

Mr. Bethune's Speech

AT THE

HUSTINGS OF THE CITY OF TORONTO,

December 21st, 1847.

If, in the month of May last, any man had prophesied, that he (Mr. Bethune) would, before the close of the year, appear before the Electors of Toronto as a candidate for the representation of the city in Parliament, he would without hesitation have proclaimed him a false prophet.

Since that time, we have had a session of the Provincial Parliament, in which the Government have proposed and carried measures, which, in his (Mr. B's) humble opinion are opposed to the best interests of this country, and in order to arrest the progress of those measures, he had not hesitated to accede to the request of his fellow-townsmen, that he should permit himself to be put in nomination as a candidate for their suffrages at this Election.

In thus presenting himself to the Electors of Toronto, he offered no personal opposition to either of the late members; his opposition was to certain measures of the Government supported by both those Gentlemen. He had known both Mr. Sherwood and Mr. Boulton almost from their infancy; and he had a sincere friendship, and he might add affection for them; but he could not suffer his private feelings to control his public duty.

What were the measures, he asked, introduced by the Government, to which he objected?

They were 1st, The repeal of the Navigation Laws, so far as respected our inland waters.

2dly, The introduction of the principle of Free Trade in our intercourse with the United States and other foreign countries.

As to the Navigation Laws, he would briefly state, that the prosperity of the British Merchant Navy, was chiefly owing to the protection those laws afforded to British shipowners. Those laws had existed in England for centuries, and up to the present day, they are still in force—with the exception of the temporary suspension of them that has been permitted for the purpose of enabling the Government the more easily to receive the breadstuffs of foreign countries to feed the starving population at Home—owing to the failure of the potato crop, particularly in Ireland.

By those laws, foreign vessels cannot take into Great Britain or Ireland, the production of any other country than that to which the vessel belongs. An American vessel cannot take from New-York to Liverpool any thing that is not of the growth, produce or manufacture of the United States; but a British vessel may take in part of a load at Cuba, and complete her cargo at New Orleans or New York.

In this country however, our Government, in their extreme liberality, allow American vessels to bring into our Ports the productions of all the world; but we cannot take a box of tea or a case of Hollands gin in a British vessel to an American Port.

The Government of this Province have induced the Legislature to address the Home Government to repeal the Navigation Laws in our inland waters, so as to enable American vessels to pass down the waters of the St. Lawrence to Montreal and Quebec, and in fact to use them in the same way that we do ourselves, for the ADDRESS contains no qualification or restriction whatever. It is true the Attorney-General has issued his PROCLAMATION or address to the Electors of this city, in which he states what Government *intended* to do. That they did not propose to allow American vessels the benefit of the coasting trade—but that it was merely intended that they should take their produce to a sea-port town, and thus assist to pay the interest upon the cost of the St. Lawrence Canal.

He (Mr. Bethune) thought that the Government had formed their opinion on the matter, without giving the subject the least consideration. He held in his hand a book, published in the United States, which shewed that the value of the steamers, sailing craft and freight boats employed in the inland trade of Canada, was not less than £618,000—near-

ly the cost of the St. Lawrence Canal; and the expenditure within the Province in navigating these vessels was upwards of £200,000 per annum.

It was proposed by the Government to admit the American to compete with British vessels on our own waters and canals, without asking for any equivalent; they were willing to run the risk of driving British vessels from our own waters, and of depriving the Province of the benefit of an annual expenditure of more than £200,000;—and for what did they run this risk? In order that some tolls to the extent of £13,000—at most of £25,000—might be secured to the Province. They would sacrifice £200,000 a year, besides 10 per cent per annum upon the cost of the vessels to keep them in an effective state—and which would be £60,000 a year in addition—for the sake of securing tolls on the St. Lawrence to the extent of £13,000!

He asked if these were the views of statesmen? If a Government that could take no more comprehensive view than the present so-called CONSERVATIVE Government had done in the matter referred to, was entitled to the support of Conservatives? If a measure of so destructive a tendency as the one he had pointed out, were to be carried into effect, and if upon an appeal to the people of this Province, any man who dared to have the honesty to oppose himself to those destructive measures, was to be cried down by a few unthinking men, who were, perhaps, incapable of comprehending enlarged commercial views, as an enemy to the CONSERVATIVE cause, it would, undoubtedly, be a hopeless task to attempt the establishment of correct and Conservative opinions in this Province.

But he (Mr. B.) had no fear that his views would not meet with the approbation of the inhabitants of the Province. The subjects to which he had drawn their attention, were too momentous and too easily understood for him to fear that his opinions upon them would for any length of time be misunderstood or unappreciated.

