

## SYNOPSIS OF THE

## REPORT of the Commissioners from British North America, appointed to inquire into the Trade of the West Indies, Brazil, and Mexico.

When it became evident that the United States were indeed about to abrogate the Reciprocity Treaty, under which the main staples of Canadian produce had been freely admitted into their markets, it was decided that fresh outlets should be sought out for us abroad. It was at first intended that a commission of three gentlemen from Canada should proceed to investigate the Trade of the West Indies, but the Imperial authorities suggested a modification of the plan. Under their auspices a Confederate Council for Trade, at which several of the Provinces of British North America were represented, was held in Quebec, in September, 1865, and it was resolved that the Maritime Provinces should unite with Canada in forming the delegation. The gentlemen, who finally proceeded on their mission, in December, 1865, were:—From CANADA, Hon. Wm. McDougall, M.P.P., Provincial Secretary; Hon. Thos. Ryan, M.L.C.; J. W. Dunscombe, Esq., Collector of Customs for Quebec; and A. M. Delisle, Esq., now Collector for Montreal. From NOVA SCOTIA: Hon. Jas. Macdonald, M.P.P., Financial Secretary, and Hon. Isaac Levesconte, M.P.P. From NEW BRUNSWICK: Wm. M. Smith, Esq., Controller of Customs at St. John. From PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND: Hon. W. H. Pope, M.P.P., then Colonial Secretary. The party divided at St. Thomas, W. I., into two, Messrs. Dunscombe, Levesconte and Pope going to Brazil, the others visiting the West Indies. The movements of the latter body were aided by the services of a man-of-war steamer, placed at their disposal by the Admiralty.

The instructions given to the Commissioners were to report "the nature and extent of the productions of the respective countries they visited," and particulars as to their "trade, tariffs, and all other burdens imposed upon commerce, the ordinary prices current, &c." Also to offer suggestions tending to remove obstructions to the rapid increase of direct trade between British America and tropical regions.

In the West Indies the Commissioners arrived at an agreement with the Governors of Demerara, Trinidad, the Windward Islands, the Leeward Islands, and Jamaica, that "Customs duties and port charges on the produce and shipping of the respective colonies shall be levied solely for revenue purposes, and for the maintenance of indispensable establishments; and that the several governments will be prepared to consider, in a liberal spirit, any complaint having reference to impost, that may be preferred by another government, on the ground that such imposts are calculated to obstruct trade." They also made with these colonies a conditional agreement to aid in the establishment of improved postal communication between British North America and the West Indies.

In Brazil they were the means of hastening the throwing open of the coasting trade of the empire, of which they were the first to receive communication, and other concessions were promised, to follow, in due time, the close of the war with Paraguay.

On their return, the Commissioners presented to Parliament a report, containing minute details as to the existing trade and Trade Regulations of all the places they visited, embodying suggestions both of a Political and Commercial character.

The Political suggestions were as follow:—

- 1st.—To establish promptly a line of steamers suitable for the carriage of mails, passengers and freight, between Halifax, Nova Scotia, and St. Thomas, in the West Indies, touching (until the completion of the intercolonial Railway) at Portland, in the United States, so as to ensure regular semi-monthly communication between the ports mentioned.
- 2nd.—To make a convention or agreement with the Postal authorities of the United States for the prompt transmission of letters, &c., from Canada and the Maritime Provinces, by every United States mail which leaves the ports of Boston or New York for the West Indies, Brazil, Mexico, &c., and also for the transmission through United States mails of correspondence originating in those countries.
- 3rd.—To establish a weekly line of steamers between Montreal and Halifax, and to complete as soon as possible the Intercolonial Railway.
- 4th.—To procure, by reciprocal treaties or otherwise, a reduction of the duties now levied on flour, fish, lumber, pork, butter, and other staple productions of British North America, in the West Indies, and especially in Brazil and the Colonies of Spain.
- 5th.—To obtain, if possible, from the Spanish and Brazilian authorities a remission of the heavy dues now chargeable on the transfer of vessels from the British to the Spanish and Brazilian flags.
- 6th.—To procure, by negotiation with the proper authorities, an assimilation of the Tariffs of the British West India Colonies in respect to Flour, Lumber, Fish, and the other staple products of British North America, a measure which would greatly facilitate commercial operations, and may well be urged in view of the assimilation about to be made in the tariffs of Canada and the Maritime Provinces.
- 7th and lastly.—To promote by prudent legislation, and a sound fiscal policy, the rapid development of the great natural resources of the British North American Provinces, and to preserve, as far as it lies in their power, the advantages which they now possess, of being able to produce at a cheaper cost than any other country, most of the great staples which the inhabitants of the Tropics must procure from northern ports.

We epitomize briefly the leading suggestions to commercial men as under:—

*British Guiana.*—To introduce among the planters the use of boxes for packing sugar, instead of bags. Boxes to hold as much as two bags could be sold there at less than \$1; bags cost 55 cents each, and do not keep the sugar so sound. To import in return Demerara sugar, which is made by improved machinery and of a very superior quality. Also to pay more attention to Demerara as a lumber market, a great quantity of broad plank being required, not only for huts for the Coolies, but to make boats for the canals, which there, as in Holland, supersede roads.

*Trinidad.*—This island having but a small market, cargoes should be assorted. Pork to be fat; fish of the coarse kind, such as is produced at Ragged Island, N. S.; flour, to be sent in barrels with round hoops.

*Barbados* is the distributing point for the neighbouring group of islands. Lumber to be chiefly 1 inch plank, with an assortment of 2 and 3 inch, and none less than 15 inches broad; staves to be red oak; shingles split, not sawed; flour in round hooped barrels; peas all yellow, none black; corn to be yellow, white and mixed being unsaleable; beef to be in half barrels; pork in barrels, and fat; codfish to be small and well cured; lard and butter in packages of about 25 lbs.; coal oil in tins.

*Cuba.*—This market is especially recommended on account of its enormous consumption of British American staples. Sugar box shooks, nails, hay, ale and beer, beans, black oats, potatoes, machinery, furniture, brooms, bricks, yellow corn, red onions, butter and lard, are pointed out as likely to be exportable with profit, and minute instructions as to the sizes and kinds are given. The Commissioners' Report has had the direct effect of causing a trade from Quebec to Havana, by steamer, to be commenced.

*Porto Rico.*—Similar details are given with respect to trade with Porto Rico, which is, however, shewn to be a poorer island, with a less extensive demand for Northern produce.