Madrid, have failed to negotiate a new treaty with Spain. At the same time, it will be remembered that Spain has made a treaty with the United States, which gives the latter country great advantages in the Spanish dominions, particularly in Cuba and the other Spanish West Indian possessions.

Great Britain has been very unfortunate of late in her endeavors to negotiate treaties of commerce with other nations, and one has not far to look to discern the cause of this. All

the principal nations of the world have adopted the high tariff plan. Great Britain alone stands as a free trade country. When two high tariff countries meet to negotiate a treaty, each has to make concessions. Each country has certain products which it wants to sell to the other on as favorable terms as possible, and in order to obtain favorable terms, mutual concessions must be made. But when Great Britain goes to a high-tariff country to ask for a commercial treaty, she has no concessions to make, for the reason that in her free trade policy she has already conceded everything. High tariff countries, like Spain, are therefore very independent in the matter. Spain did not give the United States such a favorable treaty on account for any love for the republic. The Spaniard does not regard the United States with favor, on account of the supposed longing the latter country has for the possession of Cuba and Porto Rico. But Spain was obliged to make great concessions to the United States, in order to obtain an admittance for her sugar, tobacco, etc., into the republic. Spain is in need of revenue, and since her loss of revenue on her imports from the United States, she is all the more in need of revenue from other sources. Accordingly she is not likely to give up her revenue upon British goods, unless there is some strong inducement to do so.

It is not with free trade as a principle that the British people are becoming dissatisfied. They no doubt still believe that free trade is the right principle. But while admitting the principle, the fact that British goods are everywhere being locked out, while the most strongly protectionist countries are, by means of their high tariff, forcing favorable treaties from other countries, is something which is calculated to make even free traders resort to some move in self defence. The British people are not likely to adopt a policy of protection for any reason of love of the principle of protection at home, but what may be called a policy of tariff retaliation, may be a matter of serious consideration in the near future.

POLITICS IN THE WEST.

The West now returns a solid and unbroken support to the present party in power at Ottawa. Robt. Watson, member for the electoral division of Marquette, Manitoba, was the only opposition member of parliament from the West, in the present house. He resigned his seat a short time ago, to accept a portfolio in the local government of Manitoba, and now N. Boyd, a supporter of the Ottawa government, has been elected in his old constituency, by acclamation. Thus the only constituency held by the opposition in the Dominion house, west of Lake Superior, has been lost to them, and another name has been added to the large and growing majority for the government. Manitoba, the Territories, and British Columbia now send only supporters of the government to Ottawa.

Why is this thus: is a question which may be asked. Is it because the policy of the government is particularly favorable to the West? Well, hardly. There is one direction in which the policy of the present government has been

viewed with favor in the West, in comparison with the policy of the opposition. It has been less pessimistic. The West is not pessimistic. It sees a great future before the country. It has faith in the future, and is buoyant and sanguine. So much pessimistic whining has come from leaders of the opposition (yept Liberals in the East, that it has nauseated the West perhaps with the whole policy of the yept Liberal party.

But to return to the question, is the policy of the government particularly favorable to the West? Most emphatically we say NO. Protection is the distinguishing policy of the party in power. Now, whatever may be said in favor of protection in the older provinces of the East, these arguments lose their force when we come West. Here protection is a heavy burden to be borne, from whatever side it may be viewed. It may benefit Eastern manufacturing centres, but it does so by increasing taxation upon the West. Owing to our geographical position, and to other causes, the high tariff tax presses most heavily upon the West, and the people here, though limited in means, are obliged to contribute more than their share of taxes to the national treasury. It has frequently been urged, that owing to the pressure of tariff taxation upon the West, the government should allow this portion of the Dominion some compensating privileges in some other direction, but this claim has never been recognized at Ottawa.

Why then, we may ask again, this solid support of the government in power? One principal reason we may give is the more complete organization of the government forces. The opposition, it may be said, has been practically without organization here. The opposition party has received little, in fact we may say no assistance from the east, and there has been nothing like a general organization of the party. The fact that a government supporter has just been returned unopposed in an opposition constituency, proves this. The government party naturally has better facilities for organization in the newer and more thinly populated districts, which make up the western constituencies. There are the large number of government officials who give valuable assistance in the work of organizing the political forces. Besides, in a small population, these very government officials count for considerable in the matter of votes alone, in an election contest.

It is also supposed that the country being new and in special need of the patronizing care of the government, that it is an advantage for the newer districts to send supporters, rather than opponents of the party in power. This is no doubt a mistake. Docile followers are less likely to receive special attention than active opponents, under our system of government.

If the opposition as a party wish to gain some footing in the West, the first thing necessary will be to behead some of their more pessimistically inclined leaders, then stop prating continually about an alleged exodus, and give less time to the invention of statistics to prove that the country is going to eternal smash. This could be followed up by fully renouncing the foolish policy of commercial union, and adopting a true Liberal policy of free trade. The