It was not enough for Government to say that the opening of our Canals to American vessels, was sufficient to attract the business of the Great West to Montreal and Quebec. They must show of what value that business would be to the Province—in the way of paying the interest upon the debt contracted for the completion of the St. Lawrence Canal.

He (Mr. B.) held in his hand a statement of the whole quantity of flour, wheat, and Indian Corn that had passed down the Hudson River to New-York, from the opening of navigation to the 10th of this month.

It appears there were of wheat, flour, bbls 2,910,367
" " Corn meal, " 108,505

Barrels,..... 3,018,872

Wheat, bushels, 1,602,064

Corn 3,534,182

Bushels of Wheat and Corn, 5,136,246

The Toll charged upon flour, passing through the Lachine Canal, is 1d per barrel—through Beauharnois and Cornwall Canals, one halfpenny each—making the total toll 2d per barrel. If the *whole* of the flour that passed down the Hudson River this year, had gone to Montreal—and if our neighbours in New-York could have lived upon air alone, perhaps we might have expected that that produce would have sought the channels of our St. Lawrence—it would only have produced a revenue of £25,157—and if all the Wheat and Indian Corn had forsaken New-York and had sought a harbour of refuge at Montreal, it would (if none of it had gone down the Rapids of the St. Lawrence instead of the Canals) have produced a revenue in the shape of toll at the rate demanded, £15,946—making together £41,103. Thus we see that it would take the *whole* of the Western produce, including that which is grown from Buffalo to Albany, to pay

tolls amounting to £41,000 a-year, on the St. Lawrence Canals. But it may be asked, cannot the tolls be raised? Certainly they can; but you only raise up an opposition to your Canals by so doing, and assist in keeping the trade you covet, away from you. But (said Mr B) to speak seriously, you can never expect, under any circumstances whatever, to get more than *one-third* of the produce of the West through your Canal to the sea-port. The revenue that you will derive from that portion of it—when you get it—will be about £13,000 a-year. And for this paltry sum, our Government most patriotically and wisely ask Her Majesty's Government to jeopardize our own interests to the extent of £260,000 a-year!

And if (said Mr. Bethune) the trade of the West can be attracted down the St. Lawrence, why cannot it be done in British vessels as well as in American? All that the people of this Province require is time to build vessels to carry that produce, and three or four years is all they ask.

It would take about 175 large steam freight-boats or propellers carrying 3000 barrels of flour each through the Welland Canal, in addition to a large fleet of sailing vessels, to bring the *one-third* of that produce from the *far west* to Montreal—with in 3½ months—for it must be done in the months of May and June, and in the months of October and November. These vessels would cost (the steamers alone) not less than £875,000; and the annual expense of running them would not be less than £425,000—the wear and tear at 10 per cent would be £87,500 in addition—making an aggregate of £512,500, which would be annually expended in this Province if it had that trade.

The merchants in the West would not ask if the vessel were British that came for his flour and wheat; (unless there was an American vessel for Montreal in Port requiring freight), but his question would be, what will you deliver my flour for, in Liverpool. If the rate is as high by Montreal as by New-York, he will give the preference to Montreal, because there will be no transhipment of his property until it gets alongside the ship at Montreal or Quebec. At what rate, then, can flour be taken from Lake Erie, the mouth of the Welland Canal, to Montreal? It was taken this year for 2s. 1d. per barrel, from Hamilton and Toronto to Montreal; and for 2s. 8d. from Lake Erie. It can, and no doubt will be taken from Lake Erie, above Buffalo, to Montreal, for 2s. 5d., or even 2s. 3d. per barrel.

What was the freight of flour this year from Buffalo to Albany? It varied from May to July from *one dollar and a half* to 3s. 9d. a barrel. The average was about *one dollar*; and to this add 6d. from Albany to New York.

It is clear, therefore, that flour can be carried to Montreal from Lake Erie at a much less rate than to New-York; but the rate across the Atlantic is considerably less (owing to the dangers of the Navigation below Quebec, the want of Light-houses, the expense of Pilotage, and the high rate of Insurance) from New-York to Liverpool than from Quebec.

