



DRY GOODS AND THE TARIFF.

THE past two weeks has been an important one in regard to tariff enquiry. Canadian dry goods importers have had a chance to inform the Dominion Ministers, notably the Ministers of Finance and Trade and Commerce, what they think of tariffs in general and the present tariff in particular. When the Ministers visited Montreal they were met by the following well-known merchants:

Dry goods importers Messrs. R. L. Gault, E. B. Greenshields, James Slessor, Frank May and A. Leclair.

Woollen manufacturers Messrs. Brock Willett (Chambly), E. A. Small, A. G. Lomas, John Turnbull, J. A. Cantlie, Feodor Boas (St. Hyacinthe), R. N. Heneker (Sherbrooke), and D. A. Robert.

Wholesale clothiers James O'Brien, J. W. Mackeditz, E. A. Small and S. O. Shorey.

In Hamilton the dry goods merchants and clothing manufacturers were Hon. W. E. Sanford, A. Murray, John Knox, Alf. Morgan, Fred. W. Watkins, S. G. Treble, James Robertson and A. Munro.

In Toronto they were met by a large number of dry goods importers, millinery importers, hat and cap importers and manufacturers, and furriers. Those who took the leading part in the discussion were Messrs. Stapleton Caldecott, Wyld, Dunnett and Cockshutt.

The most important point urged by the dry goods trade seems to be in favor of ad. valorem duties instead of specific. There need not be a shadow of doubt in the Ministers' minds concerning the desire for this change, on the part of the importers at least. The woollen and cotton manufacturers may desire these retained; but even here they will no doubt submit to the wishes of the majority. A manufacturer is naturally more selfish than an importer, and often desires changes and increases, simply for his individual or class benefit. This was amply illustrated when some of the manufacturers, in both Toronto and Montreal, were given opportunities to state their views. On the other hand the importers seemed to take the broader ground of the benefit of freer trade to the consumer, and for this and other reasons they urged ad valorem duties. They advanced examples showing that on some cheap grades of woollens the duty was 130 per cent., while on expensive woollens it ran from 30 to 40 per cent. They showed that a mantle costing 5s. in England paid 67 per cent. duty, while one that cost 75s. paid only 26 per cent. Numerous examples of this kind were put forward by the various importers, and they laid much stress on the extra burdens which they averred the poor man was bearing over those borne by the rich. Then to meet the well-known argument that specific duties kept out trash and shoddy goods, they declared that the shoddy goods of foreign countries were no worse than the shoddy goods of Canada. This argument needs proof, and should be accepted *cum grano salis*, although there is no doubt that some shoddy goods are being made in

this country. But on the whole the arguments advanced in favor of the abolition of specific duties should be sufficient to cause the Government to dispense with them. The shirt and collar men also made a strong protest against specific duties.

Another strong point, urged by Mr. Caldecott, of this city, was that values have fallen greatly since the specific duties were first imposed in 1878. He instanced grey cottons, which in 1878 costs 10 cents per yard, could now be bought for 6½ cents, and the duty of one cent per square yard and 15 per cent. was now much heavier than it was then. When this example is figured out it will be found that the duty in this class of cotton in 1878 was 25 per cent., while now the duty is 30 5 13 per cent. Very numerous instances of similar character might be cited, but this one will serve as an example of the class.

Another point strongly urged by the importers was the adoption of a broader classification, with a uniform duty on each class. The Toronto men urged a classification something like the following:—

- (1) All piece grey cottons, white cottons, denims, prints, etc.
- (2) All piece woollens, suitings, trouserings, overcoatings, mantle cloths, etc.
- (3) All dress fabrics, whether cotton, woollen or union.
- (4) All piece silks and ribbons.
- (5) All parasols and umbrellas.
- (6) All hosiery, gloves, underwear, etc.

They urged that some such general classification be adopted and one rate of duty for each class. Thus there would be no ambiguity, and goods coming in at small ports where the officers were not so well posted would pay the same rates as at the larger ports where the officers were more expert. It would obviate all embarrassing readings and rulings. It would prevent paying too high a rate in such cases as where parasols are made of more than one class of material, the highest duty is charged on the whole value. The present tariff has been made in sections, and as one importer put it, now resembles Joseph's variegated coat, or a patch work or crazy quilt.

The importers also pointed out that at least three months' notice should be given of all changes. In 1890 when the duty on parasols was raised from 30 to 35 per cent. the importers lost many thousands of dollars. They had taken many orders on the basis of a 30 per cent. duty, and as no notice was given before the change was made, they had to import their goods and pay the extra 5 per cent. out of their profits.

The prevalent opinion seemed to be that in no case should the duty be over 30 per cent. All classes seemed to view the matter in a more intelligent manner than most of the newspapers and free-trade politicians of the day. They did not ask for a *holus-bolus* reduction, but knowing that a revenue is essential for the preservation of Confederation under its present constitution, they simply pointed out how this might be best attained without working serious injury to any class or trade. Many points were urged, of which a limited space prevents a mention, but these may be treated of in future issues.

Most of the dry goods men believe that much good will come out of the discussion, and that a compromise will be effected by the Ministers which will eradicate most of the defects of the present tariff.

The City Commercial Travellers' Association has decided to hold its annual excursion on July 17th to Niagara Falls and Buffalo