

British ships similar restrictions on our trade with that country that we imposed upon Prussian ships entering our ports. It then became obvious to every reflecting man, that we could no longer maintain the Navigation Act. To have negotiated with Prussia, as we had done with America, would have left us with only the same task to perform towards every other country separately. Mr Huskisson then clearly saw that the case was only to be met safely and wisely by a general law, applicable alike to all countries. The retaliatory acts of Prussia, though based only on the principles which dictated our laws, were the object of much clamour and complaint, on the part of the British shipowners of the day, who thus showed how little they approved of a principle adopted by others towards them, which they considered essential for them to adopt towards others. This state of events led the government, in 1823, to propose the Reciprocity Acts of the 4th and 5th of George IV. which authorised the King in Council to repeal all discriminating duties on the ships of such foreign countries entering our ports, as were willing to place our ships in a similar position as their own, in their ports. It was against these acts, dictated by such an obvious principle of fairness, and by such an absolute necessity of events, that the clamour of the British shipowners of the day was so loudly and so incessantly raised. In pursuance of those acts, treaties have been entered into with—

Prussia, Hanover, Denmark, Oldenburg, Mecklenburg, Greece, Bremen, Hamburg, Lubeck, States of La Plata, Columbia, Holland, France, Sweden and Norway, Mexico, Brazil, Austria, Russia, Portugal.

By these treaties it will be observed, however, that the privileges given to each country extend only to direct importations from each country.—This, however, was the strongest test to which British ships could be exposed, of their power to compete with foreign ships. If American ships could extinguish British ships in any trade, it was in bringing the produce of America to this country—in bringing their own cotton, tobacco, and rice from their own ports. If Prussian ships could successfully compete with British ships in any trade, it was in bringing their own corn and timber from the ports of the Baltic. If the ships of any foreign country had the means to destroy the trade of British ships, it was surely in bringing the produce of their own country from their own ports. Those treaties, therefore, as far as they went, exposed British ships to as much real competition as if the privileges had been extended, without any restriction, to the produce of any country brought from any port. All that was left in the shape of restrictions was no real protection, but acted only as wasteful and inconvenient annoyances, harassing to the merchant, and inconvenient to the true interests of the country.

Such, then, are the changes which have been made in the Navigation Act, as first passed, up to this time. Let us shortly inquire what have been the effects of these changes. The shipowners of the day confidently predicted the rapid decay and ultimate destruction of British shipping. Our navy was to be without men—and our carrying trade was to fall into the hands of strangers. No doubt our shipowners of that day laboured under many disadvantages; the high duties on hemp, subjected them to dear cordage; the high duties upon foreign timber, in protection of the produce of Canada, subjected them to a high price for the chief material which they used; and our corn and provision laws subjected them to an expensive and costly mode of victualling.—These were great disadvantages; but, strange to say, the shipowners, as a body, were always found foremost in the support of these restrictions and abuses; and when Huskisson proposed to relieve them by means of a draw-back upon materials used in building and victualling their ships, they actually refused the boon. So baneful was the system of protections, that every interest that fancied itself benefitted thereby, opposed changes even in its own favour, lest its own fancied privileges should be attacked or weakened in consequence. Such is the vicious circle in which error runs. But let us see how far the doleful prophecies of the shipowners of 1823 have been fulfilled or falsified by events, notwithstanding the admitted disadvantages under which, until quite recently they have been relieved of many of them, in spite of themselves. The gloomy fears of the shipowners of that day anticipated that the privileges granted to foreign ships, would transfer all the trade of this country to those who, it was asserted, could build and sail their ships cheaper than ourselves. The American trade was to be carried on exclusively by American ships. And the continental trade by Prussian, Norwegian, and other foreign ships; and, in fact, our shipping, in future, was to be confined only to our own colonies. What has been the result? For seven years prior to 1823 the shipping trade of this country was nearly stationary. The following is a comparison of the shipping which was entered inwards and outwards in 1815 and in 1823, the last year prior to the passing of the Reciprocity Acts:—

Shipping entered Inwards and Outwards.

	1815.		1823.	
	Inwards.	Outwards.	Inwards.	Outwards.
British..... tons.	1,312,217	1,311,716	1,668,336	1,383,622
Foreign..... " "	673,687	671,333	528,720	515,774
Total..... " "	1,985,904	1,983,051	2,197,056	1,899,396

Taking all our shipping during those seven years the increase was only about five per cent. Let us then see what progress it has made under the freer system since 1823. Lest we should be charged with profiting in this comparison by the extraordinary demand for shipping during the last four years, caused in a great measure by the repeal of that very system of protection which the shipowners themselves strove so much to maintain, we will be content to make the comparison between 1823 and 1842, which was notoriously one of the most depressed for the shipping interest of late years. The comparison will be thus:

Shipping entered Inwards and Outwards.

