

Hamburg is said to feel assured that it will escape, and Germany appears to be under a like impression.

THE TARIFF DISCUSSION.

Another public dinner to the Minister of Finance, this time at St. John, N.B., has given us some further official utterances on the tariff. Mr. Bowell, who was present as a guest, was a little more discreet than his colleague, Mr. Foster. "The desire of the Government," he said, "was to ascertain what the people wanted and to give it to them." The Government, he added, was "prepared to reform the tariff where it was possible." But his creed was that "industries should be protected till they can stand alone." This policy, he vouchsafed the information, had been a success in the United States. A century has passed in the Republic since Hamilton, the father of American protection, began to make the experiment. After that lapse of time, we do not yet hear from the party that favors Protection, that the time has come when the protected industries can stand alone. On the contrary, it has not ceased to demand Protection in greater measure than ever before, as the McKinley bill shows. But when Mr. Bowell tells us that the "Government wants to revise the tariff so as to suit the people," it is difficult to accept the statement. Both he and Mr. Foster say that they are interrogating the consumer, as well as the manufacturer, to find out what he wants. How this is done we are not able to discover. When are consumers called upon, as such, to state their views? what opportunity is given them to do so? If there be a real desire to obtain this information, we would suggest, as a good form, the queries propounded by Secretary Walker, of the United States Treasury, in the form of circulars, in 1845. Let these be copied, as far as they are applicable, and replies to them be sought, impartially, in all quarters; if this be done, we venture to say that very different information from what the Government has received will be forthcoming. In spite of all Mr. Foster says, no impartial person believes that the tariff investigation is being carried on by Ministers in any other than a thoroughly one-sided way, and with a predetermined result.

Few persons will now have much difficulty in agreeing with Mr. Bowell that commercial union and unrestricted reciprocity are dead. But what then? Is the Opposition doomed to carry forever the fatal burthen of the corpse? There is no reason why it should. Already there are signs that these obstructions are to be got out of the way; a party convention, already called, can do it, and it will be strange if it be not done. The abandonment of unrestricted reciprocity would enable the Opposition to move with effect towards the goal of a revenue tariff. It could then act upon a consistent and intelligent policy. Unrestricted reciprocity antagonized a sentiment which is strong with a large section of the people; politically it was a losing game, and if this fact is at last realized by the forces which will control the

party convention, tariff revision will be assured. If the Government will not undertake this, and it does not look as if it would, the advocates of a revenue tariff will be almost certain to carry the country when the next appeal is made to the electorate. But the condition of success will be that the dead carcase of unlimited reciprocity shall be consigned to the dust with the least possible delay.

The Government had the game in its own hands, but it seems determined to throw it away. It could have moved, cautiously, but distinctly, towards a revenue tariff, and thus put itself on a level with the rising tide of reaction against exaggerated Protection. It could have taken a line which would have best accorded with the interests of the manufacturer and the consumer. If the manufacturers were wise, they would cease to resist a change which is bound to come; and they would so act as to try to break as much as possible the force of the blow which will affect their interests. With those who do not see that tariff revision is inevitable, it would be a waste of time to argue. If they will not assist one party to make a reasonable revision, they will be likely to have to take a still more unwelcome measure from the other. The moment the tariff becomes a distinct issue between the political parties the possibility of a change must be reckoned with. The Government party is no longer a unit for Protection. This is true whether the McCarthy defection counts for little or much, or for nothing. But, though it would be easy to overestimate it, this defection counts for something: it cannot be left wholly out of the account in an estimate of chances. Mr. Foster feels constrained to take note of the attitude of Mr. McCarthy. He is probably not far out when he says that "every vote for Mr. McCarthy would be a vote for the Liberal party"; but this does not lessen the danger, but on the contrary increases it.

Mr. Foster defends the secrecy of the conferences between the Government and persons interested in the maintenance of the tariff. He goes further, and treats those interviews as "confidential." He and his colleagues, he says, want to learn everything that affects the business of the individuals interested. He does not see that if one class of persons have duties put on for their special benefit, other classes who have to pay them have good ground of complaint. His idea is that statesmanship consists of earwigging a manufacturer in a dark room, learning exactly what he wants in the way of tariff support, and then giving him what he asks. Such confidences are to be received with childlike simplicity and in dead secret. The defence of secrecy is that it is preventive of speech-making for political effect. We do not think that the history of deputations which have voluntarily gone to Ottawa to impress on the Government certain views of tariff construction bears out this supposed danger; speeches for political effect have been rare, if made at all, on such occasions. Besides, the alleged secrecy is not maintained by the men who are tendering advice to the Government; they seldom make any mystery of what they said at these conferences.

The truth is, this secrecy in what concerns the whole public admits of no justification. The public is apt to conclude, rightly or wrongly, that where matters of public policy are treated as secrets between interested individuals and the Government, there is something to conceal, which ought not to be. Is it wise to encourage this suspicion?

With the view of discrediting a revenue tariff, Mr. Foster told his entertainers that it is a tariff which puts the highest duties "on what is not produced in the country, such as tea, and the highest [lowest?] rate on what can be made in the country." A revenue tariff is one which looks to revenue, and does not encourage protection for its own sake and without reference to the needs of the revenue or what the duties will produce. Such duties do not necessarily, and with us could not wisely, be made to fall with greatest weight on what is not produced in the country, or the lowest be necessarily put on what can. A revenue duty might be put on either class of articles; the essential point is that its object should be revenue, and that it should not rise above the revenue standard. In making a tariff, there is no reason why, this limit being observed, the manufacturing capabilities of the country should not be taken into account. Public opinion would sanction a judicious selection of objects for duty, and the principle of a revenue tariff need not thereby be prejudiced. We venture to predict that it will not pay any public man, in the long run, to misrepresent a revenue tariff for the purpose of discrediting it.

The Government, Mr. Foster tells us, has "to consider that capital is cheaper and labor cheaper in Belgium, and Great Britain and elsewhere [than in Canada], and that those countries therefore had an immense advantage [over us.] Protection to offset these was necessary." If other countries have a great advantage over Canada in manufacturing certain articles, our interest lies in buying from them, not in subsidizing opposition factories, which, left to themselves, could only be carried on at a loss. Mr. Foster's plan is to saddle the public with that loss. Does he fancy that the nation can get rich by sacrifices of this kind? Does he think that it can reap wealth from its losses? And how long is the protection, which he declares necessary, to last? As long as wages and interest continue to be lower in Belgium than here, and that will be for centuries. This is the prospect which Mr. Foster holds out to Canada; this is his answer to the demand that the sacrifices imposed on the community generally by Protection shall be gradually lessened and finally abolished.

But the incurable warp which Mr. Foster's mind has received is perhaps best seen in his comparison between workingmen's combinations and combinations of manufacturers. Does he mean to say that the latter are as defensible as the former? If so, he is not at one with Sir John Thompson. Does he intend by this comparison to defend unlimited combinations of manufacturers? As an exponent of tariff policy, Mr. Foster is doing his best to draw on his colleagues to the brink of disaster. J. B. W.