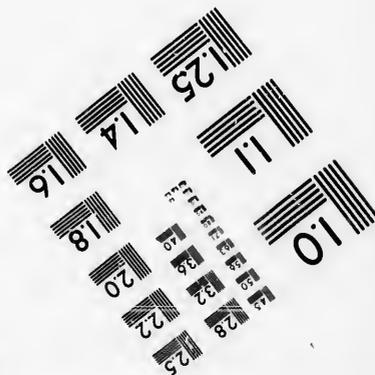
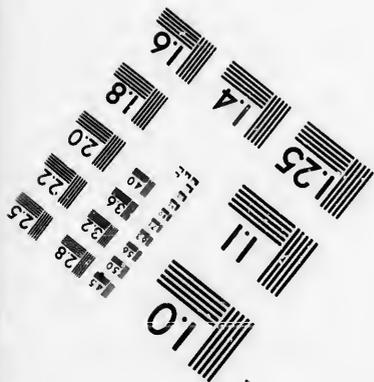
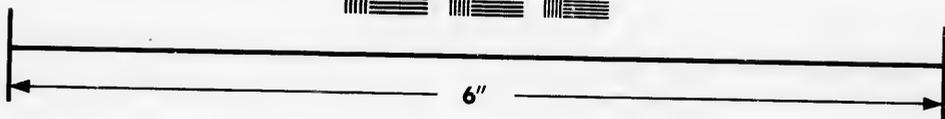
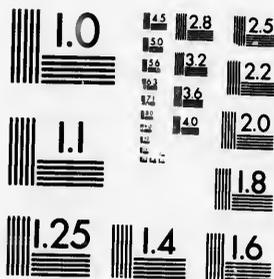


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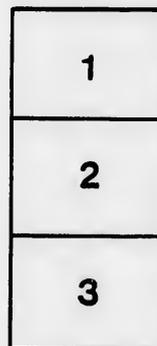
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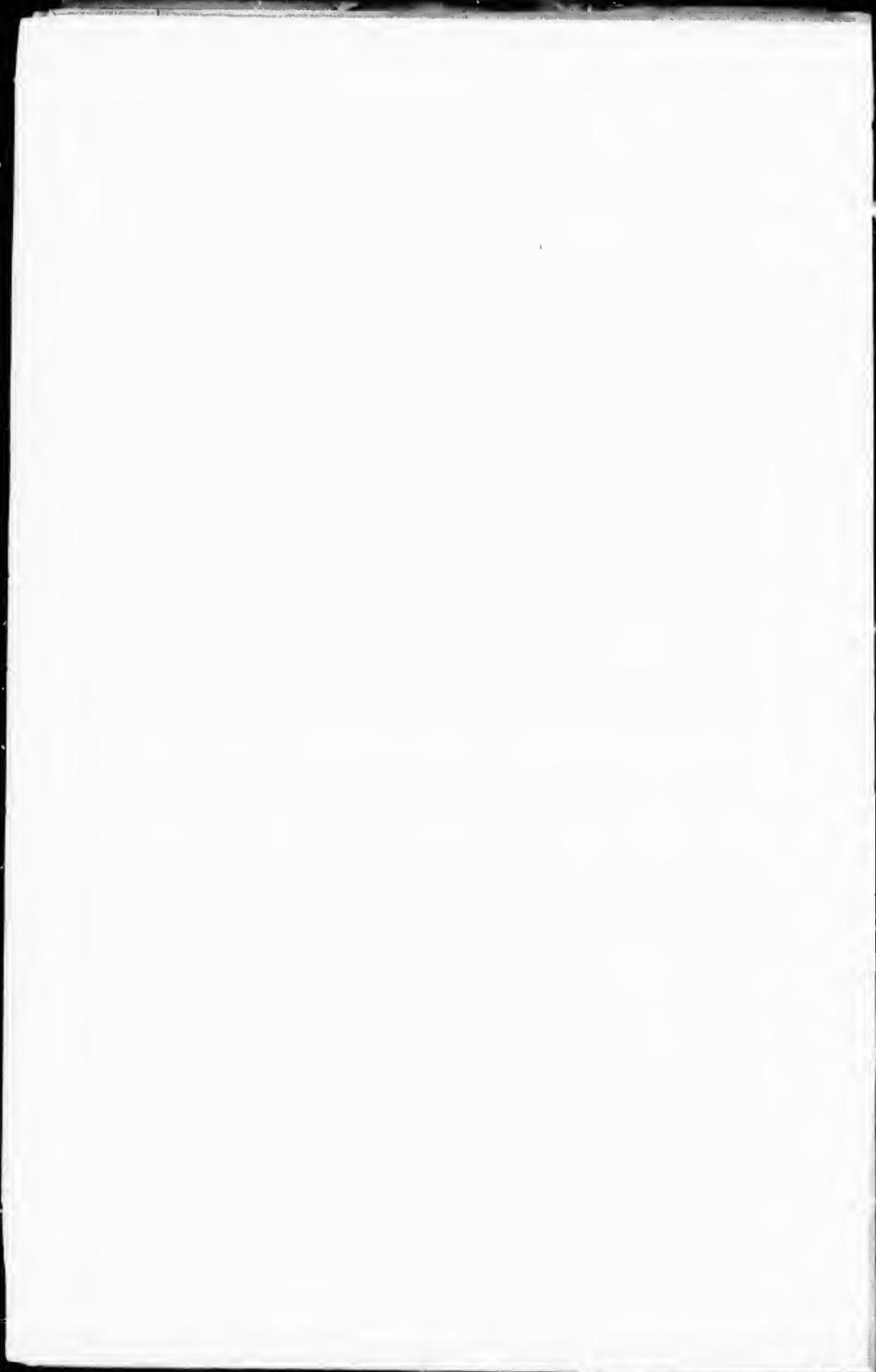
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Vol. 31

ENGLAND'S
NAVIGATION LAWS

NO PROTECTION

TO

BRITISH SHIPPING.

BY

JOHN REVANS.

LONDON:

JOHN W. PARKER, WEST STRAND.

MDCCCXLIX.

1849

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INTRODUCTION.

THE annexed statement was written by me and first published seventeen years ago, in the *Westminster Review* of July, 1831. It was drawn up at the request of the late Earl Spencer, then Lord Althorp and Chancellor of the Exchequer. His Lordship had attempted to reduce the protecting duty on British North American timber, and in consequence had called forth the loud lamentations of the British shipowner—British shipping was to be annihilated, and Britain's glory to set for ever. As the circumstances are now precisely what they were then, so the same argument and the same facts are just as applicable. I do not change the dates, as they stand evidence that the error has continued seventeen years after it was first pointed out, and that the Whig Government, so far back as 1832, attempted its remedy, though repulsed by the combined phalanx of sinister interests, then in its fullest strength. My object was to show, that *the Navigation Laws had never afforded the slightest protection to British shipping*—that they had been useless to the end for which they were created. They were useless, because the competition of foreign shipping, so greatly dreaded, had always been as complete as it could have been if the Navigation Laws had never existed. The

competition between English and foreign ships has at all times been carried on extensively, in such foreign ports as were equally open to both. No one, I suppose, will assert that British can compete with foreign ships in foreign ports, but cannot compete in British ports. If British ships had required higher freights than foreign, they would not have been employed where either could be obtained. British ships would not have sought employ in foreign ports, if the freights there were not equal to those given in British ports. And if the rate of freight in England had not been remunerating, the building of ships would have ceased, and British shipping, long ere this, would have ceased to be.

It will be seen that I have fully proved my position. And though some additional evidence has been obtained in support of that position, nothing has transpired during the long interval either to change or to vary it. But if I have proved my position, then it follows of necessity that the Navigation Laws had as much to do with producing the maritime greatness of England, as Tenterden Steeple had in producing the Goodwin Sands. The good citizen in Molière was surprised to learn that he had always spoken in prose. So the British shipowner may be surprised to learn that he has always been in full and successful competition with the foreign shipowner.

At the time I wrote the annexed statement, I had been thirteen years actively engaged in the foreign commerce of this country and in shipping transactions. I was, therefore, practically acquainted with the matters about which I wrote, and I had the satisfaction of learning, that one of the most enlightened

merchants of that time, Mr. Thomas Tooke, (the author of the work on Prices,) pronounced my statement to be strictly correct.

On the inquiry into the power of the British to compete with the foreign shipowner, an immense mass of useless detail has lately been collected about the comparative cost of tar, oakum, and of tenpenny nails; about beef and biscuit; and about the natural delight which foreign sailors are said to take in being on short commons, and fed on bad food. We may spend the remainder of our lives in striking balance sheets between all the different nations of the world, from Kamtschatka to the United States, relative to the cost in each nation of every article of ship-building, from the thread used by the sail-maker to the timber used by the shipwright, in the construction of each class of vessel, from a Thames wherry to an Indiaman, and yet not come by such means to a satisfactory conclusion. If any one wishes to confuse another, that's the process.

There is a very homely saying, which is very applicable to this question—"that the proof of the pudding is in the eating." Who would think of going to an elaborate proof of the quality of the plums, of the flour, of the candied peel, and of the brandy, of which the pudding before him is composed, in order to prove that it must be good, when a single mouthful of the compound will instantly decide? Why, then, go into an elaborate proof of our ability to build and navigate as cheaply as any country in the world, when the successful competition, through by-gone ages, of British with foreign shipping triumphantly proves the fact? But if a long and successful competition with

the foreigner is not sufficient proof of our ability to build and man our ships as cheaply as he can, we have the following irresistible proof.

Ships built in the Channel Islands are, *de facto*, British ships, and claim a British register. There are not any duties in the Channel Islands—they are free ports. Anything may be introduced from any country, in any bottom, into those islands, perfectly free from duty. No place in the world, therefore, possesses all the articles for the construction of shipping at so small a cost as the Channel Islands. The shipwrights of Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Southampton, can reach those islands in a few hours; and when there can live upon perfectly untaxed food, and even enjoy untaxed tobacco, and other untaxed luxuries. There are localities in those islands eligible in position, and sufficient in space, in which the whole shipping of Europe might be rebuilt. Yet, with these immense advantages, the British shipowner does not construct above a dozen or two vessels a year in those islands. It may fairly be inferred that he does not build more there, because he does not find any advantage in building there. On the contrary, the resident shipowner of the Channel Islands occasionally has a vessel built in England. Can there be better proof of the ability of England to build ships as cheaply as any country in the world? The facts I state are perfectly known to every British shipowner.

It will be said this may all be true, but *why abolish the navigation laws, if, as you say, they have always been a dead letter?* I answer—because, though useless, they are mischievous.

1st. Because they have been actually injurious to British shipping.

2ndly.—Because they have been most injurious to the general commerce of this country.

Injurious to British shipping, by inducing other countries to have Navigation Laws, and thus preventing the extended use of British ships. Injurious to British shipping, in causing our shipowners to depend upon the support afforded by those laws, instead of upon their own skill, and the skill and care of those to whom they entrust the navigation of their ships. In a note at page 17, it will be seen that, seventeen years ago, British ships (quality for quality) obtained higher freights in foreign ports than the ships of any other country. British ships then possessed a higher character than the ships of other nations. The evidence given before the late committee of the House of Commons proves, that the vessels of the United States, of Bremen, and of several other countries, now obtain higher freights than English vessels; whilst some foreign shippers will not, at any price, charter our vessels for the carriage of damageable cargoes; not because the ships are inferior, but because British masters and crews are proverbially reckless—damaging their cargoes and constantly incurring a general average. The British shipowner, his captain, and his crew, now fancy they derive protection from the Navigation Laws, and are therefore reckless. Remove those Laws, and you make them sensible that they have nothing to depend upon but their own skill, industry, and economy. Then, in a few years, the improvement in the number of British ships, and in the character of their crews, will be remarkable.

Protection, it thus appears, has been as mischievous to British shipping, as it invariably has been to every

branch of British industry, around which it has thrown its baneful influence. When the Silk Trade was highly protected, it was periodically in distress. The cry was always: "Give us more protection." The trade never thought of more economy, more skill, more energy. No, there was an easier course—more protection! Since all protection has been removed from the Silk Trade, it is not more often in distress than any other trade. The manufacturers now rely upon more skill, more energy, more economy, and therefore they are more prosperous. Whilst the Farmers relied on the Corn Laws, they were always in distress. They were afraid to improve, lest they should lose their claim to protection. When the fate of the Corn Laws was decided, the invariable cry at the agricultural meetings was, "We must be up and doing, we must put our shoulder to the wheel in earnest—we must not, we will not be beaten by the foreigner." They changed their whining for the plucky self-reliance of Englishmen. Any one who knows anything of agriculture, knows their resolve was no empty talk. During the last two years, farming in England, in every branch, has progressed more than it had done during the whole of the previous century. When the farmer has time to look about him, he will be astonished to find how much he has improved his knowledge, his practice, and his results. Farming will be another proof, that protection and injury are synonymous terms, when applied to industry.

The second objection to the continuance of the Navigation Laws is, *that they are most injurious to the general commerce of the country.* Whenever an alteration is proposed in our Tariff, the shipowner starts

forward with a veto—"The shipping interest will suffer." The nation, properly jealous of its maritime superiority, becomes alarmed; and the proposed improvement is given up. This country has allowed itself to be injured, during a long period, to the extent of nearly two millions a year, for the support of the British North American timber trade, merely because the shipowners have declared, that importing our timber from North America is more beneficial to British shipping, than importing it from the North of Europe.

Before concluding, I will refer to a fact worthy of the consideration of those who are anxious for the extension of British maritime superiority—to a fact which has never yet been brought under notice. It is, that *if the ports of the whole world were equally open to the shipping of all countries, without the slightest distinction, England would necessarily become in a short time the sole shipowner of the world.*

This may appear rather a startling proposition; but let us see upon what grounds it is based. England is the only country possessing a large surplus capital—that is, capital which cannot be employed at home. Hitherto she has managed to ease herself of it by attempting to work mines in foreign countries; by lending it to foreign Governments; and, lately, by constructing foreign railroads. In most cases, she loses both principal and interest. A revolution, a war, or a little repudiation—and all is gone. The rate of discount in England averages many per cent. less than in the United States, and somewhat less than in any country in the world. The rate of discount in a country is the best criterion of the value of capital—

that is, of the rate of profit derived from the employment of capital. A rate of freights, therefore, which will amply repay an English capitalist for the use of his capital, will not be sufficient to repay a foreign capitalist. Then, an English shipowner can afford to take lower freights than the shipowner of any other country. In an open market, he who offers at the cheapest rate will command the supply. An English capitalist will not compete with the United States capitalist in owning houses in New York, though the profits there are greater than the profits of house-owning in London—because he will not trust his capital permanently beyond his supervision. But a ship is never beyond the control of its owner. It can be removed from one port to another at any moment—it can at any moment be ordered home; it is never really out of the power of its owner. It is, therefore, just that species of property which a capitalist can most safely employ in a foreign country. Shipping might be termed international capital.

As I have not time to arrange the valuable evidence which exists in proof of my assertion, I must be content for the present merely to throw it out as a suggestion.

I am aware, that shipowning is not quite as simple an employment of capital as owning shares in foreign mines and in foreign railroads, or owning foreign stock; that those investments do not require personal supervision; but a mortgage upon a ship or upon a number of ships, with a general policy of insurance, has always been a common practice, and is not a bad security, with 5 per cent. When our example shall have induced other countries to abolish those Navigation Laws which our foolish example caused them

to adopt, and when a demand for further capital in shipping shall arise, in consequence of a foreign demand, the required capital will soon find its way into that channel; for it will prove rather more profitable than in South American mines, or in Spanish bonds.

The Government measure of last year was a long stride in the right direction; but still, it is far short of what the true interests of the country demand. However, we must take the instalment, and be thankful.

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ENGLAND'S NAVIGATION LAWS,

ETC.

(Reprinted from the Westminster Review, Art. XI. July 1831.)

THE people of this country are apt to attach excessive importance to their naval superiority, and to view with uncommon jealousy all enactments, which may be, or may be thought to be, injurious to our maritime power. The mercantile shipowners, taking advantage of the feeling, are ever on the alert to keep the country in alarm on the subject of what they call the Shipping Interest. They connect the Shipping Interest with the naval superiority of this country, and they endeavour to persuade the people that none are so good judges of what affects, or is likely to affect the Shipping Interest as the shipowners. In times past, when the legislature was not more instructed than the shipowners, the Navigation Laws were enacted to protect, as it is called, the shipping of this country. From that hour to the present time, there has been an ever constant clamour on the part of the shipowners respecting the necessity of protection, and the insufficiency of the laws hitherto made for that purpose. No matter what improvement in trade may be suggested, no matter how distant may be its connexion with shipping, the moment the proposal is heard, a shout of disapprobation and doleful warning is immediately raised by the shipping interest. Destruction to this country is regularly at least once a year foretold by this fearful body, and the ignorant and the timorous are often scared by their lugubrious lamentations.

If the grounds of these warnings be considered, they will be seen to result rather from prejudiced and heated imaginations, than from reason,—the offspring of ignorance worked on by the powerful stimulus of self-interest.

The Navigation Laws have been, and are by the Shipping Interest considered their Palladium. Without them it is supposed that the mercantile marine could never have arisen, without them that it cannot be maintained. Both the one opinion and the other are incorrect.

The Navigation Laws are deemed beneficial, because they are fancied to exclude the vessels of other countries from competition with our own. And this exclusive or monopoly trade is usually pointed out as the happy circumstance which has created the maritime superiority of Great Britain. But it can be shown that this exclusive trade has not been maintained: that the Navigation Laws have not created a monopoly—therefore monopoly, through them, has not created our naval superiority, therefore the Navigation Laws have not produced those wonderful benefits for which they have hitherto received the too blind admiration of our countrymen.

On the other hand, while these benefits may be proved to be chimerical, the evils resulting from this source may be shown to be important.

To make out these two sets of propositions is the object of the following observations.

It is an extraordinary circumstance, that in the various discussions on the subject of the commercial marine it should never have been perceived, that the vessels of Great Britain have, through a series of years, been actively and extensively in competition with the vessels of all foreign countries, so completely in fact as to have rendered our highly-prized Navigation Laws a mere cipher, as regards the object for which they were enacted. The competition, indeed, has been indirect, and therefore it and its effects have been overlooked; its effects have nevertheless been as complete as if the most direct and obvious competition had existed. The shipowner, though always well acquainted with the facts, from his habits of mind, has not been able to view them as a chain of consequences, nor to point out the cause which gave them birth, he therefore has strenuously resisted all relaxation of the Navigation Laws, supposing them to be his only protection. The government indeed have been ignorant of the facts, and therefore could know nothing of the efficient, but indirect competition which has throughout existed in spite of every opposing enactment.

It must be remembered that competition, with its effect, equalization of freights, may be produced in two ways. There may be competition between the vessels of Great Britain, and foreign vessels trading between foreign ports or British colo-

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nial ports and the ports of Great Britain. And it may also exist between the vessels of Great Britain and foreign vessels trading between foreign ports alone. The former of these we shall call direct competition, the latter indirect competition; and it is the latter which has always existed between British and foreign vessels.

It is well known to every ship-owner, or if it is not, any one can immediately acquire the information on referenc to the returns made to Lloyd's by their various agents abroad, that not only since, but before, long before, the reciprocity system was established in this country, British vessels were the chief carriers between a variety of foreign ports, ports in which any other vessels, equally foreign to those ports, would have possessed equal privileges. British vessels are and have been the principal carriers between the ports in South America; and between the ports of South America and those of the Mediterranean and the Baltic. The proportion of British to all other vessels trading between South America and foreign Europe is two-thirds of the whole, the other third being principally Spanish and Brazilian. British vessels are constantly absent for three or four years trading between the Levant, the Italian, and the Austrian ports; as well as between an immense variety of other ports in the Mediterranean; and yet in none of those ports are there any laws which give preference to British vessels over the build of any other country. The American, the Swede, the Dane, or the Prussian, have the same privilege. If the vessels of any of those countries offered to carry equally cheap, they would be employed to at least an equal extent with British vessels; and if while equally good, they were more cheap, they would, of course, wholly drive British vessels from their present foreign employ.*

It is no answer, to say that British vessels have not been exclusively used between all foreign ports; or to cite cases in which the vessels of some particular country have almost monopolized the trade between two foreign ports. We know that the vessels of the United States are the principal carriers between the ports of St. Domingo and Cuba and Russian ports. This, however, is not because the vessels of the United States run at lower freights than the vessels of Great Britain. It is owing to the peculiar situation of those countries,

* If the government will direct the consul at the principal port of each country, to ascertain the number of vessels, or amount of tonnage, arrived during each year, from 1814 to 1830, distinguishing the tonnage of the country itself, British tonnage, and all other foreign tonnage in one total, the truth of what we have stated will be instantly apparent.

both as to locality, and as to their wants as consumers. The people of those Islands require the provisions and lumber of America, the Russians require the sugar and coffee of St. Domingo and Cuba, and the Americans require the hemp and iron of Russia. Thus, a vessel leaving America for Russia takes a cargo to the Havannah, there she loads sugar and coffee for Russia, and in Russia receives a cargo for America. Throughout her long voyage she is at no moment unemployed. If British vessels were employed in the trade between the ports of St. Domingo or of Cuba and Russia, they would go in ballast from Great Britain to those Islands, a voyage of six or seven weeks; because, though they might load in the United States for the Islands, when in Russia they could not load for the United States—they could only load for England, which is not half the voyage. At a much lower freight, therefore, the American can earn in that trade as much as the English vessel at a much higher, and, consequently, the American is enabled to carry for less; but this is a peculiarity of situation. In like manner, the vessels of the Baltic go to the Mediterranean with cargoes of Baltic produce, and, consequently, the Danish vessels in particular, which have a reputation for goodness, are the chief carriers between the Mediterranean and the Baltic. In this instance, as in the former, the foreign vessel is freighted throughout, whereas the English vessel would start, whether for the Baltic or the Mediterranean port, in ballast. These, however, are instances of decided advantage in peculiar trades arising from locality. We do not contend that British vessels when under heavy disadvantage have been able to compete with foreign vessels: all that we are endeavouring to prove is, that in equally advantageous circumstances the British vessel has not only continued in a trade, but driven the vessels of every other country from it. We will suppose the American vessels not to exist, and the trade between the Islands and Russia to be open to the English, Swedish, Danish, and Prussian vessels, the three last would never be employed; they would have no advantage over British vessels from locality—all four would go to the Islands equally in ballast, and depend solely on the return voyage for compensation. In like manner, let us suppose the Danish, Swedish, and Prussian vessels not to exist, and the trade between the Baltic and the Mediterranean to be equally open to the British and the United States vessels, the vessels of the two countries would start equally in ballast, and, consequently, upon an equal footing; the vessels of the United States could not sail for the freight which would pay

the English vessels. The trade between South America and the Mediterranean and the Baltic is the best proof of the assertion. In those trades the vessels of either country have equally to make one trip more or less without a freight, and, consequently, none but English vessels are found therein; American, Swedish, Danish, and Prussian vessels being hardly known, or so little known as scarcely to need remark.