	1823.		1842.	
	Inwards.	Outwards.	Inwards.	Outwards.
British..... tons.	1,616,336	1,493,592	3,917,725	3,375,970
Foreign..... " "	627,720	515,774	1,203,333	1,253,176
Total..... " "	2,244,056	2,009,366	5,121,058	4,629,146

Thus, during the period when the shipping interest was to suffer such decay, the extent of British shipping has more than doubled, and the shipping of all kinds, which entered inwards and outwards in the trade of the country has increased more than 100 per cent!

But let us examine how far we were indebted to our colonial trade for this increase, and how far to the foreign trade, in open competition with the ships of all the world. For if it could be shown that the chief increase of British shipping had been to our colonies, where we still enjoyed a strict protection, even this increase would not prove the groundlessness of the fears entertained by the shipowners. If, on the other hand, it can be shown, that at least the same proportion of the increase of our shipping was to those foreign countries, where we met foreign ships in open competition, and where we had no exclusive advantages then it will be conclusive evidence, that the apprehensions of the shipowners were groundless, and that competition had worked for them the same advantages that it has done to the silk manufacturers and to the iron masters. We have before us Parliamentary returns, showing the proportion of our shipping engaged in the colonial and foreign trade, in 1820 and 1842, from which we gather the following facts.

In 1820, the 1,549,508 tons of British shipping which left our ports, were thus distributed:—

British Shipping entered Outwards to British Possessions.

	TONS.	MEM.
Gibraltar.....	14,375	620
Malta.....	5,171	300
Ionian Islands.....	7,808	436
Cape of Good Hope and coast of Africa.....	21,529	1,240
St. Helena.....	1,845	94
Mauritius.....	753	44
East Indies.....	51,133	4,073
New South Wales.....	2,823	181
British North America.....	341,620	17,616
British West Indies.....	233,460	12,900
Guernsey and Jersey.....	66,139	5,161
Total to British Possessions.....	746,822	42,820
Total to Foreign Neutral Countries.....	802,686	53,688
Grand total to all places.....	1,549,508	96,508

We thus see, that even in those times men were so little aware of the actual facts connected with our shipping, that, while protection to our colonies was maintained by many, chiefly on the ground that they were the sole dependence of our shipping interest, and the only nursery of our seamen—and while the Navigation Laws were insisted upon, as being essential to the existence of our shipping, nearly fifty-two per cent. of British tonnage, even then, was employed in a foreign trade, where we had no protection, but entered into free competition with the shipping of the whole world. Had such a fact been well known, and duly considered at the time, the apprehensions of our ship-owners, as to the effects of free trade, might have been entirely removed.

Let us now see how the British shipping, amounting to 3,375,270 tons were distributed, which left our ports in 1842,—after nineteen years' experience of the Reciprocity Acts, which were to destroy all, except our colonial trade. The following is the account:—

British Shipping entered Outwards to British Possessions.

	TONS.	MEM.
Gibraltar.....	43,503	3,600
Malta.....	40,141	2,043
Ionian Islands.....	7,058	398
Cape of Good Hope and coast of Africa.....	34,022	1,901
St. Helena.....	3,977	218
Mauritius.....	16,397	868
East Indies.....	262,101	10,076
New South Wales.....	61,234	2,878
British North America.....	495,842	19,420
British West Indies.....	261,314	14,839
Guernsey and Jersey.....	144,366	12,625
Total British Possessions.....	1,250,937	63,843
Total to Foreign Neutral Countries.....	2,124,333	112,007
Grand total to all countries.....	3,375,270	175,850

This account shows that we are dependant, for the employment of our shipping and our sailors, to the extent of sixty-three per cent, upon neutral countries, where we enjoy no protection, but where we meet in open competition the ships of all nations; while our own possessions, in which we still have exclusive privileges, employ only thirty-seven per cent. of our ships and our sailors; which shows even more strongly how little colonial protection can be insisted upon, on the grounds they are the main stay of our great commercial marine—the main source of the supply of sailors to our navy.

Now, let us see how the increase, during this period of British shipping employed to our colonies, compares with that employed in the foreign neutral markets of the world. The comparison will be as follows:—

British Shipping entered Outwards.

	1820.	1842.	INCREASE.
To British Possessions.....	746,822	1,250,937	67 p. cent.
To Foreign Neutral Countries.....	802,686	2,124,333	164 do.
Total.....	1,549,508	3,375,270	

Thus showing that that trade, which was to be the only future support of our shipping, increased during the period in question sixty-seven per cent, while that which, according to the prophecies of the shipowners in 1823, was to be entirely lost to the country, in consequence of the free trade measures then adopted, increased no less than one hundred and sixty-four per cent!!

TRADE OF THE ST. LAWRENCE.

(From the Quebec Gazette.)

The observations of "Fair play and no favour," in this day's Gazette, are deserving of public attention. The trade of the upper parts of the waters of the St. Lawrence will go to the ocean by the cheapest channel. The competition is with the New York canal, the Hudson, and the port of New York, in the season of navigation, and with the railroads in existence or about to be established from Lakes Michigan and Erie, from different ports on Lake Ontario, from its outlet at Kingston, from the foot of the ship navigation at Ogdensburg, and from Montreal to Boston and Portland. The expenses of its passing by these different routes will decide its course.