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THE MORNING GUARDIAN

THURSDAY JULY 30 1903

PREFERENCE AND PROTECTION.

There is every indication that the British public is stirred up over the proposal to inquire into the trade question. The people naturally believe that the object of inquiry is to prepare the way for a change and a change from free trade must needs be in the direction of protection. Quite naturally the free traders have become alarmed. If they had any doubts as to the trend of the Chamberlain plan, whether it is towards protection or not, the active interest taken by the leading protectionists of the kingdom in promoting the inquiry must have changed doubt to a certainty. The preferential trade idea has been to a large extent lost sight of and the battle is fast taking shape along the lines with which we were long ago made familiar in Canada.

It is not quite fair to the plan of giving the colonies a preference that it should be taken as wholly protectionist. The most that is contemplated so far as the United Kingdom is concerned is that a very moderate tariff shall be imposed against certain foreign products and manufactures, while colonial wares and products shall be admitted to the British markets as free of duty as heretofore. This would be compensated by preferential treatment of British goods in the colonial markets, after the manner of what Canada has been giving for some years past. It is really a reciprocal trade arrangement within the Empire. But the British protectionists have taken it up and not a few of them are now advocating protection for protection's sake. Hence from present appearance the battle is shaping itself as one of free-trade versus protection. Even on this ground, while it may lessen the chance of the early adoption of Mr. Chamberlain's policy it seems not improbable that the battle may be won within a few years.

When Britain adopted free trade, and had begun to prosper under that policy it was confidently predicted by the Cobden-Bright school of public men that the nations of the world would be speedily converted to the new policy. The reverse has proved to be true. Almost all foreign nations are now more protectionist than they were fifty years ago. The United States, with a population now nearly double that of the United Kingdom, has become, and remained for forty years a high tariff nation. The British colonies led by the Dominion of Canada and the

Commonwealth of Australia have fallen into line. The trade policy of the English-speaking world outside of the British Isles, and of continental Europe, is alike a policy of more or less high tariffs. In other words the civilized world has not only refused to be converted to free trade, but has set its face against it. Such is the logic of events, the verdict of history.

And this further is evident, that every one of these foreign protectionist countries, her competitors and rivals is evidently concerned lest Britain shall adopt a customs tariff against those of their products which have all along been admitted to British markets free of duty. The colonies are in favor of an inter-imperial preference. The United States, Germany, France and Russia fear that the new policy may be adopted. And to the fears of competitors and rivals is added the incentive that closer trade relations would necessarily strengthen and consolidate the Empire. These facts when clearly and forcibly presented to the British people as they are now being presented, must set them thinking. Canada's present prosperity under a tariff which to British notions is very high, may also furnish an argument against the fear of protection. There has not in half a century been a protection campaign in Great Britain, and no one can tell what the result may now be. The British public may possibly be found more ready for a change of trade policy than we in Canada have believed.

The oil business in New Brunswick has inspired its promoters with confidence. Some thirty wells already put down are nearly all producing more or less. Now it has been resolved to put four more drilling plants at work and to erect a refinery.

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