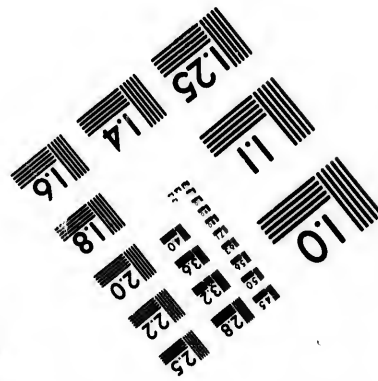
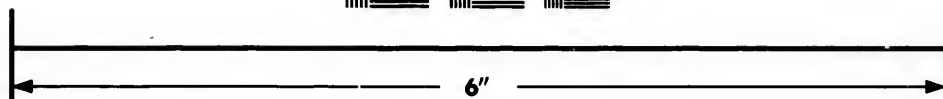
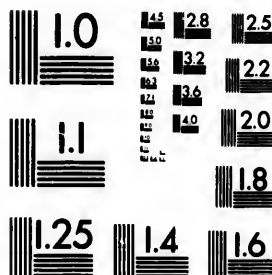


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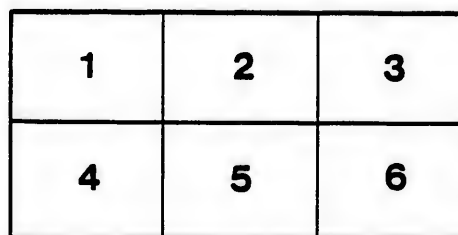
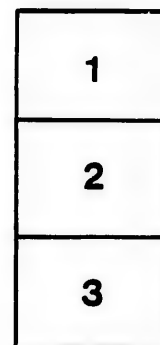
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THE SPEECH *Vol. 83*

OF

THE RIGHT HON.

HENRY LABOUCHERE, M.P.

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

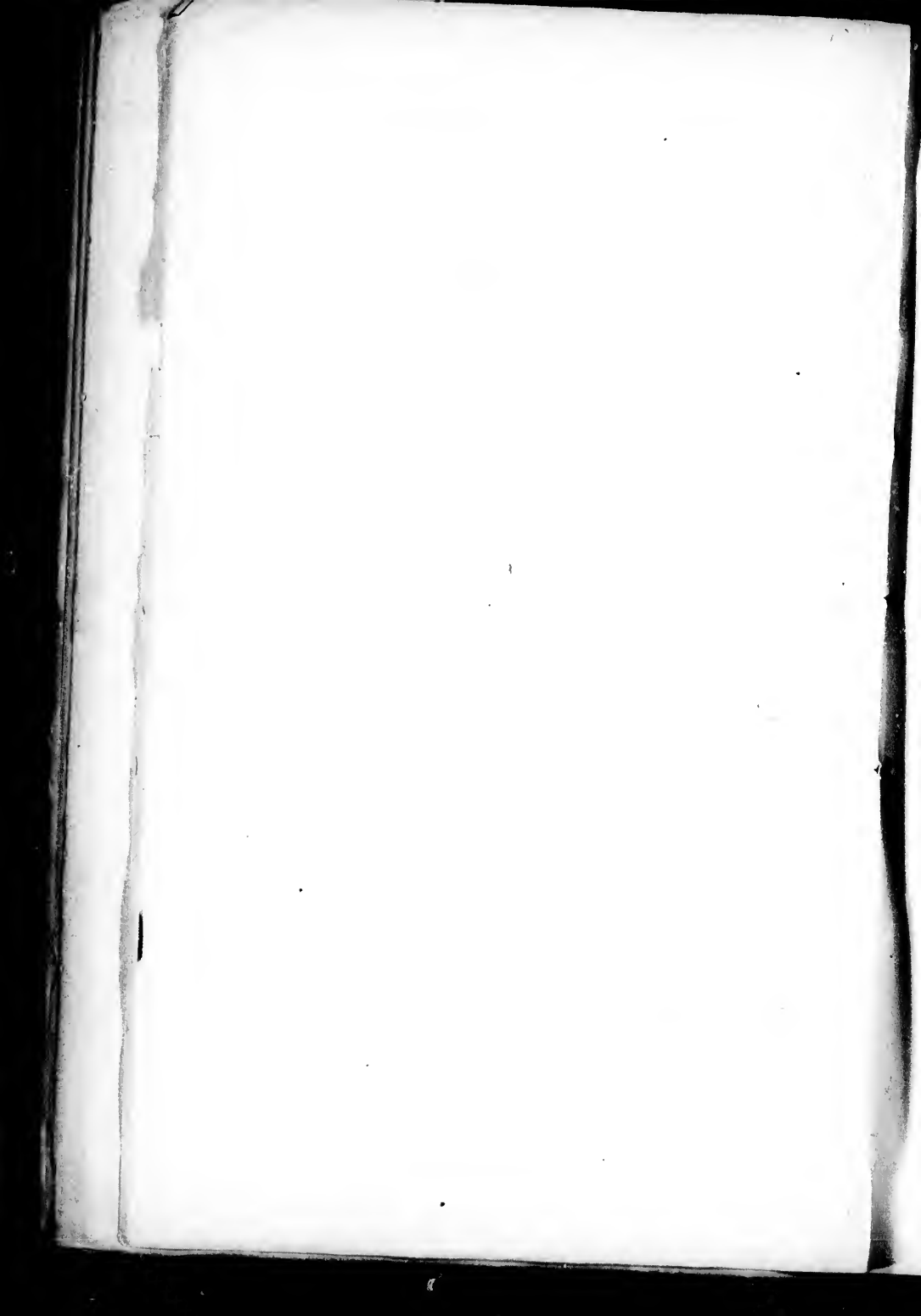
ON

THE NAVIGATION LAWS.

LONDON:

JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.

1848.



S P E E C H,

&c.

THE House resolved itself into Committee; and, on the motion of Mr. Labouchere, the following passage of the Lords Commissioners' speech at the opening of the session was read by the clerk at the table:—"Her Majesty recommends to the consideration of Parliament the laws which regulate the Navigation of the United Kingdom, with a view to ascertain whether any changes can be adopted, which, without danger to our maritime strength, may promote the commercial and colonial interests of the Empire."

