

CANADA.

To the Honourable the KNIGHTS, CITIZENS, and BURGESSES of GREAT BRITAIN and IRELAND,
in Parliament assembled:

The Memorial of the Montreal Board of Trade.

HUMBLY SHEWETH,

THAT the British Navigation Laws, and the laws affecting the navigation of the St. Lawrence are, under the system of free trade adopted by the Imperial Government, felt to be peculiarly burdensome and detrimental to the interests of this colony.

That during the continuance of the former colonial system, when the products of Canada were largely protected in the markets of Great Britain, the privileges conceded by the Navigation Laws to the shipping interest were not made a subject of complaint by the colonists, but now that the Imperial Government seem to regard the former colonial system as detrimental to the general interests of the empire, and to have resolved on a course of commercial policy whereby a very small measure of protection is left to the colony, justice would seem to require that the restrictions imposed by those laws should at once be removed.

That the general effect of those laws has undoubtedly been to enhance the cost of freight on the imports and exports of Canada, to fetter the inter-colonial and foreign trade, and to restrain the traffic on the St. Lawrence, disadvantages, however, which were fully compensated under the former fostering commercial policy of England.

That in consequence of the change in that policy, the longer duration of these laws will jeopardize the trade of the St. Lawrence, and render it very doubtful whether that river will continue to be the great highway for the commerce of Canada; and should this apprehension be realized, it is manifest to your memorialists that a commercial union of a most intimate character will be produced between the United States and this colony, the inevitable result of which would be to dissolve the ties which connect her with the mother country, a consummation your memorialists would deeply deplore.

That this apprehension of the diversion of the trade from the St. Lawrence is not based on vague and unsubstantial grounds, will abundantly appear from the following considerations. For a considerable time past New York has gradually been attracting Canadian commerce. The favourable position of that city as a shipping port, and the comparatively low freights and rates of insurance which there prevail on shipments to England, give her a great advantage over the ports of the St. Lawrence; and should the Bill now before Congress become law which provides for the repeal of the duties on Canadian produce, it can hardly be doubted, that unless the most decisive measures are taken to render the St. Lawrence route the cheaper, and more desirable of the two, the great bulk of the exports of Canada will find their way *via* Oswego and Buffalo to New York, for shipment to England. On the other hand, the removal of the Canadian differential duties, or in other words, the equalization of duties on goods whether imported by sea or across the frontier, from the United States, consequent upon the change in the commercial policy of Great Britain, has had the effect of driving the Canadian merchant to New York for his purchases of commodities instead of to Montreal, whither it has been his practice heretofore to resort, this effect being accelerated and increased by the judicious legislation of the American Congress, which is leaving no stone unturned to attract and secure so rich a prize as the commerce of Canada.

That on these and other grounds your memorialists have no hesitation in expressing it as their decided conviction that unless the protective system be again resorted to, or some other remedial measures be devised, New York must inevitably become the great emporium for Canadian business, and as a certain consequence that the traffic of the St. Lawrence will be to a great extent destroyed.

That amongst the most prominent of these remedial measures would appear to your memorialists to be the throwing open the St. Lawrence to the flags of all nations, and the repealing of those sections of the British Navigation Act which apply to the British possessions.

That a salutary competition would be thereby insured on its waters, sea going freights would be reduced to the level of such freights at New York, making allowance for the difference of cost of the voyage, the expense of inland navigation would be cheapened, and the citizens of the United States would be induced to make the St. Lawrence the outlet for their produce, thereby conferring on Canada the benefit of a transit trade of great and growing importance.

That in the present position of affairs in this colony, the repeal of the navigation laws so far as they affect this colony, could scarcely prove injurious to the British ship-owner; for, if the result of these laws be to concentrate the import and export trade of Canada in New York, (and that this will be the result your memorialists do not entertain the slightest doubt,) it is obvious the question simply amounts to this—Will the British ship-owner allow the foreigner to compete with him in the St. Lawrence; or will he compel himself to compete with the foreigner in the ports of the United States?

That in the opinion of your memorialists the objection which has been urged against the repeal of the laws in question on political grounds, is not entitled to greater weight. Nothing will so soon predispose the people of Canada to sympathize with their American neighbours, as that identity of interests which the present intimate trading relations springing up betwixt the two countries are so fitting to promote; and nothing on the contrary will contribute so much to maintain the loyalty and attachment of the people to the parent state as the preservation of their old channels of commerce, and direct intercourse with her markets by the waters of the St. Lawrence.

That the grounds therefore on which your memorialists particularly rest the prayer of this memorial are as follows:—