

THE GLEANER

AND

NORTHUMBERLAND SCHEDIASMA.

VOLUME II.]

"Nec araneorum sane texus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt nec noster vilior qui ex alienis libamus ut apes."

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THE GLEANER.

AMERICA.

FROM THE QUEBEC MERCURY.

CANADA TIMBER TRADE.

The question respecting the timber trade which now occupies the public attention is of such vast importance to these Colonies, that perhaps I may be permitted to offer a few additional observations, notwithstanding that the subject has been already so much discussed, and so ably handled by others, as hardly to leave any thing new to be said upon it. Nevertheless it is by the continued attrition of various and conflicting arguments that truth is at last elicited.

Although the principal part of the following remarks are borrowed from the more able pens of those who have preceded the writer in the field, yet profiting by their labours, he is anxious to contribute his mite to the general cause, considering his exertions amply requited if he should succeed in adding one single argument to those already advanced, or even in treating them in such a manner as to place the subject in a different point of view, relying upon the magnitude of the interests at stake as an apology for making the attempt at all.

It is in contemplation then, "at one fell swoop," to annihilate the trade of the British North American Colonies—and why? Because, it is said, the timber imported from the Baltic is cheaper and better, and because there is a forced monopoly created, in favor of these Colonies, at an expense to the British nation, annually, of one million and a half sterling.

The object of the present will be to offer a few observations, with the assistance of what has been already said on this subject by Mr. Shirreff, in order to shew that the first is untrue,—that the second is at least problematical, and that the third is but one of those blunders in political economy that are daily committed by such as estimate great national advantages only as they can be measured by their narrow scale of pounds shillings and pence.

With respect to the cheapness, Mr. Shirreff clearly shows that the present comparatively low prices of Baltic timber can only be attributed to the general depression of that trade, caused by the protection afforded by the mother country to that of the colonies. It is undeniable, say the advocates of the proposed change, if they can offer any reasonable grounds for believing that, upon the protecting duties being removed, the English consumer would be able to procure Baltic timber at the price for which it is now imported, (exclusive of duty,) there would be a saving effected to the nation of a million and a half annually. But what argument has yet been adduced to show that this is the case, or even probable? On the contrary—does not the experience of the past, with the laws which usually govern trade furnish ample proof that the destruction of the North American timber trade, would be followed by a rush to the Baltic, and such a demand created as would double the present prices?—and after the colonial timber should be effectually shut out from competition, what is there to prevent these high prices from being maintained? To what controul would they be subject, and where are we to look for a check to restore the equilibrium?

The probable, and reasonable, consequence of this masterly piece of charlatanerie, would be that the English consumer would pay a higher price for his timber than he does at present, and that the million and a half, instead of swelling the British Exchequer, would find its way across the German Ocean.

In regard to the superiority of the Baltic, over the colonial, timber little need be said, as any argument advanced on this head cannot as yet be received otherwise than as a speculative theory, in support of which those largely interested in the Baltic trade, are endeavouring to excite the prejudices of the people of England, and afterwards to foist them upon us as

the result of evidence founded upon fact. Here then it is a drawn battle between us. Time alone can decide the issue; and it is just as reasonable to suppose that, when the mist of prejudice is blown off, and vague speculations are superseded by an accurate knowledge of the subject, derived from experience, the superiority may be as clearly shown to be on our side as it was in the result of an experiment, tried lately at Portsmouth, to ascertain whether the superiority of Russian and Italian hemp, over that of Colonial growth, was such as to preclude the possibility of affording encouragement to the latter. This terminated in the successful overthrow of a similar deep-rooted prejudice by establishing satisfactorily the superior excellence of the Colonial article.

If, then, by meeting these callous calculators upon their own grounds, it can be shewn that the policy of sinking the Canada timber trade is at best a doubtful one, and that some more substantial reason must be offered by them to the nation before they attempt the dangerous experiment, what answer can be given to the host of weighty arguments brought forward against the measure, with reference to its probable and pernicious effects in a political point of view? There is scarcely a department of the state that would not sustain a shock from such a baneful measure. Its first and immediate effect would be a ruinous depression of the shipping interests, on the prosperity of which depend essentially the stability of our navy, and the security of the nation.

Would these idle speculators send the two thousand sail that are annually employed in carrying timber from this country, to crowd the United States and West India trade, already over done? Or would they heartlessly force them to a ruinous competition with the Baltic carriers?