Mr. LABOUCHERE then spoke as follows:—Mr. Bernal—In rising to redeem the pledge which was given in the speech of her Majesty, at the commencement of the present session, by bringing before the attention of the Committee the subject of the Navigation Laws, I assure them that I am deeply conscious of the weight and responsibility of the task which has devolved upon me. I know that those laws have long been regarded among us with a reverence inferior only to that which we are accustomed to pay to those immortal statutes which are the bulwarks and safeguards of our constitutional

liberties. I am aware that they have been defended by some of our greatest statesmen, and eulogized by some of our wisest philosophers and historians. But, on the other hand, I may venture to remind the Committee that they have been subject to frequent changes and alterations. It was remarked long ago by the sagacity of Mr. Burke—"If the navigation act is suffered to run the full length of its principle, and is not changed and modified according to the change of times and fluctuations of circumstances, it must do great mischief, and frequently even defeat its own purpose." And if the changes which I am about to recommend to the Committee are of a far more vital and extensive description than any that have been previously proposed to Parliament, I entreat them to consider, at the same time, how everything else has been changing around us. What changes, even in our own times, have we not witnessed, in all the circumstances that affect the commercial and industrial position of the country! The emancipation of the great South American colonies; the introduction of steam navigation; that awakened spirit of rivalry which a long peace has caused among all the nations of the world in the race of mercantile prosperity; and, above all, those great changes which we ourselves have adopted in our whole system of protection, and of the system under which our trade is conducted. These events, although crowded into a few years, have done the work of centuries, and they render it necessary that the House should well consider what may have been their effect

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-

out departing from this main principle, to the reign of Queen Elizabeth ; but in the first year of Queen Elizabeth a very remarkable change took place. The parliament of Queen Elizabeth passed a statute which altogether reversed the principle of the navigation laws which had previously existed, and adopted instead of an absolute exclusion of the foreigner, the principle of protection by means of differential duties, allowing foreign ships to come to this country as well as English ships, but imposing a differential duty upon goods imported in foreign bottoms as contra-distinguished from goods imported in English bottoms ; and, as was much the habit in those days, the preamble of this act set out much more frankly than, I think, we are accustomed to do, the reasons which induced the legislature to adopt this change of plan ; and they are reasons so remarkable that I will venture to call the attention of the House to them. The act stated—"that since the making of the statutes other sovereign princes, finding themselves aggrieved with the said acts, as thinking that the same were made to the hurt and prejudice of their country and navy, have made like penal laws against such as should ship out of their countries in any other vessels than of their several countries and dominions ; by reason whereof there hath not only grown great displeasure between the foreign princes and the kings of this realm, but also the merchants have been sore aggrieved and endamaged."

The principle adopted by Queen Elizabeth was very much the principle that prevailed generally in those times, and indeed which to a very considerable degree prevails at the present day on the part of other commercial nations of the world. At that time, I believe, every nation that enjoyed any foreign trade at all put distinctive duties upon produce imported in alien bottoms, for the protection of their own navigation ; this, I believe, was the system of all foreign nations, with one very remarkable exception. There was one country which at that period was almost struggling into existence that adopted a very different principle — of course I am speaking of Holland. Holland adopted a system of the most unrestricted freedom. She gave the utmost encouragement to commerce, and made her marshes the home of the merchants of every country who chose to go there. The result of that policy was most remarkable. It enabled the Dutch to build up the most magnificent fabric of commercial greatness and political power, upon foundations naturally so slight, that the world had ever before had an example of. I ought, perhaps, to state to the Committee, that while Queen Elizabeth made this change of policy with regard to the navigation laws, she for the first time introduced a system of restriction which did not exist under the system of the previous period. She made for the first time the coasting trade of England a monopoly. Till then the coasting trade had been open to foreign vessels. This second period of our navigation laws lasted without any material change to the

time of the Commonwealth. It was during this second period, especially in the reign of James I. that our great colonial empire originated. The successors of Queen Elizabeth applied to the colonial trade the same principle that she had applied to the home trade. They did not make it a system of strict monopoly and exclusion, but they favoured British commerce with regard to the colonies in the same way as they had done with regard to the commerce of England, namely, by virtually placing differential duties upon goods carried in foreign vessels engaged in the colonial trade, in the same manner as they were imposed upon goods in foreign vessels engaged in the home trade of this country. This was the policy of what I call the second period—I mean the period which began in the reign of Elizabeth, and lasted to the time of the Commonwealth—with regard to the navigation system.

At the time of the Commonwealth began the third period, which has lasted down to the time at which I am now addressing the Committee. The foundations were then laid of that system which has left an impress very strongly on the laws that are still upon our statute book. This system was begun by acts passed during the Commonwealth, and confirmed by the statute commonly called the Navigation Act, and which act, when taken in conjunction with the "Statute of Frauds," which was passed immediately afterwards, mainly comprises the provisions regulating our commercial navigation. It is the Act of 12 Charles II. c. 18. It is not necessary I

should state to the Committee what are the principles of the Navigation Act—they are too familiar to all of us to make it necessary for me to do so. The legislature of England at that period again reverted to the system of monopoly and exclusion. They endeavoured as far as possible to treat the British empire as self-supported and self-relying. They sought to engross to our own shipping all the trade and business of the empire; reverting in this respect to the old policy of Richard II. They included in this system the vast colonial trade which had sprung up during the interval. The motives which induced the country to adopt this change were principally political; at least they were not, I believe, mainly and originally founded upon commercial motives. Blackstone gives a very clear account of the reasons why, in his opinion, the legislature were induced to adopt this system. There was, in the first place, a desire on the part of the Commonwealth Parliament to impede the intercourse which those who had adopted the Royalist cause were carrying on with our colonies; and in the second place, they had still more for their object and purpose, a desire (to use an expression of Blackstone) “to clip the wings of the Dutch,” of whose great carrying trade we were jealous, and with whom we were then beginning to quarrel on other grounds. This system has remained in some respects unaltered to the present day; at the same time a great many changes in other respects have been made, with the details of which, however, I will not now

weary the Committee. The first circumstance that materially tended to break down this system was the occurrence of the events which led to the declaration of the independence of the United States of America. That declaration produced many remarkable consequences. In the first place, it destroyed a great trade actually existing. It destroyed that self-supporting power which the British empire had, at least as it was supposed, hitherto possessed. The commercial connection which had hitherto existed between our West India islands and the colonies, which were then becoming independent states, had been very great, intimate, and important. The violent destruction of that commercial connection placed this country in a most embarrassing position. It was some time before the Parliament of this country could make up their minds to adopt the course which they were ultimately forced to pursue. Mr. Pitt, on the first declaration of independence by the United States, with true wisdom and with great courage, came forward to propose to Parliament and the country to continue that commercial intercourse with the United States of America pretty much upon the same footing that had previously existed while those states were British colonies; but all the power which Mr. Pitt possessed failed in persuading the country to adopt that wise policy. Palliatives, indeed, were had recourse to, but many practical evils to our commerce followed from this discontinuance of the connection between our colo-

nies and those portions of North America which had become the United States. Attempts were made to enable those colonies which had remained faithful to the British Crown to supply the deficiency that had been occasioned by the separation of the other colonies; but these attempts afforded no adequate remedy, and it was not till the greatest practical evils had taken place that Parliament consented to apply an effective cure to them. I find it stated, in an address of that period from the House of Assembly of Jamaica to the Crown, that there had been for several successive years hurricanes in that island, and that, between the years 1780 and 1787 no less than 15,000 slaves had perished from the want of the accustomed supply of food from the United States of America, and from its consequent dearness; this want of supply being entirely the result of the interruption of that system of commerce which had previously existed between the West India islands and the colonies which had since become the independent United States of America. At last, step by step, free intercourse between the United States and the West India colonies was allowed, but so gradually that it is only in our own time that a free and unrestricted access has been allowed, by which the West India islands may obtain whatever supplies they may require from the United States. These changes made a very wide breach in the system of our navigation laws. Many other changes followed. The

first I will advert to is, that of the admission of Ireland into a participation of all the advantages of the English trade. This took place about the time of the declaration of American independence. Then came the measure for establishing free ports, and the introduction of the warehousing system; after that came Mr. Huskisson's reciprocity treaties; and lastly and quite recently, came the measures which we have adopted for enabling those inland countries which, by means of steam navigation and of rivers, can carry on an intercourse with the sea near to the mouths of those rivers, to use the ports which they approach as if they were ports of their own—a measure of which, in passing, I must say, that while absolutely forced upon us by a sense of justice, and in order to develop our trade, it is one which no man can fail to see has made a considerable breach in our navigation system, a breach which it is now too late to repair, and which it will be exceedingly difficult to prevent becoming much wider than it is.

