

SPIRIT OF THE PRESS.

When we look back over the events of the last seven or eight months, and mark the different spirit which animates the conductors of the public press compared with what was previously the case, we see a great deal to encourage us. Up to that time there was a feeling of apathy and indifference manifested towards every thing connected with the commercial progress of the country. Questions of political economy seldom troubled the Editors of newspapers, and the great changes in progress elsewhere were regarded with a sullenness or indifference that was more ominous than the most active opposition. We know not whether we may be allowed to claim some credit for having exercised this evil influence, and turned the public in the direction of those interests which ran so serious a risk of being shipwrecked. However that may be, the fact that a marked change has taken place cannot be denied, as it cannot that that change dates from the establishment of the Montreal Free-Trade Association, and more particularly of this journal. We now rarely take up a newspaper in which the questions we find propounded in the colony are not taken up and discussed with a zeal which, if not always supported by the discretion of the writers, is at least a proof of the importance attached to the question. In Lower Canada—most deeply interested in the subject—the battle of Free Trade has been fought by the press with more than usual determination and bitterness. Whilst a consistent support has been lent to its doctrines by the *Pilot* and French-Canadian journals, a kind of quasi consent only has been yielded by the *Times* and *Herald*; and the *Gazette*, which commenced as a thorough-going reformer, (and the Editor of which, we have been informed, formerly distinguished himself in another field by his extreme liberality on all subjects,) has thrown off the mask, and come out as the supporter of every kind of commercial restriction. In Quebec also, where a spirit of antiquity clings to the commercial body, the press has manifested open hostility to our doctrines, and the venerable editor of the most venerable paper in the colony has exhibited his dislike to the opinions of the day, at first by sententious bitterness, darkly expressed, and more lately by direct attacks on the *Economist* and its supporters. The *Mercury*—like a well-regulated barometer—has caught the spirit of its chief, and by significant nothingness tries to swamp Free Trade. In the other parts of the Lower Province, the doctrines of Free Trade have received a fair portion of support from the press. At Sherbrooke, the Editor of the *Journal*—from reasons which we think we can understand—objects only to that part of the system which would exclude his agricultural friends. We have endeavoured to answer some of the arguments he has advanced on this head, and shall be happy at all times to hear what he has to say in defence of a list of duties which we hold to be perfectly incompatible with the true interests of the colony.

In Upper Canada, the press has already, as a body, adopted the principles of Free Trade, and we should be ungrateful were we not to acknowledge the flattering testimony that has been lent to our efforts in the cause. If we have some reason to complain of scurvy treatment from our Montreal contemporaries, it is abundantly made up by the courteous conduct of our Upper Canada contemporaries. Some of the ablest articles that have been written on the subject of Free Trade have appeared in the *Toronto Banner* and *Examiner*, and lately in the *Kingston Chronicle*, which, under new management, promises to resume its old station amongst the ablest journals of the province. The *Kingston News* likewise has devoted a considerable portion of its space to the consideration of these questions, and given a wide circulation to our opinions by frequently extracting from our journal. In Hamilton, the press, which there appears to have received new spirit, is generally favourable to our doctrines, and has helped to bring them before the public. In a recent number of the *Commercial Advertiser*, the Editor, whilst denying us "any pretension to any knowledge of the science with which we seek to be identified" (!), confesses that "the *Economist* is a valuable journal,—valuable for the facts it industriously collects and lays before the Canadian public." We will not, of course, question an opinion coming from such a source, as ask our contemporary to explain the value of facts wedded to false principles, but we will except his compliment with the reservation, leaving the public to judge on that particular subject. We are glad, however, to find that our Hamilton friend has entered on the question of domestic manufactures, and that he is preparing to show the fallacy we commit when we point to Lowell as a proof of what ingenuity and enterprise will effect, but totally object to the protective system by which a portion of those manufactures have been forced up and sustained. When he will have shown this fallacy, we may probably think proper to answer him. From the *Peterborough*

Chronicle we last week extracted an able article, and did time afford us we would no difficulty in finding in many other of the numerous journals of the Upper Province proofs of an equal intelligence and liberality.

