

# LOSS OF THE COLONIES OF ENGLAND.

FROM THE SCOTCH REFORMERS' GAZETTE OF APRIL 11TH, 1846.

(TO THE EDITOR, OF THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.)

Glasgow, 8th April, 1846.

SIR.—As in your article on Saturday (*FOREIGN AND COLONIAL TRADE*) you grievously misrepresent the views, against out-and-out free trade, which I have put forth in the *Scotch Reformers' Gazette*, I hope you will not refuse me the privilege of setting myself right with readers of the *Guardian*.

Allow me to say, that there is not a man in England whose sympathies are more with the working classes than mine are; indeed, I have always held that the other classes or orders in such a society as ours are only a public benefit to the extent that, directly or indirectly, they are of use and assistance to those who labour for their bread.

My objection to the principle of Sir Robert Peel's legislation, is, that he regards the poor only as consumers, and legislates for them only in common with the rich. (How blessed the poor would be to find themselves so circumstanced.)

I am of opinion, on the contrary, (as stated in my letter in the *Reformers' Gazette* of 4th April), that, like the Americans, THE WHOLE OBJECT OF OUR LEGISLATION SHOULD BE THE BENEFIT OF THOSE WHO LABOUR.

If, then, you and I are both friends of the people, our controversy becomes the friendly and generous one of WHICH PLAN SHALL BENEFIT THEM MOST.

Now, I object to what you call the principle of free trade, because I do not call it a principle or system at all, but just in trade what free-thinking is in religion, a departure from all principle or system, than which the worst possible embodiment of sincere belief is less fatal or dangerous to the community.

To Sir Robert Peel's tariff, as reducing the protection on manufactured goods, I would object still more than to the removal of protection to British and colonial corn, were it not that one of the immediate effects flowing from the latter, viz.,—the loss of the British American Colonies—would be irremediable.

I frankly admit, however, that with free trade in manufactures, the retention of a duty on foreign corn ought not to be submitted to by the British artisan.

These measures must go together, or together be stopped.

If they pass into law, we will not only lose the trade of the colonies, but the colonies themselves; and, with them, our naval supremacy, and, secondly, Ireland.

With regard to the possibility of retaining the colonies, I defy the Colonial Minister, or any one else, to show me any bond of union between Canada and England, after free trade is introduced.

The fact is, that ignorantly governed as that colony has been, by Downing-street, the loyalists will not be able to stand their ground against the republicans in Canada West, if the former are armed with no fact, in favour of the British Government; and if the monstrous principle is avowed, that England wants territory in America, not to benefit, but only to rule, or misrule it!

The Republican party in Upper Canada are all free traders, and a favourite means of getting the province free from England (by making it of no use to the mother country) used to be the pushing for free trade with the United States.

In 1836, the Lower House of the Canadian Parliament (which had then a majority of Republicans) petitioned the King on this subject, and the following remarks of my own, in the colony at the time, I happen to have preserved:—

"Though addressed to the King, the province is evidently its intended sphere of usefulness. The petition carries to the foot of the Throne suggestions, which if acquiesced in, would leave Canada of no use to England. In fact, the repeal of our frontier duties would at once endanger the connection with England, seeing that we could expect nothing less than the repeal as a consequence of those laws of the United Kingdom which give our products advantages in the home market, in return for our employing the British artisans and ship-builders. The Republicans (the present petitioners) will then triumphantly say to us, where, now, are all your old arguments, to show the value to our farmer of the connection?"

In the following year (1837) the State of New York stopped specie payment, &c. of the legislature, and we had then brought before us more clearly than ever that even as a protection for our circulation duties on the frontier were required, such that if free trade had existed, the only safety for the stocks of our merchants and the labour of our farmers and mechanics (in Canada they feel as brethren), would have been to deprecate our currency also, and retain our gold, till our neighbours returned to a specie standard.

I go into these particulars to show that free trade between Canada and the United States (the necessary consequence of the introduction of free trade into England), IS EQUIVALENT TO THE SEPARATION OF THE COLONY FROM ENGLAND. The Americans will not in turn free trade with us; and having all the disadvantages of the trade with the United States, the natural desire of the Canadians to have the advantages of it, will precipitate the separation sooner than the general difference between the views and habits of the Canadian and the American would lead parties at a distance to expect it.