Having thus, in a very general manner, asked the Committee to survey the course of legislation pursued with regard to the Navigation Laws, I will now call the attention of the Committee to the actual state of the law at the present moment. The law on the subject is mainly comprised in three statutes. The one is the Navigation Act, properly so called—the 8th and 9th Victoria, cap. 88—which is a consolidation of the provisions of our Navigation laws;

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the next is the act regulating the registration of British vessels, being the 8th and 9th Victoria, cap. 89; and the third is the statute for consolidating the laws relating to merchant seamen, and for keeping a registry of seamen, being the 7th and 8th Victoria, cap. 112. I will state as concisely as possible what is the actual result of these laws. The Navigation Act directs that certain enumerated articles, the produce of Europe, shall be imported into this country for consumption only in British ships, or in ships of the country of which the goods are the produce, or in ships of the country from which they are imported. The bearing of this law obviously is as far as possible to secure the European carrying trade to our own shipping. It goes on to direct that the produce of Asia, Africa, and America, shall be imported into this country only in British ships, or in ships of the country of which the goods are the produce, and from which they are imported; and further, that these productions shall not be imported from any part of Europe in any ships whatever. The purport of this plainly is to keep to ourselves what is called the "long voyage trade," not permitting even our own ships to bring the produce of Asia, Africa, and America from any European port, but obliging the long voyage to take place in British ships. It also directs that no goods shall be imported into our colonies (under which term I do not include British India) except in British ships, or in ships of the country of which the goods are the produce, being

also the country from which they are imported. It confines the trade between all parts of the British empire to British ships, the only exception being in the trade between this country and India, into which some foreign ships, are admitted under treaty. The object of these provisions is as far as possible to confine the colonial trade to ourselves. These are the main provisions of the act, but they are subject to several exceptions and modifications. The act further provides that British ships shall be navigated by a British master, and by a crew of whom three-fourths are British seamen; and it defines British seamen so as to exclude natives of India. It directs, moreover, that no foreign ship shall be admitted to be a ship of any given country unless it be of the build of that country (or British built), nor unless it be wholly owned by subjects of that country, nor unless it be navigated by a master and crew of whom three-fourths are subjects of that country. The character of the British vessel is next laid down in the act for the registering of British vessels. This character depends upon three points—first, upon the building of the ship; it must be built in some part of the United Kingdom or in the British possessions. No foreign ship, unless she has been a prize taken in war, is entitled to be considered a British vessel. The next point is the ownership. No vessel that is owned by a foreigner can be entitled to be registered as a British ship. There are some anomalies which I purpose taking the present opportunity of correcting—such as that a foreigner naturalized in England may be the owner

of a British ship, but a foreigner naturalized in the British colonies cannot. I now come to the third point necessary to constitute the character of a British ship—I mean the manning. The law may be described in this manner:—A British ship engaged in the coasting trade must have the whole of its crew composed of British seamen; a British ship engaged in foreign trade must have three-fourths of its crew composed of British seamen. Every British ship is obliged to have on board a certain number of apprentices, amounting to about one-sixth in number of the whole crew. These are the main points of the law with regard to British shipping, registering ships, and seamen. I will now proceed to state the reasons that have brought me to the conclusion that these laws require alteration.

They rest as I have said upon three main principles—first, to secure our colonial trade; secondly, to secure the long voyage trade; and thirdly, indirectly to secure the carrying trade to ourselves. I will proceed to call the attention of the House to the operation of each of these principles, and to state the reasons that have induced me to believe that we cannot, consistently with our own well understood interests and sense of justice, leave either of these principles as it now stands, or without applying to it some large and fundamental alteration. I will begin with the case of the colonial trade. I believe that if ever there was a just demand made upon this House—I say this House, which has adopted the principle, and which I trust

will maintain the principle, that there shall be no differential duties, as a system, in favour of English colonial produce imported into the mother country—I say, if the House is prepared to maintain that principle, then, I repeat, if ever there was a just demand made on a British House of Commons it is that which is now proceeding from every part of the British colonies, namely, that if we think it right to set ourselves free from those restrictions which we at one time thought it conducive to our own interests and those of the colonies to maintain, but which we now think it beneficial to ourselves (and, as I believe, it will be found equally beneficial to the well-understood interests of the colonies themselves) to abrogate, then we ought also speedily to relieve the colonists from those other restrictions which we have imposed upon them in reference to navigation. Everybody knows that even during the system of protection our colonies bore most impatiently those restrictions on their navigation. When Mr. Huskisson brought forward his proposal with regard to treaties of reciprocity in 1826, he declared it to be his opinion that these restrictions upon trade and navigation had had more to do with that fatal war which took place between the American colonies and the mother country, and which led finally to the independence of the American colonies, than the question of taxation itself. I believe there is no one who has looked with any attention into the history of that period but must be

convinced that the opinion so expressed by Mr. Huskisson was a well-founded one. Now, with regard to our West India colonies, I have already quoted an account of the injuries inflicted during several years upon the island of Jamaica for want of supplies from America after the independence of the United States; but the whole history of the West India islands shews, that even during the period of the system of protection, they were constantly complaining of the injuries imposed upon their trade by our system of navigation laws. The history written by Bryan Edwards is full of the complaints made by the colonists to the Board of Trade of that day, and of accounts of the struggles which took place between the West India colonies and those of Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, and the Government of the mother country, in consequence of the complaints of the former, on account of the grievances which these navigation restrictions inflicted upon them. I now ask the Committee well to consider, whether they think it possible or just, after having adopted a policy which deprives all colonial produce of any preference in the markets of the mother country, to maintain those restrictions which could only be justified as long as the produce of these colonies enjoyed protection? ("Hear, hear," from the opposition benches.) I understand those cheers coming from the benches opposite. Undoubtedly those hon. gentlemen would urge the argument I am now using as a reason for

persuading us to retrace our steps and restore protection once more to the colonies; but I now address myself to those who are not prepared to take that step; and I think I have a right to ask them to join me in relieving the colonies from restrictions which are so unjust and insupportable, especially in the condition in which those colonies are now placed. I have stated that remonstrances and complaints have come from all parts of the British colonial possessions with regard to the operation of this Navigation Act. I will read to the Committee some of the most remarkable documents that have thus reached the Government from those colonies. I will begin with Canada, and read to the Committee an extract from a joint address from the Legislative Council and Assembly to the Queen, praying for the free navigation of the St. Lawrence by all nations, and the repeal of the navigation laws as far as respects that colony. This address, dated the 11th of July, 1847, states:—

“That measures have been adopted in the neighbouring Republic, with a view to divert the trade of this province to and from Great Britain through the railroads and canals of that country, and thereby to secure to them a large accession of carrying trade, and from which a revenue was yielded last year of about £700,000; and that there is too much reason to fear that their attempts will prove successful, unless other and further inducements than at present exist are offered in favour of the route by the St. Lawrence. That to afford such inducements, and to prevent a calamity so much to be apprehended, we humbly pray that your Majesty will be most graciously pleased to sanction the

free use of the navigation of the river St. Lawrence by all nations ; and that, to that end, your Majesty will be further graciously pleased to recommend to the Imperial Parliament to repeal the laws of navigation so far as they in any manner relate to or affect this colony."

