

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, MAY 8, 1893.

THE CUSTOMS.

The recent change in the customs department at Ottawa is likely to produce some good effect in increasing the efficiency of the department. Comptroller Wallace has made some trips about the country, visiting principal importing points, and hearing complaints from importers, with a view of remedying existing grievances. One frequent complaint which has been presented to him, is the valuation of goods at different ports, for customs purposes. This has been a matter of considerable annoyance to large importers at some points, where it is claimed the valuation has been higher than at other ports of entry.

While our present tariff policy remains in force, the comptroller of customs is not likely to be long without complaints of some kind on hand, for there will be many difficulties and perplexities continually growing out of the tariff situation. One thing, however, which the comptroller can enforce among customs officials generally, is civility toward the public. Customs officers are not all noted for civility or polite attention to their duties when dealing with the public. Some of these officials are inclined to assume a lordly, and even insulting air, toward those who have business to transact with them. They assume the position of masters, rather than servants of the public, and make themselves generally disagreeable. This of course should not be permitted in public servants in any capacity, and the comptroller has given orders that it must be discontinued. Hereafter, he says, all complaints against customs officers of insult or incivility toward the public, will be rigidly investigated. There are many officials who will not need a warning of this nature, but there are others who require some such restraint. At any rate, the public will appreciate the order.

COMMERCIAL LEGISLATION.

Political parties are proverbially slow to move when the subject before them is of a commercial nature. At a commercial dinner in New York not long ago, the burden of the principal speeches was the difficulty of obtaining desired commercial legislation, either from congress or state legislatures. It was declared that there is altogether too much politics and not enough business about legislative bodies. In the United States congress, made up as it is so largely of lawyers, this is perhaps not to be wondered at. The business men in congress are few and far between, and a good deal of the legislation emanating there from is a drag upon the commercial progress of the country.

At home our legislative bodies have been more guarded, and we have perhaps made proportionately fewer huge blunders in the matter of commercial and financial legislation, than has been made in the States. Still there is here the same difficulty, in a less acute sense to be sure, in the matter of securing desired com-

mercial legislation. Party questions are largely debated, and any matter which is likely to serve any party purpose is brought forward on the least provocation, or without any provocation at all. Our parliament will run into a prolonged and animated debate upon some feature of the Irish question, or some other matter which is none of its business, all for party effect; but when a commercial measure is wanted it is difficult to get up interest in the question. Take for instance the matter of insolvency legislation, which has been before parliament for many years, but nothing has yet been evolved.

Even in Great Britain, where legislators are supposed to be of a more advanced type than we have on this continent, there is the same cry coming from the commercial interests, of neglect of legislation in the interest of trade and commerce. At the recent annual meeting of the Association of Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom, the president, himself a member of parliament, dwelt at length upon this theme in his address. The apathy of parliament in this respect was described as astonishing, and such as to evoke the indignation of business men. Legislation had been pressed upon parliament time and time again, by the united effort of the business element of the country, but to no purpose. The president suggested as a remedy for this state of things, the formation of a commercial section or party, or a committee of commercial men of all parties among the members of parliament, who thus united would be able to enforce the consideration of commercial questions. The formation of an advisory board of representative commercial men, with whom the minister of commerce might confer, was also suggested.

These two suggestions coming from the president of the greatest British commercial body are worthy of some thought. The formation of a committee of the business men in parliament, in Canada at least, would be somewhat impractical. The majority of the business men in Canada who go to parliament are too closely tied to party to take an independent stand, even upon an important commercial issue, if party dictated otherwise. It would first be necessary to elect a few good men, upon an independent business platform, to form the nucleus of such a committee. Here, again, comes in the difficulty, that business men out of parliament are also too closely tied to party to take such an independent stand. Sometimes at meetings of commercial bodies, some very independent talk will be heard, and even resolutions, speaking the voice of the meeting in a tone quite independent of party, will be unanimously adopted. But at the next election these business men will be found working hard for the return of their respective party candidate, quite regardless of commercial interests. If the business men in the larger towns and cities would unite for the purpose of taking an interest in politics from a commercial standpoint, there should be no trouble in sending a few good, independent, representative business men to parliament. The thing, however, is impractical at the present time.

The second proposition, for the establishing of an advisory committee of representative business men, with whom the minister could

confer upon commercial questions, appears more feasible. It also appears reasonable that something of this nature should exist. The commercial interests are not represented in parliament as they should be. The commerce of the country is really the matter of first importance, but representative business men are not the class, for various reasons, to seek election to parliament. In order to make up for the deficiency, and provide for the reasonable representation of the commercial interests, the advisory board or committee might be introduced. This committee should be elected by the leading boards of trade of the country, thus ensuring the appointment of representative men, independent of party considerations. Such a committee should have the privilege of suggesting required legislation, as well as being a consultative body. In this way the commercial interests of all sections of the country would be represented more directly in the proper quarter, as each board, representing a district of territory, could speak through its representative upon the advisory board or committee, and the latter would be in direct communication with the ministry.

This is only one proposal, and other plans might be suggested to meet the exigencies of the situation. At any rate, the necessity for better representation of the great commercial interests of the country, independent of party sentiment, is apparent to all who have given the matter any thought.

VALUE OF WATER POWER.

The great flood of water now passing down the Red and Assiniboine rivers, past the city of Winnipeg, may cause some to turn their thoughts to the various proposals which have been made to utilize these streams for manufacturing purposes, by the construction of works necessary to control the water power. What an immense power this vast force of water would furnish, if it could be successfully harnessed and used as required. An exchange, referring to the question of the value of water-power says:—

Water power is the cheapest source of energy that can be found, yet millions of horse power go to waste within easy reach. The greatest enterprise for the utilization of water power now contemplated is that of harnessing Niagara. The Cataract Construction Company is just completing the first section of its contemplated work. It takes only a small fraction of the possible power of the falls, yet it will furnish 150,000 horse power from the United States side, and 100,000 horse power from the Canadian side. If the whole power of Niagara could be harnessed it would probably be more than all the steam power now used in America. The watercourses of the Sierras that fall 6,000 feet in a score or two of miles have greater possibilities than even Niagara, and will one day be brought to furnish all the power that California needs. Electric transmission of power is a development of only a few years. A decade ago it was hardly more than a dream of the future. To-day it is revolutionizing industry, and in another score of years it will probably have driven direct application of steam power from the field.