For carrying hides to Holland and Hamburgh from South America the Danish vessels are sufficiently good; and being of an inferior quality to British vessels are afforded at a less freight. But such a circumstance cannot be adduced as a proof of British vessels being unable to sail at as low a freight as foreign vessels; and, consequently, that wherever they come into competition, the British vessels would be driven from the market. As well might it be said that, because some of the slop-built vessels manufactured in our North American colonies (particularly in the years 1824, 1825, and 1826) of timber actually condemned by the inspectors as unfit for exportation, could afford to run at a much less freight than our Thames-built East and West Indiamen, the latter would be laid up in dock. The former were never fit for carrying any but cargoes that could not be damaged, as timber or coals; and would be rejected if they would carry for nothing silk, cotton, or sugar. If, on the other hand, the East or West Indiamen, built of the best materials, and finished in the highest manner, attempted to compete in the timber or coal trade with the miserable class of vessels just named, then, indeed, the owners would be ruined. The vessels being of a superior description would not assist them to higher freights; the commoner vessels being equally good for conveying timber and coals, would always be preferred at a lower freight, quality not being of importance. Wherever foreign vessels are in foreign employ found competing with British vessels, the former are taken at inferior freights for inferior purposes, whilst the latter are taken at superior freights for superior purposes.*

If it were fairly dealing with the question to cite cases where decided local advantages exist, such as are the cases of the Americans carrying from St. Domingo or Cuba, to Russia, and the Danes and Swedes, carrying between the Mediterranean and the Baltic, we might adduce as a proof, that British vessels are able to beat the vessels of all other coun-

* British vessels are generally hired in foreign ports at a rate from twenty per cent. to thirty per cent. higher than the vessels of almost any other country.

tries, the trade from Great Britain to Mexico. There is no law to prevent foreign vessels loading in Great Britain for Mexico, and yet none but British vessels ever do; the reason being, that when at Mexico the British vessel can run to Honduras or Belize, and obtain a cargo of mahogany, or to New Orleans for a cargo of cotton, or to the West Indies for a cargo of sugar, with which to return to this country. A foreign vessel could not return with a cargo from any of these places to Great Britain, and for many of the cargoes there are few countries, except Great Britain, which offer a market: it would therefore make a voyage in ballast, most probably a long one, but this would be no proof that the foreign vessel could not sail at as low freight as the British, when under equal advantages.

Besides the disadvantage of locality against British vessels in carrying between the Baltic and the Mediterranean, there is another arising from the laws of the northern countries. None of the countries of the Baltic, with the exception of Sweden and Norway, will permit British vessels to enter from ports not British, although they will allow the vessels of almost every other foreign country to carry between their own and any foreign port in the world. Such is also the case with France and Holland: they exclude us from a privilege granted to most other nations.

It is not wonderful, therefore, that our vessels are not often found carrying between the Baltic and Mediterranean, placed as they are under every disadvantage; and their absence cannot be adduced as a proof of their being unable to compete with foreign vessels upon equal terms. Equal terms are the terms feared by the friends of restriction.

Were foreign vessels permitted to compete with British in carrying from British colony and foreign ports to ports in the United Kingdom, they would only be on equal terms; but then it is evident they need not be dreaded.

Having shown that British vessels not only are now, but have been from time immemorial, employed to a considerable extent between foreign ports, where no fiscal or local circumstances exist either in favour or against British ships; and in which consequently they are on an equality with the vessels of every other country, and no more; it now remains to be considered what have been the general effects to the British shipowner resulting from this competition.

So long as British vessels carry between ports, wherein the vessels of other countries are equally favoured, British vessels must carry at as low a rate as the vessels of other countries.

Did they not they would not be employed ; this must be so self-evident, that it only needs to be mentioned.

If, then, those which have been employed abroad, have carried at as low freights as foreign vessels of equal goodness, so have those which have been employed between foreign ports, or British colonial ports and the ports of Great Britain, from which employment formerly foreigners were wholly excluded, and to which they are now only partially admitted under the Reciprocity Act. It would be absurd to suppose, that the vessels of Great Britain, carrying between foreign ports, carry at lower freights than those employed between the British colonial or foreign ports and the ports of the United Kingdom. No shipowner is willing to make a sacrifice for the good of the rest. Every owner of ships, like every owner of goods, seeks for his ships the best market, and only takes the price offered him because no better is to be had ; this position, perhaps, cannot be more clearly explained than by the illustration of a charter by the month. That engagement may be, that the charterer shall pay all the port charges and the insurance. In such case, it matters but little to the owner of the ship to what part of the world his vessel goes ; he will pay all other expenses, and hire her at a fixed rate per ton, per month. Let it be supposed that two monthly charters are in the market, the charterers to pay port charges and insurance ; the one to run wholly between British colonial ports and Great Britain, the other charter to run between wholly foreign ports—for example, between South American and foreign European ports. Let it be supposed that there are two vessels, each applicable to the purpose of either charter. Twenty shillings per ton per month are offered by the person wanting a vessel for British employment, and nineteen shillings only are offered for the foreign employment. It is evident that one only of the vessels can have the British charter, but which shall give way to the other ? Each owner prefers twenty shillings, and each considers that anything more than nineteen shillings is preferable to that latter sum. The two vessels compete with each other for the British employment till they reduce the offer to nineteen shillings, the rate of the foreign charter, when (both charters in other respects being equal) it becomes immaterial to each owner which charter his vessel may obtain ; but the effect on the freight in the meantime is evident. That which is true, however, between two vessels, is true between a greater number. It does not matter whether there is one British and one foreign charter in the market, or ninety-five British and five foreign charters. So

long as there are any vessels willing to take foreign employment, so long foreign employment is evidently equal in profit to British employment: for the surplus British vessels would tender at something less than the other British vessels were to receive, provided it were only a fraction more than for foreign employment; and the persons requiring vessels for British employment would take those vessels which, all things considered, offered at the lowest price. Whilst, therefore, there are one thousand British charters, and one thousand and fifty British vessels, so long will British freights and foreign freights be equal. So long only as the number of British vessels are just sufficient for British employment, will vessels in British employment receive higher remuneration than vessels in foreign employment; whether those vessels be British or foreign; and consequently so long as a portion of vessels having British registers, have been in foreign service, so long have British freights and foreign freights been on a level: the differences in voyages consisting of bad or good climates, intricate and easy navigations, and long or short periods, as well as the qualities of vessels being considered: for such differences equally exist between the various British employments, as between foreign employment and British employment. It would be almost impossible to name two voyages, where, in every minute particular, the circumstances were similar; and consequently any two instances of similar length where the employment would be equally good at a similar price.

