

ADVOCATING FREE TRADE

AFTER-DINNER SPEECHES BY SUPPORTERS OF THE PRINCIPLE.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, THOMAS G. SHEARMAN, PARKE GODWIN, AND OTHERS BEFORE THE FREE TRADE CLUB.

Free trade was toasted in bumpers of red wine, white wine, and sparkling amber at Clark's in West Twenty-third-street, last night. About 100 gentlemen sat down to the annual dinner of the New-York Free Trade Club. Mr. Everett P. Wheeler, President of the club, presided, and among the other gentlemen present were Parke Godwin, Horace White, ex-Commander E. H. Gorringe, the Hon. Theodore Roosevelt, M. Weletsky, the Russian Consul, the Hon. O. B. Potter, J. S. Moore, Thomas Holland, Thomas G. Shearman, Henry George, the Hon. Benjamin A. Willis, J. D. Jones, George Haven Putnam, Gen. John B. Gordon, of Georgia; Gen. Clingman, of North Carolina; the Hon. Señor Rincon Gallardo, of Mexico; William Saunders, Peter Marié, Simon Sterne, Capt. John Codman, E. Ellery Anderson, F. Hopkinson Smith, F. Lynde Stetson, Capt. R. M. G. Brown, of the United States torpedo boat Alarm, G. W. Van Slyck, L. Lafin Kellogg, George Hill, H. V. B. Stapler, Gen. Di Cesnola, J. Schoenhof, Le Grand Lockwood, and Albert Matthews. The dinner began at 7:30 o'clock, and a few minutes after 10 o'clock Mr. Wheeler rapped for order and made a short speech, in which he spoke of the necessities that led to the formation of the late Tariff Commission.

"The Detroit Conference" was the first regular toast, and Mr. Thomas G. Shearman explained that the conference of free traders which is to meet in Detroit on May 31 will probably consider various subjects, chief among which should be that of equal taxation. Mr. Shearman elicited applause by remarking that this Nation had not made as much progress, proportionately, during the last 20 years as it made during the low tariff period from 1850 to 1860. He said that he proposed to go before the Detroit conference and ask its members to recognize certain facts relating to the good effect of free trade on the wages of working men. With a policy of free trade and equal taxation, this country would witness a greater rise in the wages of working people than has ever been known before.

The Hon. Theodore Roosevelt was received with great enthusiasm when he arose to speak on "The Tariff in Politics." He said that he had been warned by two or three good friends that it would be his political death if he publicly committed himself in favor of free trade. He thanked his stars, however, that he was not dependent in any way upon politics, and as soon as any disagreement upon subjects of public importance arose between himself and his constituents he was prepared to step out of office without reluctance. The present condition of affairs was such that the speaker thought it would not do for free traders to take a too sanguine view of the prospects of their favorite doctrine. During the last six or seven months there had been a decided change in public sentiment adverse to free trade, but Mr. Roosevelt felt confident that the complete success of free trade doctrines was merely a question of time. There could be no doubt that the Chinese wall policy that now prevails in this country would sooner or later be abandoned. One reason why free trade did not grow in popularity more rapidly was that no vivid, striking argument in its favor had been placed before the masses. To thinking and educated people it was comparatively easy to illustrate the benefits of free trade, but to the vast majority of the people progress by free trade advocates must necessarily be slow. The first class of people with whom such advocates would be successful would be the farmers, who certainly had nothing to gain from the present tariff policy. Mr. Roosevelt was in favor of a gradual and progressive modification of the import duties in the direction of a tariff for revenue only. The country would not stand a rapid change in the tariff, for there were so many great business interests involved that a sudden radical change would be likely to produce a serious convulsion. The speaker repudiated the idea that in establishing a policy of free trade this country would be helping other countries at its own expense. As a full-blooded Yankee, jealous of Yankee interests, he was prepared to urge a low tariff from motives of self-interest. It was wrong to undertake to postpone consideration of the import duty question by talking of a reduction of the internal revenue. It would be the wisest way to prepare gradually for the reduction or abolition of import duties, for the time was surely coming when the protective tariff would be swept away as in a torrent. "There is certainly a reaction in public sentiment against our doctrines," said Mr. Roosevelt, "but this should not encourage cowardice in the ranks. It should rather make the advocates of free trade more persistent in their efforts to bring about the desired reform. The first and most prominent evil to be attacked is the prohibitory tariff on ships, and after that may be mentioned the tariff on art, which makes us the laughing stock of the world."

Mr. Parke Godwin, in speaking on "Free Speech, Free Press, Free Soil, Free Men—Why Not Free Trade?" said: "We are debating still the same principles which I debated with Horace Greeley 40 years ago." He did not think that any good effects had followed the appointment of the recent Tariff Commission, but felt that the labors of that commission had been ridiculous and devoid of intelligence. The ultimate triumph of free trade, however, could not be questioned. No petty, tricky politics could stay the tendency of public sentiment toward "this mighty reform."

Capt. John Codman created much merriment by a facetious speech on "Infant Industries and Free Ships." He said that a protectionist friend of his tried to illustrate a protection argument the other day by calling his attention to a little bow-legged negro on Broadway. "What is the application?" asked Capt. Codman. "Why, don't you see?" said his friend; "that little negro was not protected in his infancy, and he grew up crooked. Had he been properly protected he would have grown up straight." "The dence he would," answered the Captain. "Well, I don't think it would have been much loss if the little negro had died. As for American ship-building, Capt. Codman said that the United States had followed the example of the aristocratic parents who gave their children in charge of Irish nurses. American ship-building had been left entirely in charge of an Irish nurse, viz., John Roach, who had nearly, if not quite, succeeded in strangling the infant. [Prolonged laughter.]

Mr. J. Schoenhof spoke in favor of free raw materials, and Mr. Henry George responded to the sentiment of "The Working Men of America." Mr. George said that there were men and women working in New-England mills for 90 cents a day who were all but absolute serfs of the rich mill-owners whom so much care had been taken to protect. There was enough in the unfortunate condition of the laboring classes in this country to stir up the masses to an appreciation of the necessity of free trade if the facts were clearly and persistently discussed. He believed that free trade was bound to win, for the working people were beginning to look upon it as a possible means of escape from their bondage. Mr. George sharply arraigned the two great political parties for dodging the tariff question. Other speeches were made by Mr. E. Ellery Anderson, Gen. di Cesnola and F. Hopkinson Smith.