

BEFORE THE TARIFF COMMISSIONERS.

VIEWS OF VARIOUS SECTIONS OF THE COUNTRY ON DRY GOODS DUTIES.

THE TRADE IN QUEBEC.

A DEPUTATION from the dry goods section waited on the Commission. Mr. T. J. E. Bedard thanked the Commission for allowing them this opportunity and said he would call upon Mr. Chouinard to address the Commission. He said that there was a little difference of opinion, but no doubt those who had these differences would state their views.

Mr. Chouinard said that in answer to the invitation which appeared in the press some time ago, and which he took as being addressed to all, individually as well as collectively, the merchants and business men of Canada, he thought it advisable to send to *The Toronto Globe* a communication. In it he respectfully submitted his views on that part of the question of the tariff revision connected with the dry goods branch of the Canadian trade. The approbation with which that communication met at the hands of quite a number of business men, merchants, and even manufacturers, from Toronto to St. John, N.B., afforded him more courage to present here an opinion which he regretted to say did not seem to perfectly harmonize with those already laid before the Commission by some of his own class of interviewers in other cities. He did not pretend that his views represented entirely those of all the Quebec trade, but he entertained the hope that the majority of dry goods merchants, if not all, would think it proper to endorse them generally. They might differ in details but agree on the principal lines of the question. It was a question which was closely connected with the interests of commerce and it had nothing to do with political party preferences and feelings.

On a similar occasion in 1893, when a representative of the late Administration came to Quebec with the object of ascertaining the views of the members of the trade regarding the then contemplated revision of the Customs tariff, he had been the spokesman of the wholesale dry goods trade of Quebec. Speaking as he did then, solely in the capacity of a merchant, he had thought it useless to dwell upon the question of the burden which weighed on the shoulders of the consumer. And his remarks went merely to show in the tariff as it was some of the anomalies and discrepancies which made it of an extremely difficult and sometimes ludicrous application, thus rendering miserable the life of the importer and hurting the interests of commerce generally. In the opinion of a great many merchants, if not of all, the change or so-called reform of the tariff enacted during the Parliamentary session of 1894 has served but to replace some of the old anomalies by newer ones, and nothing more. They had this year consequently to complain of the same class of evils which existed before 1894, and he had also to present another consideration to which the hon. Ministers would do us the honor of consulting our views in the matter and are respectfully invited to lend a special attention, and that was, that the present Canadian Customs tariff was too high in a certain number of items not only for the benefit of the consumer, but also in the interest of commerce itself.

That the Canadians were in favor of a revenue tariff went, he thought, without saying. They had serious obligations to meet, enormous expenses to pay, and for good or bad reasons they had a special dislike for direct taxation. Therefore the following remarks would be made to concur as much as possible with the exigencies of commerce and their need of revenue. In his calculations he had not forgotten the welfare of their industries, an attention on his part which the manufacturers would probably repay by telling him to mind his own business and let them alone.

To make the statement as brief as possible he would divide the tariff as relating to dry goods into nine heads, viz.: Duty on cot-

ton, on woolen goods, linen and jute goods, silks, notions and haberdashery, carpets of all kinds, knitted goods of all kinds, hats, caps and bonnets, and clothing of all kinds. Speaking on the duty on cotton he would divide it into three parts: Grey or unbleached, now rated at 22½ per cent.; white or bleached cottons, 25 per cent.; dyed, colored, or printed cottons, rated at 30 per cent. With regard to grey or unbleached cottons both the merchant and the consumer had ample reason to say that a percentage of 22½ was rather an extravagant amount of protection for an industry which has been able for several years to somewhat seriously compete with the English and American manufacturers in the China market. That question had already been discussed in the press; with what amount of sound reasoning and good faith may be fairly exemplified by the following quotations from a generally well-informed newspaper published in 1894, but which had evidently at that time put a little too much confidence in the suggestion of one of our well-known cotton monopolists: "We are accused," said the paper in the name of the cotton king, "of selling cotton to China. Well, we do it solely for the purpose of keeping our mills running during the dull times of the Canadian market. We get no profits from these sales in China; in fact, sometimes we lose. In all cases the cotton made for China was a specially low-grade cloth, not adapted for the Canadian market. It is only our surplus of production." The writer's idea of giving at first to these transactions a somewhat mild character is seen when he says: "We get no profit from these sales to China; in fact, sometimes we lose" and then a moment later of putting it down more forcibly in the words: "These sales occasion a serious loss of money." This is not, it seems, over indicative of good faith. As the Scotch would have it: "It soun's muckle like that o' a mon that wudna ken whilk o' the twa, his brither or himsel, had received t' bullit in thae thick o' thae thigh during thae thick o' thae ficht."

If these sales to China either give no profit or occasion serious losses, decidedly the manufacturing of cotton in Canada solely for that purpose is ruinous. And if such be the truth how can one explain the fact, that within a few miles of the walls of Quebec there exists and flourishes an important manufactory devoted exclusively to making cotton for China, and which is being enlarged presently for no other purpose than that of increasing that trade. This little reasoning would seriously affect the declaration that the cotton sent to China was made solely for the purpose of keeping the mills running. Moreover, the cotton made at Montmercy for the China market weighed strictly and invariably 3 yards to the pound or 5½ ounces per yard, that which may be considered one of the best grey cottons made, not only in Canada where much lower grades are constantly in use, but also in any other country in the world.

In the presence of such an indisputable fact the Ministers would find it rather difficult to qualify meekly the bold assertion to the effect that "Canadian cotton made for the China market is a special low-grade cloth, not adapted for the Canadian market." Considering, then, that the Canadian manufacturers can successfully compete with the foreign makers on the China market, and consequently on all the other markets as well, there is no plausible reason why the Customs duty on grey or unbleached cotton should not be reduced from 22½ to 20 per cent., or even 17½ per cent., which was the rate on that class of goods before 1878.

The same reasoning applied to white and unbleached cottons, which the Canadian manufacturers had several times tried to export to England evidently because they felt that they could dispense with a considerable portion of the protection which they enjoyed.