It is plain, then, that British vessels have from an indefinite period been in full competition with foreign vessels, and that it would be absurd to imagine that the carrying trade possessed by British ships between colonial and foreign ports and the ports of the United Kingdom, is owing to the existence of the Navigation Laws; but it is evident, that whether those laws existed or not, British vessels would equally have possessed their past and present supremacy.

A case completely parallel to that of the British shipowner, may be found in the exclusive supply of the British demand for cotton by the British manufacturer. Does the British manufacturer,—does any man who can lay claim to the smallest powers of reasoning, suppose that the British cotton manufacturer owes his monopoly of the British markets to the duty of ten per cent. imposed by the legislature on the importation of foreign manufactured cotton? If the protecting duty were abolished to-morrow, and a bounty were given to the foreigner of two and a half per cent., not an ounce more of foreign manufactured cotton would be used in this country than is

now used. Would any one contend that the British cotton manufacturer does not, to all intents and purposes, compete with the foreign cotton manufacturer, because a protecting duty of ten per cent. exists in this country, and of fifteen per cent. in the colonies, and foreign cottons are never found in either the one or the other? The foreign manufacturer could not supply those markets, because he could not supply them so cheaply. In the markets of South America, and in the markets of many countries of Europe, the British manufacturer has no protection; and yet has he not always kept the markets almost exclusively in his own hands: and is not the supply of foreign markets competing with the foreign manufacturer, as completely as if no protecting duty existed at home? Is it not absurd to say, that we can compete with the foreigner abroad, but not in our own markets, whilst to foreign markets we have, like himself, a freight to pay, but for the home market he has a freight, and we have none?

In like manner with our shipping. Its monopoly of the British carrying trade is not owing to the protection afforded by the Navigation Laws, it is owing to circumstances perfectly independent of them. Neither can it be said of British shipping that it cannot compete with foreign shipping when it does compete, and has always competed though only in foreign markets; nor that British shipping can compete in foreign ports, but cannot compete in British ports.

Whilst the truth of the statements and reasoning are admitted, it will probably be answered by some, that British vessels have for a long series of years been sailing at a loss to the owners. That, at the conclusion of the War in 1815, a great number of vessels which had hitherto been employed as transports, or had found employment whilst we had a monopoly of the carrying trade of Europe, had been thrown into the general market, and that by the reduced employment freights were lowered so much as no longer to be a gain, but to leave a partial loss to the shipowner; and that, bad as foreign freights and home freights may have been, the British shipowner thought it better to accept them than to be totally idle, and to incur a total loss. Even if this had been true, it does not in any way invalidate the above position, that the existing Navigation Laws have afforded no protection. That it is not true, however, is evident, for if true, capital when invested in shipping, not having yielded the ordinary remuneration, no vessels would have been built till the number in existence were reduced to an exact sufficiency for the home demand—viz., to carry for the Mother Country and her

colonies: for not till then could freights have risen to a remunerating price. What, however, has been the case? Why, that in the United Kingdom alone there have been built in each of the years since the commencement of the peace—

	ENGLAND.		SCOTLAND.		IRELAND.	
	Ships.	Tons.	Ships.	Tons.	Ships.	Tons.
1814 ...	524 ...	69,539	136 ...	14,563	46 ...	1,973
1815 ...	712 ...	84,794	165 ...	16,227	35 ...	1,882
1816 ...	618 ...	67,083	192 ...	15,608	42 ...	1,985
1817 ...	500 ...	63,260	156 ...	14,824	102 ...	3,126
1818 ...	573 ...	70,542	131 ...	13,923	49 ...	2,486
1819 ...	586 ...	71,257	154 ...	16,228	35 ...	1,500
1820 ...	461 ...	54,014	121 ...	11,014	38 ...	1,684
1821 ...	399 ...	46,296	122 ...	9,457	64 ...	2,343
1822 ...	442 ...	43,212	87 ...	6,162	35 ...	1,548
1823 ...	468 ...	54,068	92 ...	7,418	34 ...	1,659
1824 ...	625 ...	76,428	139 ...	12,840	35 ...	1,811
1825 ...	722 ...	102,842	209 ...	17,136	44 ...	2,497
1826 ...	802 ...	90,813	265 ...	24,897	48 ...	2,653
1827 ...	650 ...	72,065	210 ...	18,629	34 ...	2,450
1828 ...	630 ...	70,685	167 ...	15,973	45 ...	2,005
1829 ...	517 ...	61,299	170 ...	14,023	31 ...	1,313
1830 ...	529 ...	60,726	156 ...	12,692	45 ...	2,564

Total in the United Kingdom: Ships, 13,194; Tons, 1,447,016.

To which must be added the following built in the colonies—

	Ships.	Tons.		Ships	Tons.
1814 ...	131 ...	11,069	1822 ...	209 ...	15,611
1815 ...	234 ...	24,061	1823 ...	245 ...	22,240
1816 ...	408 ...	32,282	1824 ...	342 ...	50,522
1817 ...	316 ...	22,321	1825 ...	353 ...	50,299
1818 ...	298 ...	17,302	1826 ...	580 ...	86,554
1819 ...	328 ...	21,701	1827 ...	529 ...	68,908
1820 ...	248 ...	16,440	1828 ...	464 ...	50,844
1821 ...	275 ...	15,365	1829 ...	416 ...	39,237

It may be objected, that colonial vessels, being built of timber on the spot, can be afforded at a much cheaper rate than those built in the Mother Country. This is true as regards the timber; but, in the colonies, cordage, canvass, and ironwork are far more expensive, so also is that material ingredient, labour. If colonial-built vessels could be afforded at a lower cost, they, being equally entitled to a British register with those built in the Mother Country, and to all the advantages which that register confers, would have wholly super-

seded home building; that they have not done so, a comparison of the foregoing tables will fully evince.