The average rate from New-York is about 2s. 6d. per barrel of flour; whilst from Quebec it varies from 3s. 6d. to 6s. 6d., making an average of 5s. I have no doubt, that if larger ships were employed in the Montreal and Quebec trade, that it could be done for 4s. from Montreal; as a 400 ton vessel, making two voyages a year to Montreal, carrying 6000 barrels of flour homewards and 500 tons freight outward, each voyage at 12s. 6d. per ton, and making a winter voyage to the West Indies or New Orleans, would clear from £1000 to £1300 a year, over all expenses—including the interest on the money the vessel cost. If so, it would be a good investment for capitalists. Taking then, the average rate of freight on flour from New-York to Liverpool at 2s. 6d., from Lake Erie to New-York at 4s. 6d., you have the cost from Buffalo to Liverpool, 7s. per barrel; and taking the average rate at 4s. from Montreal to Liverpool,—and from Lake Erie to Montreal, 3s.; instead of 2s. 5d., you have the whole cost, 7s. per barrel, the same as by the American route; and the merchant saves at least 2d. a barrel in not having it transhipped until it gets alongside of the ship at Montreal or Quebec. There can therefore be no reasonable doubt of our being able to get a portion of the Western trade by the St. Lawrence. And if it can be obtained, as he had shewn it can, in British vessels, why not keep it in our own hands? Is it of no consequence to employ ship-builders, engineers, carpenters, joiners, caulkers, to build these vessels; and that the iron, spikes, nails, chains, anchors, sails, and rigging should be purchased in this country to the amount of nearly *one million* pounds; and that an annual expenditure of more than *half a million* should be kept within the Province; Or is it of more consequence that we should enjoy the name of liberality, repeal the Navigation Laws, allow the Americans to use our waters, and pay tolls to the extent of

£13,000 a year! He asked if there was any man present who could for a single moment hesitate between the two propositions? Whether in fact, the BRITISH FLAG should wave over us, or the STARS and STRIPES of the United States.

But he might be asked, -if we can and do carry flour at the low rate he had named, why fear competition from the Americans?

The power of wealth was well known; and if the Americans were permitted to contend for this trade with British vessels, the wealth at their command would soon drive us off our Lakes and Rivers, as we are comparatively poor, and are without the resources open to the Americans.

If a man in business has £1000, and he requires a £100 a-year to support his family, is it not a rate of 10 per cent. upon his capital? If his neighbour has £5000, and requires a £100 a-year to support his family, it takes only 2 per cent. of his capital.—He has then an advantage of 8 per cent. over his poorer neighbour, and can carry on his business at a less profit in proportion to his capital. So will it be with the Americans. The large capital in their sea-port towns seeking investment, will quickly crush any puny attempts we may make to resist it, and the result will be, as he had stated, the loss of the whole trade upon our own waters.

We are now doing a prosperous business, which we can extend ourselves, to meet the increasing demands of commerce; why should our Government rashly and unwisely jeopardize that prosperity?

Was it for £13,000 a year Canal Tolls!!!

Mr. Bethune then turned to the question of

FREE TRADE,

And after giving a variety of examples, shewing the injury it would do to this Province, even if we enjoyed reciprocal benefits from the United States; he stated that the principles of Free Trade were to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market; and that the advocates of the system in England asserted that if they could only get *cheap bread* there, they could manufacture so cheaply, that they would force their manufactures upon the whole world.

He asked what was the history of Free Trade during the past year in England.

Was not the flour, and breadstuffs of the whole world admitted into England free of duty; and before the arrival there of the immense quantities that were poured into every British and Irish port, what was the price of Flour? Was it ever known to be dearer since the war, than it was from January to June last? And while flour was at a famine price, how fared manufacturers?

Were they ever known to be in a more prosperous state, than during the time provisions were at famine prices? No: although famine existed to a fearful extent in many portions of the United Kingdom.

When the price of flour, and provisions, and cotton fell—when the loaf was CHEAPER in England,—from June to December, than it was ever known to be before, how fared manufacturers then? Let the great champion and organ of *Free Trade* answer the question. In a late number of that leading Journal of the world, the *London Times*, he found the following language:—"The cotton and woollen manufacturers are declining. The mass of the people have not been able to spend this year so much by a third, or even a half, as they have done in new clothing. Rustic wardrobes have dwindled. The village shopkeeper has become insolvent. The consumption of foreign commodities is abating. Prices cannot be sustained at a point to remunerate the Manchester manufacturer or the West India merchant. Sales are forced, and losses are submitted to in every direction."

Such, said Mr. Bethune, was the melancholy history of Free trade in England during the past year; and he sincerely trusted the people of this Province would be wise in time, and avoid it. Let them foster and encourage a home market; give a fair and reasonable protection to manufacturers, and build up a *Home Market* to as great an extent as possible, for the productions of the agriculturists.

If (said Mr. B.) he were Mr. Secretary Walker at Washington, he would have proposed to Congress for its adoption, just such propositions as our Government at Montreal have recommended and acted upon. Nothing could be more advantageous for the United States; nothing more injurious to the interests of Canada. But as our Canals were built, not for the United States but for *Canada*, it would be a sorry policy to sacrifice Canadian interests to Americans, and more particularly for £13,000 a-year tolls!

Mr. Bethune afterwards declared his *opposition* to the Government scheme of dividing the endowment of the University of King's College. He was for preserving the charter as it is, and building up an institution worthy of the Province; but had no objection to aid other colleges from the general funds of the Province.