

TRINIDAD.

No. 5.

(No. 29.)

COPY of a DESPATCH from Governor Lord HARRIS to Earl GREY.

No. 5.
Governor
Lord Harris
to
Earl Grey,
1st April 1847.

My Lord,

Trinidad, 1st April 1847.

I HAVE the honour to acknowledge your Lordship's despatch, No. 117, dated 1st March, and beg to thank you for the opportunity you therein afford of offering some remarks, and making a statement of some facts, which will show that the influence of the Navigation Laws, upon the trade and commerce of this island, is any thing but beneficial.

It has not been in my power to obtain such satisfactory evidence in figures, as I should have wished; but I think, nevertheless, that it will not be difficult to show that the position of this island would be most materially altered, could a relaxation in, or the abolition of those laws be permitted.

Your Lordship is aware, that a large portion of the population of this colony is of foreign extraction, retaining in many respects the habits and tastes of the nations whence they are sprung, and, consequently, there is naturally a desire for the products and manufactures of those countries. I refer more particularly to the descendants of French and Spanish families, as also to a considerable portion of the Creole black population. Now, by certain provisions in the Navigation Laws, but very few of the articles required can be brought here direct from France or Spain, in French or Spanish vessels. The means of transit which must be adopted becomes therefore far more expensive. With respect to the French trade, which is far the most important of the two, it is either necessary to charter an English vessel, and send it to some port in France, and by which the charge for freight per ton is 1*l.* 15*s.*, whereas by a French vessel it would be 18*s.*, or it is necessary to have goods forwarded by a French vessel to Martinique, to which island the freight is as heavy as it would be direct to this island. But, besides, the goods must be landed, on which some commission must be paid, and an additional freight of 18*s.* 6*d.* per ton from Martinique to Trinidad. But not only is the price of, and the risk and trouble of procuring French goods considerably enhanced, but the opportunity of a return trade is entirely prevented, and there is reason to suppose that a large quantity of cocoa might be shipped for France, were there sufficient inducement to vessels of that nation to resort to this island, and which is now impossible, as the differential duty in France, against articles arriving in English vessels, precludes any attempt of the sort, and this argument holds good in a similar manner as regards Spain, though not to any extent in respect of imports, but to a larger as respects exports.

This subject is not confined to the direct intercourse of this island with both those countries; but indirectly as regards that, the trade with Venezuela affords a very important, perhaps the most important feature in the case; its favourable position, and its proximity, would at once ensure the largest portion of that trade, if the opportunity of competing on fair terms with other places were afforded; but in consequence of such not being the case, a more distant port has become the resort of the Venezuelan traders.

I find there is a material and important difference between the value of goods imported into Venezuela from St. Thomas and from Trinidad. For the three years 1843, 1844, and 1845, of which I possess returns, the value of goods exported for Venezuela from the two places mentioned, is as follows:—

1843 :—From St. Thomas	-	-	-	-	£944,409	48
Trinidad	-	-	-	-	154,131	86
1844 :—From St. Thomas	-	-	-	-	607,308	38
Trinidad	-	-	-	-	165,493	58
1845 :—From St. Thomas	-	-	-	-	781,680	00
Trinidad	-	-	-	-	177,585	58

Now, the average of exports from Venezuela to Trinidad during the last 10 years, amounts to £408,527, so that the exchange must always be against this colony; but if greater freedom existed in commerce, even if this island were on equal terms with St. Thomas it would have a great advantage over that place, as all ships coming here would be able to procure return freights in the produce of the country, which at once lowers the rate of freight on imports, and consequently the price of goods.

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