Considering the parties from whom that address proceeded, and the circumstances under which it was agreed to, it is impossible that any document could be more deserving of the attention of Parliament. In conjunction with this address I cannot avoid reading an extract from a despatch penned by the distinguished individual who now fills the office of Governor-General of Canada, and dated March 26, 1847. It contains much good sense, and I take the liberty of recommending it to the consideration of Hon. Gentlemen opposite, particularly those who are connected with British North America. Lord Elgin said—

" It will probably be urged in certain quarters that the monopoly of the river navigation is essential to the maintenance of British supremacy in this portion of North America, and that the authority of the mother country will be imperilled if the United States are permitted to share the privilege. It may well be doubted, however, whether these apprehensions are well founded. One of the most efficacious expedients for securing the allegiance of a high-spirited and enterprising people is to convince them that their material interests will not be advanced by separation ; and with respect to any disposition on the part of the United States to resort to a policy of aggression, I think it may safely be affirmed that nothing will be more likely to keep such a tendency in check than the knowledge that it will entail the destruction of a flourishing trade, in which the citizens of that country are largely engaged."

Those are wise and statesmanlike opinions. My belief is, that the more liberal and beneficent our policy towards the colonies shall be, the more strict and durable will be the ties which bind them to us. I might multiply extracts from the correspondence of various parties in Canada, all bearing on the same point, but I feel it unnecessary to do so. I think that if the Committee will only consider the position of the British North American colonies at this time with regard to the United States, with its system of drawbacks, giving every possible facility for the export of the produce which grows on the great lakes through the canals of the United States in connexion with the port of New York, whilst, on the other hand, every encouragement is given by the same system of drawbacks to import, by way of New York, goods intended for the use of those flourishing portions of Upper Canada about the great lakes;—if the Committee will only consider this state of things, it will see that we are deeply interested in affording the people of Canada every possible facility, by means of cheapening freights (which can only be the result of competition), to avail themselves of the natural advantages which the St. Lawrence presents. So much for British North America. I now come to the West Indies. The strongest representations have been sent to this country by the West Indians of the evils which they believe themselves to be suffering in consequence of the restrictions which they conceive to be imposed upon them

by the navigation laws. I am aware that some persons will say that the West Indians do not understand their own interest in asking for this change. All I can say is, that the West Indians themselves are of a different opinion. The West Indians urge, that since we have adopted the policy of depriving their produce of the preference which it used to enjoy in the markets of this country, they are entitled to claim, as a matter of justice, that they should be released from the trammels of the navigation laws. I request the attention of the House to the following extract from a memorial to her Majesty from the House of Assembly of Jamaica :

“ Your memorialists could point out the advantages possessed by the island of Jamaica for becoming a commercial depôt, especially as to position with respect to both continents of America and the surrounding islands. If the navigation laws were withdrawn, foreigners would bring assortments of goods from Europe, Asia, and North America, and other foreigners would come to purchase and re-export these; and, as the Government of England already permits the abolition of all differential duties hitherto enforced for the protection of her manufactures, no injury could arise from an extension of this permission and a relaxation of the navigation laws. Your memorialists would call to your Majesty's consideration, that the prosperity of your Majesty's colonies cannot but be beneficial to the people of England, who always have been able to undersell the manufacturers of all other countries, and could not fail to find in the free ports of Jamaica a profitable outlet and depôt for their productions, both for consumption and exportation; nor could any loss occur to them in regard to their shipping, which has ever competed successfully with that of the world; a great demand would inevitably arise both for ships and manufactures and merchandize of all kinds. The

benefit to Jamaica from such relaxation of the navigation laws would be infinite ; it is the most desirable boon that her inhabitants could solicit or receive from your Majesty's Government ; it would aid Jamaica out of her difficulties ; it would be hailed with exultation, and acknowledged with every sentiment of gratitude and respect, and it would be an honourable and generous concession on the part of Great Britain, which would exalt her in the esteem and admiration of all other nations."

I will also trouble the House with an extract from a despatch of Lord Harris, the Governor of Trinidad, to Earl Grey ; it is dated January 20, 1847 :—

" But what I intended to ask is, whether any relaxation in the terms of the navigation laws might be hoped for ; such as I am informed has already been granted to the Mauritius, and which the nature of the population of this island and its position might warrant, so as to allow the goods of all nations to be brought here in any vessel without restriction ; it would undoubtedly promote an extensive and direct commerce between Trinidad and France and Spain, which is now much retarded and restricted by being carried on by way of Martinique and the Spanish Main. Another great advantage would accrue respecting immigration, as the freight of immigrants would be much reduced. When Coolie labour was first proposed to be introduced, American vessels could have been procured to bring them at £9. per head, whereas the present charge is nearly £18."

I feel, however, it would be an unpardonable waste of time if I were to argue the question whether it would be advantageous to the West Indies to abolish these restrictive laws. Looking at the position of the West India islands, which qualifies them to be the entrepots and depositaries of the merchandise of that part of the world, it is impos-

sible to foretell what development of trade might take place if those colonies were allowed the free use of their own energies in unrestricted intercourse with the other parts of the world. I am unwilling to detain the Committee longer than is necessary by quoting from the evidence taken before the Committee which was appointed on the motion of my Hon. Friend the member for Stoke-upon-Trent; * but I cannot allude to that gentleman without offering my tribute of gratitude to him for the great ability and industry which he has brought to bear upon the question, and for what he has done to promote just and sound views on the subject. It was but the other day that Mr. Gillespie, one of the greatest North American merchants, came to me at the office of the Board of Trade, and stated, that if the navigation laws should not be repealed as far as regarded the West Indies he had made up his mind finally to abandon the trade. Mr. Gillespie's opinions must carry great weight with them. I believe he is a protectionist, and though he is sorry that we reduced the duties which gave a preference to colonial produce, yet he says that, having done that, we must repeal the navigation laws. If we did not do that, Mr. Gillespie thought that we should commit an act of monstrous injustice. Gentlemen opposite may cheer, but I think I am entitled to say, even upon their own principles, that if a majority of this House will not retrace their steps and reimpose differential

* Mr. J. L. Ricardo.

duties for the protection of colonial produce, we must not retain restrictive laws which would drive Mr. Gillespie and other enterprising merchants from the colonial trade, in which they are prevented by the operation of those laws from competing with foreigners. I could also read to the Committee memorials to the same effect from Ceylon and Australia. Thus much with respect to the navigation laws, as they relate to the colonies.

