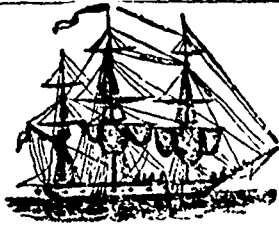


CANADIAN ECONOMIST.



FREE TRADE JOURNAL, AND WEEKLY COMMERCIAL NEWS.

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MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 25th JULY, 1846.

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THE CANADIAN ECONOMIST.

MONTREAL, SATURDAY, 25th JULY, 1846.

CORN LAW LEAGUE AND FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION.

The various items of intelligence received by the steamer *Cambria* have, long ere this paper reaches our subscribers, been read with avidity through the length and breadth of this Colony. Perhaps on no former occasion has such a press of interesting matter been conveyed at one period. The passing of the Corn Bill,—the rejection of the Irish Coercion Bill,—the dissolution of one Ministry, and the formation of another,—the total disruption of one of the most powerful political parties ever formed,—and the memorable speech, on retiring from office, of him who had been the founder and leader of that party—a speech in which, casting off the trammels which had bound him, he boldly enunciated those broad principles of freedom and equality which must hereafter be applied not only to the commerce but the general government of the country.—These subjects, important as they doubtless are, and destined to fill an important page in our country's annals, it is not within the scope or object of the present article to discuss.

But there is one interesting fact conveyed by this packet, which must not be passed over in silence: that is the dissolution of the Corn Law League, consequent on its success in obtaining the object for which it was originally founded. In the history of the various struggles for freedom with which the annals of our mother country abounds, we know of none commenced under greater difficulties and more admirably sustained to the end than that in which the Corn Law League has been recently engaged and has so signally triumphed. The triumph has been of truth over error, of reason over prejudice, of public principle over private and class interests.

When we look back to the original formation of the League, we cannot but be astonished at the mighty results which it has achieved. Founded in a provincial town, known only as the principal seat of the cotton manufacture, but not distinguished as having ever occupied a prominent position in the political history of England, having only very recently under the Reform Bill enjoyed the privilege of returning its representatives to the Imperial Parliament,—numbering amongst its members no names distinguished either in the political or literary world,—no scions of aristocracy or nobility,—none but plain manufacturers and tradesmen, men whose ideas were thought never to have extended beyond the loom or the spinning jenny,—few attached much importance to its labours, or dreamed of what they would produce. By degrees, however, the zeal, energy, and talent which were exhibited in its support produced their natural effects; and that which had in the first instance been looked upon with indifference or contempt, became the subject of apprehension to the giant monopolists, whom its object was to overthrow. Need we go on to point out its successive achievements,—how it enlisted in its support the whole manufacturing and the principal part of the commercial class, with at last a sprinkling even of the agricultural—how it influenced the electoral constituencies and sent its representatives to the senate of the empire, where at first they were received with haughty indifference or evident dislike by the leaders

of both the great political parties; but where by their singleness of purpose and their admirable talent and tact they succeeded in commanding the respect and attention of the most fastidious assembly in the world? They did more—they persevered in their efforts until, backed by the public voice, they succeeded in converting to their opinions the majority of that house of which but a few years before they formed in numbers so insignificant a portion. How great must have been the satisfaction and pride of RICHARD COBDEN, the man who had especially borne the burden and heat of the day, to receive at last the meed of approbation to which he was so justly entitled at the hands of that premier who but a few years since, in the plenitude of his power as minister, in the vain attempt to crush the representative of the League when just entering on his career, had actually accused him in that assembly of inciting the people to assassinate him! How great must have been the triumph of RICHARD COBDEN to find the Premier of England pass no measured eulogium on that League which but a few months since Lord BROUHAM stigmatized as an unlawful conspiracy! Nor, we rejoice to observe, are the people of England unmindful of the debt of gratitude they more especially owe to their unwearied champion: that gratitude they are about to mark in a manner more emphatic than by mere words, and surely never was tribute more justly earned.

The triumph of the Corn Law League is certainly calculated to inspire with hope all other associated bodies peacefully engaged in similar struggles for freedom. In many respects the Free Trade Association resembles its celebrated and successful prototype. Both had to contend in the first instance with the apathy of the public, the indifference, to use the mildest term, of politicians of every hue, and the opposition of classes who conceive their private interests in jeopardy. Both bodies have had their objects misrepresented through malice or ignorance, and both have relied on reason alone as the antidote for the calumnies with which they have been assailed. Both can appeal with confidence to their acts and declarations as demonstrative that their views are general in their application, and not intended for the aggrandizement of any individuals or classes apart from that of the community. Every argument in favour of the Corn Law League applies at least with equal force to the Free Trade Association. The latter body has to contend against a fiscal system impregnated with all the vices of that which the League in England has been mainly instrumental in overthrowing. But we must not disguise the fact that the difficulties in the way of the attempts at reformation of our commercial code are at least equally great with those which the League experienced in the mother country. Although no such plea can be set up here as a vested right to protection, founded on its existence for ages, yet we may be assured other pretexts will not be wanting. To strip the scanty plumage with which such arguments may be clothed is a work of comparative ease, but the problem remains unsolved—how is the public mind to be so acted on that the still small voice of reason may be heard amidst the clamour of interest or prejudice? This desirable object can only be attained through the press; and on its conductors mainly devolves the duty of enlightening the public on the great questions connected with the commerce of the country which will ere long force themselves on the consideration of our legislature.

We are aware that the members of the Free-Trade Association, and more especially the conductors of this journal, have been censured as taking too prominent a position in the present crisis: but certainly if ever there was an occasion when it behoved every member of the body politic to express his sentiments, it is the present. Who is there that will have the hardihood to deny that the commercial aspect of affairs is critical in the extreme? We have no desire to disparage the labours of our fellow-conductors of the press; but are they not all too much immersed in the party politics of the day, to pay that undivided attention to commercial subjects which their importance at this juncture calls for? What has been the conduct of those who are ordinarily classed amongst the leaders of the commercial world? Have they evinced their fitness for the position which they assumed, and which we would willingly assign to them? What, commercially speaking, were the fruits of the late session of the Provincial Legislature? How much of their time and labour was directed to a consideration of the changes in our commercial system which would become necessary in consequence of our altered position