The loss of British America thus effected, the empire, instead of soon being able (through applying enlightened and active management in these colonies) to raise up a colonial trade intrinsically as valuable as all our foreign trade, will have the present colonial trade reduced to a mere shadow of its former self, and the amount per head that colonists take of British goods. This is the consummation so devoutly desired by the Americans. They will tell you otherwise; but never let us forget the sympathies of 1837 and 1838, nor allow ourselves to be gulled into the belief that the heart's-wish of every Republican is not to see the United States possessed of Quebec, and monarchy driven from America, and not to see WASHINGTON's favourite project carried out of according to their Republic the Gibraltar of our West Indian colonies, the Bermudas, to make them a nest of hornets for the annoyance of English commerce in times of trouble.

You also accuse me of ALLEGING THAT THE BRITISH ARTISAN IS DEPENDANT ON COLONIAL TRADE FOR EMPLOYMENT WHICH HE RECEIVES.

Now, I allege no such absurdity, although I think that, had we for the last twenty years followed a sound and extensive system of removing to the colonies of our surplus population, this country might now have been very independent of foreign trade. WHAT I ALLEGUE IS, THAT THE ONLY PERMANENT DEPENDENCE OF THE BRITISH ARTISAN IS THE PROSPERITY OF BRITISH AGRICULTURE, OF WHICH COLONIAL INDUSTRY IS A BRANCH. I allege, moreover, and that truthfully, that the Colonial, like the Home trade, has the only limit to its purchases of manufactures in the extent of its entire means, while Brother Jonathan, and all other foreigners, will not take English goods for one-half the amount even of that part of their means which they draw from England.

The following extract of my letter of 14th March, in the *Scotch Reformers' Gazette*, will show exactly the views I expressed:—

In a former number it was shown that free trade must necessarily, in its very nature, lose us the colonies, because the principle of protection abandoned, the colonial system (which is a mere branch of it) falls also, or, what is in my mind far worse (and could only last a year or two), the colonies become a drag on the empire, having ceased to benefit the mother country in any way after they have thrown off the Imperial Parliament's right to legislate for their trade, and commenced free trade with all the world.

But I argue for the retention of the colonies only, because it is the interest of England.

I hold that it were better for England to lose her colonies, magnificent though these be, than to forbear doing anything which is shown to be clearly in favour of the oppressed population in this country.

Though I before pointed out that the adoption of free trade would necessarily lose the colonies (whose markets there is no reason for us going to the expense of defending, unless our manufactures are protected there), I do not pretend to argue that, to save the colonies, for their sake alone, should prevent us adopting free trade in England, if the greater and more immediate interests of the mother country would be advantaged thereby.

Far, however, from being the case, I view free trade as tending to reduce the extent of our own manufactures, to degrade the condition of our manufacturers, and thus to secure for the aristocracy by-and-bye a mono-

poly of political power in England, as rendering it in character more an agricultural country than at present!

In fact I view that free trade is suicide on the part of Mr. Cobden and the weavers. I cannot suppose any way by which Sir Robert Peel has secured the support of those independent members of the aristocracy, who are favourable to his measure, in the face of the score of their friends, and the inward contempt of their former political adversaries, and by their seeing it to be the ultimate interest of their class.

Sir Robert Peel may have shown them that, as they individually are now able to submit to a loss, they should do so, as this would be the only means of rolling back the tide of popular feeling in politics, and securing the reduction of every interest in the country into the narrow limit that formerly enabled them to control the government of the country.

I view the FREE TRADE PROPOSED AS ONLY REMOVING THE RESTRICTIONS FROM, AND GIVING FREEDOM TO, THE INDUSTRY OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

Far from being an encouragement to native industry, FREE TRADE PRACTICALLY DENIES THE BRITISH ARTISAN'S RIGHT TO LABOUR, BY TAKING AWAY HIS OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO.

Small though the exports to the Colonies show in your tables, it is wonderful to me to see the amounts they are, knowing how grievously the progress of the Colonies has been neglected.

Neither the two most practical of purposes—the AMELIORATION OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE BRITISH ARTISAN, AND THE PROCURING PERMANENT MARKETS FOR OUR MANUFACTURES, through planting in our Colonies a population with British habits—have come home to governments, which have not usually been many months at a time otherwise engaged than in mere struggles for existence.

The comparative value of Home and Colonial, as compared with Foreign trade, must not be judged by mere figures.

It should be remembered that as much or more profit accrues in the Home and Colonial trade, to British subjects on the goods after they leave Manchester as before, and that the Home and Colonial trade take no gold, while to the Americans we pay more gold than goods, and do not materially increase our exports to the United States; although in 1845 we took from them 1,499,600 bales of cotton, against 329,906 bales in 1822, with a similar increase in most of our other imports. From the Colonies you have an increasing demand, as the population increases; but the United States, with a population of twenty millions, do not take double the quantity of goods they did when a colony, with scarcely over two millions of a population.

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