Thus, then, it appears that on an average of sixteen years, the Mother Country and her colonies have built 1160 vessels per annum. This is sufficient to show the utter incorrectness of the supposition, that capital invested in shipping has not yielded an ordinary profit during the last fifteen or sixteen years. Unless indeed we are called upon to believe, that there is a certain class of people in this country, so wedded to a peculiar employment for their capital, that they would rather lose by that than gain by any other.

It has been asserted, that although vessels do not pay, they are nevertheless built for the employment, as captain or mate, of a relation or friend. A few cases of this nature may exist, but there are very few men who have friendship so intense as to lead them into a decidedly bad speculation; but supposing the feeling general, the building would still continue, whether the Navigation Laws did or did not exist; and then it is evident those laws have afforded no protection, since the end is not gain but the advantage of a friend. A more plausible pretext is, that vessels are required for particular trades; and that although they do not pay, the trade in which they are employed does. But if the total capital invested in the vessel and the trade did not make a return equivalent to the return in most other trades, the capital would be withdrawn from the vessel and the particular trade. If it does make the ordinary return, then the trade and vessel will be continued under any circumstances; so that neither of these arguments is of any importance. If motives exist sufficiently strong to maintain vessels at a loss with the Navigation Laws, they will be sufficiently strong without them, since by them no protection is afforded. No one, however, will for an instant believe that either one or the other statement is generally true.

Having shown that British vessels have competed, and successfully, with foreign vessels in foreign ports, in which foreign vessels have equal advantages; the next position to be maintained is, that they have of late years competed with foreign vessels in British ports, and with perfect success. By the Reciprocity Act introduced by Mr. Huskisson in 1824, goods, brought in vessels the build of the country producing the goods, pay no more duty than goods brought in British vessels. In other words, British and foreign shipping were by that Act put on an equality.

We will now see how far since the passing of the Reciprocity Act foreign shipping has been able to exclude our own.

The annual average of British tonnage entered into the United Kingdom for the four years ending 1823 (the year previous to the passing of the Reciprocity Act) was 1,468,095. The annual average of British tonnage for the four years subsequent to the passing of the Reciprocity Act, including 1827 and 1830,* was 2,136,458, being an increase of 668,363 tons on the average of the first period; amounting to between forty and fifty per cent. on the already enormous amount of British tonnage. Since the passing of this act (now six years) our tonnage has only decreased with two countries, Norway and Sweden, two countries whence the most inferior class of vessels and the least damageable cargoes are brought, and even with these countries the decrease has only amounted to 12,000 tons.† With the four principal ship-owning countries of the north of Europe, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Prussia, taken together, our tonnage has increased 37,000 tons on a comparison of the two periods. With Denmark and Prussia the increase has been about 50,000 tons; and with the north of Europe, including the preceding four countries, and Germany and Russia, the British tonnage has increased from 420,000 tons in the first period to 611,000 in the latter, an increase of nearly fifty per cent. In the trade with the United States British tonnage has been very nearly doubled.

We think further proof is not requisite to establish our ability to compete with foreign vessels on equal terms in our own ports. The foregoing is evidence of our having competed most successfully with the vessels of the principal ship-building countries of the world.

If under any circumstances British vessels are unable to compete with foreign vessels, it is where vessels only of a very inferior description are required. As for instance, to carry cargoes that are not damageable or not easily so, cargoes of wine, tallow, coals, hides, or more particularly of timber, which cannot be damaged, but is able to assist the vessel to float. It may be contended, that were Danish, Norwegian and Swedish vessels allowed to carry for us without restriction, that for many of the above purposes they would be hired, as, from their inferiority, they could take a freight lower than British vessels could exist upon.

* The years 1824, 1825, 1826 have been avoided; having been of so extraordinary a nature, they might not be considered a fair comparison.

† If we had been allowed cheap timber, even this decrease would not have taken place. Our present duties on timber render that commodity full fifty per cent. higher than it would be, was the protection withdrawn from British colony timber.

In a commercial fleet of 22,000 vessels a large number are yearly falling into decay, and at a certain period become unfit for carrying cargoes of a valuable and of an easily damageable nature, as silk, cotton, sugar, grain, tea, &c. These old vessels nevertheless with slight repairs continue for many years capable of carrying cargoes of a description not to be damaged, as timber, coals, &c. Since the Reciprocity Act was passed a great number of them have continued in the Baltic timber trade, competing with the Baltic vessels. Now, as they would not continue in the Baltic trade, if North American timber freights were better than Baltic freights, it is evident that our old vessels have been, since the Reciprocity Act, to all intents and purposes as much in competition, and have been reduced in freights as low, as they would be, or could be were foreigners allowed to carry timber between our North American colonies and the United Kingdom. The competition with the lowest class of foreign vessels has been as complete since the Reciprocity Act, as the competition between first quality British vessels and first quality foreign vessels had been previously. It is probable that the freights of a particular size of our inferior vessels—viz., of those between one hundred and two hundred tons—would suffer a slight fall, were foreigners allowed to compete with them, although vessels of a better class or of a larger size would not; and for this reason, the vessels of this smaller size, not being more than equal, perhaps we might more properly say not being equal, to the demand in British employment, enjoy a species of monopoly. The freight consequently may be rather higher on these vessels than it otherwise would be. We do not see, however, any great mischief were a small class of our inferior vessels to be slightly reduced in their freights. They would sell for less when they came into inferior employment by a few hundred pounds, which difference would, in the shape of freight, be spread over the whole valuable cargoes which they carry during the first twenty years of their existence, and on which the amount would be so trifling a per centage, as not to be felt, or scarcely to be perceived by the consumers of those cargoes.