The North American timber trade has been aptly compared to a bridge, by means of which the superabundant population of the mother country has been transplanted, at a low rate, into a less populous and more fertile region. How are they to supply the want of such a safety valve? Lastly, how is England to avoid the blow to her manufacturing interest? Would it be wise in the present discontented state of the labouring classes to curtail, rather than enlarge, the market for their manufactures.

But admitting all the arguments of the million and a half gentlemen, add waving all those founded upon the collateral advantages accruing to the nation from the present protecting system, let us come to the consideration of the important question,—Where is Great Britain in the event of a war with the Baltic Powers to look for her supply of timber? should such a case arise, no doubt these Gentlemen are of opinion that they could again turn their attention to Canada, where they would be always sure of finding abundance of it. Do they imagine that the Canada timber trade, once annihilated, could be revived at will, as if by magic? are they so blind as to suppose that the people engaged in this trade, harshly driven into less profitable pursuits, would return with alacrity to a source of employment rendered so precarious by the vacillating policy of the home Government? This act of infanticide once perpetrated, can they entertain the most distant idea that confidence in the mother country could ever again be restored to such a degree as to induce the inhabitants of this colony to embark their capital in the construction of such fine establishments as are now in operation in different parts of the country? If the men at the helm of affairs have really determined to make this immolation on the altar of the free trade mania, let them abandon every hope of a dependence upon Canada for a supply of timber at any future period. After such a changeable policy being once acted upon, it would be an idle chimera. As well might they destroy all the arteries of the body and then look for a supply of blood from the veins. While Great Britain would not hesitate to lavish her blood and treasures to redeem the most trivial pledge given to the most barbarous power, is it with her own colonies

alone that faith is to be broken? Is an integral portion of her empire, fostered by her peculiar care and protection, to be all at once sent adrift in order to essay a dangerous and doubtful experiment, at the suggestion of a few visionary economists? Is it possible that all the advantages which accrue to the parent state from her connection with a valuable colony, if summed up together, do not afford an equivalent to these pounds, shillings and pence, calculators for their million and a half,—that stumbling block so much insisted upon? Would the saving of this paltry sum, if really it could be made, be a sufficient justification to Great Britain for leaving such an imperishable monument of her injustice, as the wanton abandonment of an infant colony, by causing it shamefully to retrograde, instead of rearing it up to become a valuable appendage to her crown, consistently with the policy hitherto invariably acted upon?

To conclude, it is an agitation I understand among some of our merchants, in the timber trade, to make a representation to ministers with a view of inducing them to allow a certain time to enable them to wind up. Surely they are not serious in such an intention; if so it will be considered as more indicative of the state of their nerves than either of their disinterestedness or of their skill in political economy. Is it to be expected that if Ministers are seriously resolved upon this measure, in violation of the soundest policy, and in the face of all the arguments that can be urged against it, they will be diverted from their purpose by this pusillanimous proposition? And pray upon what principle of reason or justice does these gentlemen assume to themselves the right of compromising the interests of thousands by such a mercenary capitulation? Such a plea would defeat its own object; for as soon as it is determined to carry this measure into effect, even at the expiration of three, four or five years, that very instant the value of every timber establishment in the country falls fifty to seventy five per cent. Ruin in either case is inevitable: why then be so infatuated as to desert the strongest arguments that ever supported a cause to take up a temporary post on such untenable ground? If a suggestion of this character should go home clothed with the sanction of the Board of Trade, or of a few leading men among the merchants, it would do incalculable injury to the cause, as it would furnish arms to our enemies and be the means of inducing Ministers to consider the measure as practicable, while in their right senses they dare not look it in the face, however strongly urged by those largely engaged in the Baltic trade, under the mask of free trade principles. Surely these gentlemen will pause before they inconsiderately draw down upon themselves the censure of the whole country, while it amounts almost to a certainty that upon a proper representation being made and upon the subject being fairly and dispassionately discussed, this ruinous innovation will be relinquished as unnatural and quixotic.

NOTE TO THE DRAMATISTS.—The Theatre is a living picture of the virtues and passions of men. On the stage it is necessary to conform to the weakness of mankind—too much moralizing tires, too much reasoning chills the mind; we must turn maxims into action, convey noble sentiments by a single stroke, and instruct rather by the manners of the hero than by his discourse.

A splendid bequest of £200,000 has been made by a person of the name of Donaldson for the erection and endowment of an hospital for orphans and destitute children in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh.