

**THE FRANCO-AMERICAN TREATY
OF COMMERCE: REPORTS AND
RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED IN
THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE**

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The Franco-American Treaty of Commerce: Reports and Resolutions Adopted in the United States and France by Léon Chotteau

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LÉON CHOTTEAU

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TREATY OF COMMERCE

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages contain the resolutions adopted by various Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade, after important speeches delivered by Mr. Léon Chotteau in the principal centres of commerce of the United States during the two campaigns which he made with the view of concluding a Franco-American Treaty of Commerce. In the second part of the present volume, the reader will find the Reports sent to the Paris Committee by the principal Chambers of Commerce of France.

Mr. Chotteau visited America as delegate of a French committee formed in January, 1878, upon the initiative of Mr. E. Menier, member of the Chamber of Commerce of Paris and deputy of Seine-et-Marne.

Before detailing the acts of this committee and the two campaigns of its delegate in America, we must briefly explain the present state of the commercial relations of France and the United States, and the plan adopted by the French committee for the purpose of ameliorating those relations by a reciprocal lowering of the custom-house tariffs of the two countries.

I.

A comparison will aid the reader to make himself acquainted with the abnormal character of the actual relations of America and France.

In 1877, England, which only reckons thirty millions of inhabitants, purchased French produce for more than a thousand million of francs.

The same year, the United States with a population of more than forty-three millions purchased French products for only about 216 millions of francs.

Whence arises this immense difference? From this fact, that France and Great Britain are united by a

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liberal treaty of commerce which promotes exchanges between them, whilst the United States and France are connected by no convention of this kind, and that, in the absence of any treaty of commerce, they apply reciprocally to the products of both countries tariffs exorbitant and often even prohibitive.

This custom-house policy produces an injury to the commerce of the two countries which it is impossible to state precisely in figures, but to which we may be able to approximate by continuing the comparison instituted above.

Thus, thanks to the treaty of 1860, England in 1877 sold to France 576 millions of francs worth of produce.

Then in that same year, the United States imported into France only 257 millions worth of their produce. French high tariffs caused them to suffer a loss which amounted to more than 300 millions, if we consider only a group of 30 millions of their inhabitants, but which is singularly increased if we take into account the real amount of the population of the American Union, the enormous extent of its territory, and the incalculable importance of its natural riches.

This same custom-house policy causes to French commerce an annual detriment which we may reckon at 750 millions of francs, since it is natural to think that with a population of more than forty-three millions, the United States could make use of annually at least as much of French produce as England, if they enjoyed the same liberal tariffs.

The details of the articles throw a clear light upon the subject.

Do we wish to know for example what amount machines and articles issuing from American factories constitute in this sum of 257 millions of products of the United States imported into France in 1877 ?

For two millions of francs only.

All the other articles figure under the denomination of raw cottons and petrolcums, things necessary for food, as fats, salt meats, cereals.

Seeing their industry so badly treated by the French custom-house, the United States are little inclined to modify their own tariffs in favour of France.

Consequently, in this same year 1877, French exports to the United States reached only the amount of 216 millions whilst the preceding year they were 250 millions of francs.

The diminution, as may be seen, is very considerable ; it is

still more perceptible if we refer to the year 1856, when France sold to the United States for \$04 millions of francs of her products.

What is the cause of this increasing diminution of French exports to the United States?

The high tariffs which America has considered it necessary to establish with reference to foreign produce after the war of secession. Mr. Menier pointed out this cause when he said in December, 1877, in a letter addressed to Mr. Léon Chotteau :

“ In 1816, as in 1865, the Americans committed a great commercial mistake ; they wished to make foreigners pay their debts by raising the custom-house duties. What is the result of it ? It is that foreign commerce has left them.” *

The evil thus pointed out, the remedy was at once indicated ; it was necessary to try to get from the United States government a lowering of these tariffs, and for that purpose to show France ready to welcome American products upon conditions less hard.

Then the law requiring that the general tariff should be applied to all nations which were not connected by special treaties with France, it was not possible to ameliorate the conditions imposed upon American products on their entrance into France, except by means of a treaty of commerce to be concluded between France and the United States. From this arose the necessity of propagating in the two countries the idea of a reciprocal treaty.

II.

A committee, the composition of which will be found a little further on, was formed at the beginning of 1878 with the view to this indispensable propaganda. On the 3rd of February, it published an Appeal to the Americans which will be read a few pages lower down.

This Appeal indicated with precision from the commencement the object aimed at ; there it is stated :—

“ Setting aside absolute solutions, transitions too abrupt, we accept a practical means of lowering tariffs.

* See the pamphlet entitled *LE TRAITÉ DE COMMERCE FRANCO-AMÉRICAIN*, by Léon Chotteau, with a preface by M. Menier. Paris, 1878.

" Besides, it is upon this ground where accord is easy that Mr. J. Sherman, your minister of finance, has recently placed himself. The sixth report of the commission nominated by Mr. Sherman for the purpose of modifying the custom-house laws in America shows that the articles upon which duties are levied, amount to more than 2,500, of which 823 pay duties *ad-valorem* from 10 to 75 per cent., 541 specific duties, 144 are subjected to complex taxes, 1,000 although not enumerated are in every case charged with duties.

" These 2,500 articles do not give to your treasury the millions which fifteen or twenty articles subjected to moderate duties would furnish."

The Appeal invited, in concluding, the Americans to form on their part at Washington a national committee, which might be able to combine its action with that of the French committee, so as to assemble at Paris, during the Exhibition, delegates of the commerce and industry of the two nations in a grand Franco-American conference, which would thus have the qualification requisite to lay down the basis of a treaty of commerce.

III.

This Appeal once drawn up, it was necessary to send to America a delegate charged to develop, before the chambers of commerce of the United States, the views of the French committee. This delegate was moreover indicated beforehand by aptitudes altogether special, by the extensive knowledge which he possesses of the commerce of the two countries, and by the personal relations which he had created in the different States of the Union during a long sojourn in America. A French publicist, M. Léon Choiteau, had, in fact, visited the United States in 1867, he had studied closely the institutions, the manners, and the immense resources of that country. He had become connected with a great number of politicians, of publicists, of merchants, and of American manufacturers. On his return from France he had published, in 1876, a history of the war of independence, a book as well known in France as in America where it arrived a propos, since the United States were then celebrating by a universal Exhibition the

centenary of their liberation.* Mr. Chotteau, moreover, had been one of the first to point out through the medium of the press the advantages which would result from the conclusion of a Franco-American Treaty of Commerce, and he had published in the month of December, 1877, a pamphlet upon that subject.

The committee could not hesitate, it chose Mr. Chotteau, and furnished him with the means of going to America.

The Transatlantic Company associated itself, from the beginning, with our work in giving to the French delegate a free passage upon its magnificent steamers.

Mr. Chotteau embarked at Havre on the 2nd of March, 1878, upon the steamer *La France*. Arrived at New York the 14th, he commenced two days afterwards the campaign by a conference at the Free Trade Club of that town, visited in turn Boston, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Saint Louis, Chicago, and San Francisco; spoke before all the Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade, and succeeded in interesting all these bodies in the work of the committee, and in inducing them to promise to send delegates to the conference which was to take place at Paris on the 7th of August. Having quitted New York the 12th of June, upon the *Saint-Laurent*, he learnt on arriving at Havre on the 24th, that the merchants of that town had arranged to offer to him a banquet, which took place on board the same steamer.

At a meeting of the committee, held the 2nd of July, at Paris, at the Hotel of the Syndical Chambers, he gave an account of his mission. It was then learnt that a committee had been formed at Washington. An address sent by this meeting to the French committee, in reply to the Appeal of the 3rd of February, was read. We extract from that document, dated Washington, 6th June, 1878, the following passage:—

“The diversity of the natural products and manufactures of the two countries is such that they cannot be rivals. Each produces in a very large measure what the other wants, and we cannot conceive that any political theory should forbid the closest commercial relations between nations thus situated.

“The United States is teeming with products which should

* LA GUERRE DE L'INDÉPENDANCE, 1776-1782. LES FRANÇAIS EN AMÉRIQUE. A volume of 450 pages, with unedited documents. G. Charpentier, éditeur. Paris, 1876.

find a market in France, and if we sell to you, it is a natural and inevitable result that we shall buy from you.

"We are, therefore, prepared to cordially co-operate in directing the public sentiment of France and the United States to the great advantages which must accrue equally to each country by such an adjustment of import duties through a conventional tariff, as will increase its trade and develop its resources.

"We quite agree with you that such a change can best be made effectual and mutually profitable in being initiated, after careful consideration, by practical men; and your suggestion that we should combine our efforts to prepare the way for a Franco-American Congress is a wise one, which meets with our hearty approbation."

Thus M. Chotteau had obtained the desired result; a committee had been formed at Washington; that committee was on all points in accord with the French committee; American delegates were going to assemble at Paris. This was a first success.

IV.

The Franco-American Conference met the 7th, 9th and 11th of August, 1878. One hundred delegates took part in it, fifty American and fifty French. A commission of sixteen members was deputed to lay the basis of the treaty. We will cite among the American members, Messrs. Nathan Appleton, Felix Limet, Cornelius Roosevelt, James Hodges, and Emile Karst. The eight French members were Messrs. Foucher de Careil, Senator; D. Wilson, M. Rouvier, Pascal Duprat, Deputies; P. A. Delboy, Counsel General; Armand Lalande, President of the Chamber of Commerce of Bordeaux; L. Hielard, President of the General Syndicate of the Union of Commerce and Industry, and Auguste Desmoulins, publicist.

This commission discussed, modified and adopted a project which had been prepared by two of its members, Messrs. Felix Limet and A. Desmoulins. This document, submitted to the general conference, was approved by the same the 11th of August.

It had the form of a memoir addressed to the Congress of Washington, and to the French chambers by the members of