Nor is it so much in the direct support and unreserved sanction lent to our journal and its opinions that we mark the improved spirit of the public press, as in the altered tone of the very few papers that venture to oppose us. Driven from their original position, these papers keep up a struggling fire, meant to be mischievous, in defence of the Navigation Laws or agricultural protection. After what has already taken place, they cannot muster the courage to repeat that Free Trade is actually going to ruin us, but all their arguments are directed to show that the restrictions they support are consistent with our future prosperity, and that without protection in the English market we can afford to pay a higher price for freight and for articles of consumption than are paid by the people of other countries. These are more particularly the arguments of the *Toronto Patriot* and *Cobourg Star*—which are now endeavouring to excite the feelings of the agriculturists by persuading them that they are to be the principal sufferers by the changes proposed. The farmer has, however, already had sufficient proof of the value of the predictions of the protectionists to have taught him how little reliance is to be placed on them; and the state of things at the present moment is not such as to give much force to their reasoning. He knows very well that whatever tends to lessen the expense of the conveyance of what he produces must be for his good, by giving him a better chance of the home market, and removing any difference that may exist in prices between him and his foreign competitors. As to the Agricultural Duties, we know it is a question on which many feel sorely, but we also know that already a great change has taken place in the opinion of the agriculturists themselves, and after what has been done in Great Britain it is scarcely possible to suppose they can be maintained.

But, we repeat, on the great principles which govern commerce in our day, there is very little difference of opinion, and the Press, which at first viewed with indifference or dislike the doctrines proposed, now scarcely venture directly to oppose them. This is at least encouraging, and leads us to hope confidently that ere very long public opinion will be quite as unanimous on the other questions now disputed, as it is on the leading points it formerly refused to listen to.

PROOFS FOR PROTECTIONISTS.

(From the *Toronto Globe*.)

The Canadian protectionists are resolved to die hard. There is a sort of tacit admission that they are entirely run out of arguments, but they can still use the words, *Foreign Trade, British Connection, Ships, Colonies, and Commerce*, without any definite meaning being attached to these phrases. They generally begin their remarks in this way—"I am a Free-Trader as well as you." This is the very language of an apologist for American slavery. He always begins with "I hate slavery as much as you do." But before he has spoken twenty words you find that he cherishes slavery, and cordially dislikes all who oppose it. Commercial slavery is defended on the same ground. We say—Well, we are a Free-Trader—what articles will you allow to be unprotected? Whent—No, that would never do; Timber—never; Ashes—impossible. Would you then allow the shipping trade to be free? "Worse and worse—You would destroy Britain's naval supremacy." Our Tory contemporaries have condescendingly turned out to protect the navy of England. A correspondent of the *Cobourg Star* distinguished himself in this line. A strange discovery these people have made. If they were not well known to be so very very loyal, we would certainly say that they were the very reverse of patriotic.

We had always thought that the naval greatness of the British Islands arose from their extensive sea coasts and numerous colonies, from their inhabitants being long addicted to maritime pursuits, from the freedom of their institutions, and, above all, from the skill and intrepidity and industry of the population. We have thought of the undaunted looks which our gallant tars have directed to "the meteor flag of England" in the hour of danger—on the memorable proofs that they have given that the "flag which has braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze," shall never be tarnished. It is all a mistake. If the navigation laws are relaxed, or in the least abated, away would go our naval supremacy. It is all a mistake about the bravery and enterprise of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic races. Only let the Yankees and the Norse men of Germany and the Dutch, be on equal terms with us, and "ships, colonies, and commerce" would vanish forthwith. It is rather too bad that these aspersions should be cast on the great arm of our national defence and on British enterprise and industry, by gentlemen of such superabundant loyalty.

The navigation laws of England, which were passed to crush the Dutch trade, were long looked up to as the palladium of the naval power of Britain. Under them foreign ships could only bring goods into England if the whole cargo was the produce of the country to which the vessel belonged. But it is long since many competent judges have called in question the wisdom of these laws. McCulloch says, that there are good grounds for thinking "that the laws have had a precisely opposite effect, and that they increased rather than diminished our navy." Roger Coke, in his "*Treatise on Trade*," published as far back as in 1671, says that this act, "by lessening the resort of strangers to our ports, had a very injurious effect on our commerce," and that within two years after the