I will now advert to that portion of the navigation laws the object of which is to secure to this country the long voyage trade, and which prohibits even British ships from bringing to England the produce of Asia, Africa, or America. At present a British ship could not bring from Havre or Hamburgh sugar, cotton, or any other article, the produce of those three quarters of the globe. This branch of the navigation laws is almost universally condemned. I shall be surprised if it finds protectors even in the ranks of Hon. Gentlemen opposite, for several among them have intimated that they are prepared to abandon part of the navigation laws, and I suspect it is this part. Let us see how it operates in the way of protection. If the cotton of the United States, or the Alpaca wool of South America, be made into cloth, or the sugar of Brazil be refined in a foreign port, or if mahogany be converted into furniture, it may be brought into this country, because it is then no longer raw produce, but manufactures, with which we have to deal. The consequence is obvious—

the navigation laws give a premium to the foreign manufacturer against our own manufacturer.

That is not the only evil which results from this portion of the navigation laws ; it also deprives our shipowners of a great deal of business. Some conversation took place in this House not long since about the difficulty of bringing some cotton from Havre to this country. The cotton had been carried to Havre on English account in foreign vessels, and landed at that port. Political events in France destroyed the market for cotton in that country. It could have been sold at Liverpool to advantage, but in the existing state of the law no British ship could bring it. The consequence was that the British merchant who sent the cotton to Havre lost his money ; the British shipowner lost the profit he would have made by bringing it to England, and the British manufacturer lost the profit he would have gained by working it up into goods. Can so absurd a restriction as this be of any advantage whatever ? The attempt to secure what is called the long voyage for our shipping by these means is perfectly futile. I remember that a friend of mine, a Member of this House, lately imported into Havre a cargo of ground nuts, which are articles of African produce, extensively used in the manufacture of oil. This gentleman came to the Board of Trade, and begged that the Treasury would grant him permission to bring his merchandize from France, where it was unsaleable, to this country,

where he could find a ready market for it; but I was reluctantly obliged to tell him that such a proceeding would be in the teeth of the absurd restriction imposed by the navigation laws, and that neither I nor the Treasury was able to dispense with the law of the land. I cannot for a moment believe that the Committee can suppose that the commercial and maritime state of this country can depend upon the maintenance of such preposterous restrictions. The truth is that commerce has outgrown these restrictions. They may have produced a comparatively small amount of mischief in former times; but we are now running the race of competition in a vastly extended system of commerce, against rivals who are unencumbered by similar restrictions. To continue such a system would be like putting new wine into old bottles; the result could not but be disastrous. On this point abundant evidence was given before the Navigation Committee; but I will read to the Committee only two extracts from the evidence given by as many witnesses. Mr. R. V. Swaine, a merchant at Hamburgh, said that,—

“If the navigation laws were repealed, the whole of the Alpaca wool, South American sheep wool, and nitrate of soda, and almost all the palm oil from the coast of Africa brought to Europe for account of Hamburgh merchants in foreign bottoms, would go to London or Liverpool. The palm oil which now goes to Hamburgh would go to England in Hamburgh vessels. The operation of the navigation laws, with respect to the supply of Peruvian wools to this country, such as are brought to the continent of Europe first, is unquestionably unfavourable to British

manufacturers, because the German manufacturer is purchasing that article now at a less price than the manufacturers can purchase it in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the consequence must be that the German manufacturer can afford to sell his cloth at a less price than the English."

Mr. G. Houghton, a merchant in London and the Canary Islands, said,—

"The navigation laws interfere excessively with the trade with the Canaries. The cochineal produced there is obliged to be shipped to Cadiz, owing to the few English vessels coming direct to England. Having once been landed in Europe, it cannot come to England, as being the produce of Africa, except for exportation, although the Canaries are virtually part of Spain. The consequence is, that it now goes almost entirely to France. The barilla trade is circumscribed much in the same way. Cochineal can be sold at 4*d.* or 6*d.* per pound more for consumption than for exportation. This prevention of the importation of cochineal from Europe into Great Britain gives a very great advantage to the French and other foreign manufacturers over the English manufacturers, as the cochineal of the Canary Islands is of a very superior quality. The effect is an addition of 6*d.* per pound to the price, besides the injury caused by the prohibition of its use in British manufactures."

But, Sir, the Committee will form an inadequate idea of the impolicy of these restrictions, if they look only to the cases of actual injury produced by them. Of far greater importance than that is the trade which they prevent being carried on at all. It is hardly possible to estimate the extent to which commerce would be developed if it were relieved from these restrictions, and the navigation of the country conducted on the same liberal principles as those which Parliament has applied to our system of duties.

I shall now address myself to the remaining branch of the subject, namely, those provisions of the navigation laws which have for their object to secure the indirect or carrying trade to this country. I feel it unnecessary to discuss whether the attempt to secure the carrying trade to this country at a former period, was or was not wise policy. I have no wish to disguise what my own opinion is, namely, that at no time did the measures adopted effect the object they were intended to attain. But we shall greatly deceive ourselves if we suppose that the question whether or not we shall retain the carrying trade exclusively to this country is one the decision of which rests with ourselves. The House must recollect that this is a game which two can play at. Foreign nations have given no very obscure indications of what their intentions are upon this point. My impression, derived from those best able to form an opinion, is, that foreign nations are determined not to trade with us except upon equal terms, and the practical question which the House has now to decide is, whether we shall engage in a contest with every commercial nation in the world for the maintenance of privileges which are many of them worthless, and some positively injurious; or whether on the contrary we shall, by making timely concessions and adopting a more liberal policy, place our commercial interest on a surer foundation of prosperity than it has hitherto rested upon. From one country we have already received an important inti-

mation upon this point, not in the way of menace, for it was given in no hostile or unfriendly tone, but of warning. It comes from the same country which induced Mr. Huskisson to make his great alteration in the navigation laws in 1823,—Prussia; and on this occasion Prussia speaks with the voice of Germany. Our commercial treaty with Prussia is on the point of expiring, and an intimation has been given by M. Bunsen, the Prussian Minister, that it will not be renewed by Prussia upon the same terms as before. M. Bunsen says in a note addressed to Lord Palmerston, dated May 10, 1847,—

“The treaty of 1841 does not allow Prussia, as the aggrieved interests and public opinion in Germany, which powerfully supports those interests, would require, to restrict in an analogous manner the admission of British ships; for the second article of this treaty accords to Great Britain the right of the most favoured nation with respect to the importation of sugar and rice. The expiration of the treaty at the end of the present year will restore that liberty to the Prussian Government, and a change in the laws affecting navigation has been the subject of its serious consideration. The nomination of a Parliamentary Committee to examine the English navigation laws, and to report during the present session of Parliament thereupon, has nevertheless held out to the Prussian Government a hope that Great Britain will, at no remote period, by means of a general legislative measure, cause the restrictions to disappear which at present weigh upon German navigation and commerce, and which so notoriously impede the development of the commercial relations of the two countries.”

