

Politics and Protection

In the May issue of the Canadian Magazine is the first installment of the personal and political reminiscences by Sir John Willison, for many years editor of the Toronto Globe and later for some years editor of the Toronto News. Sir John has had a long connection with the political affairs of the Dominion and has undoubtedly known the inner workings of both political parties. It is given to few men to be editor of the chief Liberal organ and later, editor of the leading Conservative organ. Sir John's reminiscences make delightful reading and will entertain a wide circle of readers. He discusses in his first article how nearly the Tory party came to being free traders and the Grits to being protectionists. It is best to let him tell it in his own words. The following is the extract from Sir John's article:

For his resistance to protection Mr. MacKenzie (Hon. Alexander MacKenzie, Premier of Canada), gets more praise than he deserves. He was ready to raise the duties from seventeen and one-half to twenty per cent. So were Honorable George Brown and Sir Richard Cartwright and Honorable Edward Blake, and other leading Liberals of Ontario and Quebec. Principle does not concern itself with percentages. If Honorable A. G. Jones and the near-sighted, contumacious, anxious Liberal group from the Eastern Provinces who were possessed by the delusion that they could not carry their constituencies if duties were increased, had not gone into revolt against Mr. MacKenzie, he would have raised duties to twenty per cent., and once committed in Parliament and on the platform to the defence of higher customs taxation, who can be certain that the Canadian Liberal party would not have become entrenched in the fortress of protection. There is reason to believe that if the MacKenzie Government had committed itself to higher duties the Conservative Opposition would have adhered to low tariff. The common story is that when Sir Richard Cartwright rose to deliver the budget speech of 1876, it was not known if he would declare

for or against higher duties, while Sir Charles Tupper, who was to follow, knew only that he would not agree with Cartwright.

In a speech at St. Mary's in 1893, Mr. D'Alton McCarthy said: "There is no doubt in the world that we were out of power and by going in for the National Policy and taking the wind out of Mr. MacKenzie's sails we got into power. We became identified with the protection policy, but if Mr. MacKenzie had adopted the protective policy we should have been free-traders." Mr. W. F. MacLean, M.P., whose father was one of the most convincing writers of protectionist literature at this period, had said that Sir John Macdonald was "timid unto death of protection," and "had to be bullied into it, led into it, committed to it by others." Mr. Goldwin Smith declares that when he warned Sir John that "Protection would never do for Canada," he was assured, "You need not fear that I am going to get into that hole." One does not understand how Mr. Goldwin Smith could give any such warning, for he was opposing the MacKenzie Government, petting Honorable Edward Blake as the repressed believer in a more liberal commercial policy, and cultivating close personal and political relations with the Conservative leader. In a letter to The Toronto News in 1901, Mr. Nicholas Flood Davin said:—

"Now as regards Sir John Macdonald's opinion, he is on record quite early in his career on the side of protection. On the other hand, in 1876, I was in The Mail office talking to the late Mr. Charles Belford, who was then editor under Mr. Patteson, who was manager and editor-in-chief, when Sir John Macdonald entered and said: 'Belford, what do you mean by that article on protection? I'm not a protectionist.' Belford replied: 'It doesn't commit you or the paper. It is marked "communicated." But that policy is taking hold of the public mind, and that is the question on which you will have to go to the country.' The policy of protection was preached on platforms and advocated in The Mail before Sir John Macdonald took it up heartily. He had undoubtedly gone over to free trade with the Disraelian Conservatives, and was fully aware what a hold belief in it had taken of the public mind. He, however, took to studying protectionist books and when he began to advocate protection he brought to bear on its popularization his fine

power of illustration, sometimes homely, sometimes whimsical, always effective. It is the good fortune of the leading statesmen to get credit not only for the work, but the idea, whereas they are never the first to conceive the idea."

What Mr. Davin, Mr. MacLean and Mr. McCarthy have said Mr. T. C. Patteson, who was the editor of The Mail during that period, often admitted and emphasized. But if it was the fortune of Mr. MacKenzie to take the wrong turning, this was not so much through devotion to low tariff as through submission to a wing of the Liberal party which by high concern for principle or through zeal to save itself, gave the whole position to the enemy. After the turnover in 1896 the common injunction among Liberals was to remember "MacKenzie's mistakes."

Sir John's statement has been corroborated by others who knew the political history of those days. Both parties wanted to be in power and the majority of the politicians were willing to do anything to get into office. The Liberal party came into power in 1896 and very quickly became as ardent supporters of protection as had been the Conservatives. From that time until the present protectionism has held the reins and driven both parties without discrimination. It is interesting to know however, that there was once a time when the politicians in the Conservative party were willing to jump either way on the tariff so long as they thought it would catch enough votes to bring them into power.

Ought not so vital an industry as coal-mining be nationalized? When the government takes over the railways, it will not be able to risk a fuel famine. Government ownership of railways should be accompanied by a similar control of coal mines. Incidentally then, the citizens of the country may be able to secure a winter's supply of coal from an agent without having to relate their life's history with each purchase.



THE BACK DOOR TO GERMANY