

The Weekly British Colonist

Wednesday, August 24, 1870.

Customs Tariffs.

Let us now consider the question of customs tariffs from an agricultural standpoint. In a not unfair analysis of the subject, a local contemporary reached the conclusion that the Canadian tariff would only bear injuriously upon two classes of production—grain and butter. Taking the last first, it has been seen that the highly protective duty now in force has not sufficed to avert the influence of Canadian butter on our markets; and it is presumable that with the reduction of that duty from ten to four cents a pound that influence would be increased. But it appears to have escaped the observation of our contemporary that the article of butter can have little or no influence upon a choice between the two tariffs. Under Confederation, whatever tariff may be in force, Canadian butter will be admitted free into this Colony. Competition will, therefore, be between the Canadian dairy men and our own, rather than between the latter and those of Oregon. Of course the retention of the present tariff would give us 10 cents protection against foreign butter, while under the other we should only have 4 cents. But if Canadian butter competes in our markets now, surely it would, with free entry, supersede the foreign article. It is clear, therefore, that under union it is the Canadian, not the foreign dairy men, with whom we shall be brought into competition. The butter question is, therefore, less an argument against the Canadian tariff than against Confederation. Are we to reject Confederation in order that we may enjoy the questionable privilege of consuming our own butter? In so far as grain is concerned the case is different. Under union Canadian grain, equally with butter, will have free entry here; but the expense of transport will tell so heavily in the case of grain as to forbid the idea of Canadian growers competing successfully in our markets. The Canadian tariff imposes a duty of 4 cents a bushel on wheat and 3 cents a bushel on other grains. Our own tariff imposes 85 cents per hundred pounds on wheat and 90 cents per hundred pounds on other kinds of grain. Here is certainly a great difference. Thirty-five cents on the 100 lbs. of wheat, in the one case, and six and two-thirds of a cent in the other! Let us examine this rather startling aspect of the case and see how the matter stands. At the first blush one would naturally conclude that under the present tariff we would grow all our own grain, and that the Canadian tariff would be certain death to grain-growers. But a glance at facts will reveal a different state of things. Although the grain growers of British Columbia (West of the Cascade Range) have enjoyed the enormous protection of 85 cents on every 100 lbs. of wheat and 90 cents on other kinds of grain, it is a fact that they do not yet produce nearly enough for chicken-feed! And, as for human food, we believe we are warranted in asserting that during two years there has not been consumed in this market one barrel of colonial flour. It may be as well to explain that in dealing with this subject the view is confined to this side of the Cascade Range, as being really the only part of the colony materially affected by the question. Now, we do not say these things by way of disparaging the farmers. It must be perfectly clear that the reason why our farmers, in common with all other classes, continue to consume foreign breadstuffs, notwithstanding the enormous protective duty imposed by the tariff, must be looked for in the obvious fact that, up to the present time at least, grain-growing has not been regarded as the most profitable branch of agriculture. Regarding this subject in the light of the two tariffs, we have to ask ourselves two questions: Is it wise policy, taking the broader national view, to impose such an enormous protective tax upon bread? Would the continuance of that tax under Confederation be beneficial? The first question opens a subject upon which so much has already been said and written that few words will be necessary here. It will hardly be denied, however, that cheap bread must be regarded as a common good the world over; and it will be accepted as a sound principle in political economy that, in British Columbia, as everywhere else, bread is the very last thing that should be taxed. Perhaps one of the greatest drawbacks to this colony is the dearth of labor. Its resources as varied as they are abundant. But comparatively few of these resources can be developed owing to the high price of labor. The farmer is this. The coal miner, the gold digger, the mechanic, the manufacturer, the lumberer, the fisher, the mariner, all feel this to be a clog to industry and development. And yet we make all classes, even the farmer himself, pay an enormous tax upon bread. The farmer in the most remote settlement is consuming California and Oregon flour; and he is made to pay a tax of \$1.50 on every barrel, just as if the freight were not tax enough. A word in reply to the second question. If one were assured that the continuance of the bread tax, under Confederation, would have the effect of supplying our markets from our own soil there would still be the question of cheap bread to contend with. But we fear it must be admitted that a measure which has so signally, so entirely failed in the past to produce the intended result could not be relied upon in the future. It is to be believed that, as in the past, the great bulk of grain, and all or nearly all the flour required for consumption in the lower country would continue to be imported, the farmers still preferring to confine their attention to more profitable branches. But there is one reflection in this connection, which must have very great weight, as against the continuance of the present tariff. Under Confederation and the retention of our tariff this enormous tax upon bread and grain would all go out of the country and be absorbed in the general revenue. Under all the circumstances it would not appear to be the true interest of the farmer to retain the higher tariff which, while professing to protect him, in reality means taxation and nothing else. This higher taxation enters into his every effort. It is in the price he pays for labor. It is in his meat and his drink. It is in his clothing. He smokes it, and snuffs it. It inebriates itself into every interest and every industry; and not the least danger consists in its deceptive character. We incline to the belief that if those who still cling to this so-called protective tariff, were to make a strict account of what is lost and gained by it, even while the revenue derived therefrom is retained in the colony, it would be found that protection has been purchased too dearly. There is in the Canadian tariff one item which, in our opinion, will constitute a set-off to any imaginary loss of protection enjoyed under the present tariff. We allude to the article of cattle. The present tariff imposes a duty of \$2 on milk cows, and \$3 on beef cattle. The Canadian tariff imposes a duty of ten per cent ad valorem upon animals of all kinds, except such as are for the improvement of stock, which shall be free. Under the latter tariff beef cattle would have a protection of from \$5 to \$6 a head. There is observable, both on this island and on the Lower Fraser, a far greater disposition to engage in stock-raising than in grain-growing. The country would appear to be eminently adapted for it; and the dearth of labor tends in that direction. We are disposed to think that, with the additional inducement which would be presented by the Canadian tariff that stock-raising would be the great business of the Lower Colony, for some years at least. As labor became cheap, of course people would betake themselves to grain-growing and the like; but it would not be wise to attempt by legislation to force our people into grain-growing just now, especially when, by the attempt, we would place a heavy tax upon bread and send the proceeds of that tax away out of the country. These remarks are necessarily crude and superficial; yet they may be the means of leading the reader into a train of reflection calculated to promote the sole object in view—a wise and intelligent choice between our present tariff and the Canadian one.