The allusion to the Committee on the Navigation Laws in this extract is deserving of a passing no-

tice. Hon. Gentlemen opposite said that the appointment of that Committee would be productive of nothing but mischief, whereas it is evident that it had the effect of suspending the blow which Prussia was already prepared to strike, and which, but for the appointment of that Committee, would have already fallen upon our shipping interest. I have reminded the Committee that a voice of warning came from Prussia. I will now speak of another country from which has proceeded a voice, not of warning, but of invitation ; I allude to that great republic of the British race, which is second only to ourselves in commercial and manufacturing industry—the United States of America. In the autumn of last year, the American Minister, Mr. Bancroft, put himself in communication with my Noble Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and myself, and informed us, that the Government of his country, believing it was the disposition of Parliament to make a large and liberal alteration of the navigation laws, was most anxious to co-operate with us in that work, and in conjunction with us to give an example to the rest of the world, which he hoped would be productive of the most important and salutary effects. Mr. Bancroft's language, in a conversation which I had with him upon this subject, was, " We are ready to do anything you like ; if you can do but little, we must do little—if you can do much, we will do much—if you shall do all, we shall do all." My Noble

Friend requested Mr. Bancroft to put his views in the shape of a formal communication, and the consequence was that he addressed a letter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which I will now read to the Committee:—

“American Legation, Nov. 3, 1847.

“The undersigned, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States of America, has the honour to inquire of Viscount Palmerston, her Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, if her Majesty's Government is inclined to remove existing restrictions on international commerce. Universal reciprocity, in the widest sense, is held by the American Government as the only thoroughly appropriate basis for intercourse between two great nations. The prohibition of the indirect trade has but restrained enterprise; it has done good to neither country. To abrogate it would at once set free dormant commercial wealth, without injuring any one. Should her Majesty's Government entertain similar views, the undersigned is prepared, on the part of the American Government, to propose that British ships may trade from any port in the world to any port in the United States, and be received, protected, and in respect to charges and duties, treated like American ships; if reciprocally, American ships may in like manner trade from any port of the world to any port under the dominion of her Britannic Majesty. The removal of commercial restrictions, while it would be of mutual advantage to the material interests of both countries, could not but give openings to still further relations of amity between them; and by its influence on the intercourse of nations create new guarantees for the peace of the world.

“GEORGE BANCROFT.”

I will not read the reply of my Noble Friend to that communication; but simply observe, that he

stated to Mr. Bancroft, that though he was not prepared to enter into negotiations on a subject which would imply the abandonment of some of the most essential principles of our navigation law, and that such a course, with a view to any final arrangement, would not be justifiable on the part of the Government without the previous sanction of Parliament, yet that Government were prepared to make such proposals to Parliament as would meet the views expressed by Mr. Bancroft on the part of the United States. Thus, concurrently with this warning from Prussia, in which Prussia spoke in the name of Germany, and I believe I might add, all other foreign countries, we have this invitation from America ; and I should for one most deeply lament if we were to throw away the opportunity thus presented to us. I should indeed lament if we were prevented from availing ourselves of this opportunity, believing as I do that it is a matter of grave concern that our navigation laws should be placed on a sound footing, and also that no time should be lost in doing so—that we should not follow the course which, I am sorry to say, has been too frequently the case in preceding alterations—that they have come somewhat too late, and not till great practical evils have been inflicted.

I have now stated to the Committee in a general manner what the navigation laws are, and I have stated my reasons for believing that we cannot, consistently with the interests of this country, maintain

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those laws in their present shape. I shall now proceed to state what are the alterations that on the part of the Government I am desirous to make, and I will begin with those parts of the navigation laws that I do not propose to alter. It is not my intention, then, to make any material alteration with regard to the coasting trade of this country. I have not adopted this resolution because of any belief that if we were to throw open the coasting trade foreigners could by possibility, to any great extent, avail themselves of it. On the contrary, I am bound to admit that, if there is any part of our navigation that is more protected by nature from foreign interference than another, it is our coasting trade; but, on the other hand, if that is the case, I think it must also be admitted that throwing open the coasting trade would produce no very great amount of good. I cannot think that if foreigners are by nature so practically excluded from the coasting trade, an alteration of the law would produce any great relief or benefit to any interest. Under these circumstances, and being desirous not to recommend to the Committee any alteration of which I cannot lay the foundation on a case of urgent and absolute necessity, I think that as a matter of prudence and circumspection, in dealing with a subject of this magnitude, in which the feelings as well as the interests of the country are involved, and seeing, moreover, that no practical advantage could be gained by throwing open the coasting

trade, while it would cause considerable alarm among the shipowners and merchants of the country,—an alarm, nevertheless, which I could not share,—I think that, on the whole, the more prudent and advisable course is not to ask the Committee to interfere with that branch of our navigation. I may also add that I think there may be just objection to any change in this branch of our trade for another reason; there may arise many difficulties with regard to the management of the revenue and police of our coasts, if the admission of foreigners to the unrestricted use of the coasting trade is conceded. On these grounds, the Government have come to the determination, that it is not right to interfere with the navigation laws relating to the coasting trade of the country. For reasons somewhat similar, but, I think, stronger in degree, I do not intend to propose any alteration in the laws which restrict the fisheries to English vessels. Those laws will be affected in an indirect way by the general alteration of the navigation laws; but, so far as regards mere fishing, I propose no alteration. Having made these reservations, I shall propose to the Committee to deal in a very large and general and comprehensive manner with the remainder of the system of our navigation laws. The truth is, that system hangs so together, that it is very difficult to separate one part from another, and on the best consideration I have been able to give the subject, I believe there would be little practical

advantage in doing so. Moreover, I am bound to say, that having looked into each of the several parts of our protecting system,—that part, for example, which restricts the importation of goods the produce of Asia, Africa, and America, from European ports, either in foreign or British ships, and also that part which is devised to protect our carrying trade,—I cannot believe that this country has any real interest in retaining these laws, at least so far as regards foreign countries that may be disposed to reciprocate with us in respect of these matters. I therefore propose, by Act of Parliament, altogether to strike out of the statute-book the existing restrictions; but I shall desire the Committee not to deprive the Queen in Council of that power which she already possesses, under so many statutes, of imposing countervailing duties, if she so think fit, on any foreign nation that may treat our shipping with injustice. I do not propose that the exercise of this power shall be obligatory on the Crown. I do not propose that the Crown, for the mere sake of retaliation, shall be obliged to impose restrictions on the ships of a foreign country which imposes similar restrictions on ourselves; but I do not think that it would be expedient so completely to strip this country of all power of retaliation, under all possible circumstances, and under any amount of aggravation and injustice, as to deprive the Crown of the powers which it already possesses under so many Acts of Parliament. I do not know

whether I have clearly explained to the Committee the plan which I mean to submit, but I shall be ready to do so, if required, still more explicitly.

SIR R. PEEL.—What restrictions, if any, are to be placed on the fisheries ?