The whole of this difficulty, however, would be obviated by the duty on foreign timber being reduced to the present rate on colonial timber—viz. 10s. a load. It is peculiarly in the lower class of vessel that the tax on wood acts so severely; in a vessel built for the purpose of carrying inferior cargoes, the timber bears a greatly increased proportion to the whole cost, compared with what it does in the superior class. In the superior vessel, the workmanship, fittings, and finishing, form very

materially the greatest portion of the expense, whilst in the common vessel, as built in the timber growing countries of Northern Europe, the wood is put together in a very rough state, and the fittings and fastenings are of the poorest. If Baltic timber was admitted at 10s. (at which the revenue would gain more than it has during the last fifteen years) the material for building and repairing second and third class vessels would then be had in the north-east of England, where the bulk of our building establishments are, at a greatly reduced cost, nearly fifty per cent. less than now; whilst at the same time wages, from the increased demand for timber, would experience a considerable rise in the countries from whence the timber would be brought; the consequence would be, that we should be able to build, and repair vessels of an inferior description at as small, or at a smaller expense than any country of Europe.

There is yet another subject respecting which great delusion has been created and maintained by the Navigation Laws. It is generally believed, that if they did not exist, foreign sailors would wholly or nearly displace British sailors: and that in the course of time, particularly during war, we should find it impossible to man our ships of war. The Navigation Laws allow every British vessel—no matter to what port she trades—to have one-fourth of her crew of foreigners; in other words those laws only compel her to have three-fourths of her crew English. If foreign sailors could be had at lower wages, or were better at the same wages, we should find advantage taken to the full extent permitted by law, and every British vessel would possess a crew fully of one-fourth foreign seamen. To those who are acquainted with British shipping it is well known, that there are not twenty-five per cent. of foreigners on board of our commercial navy, nor even five per cent. Foreign sailors are very rarely found in our vessels trading with the West Indies, with North America, with South America, or the Mediterranean, and seldom in those trading with the East Indies. The only vessels in which they are to be found are those sailing to and from ports of the Baltic, and then they are mostly of the country to which the vessel generally trades. But even in vessels trading to the Baltic, they rarely amount to one-fourth; and in all instances the foreign sailor demands wages as high, and provisions as good as those demanded by the British sailor.

It may now be asked, supposing all these statements to be correct, why need any alteration be made in these laws? It is said, they do not raise freights, they do not raise wages,

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what evil, then, is effected by them? Although there is not a rise of freights or of wages, in consequence of the existence of the Navigation Laws, there are other injurious circumstances resulting from them.

According to the present laws, goods can only be imported for consumption into this country in ships of Great Britain, or in those of the country producing the goods. The consequence is, that, however much we may require produce of a particular description, should there be twenty cargoes off our coasts in ships neither British nor of the country of which the produce is the growth, no relief can be derived therefrom, not a particle of such produce can enter this country for consumption. But, absurd as it may appear, the cargoes, after being taken to Gibraltar and landed, may be brought here in British vessels, and then admitted for consumption. Of course, landing, re-shipping, and the extra voyage tend materially to raise the price to the consumer in this country; and great as such an evil may be, in many instances the delay in obtaining goods which are much needed, is a far greater evil.

A further, and, at times, a serious evil arises from the Navigation Laws, coupled with the inequality of the demand for shipping at different periods. In a country possessing such an enormous trade as England does, the demand for shipping is subject to great variations; so great as to make a difference in the general rate of freights of full twenty per cent. During a period of diminished demand at home, many of our vessels are employed in conveying between foreign countries; and when a revival of the home trade takes place, they are absent, and frequently are engaged for an unexpired period, and cannot return. To supply the increased demand for shipping in those trades in which none but British vessels are allowed to sail, as for British colony ports, and the ports of foreign countries having no shipping of their own, the best of the inferior British vessels are taken from inferior employment, the deficiency being made up by an increase of foreign vessels, each foreign country supplying an additional number in its own trade with Great Britain. An additional number of foreign vessels must, from necessity, be admitted into our service; but, by our foolish laws, they are prevented from entering it so as to be most serviceable. The better vessels of one country are employed for inferior purposes, whilst the worse vessels of another are employed for superior purposes. And this because foreign vessels can only enter our employ through the trade with their respective countries.

If the Navigation Laws did not exist, at periods such as

those mentioned, the superior vessels, no matter of what country, would be applied to the superior purposes.

To these evils is the still greater mischief that arises from the erroneous opinions entertained by the shipowners as a body, respecting the protection which the Navigation Laws are supposed to afford to our commercial marine. The moment that any change is proposed in the trade of this country, no matter how obvious may be the benefit to the community, there is immediately raised by the shipping interest a cry that their welfare is sacrificed to new and unwholesome theories, no matter how indirect may be the probable influence of the proposed measure.* By this cherished interest, opposition is immediately commenced and pertinaciously adhered to. The old maxim, that prevention is better than cure, is steadily acted on; the other consideration, whether the thing prevented be an evil or not, is a matter carefully neglected. Not a session of Parliament passes over without vehement lamentations on the part of this watchful interest. Not a single beneficial measure is proposed, without its being seriously impeded by the ignorant clamour of those who fancy themselves interested in the shipping of this country. If, as we believe, it has been made manifest, that the Navigation Laws are, as a protection, absolutely futile, it is of the highest possible importance, that they should be known to be, and felt to be so. Nothing, however, short of their repeal, and the consequent plain proof attendant on such repeal, will ever be sufficient to convince those who are wedded to the old system of the utter uselessness of these much and long-prized enactments. We would suggest, therefore, that the matter should be fully reconsidered, and the various statements here urged be thoroughly sifted. To us it appears plain, that by the various facts and reasonings brought forward in the course of the preceding observations, the assertions put forth at the commencement have been fully borne out and substantiated. To any purposes of protection the Navigation Laws are powerless; to purposes of mischievous restraint they are all-powerful.

* At a late meeting of the shipowners in London, a Mr. Urquhart deprecated the abolition of the Slave trade, as having been injurious to the shipping interest. [Vide *Morning Herald*, Friday, 10th June, 1831.] After this, a protest may be expected from the shipowners against giving moral instruction to the people, as tending to lessen crime, and consequently to diminish the number of convicts for transportation in British vessels.

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