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## The Journal of Commerce

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By W. W. SWANSON.

### A City Chaplain.

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

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## A Tariff Board

AT the important meeting of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association held in this city last week, Mr. Parsons, the President, in his vigorous address, discussed the tariff question at considerable length. In the course of his remarks he said:

"Manufacturers feel that the tariff could and should be changed here and there, and so amended that it would apply more scientifically than it does at the present time. For this and other reasons the manufacturers would like to see created what might be termed 'A Trade and Tariff Board'; such a Board to be composed of representative men of actual experience and wide knowledge of commercial conditions and whose broad outlook and vision would fit them particularly for the proper study of these great questions so vital to our national interests; this Board to report to the Government from time to time their findings, and if after a full and complete survey of the situation it be clearly established that the tariff is inimical to the best interests of the country at large; nay, more than that, if it is not actually essential from a national standpoint, then, I say, 'Away with the tariff.'"

Mr. Parsons' proposal is not new. It is a revival of one very frequently offered, almost always by the manufacturers, though at times it has found some favor among other classes. Those who have had the responsibility of dealing with the subject in Parliament have not found so much merit in it. At one stage the Conservative Government took it up, but when the details of their measure met some criticism in the Senate, they dropped the proposal and never brought it forward again.

To many people, the idea of handing over the business of tariff making to a body of business men will seem excellent. Nevertheless, the project is not more likely to find favor now than in past years. The able business men who make or support the proposal can speak with much authority on most business matters, and their opinions on such matters will very properly have great weight among the thoughtful public. It is, however, a serious mistake to assume that the tariff is simply a question of business, to be handled by business men just as they would deal with their own affairs. A business question it certainly is to a large extent; but it is much more than that, and the student who would understand it needs to acquire not only some knowledge of business, but also another form of knowledge that business men too often dis-

regard, and that is a knowledge of the underlying principles of our constitutional system.

The tariff is a tax, a huge engine of taxation. He who imagines that the people of Canada are going to hand over the taxation power to any irresponsible body, by whatever name it may be called, fails to understand the principles of responsible government. Every proposal that has been made for the creation of a Tariff Board has contemplated that the Board should virtually have the making of the tariff. True, the proposal has usually included, as the present one does, a provision that the Board shall "report to the Government," and this may seem to give the Government, the representatives of the people, a veto power. But this veto would be more nominal than real. The advocates of the change will not deny that their expectation would be that the determination of the Tariff Board would prevail. The foundation of the argument for such a Board is the assumption that the Government are themselves incompetent for the work of tariff making. What would be thought of a Government who, having acted on the admission of their own incompetence and appointed a Tariff Board, presumed to set aside or vary the conclusions reached by the Board supposed to be composed of tariff experts? No, if the Tariff Board be appointed to deal with the tariff in a scientific way, the Government making the appointment, if they are not to become ridiculous, must be content to accept the Board's conclusions. The Government, the representatives of the people, would thus become a mere rubber stamp, and the duty of levying taxation—one of the most important functions of Parliament under the British system of government—would be handed over to irresponsible people. The proposal, well intended as it is and approved by many people who, we believe, have not appreciated what it would lead to, is entirely at variance with the essential elements of our democratic system of government.

The country already has the only kind of Tariff Board which our institutions can properly have—a Minister of Finance and his assistants. Nobody will question the desirability of the Minister obtaining the fullest possible information respecting the various interests affected by the tariff. He will, as a matter of course, endeavor to do that. If his assistants are incompetent he should dismiss them and get others. If his staff is not large enough, he should strengthen it with additional men fit for the service. By all means let the Minister have the benefit of all the knowledge that can be thus obtained. But when he has obtained it, he must take the responsibility of analyzing it and applying it in the form of a tariff measure. He and his colleagues must assume the full responsibility of that measure before the Parliament of Canada.