MR. LABOUCHERE.—With regard to the fisheries I make no alteration, and whatever privileges fishers have on our coasts they will still retain. Those rights depend upon the law of nations and upon various treaties with other countries, especially with France. There are certain enactments, which I adverted to in the beginning of my speech, to which it is now necessary to call the attention of the Committee. These are the acts which regulate the character of British vessels,—the ownership, the building, and the manning of vessels. I think, in exposing the British shipowner in the manner I propose to competition with all parts of the world, it is but reasonable that he should be afforded every facility for obtaining his ship at the cheapest rate. I therefore propose to do away with the restriction which at present limits the right of acquiring a British register to a British-built ship. I propose that a ship built abroad, but owned by Englishmen, shall be entitled to a British register, whether that ship be employed in the coasting trade or in foreign commerce. With regard to the ownership, I do not propose any material alteration. There are some anomalies which I hope to remove, but with regard to the general principle of rendering British ownership necessary, I do not

make any change. With regard to the manning of vessels, I propose still to make it necessary that a British ship engaged in the coasting trade shall have a crew entirely composed of British seamen; and I propose no alteration in the law regarding the crews of British ships engaged in the foreign trade, but will require that they still have three-fourths of their crew British sailors. There is one alteration with regard to manning that I shall propose, and this I think it best to mention before I proceed to the subject of apprentices. I shall propose to raise Indian seamen, who go by the name of Lascars, to the character of British seamen. I think it is absurd and unjust to leave them in their present position, and, therefore, I will take this opportunity of placing the Lascars on the same footing with British seamen. To this privilege they are fully entitled by their excellent conduct, and by the uniform fidelity they have shewn to British connexion. Then I propose altogether to abrogate the necessity of taking apprentices. I believe this obligation has been of the most inconvenient and burdensome nature, and I have no hesitation in saying it has utterly failed in its object. The effect has been, that one sixth of the crews of the merchant navy consists of these boys, and, as a necessary consequence, there has been a great disturbance of the labour market. The system tends to drive the able-bodied men out of our ships, and to force them to seek employment in the American or

Swedish navy, or in that of any other country where their services are required. This is the effect of overstocking the labour market by compelling shipowners to take these boys. I believe that so far from this restriction answering its purpose, viz., to increase the number of able-bodied seamen in the British navy, and to provide a nursery for the Royal navy, it has not in the slightest degree done so, and has not in any way improved the character of those engaged in the commercial marine. The law makes it necessary to have a certain number of apprentices on board ship; but this, in future, I will leave entirely in the option of the shipowner, and enable him, if he so choose, to employ none but able-bodied seamen. In his examination before the Navigation Laws Committee, Sir James Stirling, a most competent authority, says on the subject,—

“ It throws the older seamen out of employment at times when trade is not very brisk, and leaves them no alternative but to seek employment in foreign service. The law requires that about a sixth-part of the whole number of sea-faring persons shall at all times be apprentices; but, if too many seamen are made by this process, the hardship falls upon the old sailor, who is thrown out of employment, or is prevented from getting full employment. It appears to be an arbitrary interference with the labour market, is at all times a hardship upon the shipowner, and at certain times a hardship upon the seaman.”

Mr. Duncan Dunbar says, —

“ We being compelled to take apprentices entails a very considerable expense and very considerable inconvenience. If not obliged to send boys, I should send a ship with 20 able-

bodied men. I now send her with 14 able-bodied men and 6 ordinary men, and 6 apprentices. The ships could be better manned if we were not compelled to send boys, and there would in that case be more security for the lives of the people on board."

I think I have now given an outline of the measure I have to submit to the Committee on the part of the Government. I will now recapitulate the scheme I had laid before them. I propose to reserve unaltered the law affecting the coasting trade and fisheries of this country, and of all our colonial possessions. With regard to the coasting trade of the colonies there is a modification to which I will hereafter allude, but, with this exception, I propose absolutely to throw open the whole navigation of this country, of every sort and description. I propose, however, to retain to the Queen in Council the power of putting such restriction on the navigation of foreign countries as she may think fit, if those countries do not meet us on equal terms,—not making it obligatory on the Queen in Council, but enabling her to use such power in such a way as may be best for the interests of the country. I ought to have stated, as regards the coasting trade of the colonies, that I propose to reserve it in the same manner as I do the coasting trade of the mother country; but I mean to allow each colony, if it shall think fit, to pass an act, throwing open the coasting trade to foreign ships, such act to have the consent of the Crown in the usual manner; in short, that each colony shall be allowed to deal with its coasting trade as it thinks

proper. If such a power were not given, the case of Canada and the St. Lawrence would not be provided for at all. As to the manning, ownership, and building of ships, I propose that, to entitle a vessel to be called a British ship it shall not be necessary that she be British built, though it will be necessary that she be a British owned and British-manned ship, retaining the regulation that now exists of three-fourths of the crew being British. I propose, however, altogether to do away with the necessity of having a certain number of apprentices. These are the outlines of the alterations which I have ventured to submit to the consideration of the Committee. I do not disguise from myself that they are of a very grave and serious nature—that they go to the very foundation of what have hitherto been considered the navigation laws of this country; and I can assure the Committee that it is only after giving the subject full deliberation, and having come to a full conviction in my own mind that the alterations in question would be most conducive to the interests of this country, that I have ventured to propose these alterations to the consideration of Parliament. I cannot believe that the alterations which are contemplated will really injure the commercial marine of this country. I look to the results of the removal of former restrictions and the progress towards commercial freedom. I recollect the prognostics made of the ruin which would befall the trade of this country in consequence of

the alterations made by Mr. Huskisson in 1826. But I beg to remind the Committee of what has been the result of those alterations, which will appear from the following statement of the tonnage of shipping which belonged to the ports of the United Kingdom and its colonial possessions in 1824 and 1847 respectively :

	United Kingdom.	Colonies.	Total.
1824 . .	2,348,314 . .	211,273 . .	2,559,587
1847 . .	3,307,921 . .	644,603 . .	3,952,524
		Increase	1,392,937

There may have been ebbs and flows of prosperity since, but I think these figures, which indicate so great and steady a progress, clearly prove that the relaxation then made by Mr. Huskisson has not been productive of that injury which many persons expected it would cause. If I turn to the general commerce of the country, and especially to that portion of it which has been particularly exposed to competition with other countries, and then compare it with that part of our own trade which has been especially protected, I find nothing to discourage me from proceeding in the course of commercial liberality. I hold in my hand a return which has been the subject of much comment, and which was produced before the Committee on the navigation laws; I mean the statement of the tonnage of British ships that entered the ports of the United Kingdom from different foreign countries and British possessions in

each of the years 1824 and 1846 ; distinguishing the tonnage employed in the trade with British possessions, and which is protected by the navigation laws, from the tonnage employed in the trade with foreign countries, and which is unprotected from competition with foreign ships. Now, a great deal has been said about the unfairness of the statement made in that return, and thus far I agree with the objections urged against it, namely, that the term "unprotected," used in the heading of the return, is not strictly applicable. If the designation had been "less protected" instead of "unprotected," it would undoubtedly have been more correct. I must say, however, in favour of the officer of the Board of Trade, by whom this return was drawn up, that the distinction between "protected" and "unprotected" was made by Mr. G. F. Young, who fought most stoutly the battle of the navigation laws ; and therefore with reference to Mr. Young's evidence, at any rate, no blame could be thrown on the officer of the Board of Trade. But I think we must allow that there is a broad distinction between the closely protected trades, and those which are in some degree open to competition. The result of this return is this, that while in the protected trade the British tonnage for the year 1824 was 893,097 tons, and amounted in 1846 to 1,735,924 tons, being an increase of 842,827 tons, or 94.37 per cent., the tonnage in the less protected trade was 904,223 tons in 1824, and 2,558,809 tons in 1846, shewing

an increase of 1,654,586 tons, or 182.98 per cent. With reference to that return I will call the attention of the Committee to the comparative effects produced on British and foreign ships engaged in this less protected trade. I hold in my hand a comparative statement of the tonnage of British and foreign ships that entered the ports of the United Kingdom from the same foreign countries in each of the years 1824 and 1846, shewing the actual and per centage increase that has occurred between those years:—

