

upon our navigation laws, and what course it may behave us to pursue in reference to those objects which it professes to maintain—objects which no man can be more anxious to see secured than I am myself,—I mean the commercial greatness of the country, and the continuance of its military naval power. The Committee will perhaps allow me, in a very rapid and general manner, to call their attention to the changes that have taken place in the navigation laws in this country. I believe the first navigation law which is to be found on our statute-book was enacted in the fifth year of the reign of Richard II. ; and it contains perhaps the strongest provisions that are to be found in the whole code. It enacts broadly, “ That no subject of the King should ship any merchandise outwards or homewards in any but ships of the King’s liegeance, on pain of forfeiting all merchandise shipped in any other vessel.” This act only lasted a single year; it was found necessary to alter it the next year, and foreign ships were allowed to be employed if English ships could not be procured. A few years later it was enacted that English ships should only have reasonable rates of freight; and afterwards a law was introduced to fix a tariff of the *maximum* of the freights to be charged by vessels carrying between the ports of England and the principal ports of the continent of Europe. The distinctive character of this system was plainly that of exclusive monopoly and restriction. It lasted, with some modifications, but with-