

INTRODUCTION

THE modern Board of Trade may be regarded as the descendent of those important Associations of Merchants which, in the centuries now passed were formed for the purpose of "fostering, protecting and forwarding their mutual interests." They became a power which not only exercised a mighty influence on the trade and commerce, but also on the political condition of the States of Europe. Those who have visited, for example, the once grand and historic city of Louvain, now in ruins as the result of German military barbarism, and which was formerly the seat of the mighty trade of the Duchy of Brabant, will have seen for themselves one noted place where the medieval seed was sown from which our modern Trade Associations have sprung. The story of the numerous Livery Companies which to-day flourish in the little circumference known as the City of London, their field of operation being bounded by a stones thrown of that singularly important institution known as the Bank of England, also tells of Commercial Union. It is in fact a matter of history, not at times it must be confessed very clear, that there has always been somewhere latent in some form or another, a species of "Board of Trade" and antiquarians find a connection between the modern corporation of the name and the Roman Collegia and Sodales.

The Historical Record of the Montreal Board of Trade is necessarily one which has to deal with matters, practically, almost of to-day. A Canadian Justin McCarthy, or a modern Bishop Burnett, would have to incorporate its story with the general affairs of "Our Own Times", at least in a relative sense. In its present commanding position, exercising as it does an influence not alone upon the trade affairs of the Commercial Metropolis, but also on those of a much more extended area, it differs in a very wide degree from the first Board which was organized April 6th, 1840, at a meeting over which that famous Montreuler, the Hon. P. McGill presided. But the Board which then came into existence, had its predecessor. It succeeded a previous institution known as the "Committee of Trade" organized in 1822. Business interests were at the time, becoming alert. The work on the modern Lachine Canal had been commenced July 17th, 1821, the first sod being broken by the Hon. John Richardson, whose name is on the roll of the first Legislature of Lower Canada in 1792, and is "kept green" by the walls of the Montreal General Hospital. Less than a year later, April 11, 1822, he presided at a meeting which had as the result of its deliberation the creation of the Committee referred to and how effective and valuable its work must have been is proved by its own records which are fortunately, for the most part extant to-day. They show, it may be noted in passing, that the population of the city was less than 19,000, a remarkable contrast with the 595,000 people of ninety two years later. They also show the public spirit of the period and reflect an unsatisfactory condition of commercial affairs. At the important meeting, described strongly worded resolutions were passed in which reference was made to the existing "growing embarrassments of Canadian Commerce" and their attendant "ruinous consequences" and the urgent need at an alarming crisis, of "the establishment of a Standing Committee of merchants to watch over the general interests of the trade of the country." In order to "conciliate public favour and confidence and to obtain such a combination of experience energy and perseverance as circumstances require," it was resolved that "the Committee

shall be established on liberal principles, elected annually by ballot by such resident merchants of the city who shall annually contribute the sum of three Guineas." The "growing embarrassments of Canadian Commerce" referred to, and the general outlook of Trade and Commerce may be appreciated by any one who looks at the contemporaneous records. Specie payments had followed in the train of the events consequent on the Battle of Waterloo with corresponding confusion in matters of adjustment.

• • •

The consequences of the Constitutional Act of 1791 were beginning to have a marked effect on trade owing to the Separation of Lower from Upper Canada and the division of jurisdiction between the Imperial and Local authorities notably in matters pertaining to customs collections which were made by British officers, whose want of knowledge of Canadian conditions and needs caused friction of an irritating character. At the time Upper Canada had no port of entry and the revenue was divided, by a Board of Commissioners, between the two provinces. The collectors of Revenue were not under local jurisdiction and, some years later, when the proportionate division was fixed, at two fifths for Upper, and three fifths for Lower Canada, the greatest dissatisfaction was manifested. A union of the Provinces which came many years later under different circumstances was strongly advocated when the committee was formed and political feeling ran very high. A dead lock in the Legislature and the stoppage of supplies by the Assembly, provoked a species of panic necessarily most detrimental to trade and commerce. Protests and appeals seemed unavailing and as described in the preliminary resolutions troubles were not "averted, or even delayed, by the solitary exertions of individuals or by the hasty and inadequate deliberations of public meeting" and so the Committee of Trade was formed, evidently none too soon, for the Imperial authorities and their local administrators seem to have exhibited "an utter absence of any appreciation of the issues at stake." And, with the resolutions passed at the meeting as a basis, a committee of organization was composed of men whose names shine brightly on the pages of our municipal history. Horatio Gates, George Auldjo, George Moffatt, (chairman) John Hemming, Henry McKenzie, Campbell Sweeney and W. M. Porter. At a later meeting, April 20, 1822, a code of rules were reported. Summarized they provided for a three guinea subscription, the prohibition of partners in trade serving on the committee at the same time, thirteen to be the number of members, forfeiture of seat for absence of six months from the Province, and for neglect of duty for three, fortnightly meetings, open records at all convenient times, the imposition on the committee of the duty of representing to His Majesty's Government, the Imperial Parliament and others in authority, representations on trade matters, mutual protection, co-operation and support of the interests of members, arbitration suppression of illicit traffic and inquiry into the authority under which the fees levied by the several officers of the customs in the district was made. The first subscribers supporting the movement numbered fifty-four and their names deserve as these of the initiators of a great movement to a place in this record. They were as follows: Horatio Gates, George Auldjo, H. McKenzie, George Moffatt, Campbell Sweeney, D. Robertson, John Forsyth, W. M. Porter, John Brown, Peter McGill, John Gray, F. A. Larocque, John Fleming, James Cuthbertson,