Responsible Government. We have seen a very able article in the St. John's (N.B.) Telegraph, upon the subject of the proposed admission of British Columbia into the Dominion of Canada. The writer expresses surprise that our Delegates should have proposed the retention for a single day of the present anomalous and obstructive system of government. It has, says the writer, 'come to be one of the great essentials of good government that it shall be administered according to the well understood wishes of the people.' The principle, he continues, has been adopted throughout the empire. Even to the ill-fated Province of Manitoba we have guaranteed by act of Parliament a government that shall be answerable to the people for its conduct. In view of this universal prevalence of Responsible Government it would appear most unwise to continue in the Pacific Colony a system which makes popular government an impossibility. It would be a bad exception to a good rule; and it would probably lead in the future to a long and violent if not revolutionary struggle on the part of the people there, to free themselves from the vicious system already weighing like an incubus upon their country.' After pointing out the difficulties surrounding a system of Responsible Government proposed by our Executive, the writer arrives at the conclusion that 'Under these circumstances it appears clear that Responsible Government, and a system of popular representation in its local Parliament, should be given to British Columbia at the date of its union with the Dominion. With less than this the people cannot be satisfied, and they cannot prosper. We are led to believe that they desire union with Canada primarily because their system of government is a clog to industry and development, and we believe that it is in the power of our government at Ottawa to secure them upon this point. But if the contrary course is pursued—if the Colony be brought into the union by negotiations with its non-representative government or legislature, and the popular will, at the same time, be entirely ignored, we shall have, as in the case of Nova Scotia, a people to "conciliate" afterwards. This should not be permitted to occur, and we trust it will not. If the delegates really desire that their Province shall become a part of the Canadian Union, they will not permit the proposal to fail of adoption because the Dominion Government insist upon conferring representative British institutions upon them. But we confess that, desirous as we are to see the completion of the work of Union, in which such slow progress is being made, we would rather for the time see the pending negotiations result in nothing than in the bringing in of the colony only to perpetuate upon it a system of local government which would continue to dwarf its growth, check its advancement and create deeper and more lasting discontent than at present exists. Responsible Government and representative institutions are as necessary in British Columbia as in New Brunswick or Ontario, and once given would be as dearly prized and as carefully defended. We are confident that the British Government, whose instructions to Governor Mulgrave are the prime cause of the present movement, notwithstanding, have no desire that the colony should enter the Dominion on less favorable terms as regards its local institutions than the other Provinces have done or may do; and we doubt not that, if the terms respecting all the other points than this were agreed to, the Dominion Government would be satisfied in the utmost in any effort they might make to secure for British Columbia a system of popular government and representative institutions. Our contemporary is right, both in his appreciation of the value of these institutions which confer upon a people the power to manage their own affairs, and in his estimate of the feelings and aspirations of the Pacific colonists; and from what we know of public opinion in this colony, we are in no danger of entering the Dominion upon a lower political basis than that occupied by the people with which it is proposed to unite.

Score of the Cricket Match. The match between the British and the Canadian teams was played on the 21st inst. at the Victoria Cricket Ground. The British team, captained by W. G. Grace, consisted of the following players: W. G. Grace, A. C. Jones, H. H. Stephenson, J. B. Johnson, J. C. Clark, J. D. Smith, J. E. Brown, J. F. White, J. G. Black, J. H. Green, J. I. Grey, J. K. Gold, J. L. Silver, J. M. Copper, J. N. Iron, J. O. Lead, J. P. Tin, J. Q. Zinc, J. R. Nickel, J. S. Cobalt, J. T. Cadmium, J. U. Mercury, J. V. Selenium, J. W. Tellurium, J. X. Arsenic, J. Y. Antimony, J. Z. Bismuth, J. AA. Strontian, J. AB. Barium, J. AC. Calcium, J. AD. Magnesium, J. AE. Zinc, J. AF. Cadmium, J. AG. Tin, J. AH. Lead, J. AI. Bismuth, J. AJ. Antimony, J. AK. Arsenic, J. AL. Tellurium, J. AM. Selenium, J. AN. Mercury, J. AO. Silver, J. AP. Gold, J. AQ. Copper, J. AR. Iron, J. AS. Nickel, J. AT. Cobalt, J. AU. Cadmium, J. AV. Zinc, J. AW. Magnesium, J. AX. Strontian, J. AY. Barium, J. AZ. 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