TONNAGE.			
British.		Foreign.	
1824	1846	1824	1846
Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.
904,223	2,558,809	758,599	1,803,177
British Increase.			
1,654,586 tons ; or, 182.98 per cent.			
Foreign Increase.			
1,044,578 tons ; or, 137.70 per cent.			

This statement shews, therefore, that the general amount of commerce in the less protected trade had increased more than in that trade in which a strict monopoly existed, and also that the increase in British shipping was greater than in foreign. I have stated shortly my reasons for believing that the British shipowner and British commerce will not be injured by the alterations in the law which I propose for the consideration of the House. I do not, either, entertain any apprehensions that the British shipbuilder will be injured by these altera-

tions. When I consider the great natural advantages which this country possesses in regard to the manufacture of ships—in iron, in cordage, in paint, and in a greater choice of timber than any other country in the world has at its command, I cannot believe that there is any danger which the British shipbuilder will suffer, when he is brought into competition with the shipbuilders of other countries. It is a great mistake, when comparing the cost of ships, to look merely to the actual amount of money which has been expended in their construction. We must also consider the quality of the ships built and their durability, and I believe it can be proved that, taking ship for ship, and considering the excellence and durability of British ships, we are able to build ships fully equal to those which are constructed in any other part of the world. If the trade of ship-building depended merely on the cost of construction, the British shipbuilder would have been driven out of the market long ago by our own colonists. Those ships which cost least in construction are at this moment built by our North American colonists. For many purposes they are very useful; but it is very far from being the case that they have superseded the employment of the dearer sort of ships built on the coast of England; and, while there is no doubt that colonial ship-building has greatly increased, the trade of ship-building on the coast of England has also increased enormously. I have mentioned

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the great advantages which the English ship-builder enjoys, but I am told that he has to contend with great disadvantages in the rate of wages which he has to pay. Now, my opinion is, that the disadvantage which he labours under in that respect is far more nominal than real. I believe that, taking the value of the work done into consideration, English labour is not the dearest, but cheaper than any other labour in the world. Look at what takes place in our dock-yards. It has been tried to build British ships of war in the dock-yards of Bombay. The timber there is excellent, and labour is nominally very cheap, but it has been found by experience to be far cheaper to build a ship-of-war at Portsmouth or Plymouth than at Bombay. My honourable and gallant friends connected with the Board of Admiralty, will tell the Committee that the nominally cheap labour obtained in the dock-yards in India is found to be dearer than English labour at home, though six Hindoos may be hired for the same wages which would be paid to one Englishman. I will also advert to a circumstance which I think ought not to be left out of consideration, namely, that if we repeal the navigation laws, materials for ship-building will be brought to England at a cheaper rate than at present, and in that manner also the ship-builder will derive considerable advantage from the repeal of those laws. Upon the whole, I am satisfied, that when the Committee comes to consider this part of the subject,

they will be convinced, that while they do an act of justice towards the British ship-owner, they will not destroy the valuable and important trade of the British ship-builder. I can see no reason whatever for our lagging behind any nation of the world in the trade of ship-building, and if there does at present appear in the United States any evidence of superiority over us in that respect, I think it may be ascribed to the spirit of monopoly which has hitherto prevailed here. It appears to me, that any one who is prepared to contend that ships cannot be built in England as cheaply, considering their quality, as in any other country of the world, ought also to contend that we cannot conduct any manufacture as cheaply as it can be done in foreign countries. I cannot conceive any argument of that kind which would not apply to our great cotton and many other manufactures in the same degree.

I now come to the objection which I know has the greatest weight in the minds of many men, and if I believed myself in its truth and validity, I confess I should think that all the arguments I have adduced in favour of these changes ought to go for nothing ; I refer to the objection that this alteration in the navigation laws would be destructive of the military marine and naval greatness of this country. Adam Smith has declared his opinion that, as the defence of the country is better than opulence, the navigation laws impose a wise and salutary restriction. I will not inquire whether, in the days of Adam Smith,

that opinion was well-founded or not, although, speaking with that diffidence which it becomes me to use in questioning the soundness of any statement made by so great a man, I may venture to state my own opinion, that this declaration involves one of the few errors which Adam Smith ever made. At any rate, whatever truth and force there might have been in the application of those laws in the time of Adam Smith, I believe that his arguments in their favour would not apply now. The question with me is, will the removal of these restrictions in the navigation laws increase or diminish your mercantile commerce? I am not prepared to go the length of those who contend that you can separate maritime commerce from naval power; for I do not believe that maritime power can be placed on any other basis than a commercial marine, and if I thought that the changes which I propose would have the effect of crippling our commercial marine, I should not recommend them to the consideration of the Committee. But, as I contend that this will not be the consequence of these alterations, I cannot see how it is possible, so long as our commercial marine is maintained, that the military marine of this country should suffer. Mr. Huskisson truly stated that the only secure foundation of our naval power was to be found in the beneficial employment of our commercial marine. I apprehend no danger to our mercantile navy from a free competition with the ships of foreign coun-

tries, but I must admit that there are causes in operation which threaten the continuance of its prosperity. I hope the attention of gentlemen has been directed to the very remarkable correspondence which has been laid on the table of the House, and which is contained in the letters of our consuls abroad in reply to the inquiries addressed to them from the Foreign Office. I think no gentleman can have perused those documents without feeling deep concern at many of the statements there made. Our mercantile navy suffers exceedingly in comparison with the mercantile marines of other countries, not from the want of protection, but I regret to say from evils inherent in itself, which no amount of protection will cure, but which, on the contrary, I believe the removal of protection will have a great tendency to eradicate. We find that while the character of British sailors, so far as skill in the handling of ships goes, stands as high as ever, the character of British shipmasters, in many branches of our trade, is at a low ebb, partly on account of their want of nautical skill, and partly owing to their low moral characters. Owing to these causes, our ships are fast losing their character in the commerce of the world. I must say I think it is better to look these evils in the face, than endeavour to dismiss the truth from our minds. The consequence is, that merchants prefer in too many instances, to trust their cargoes to American, Bremen, Swedish, and other vessels, rather than to

British ships, because of the injurious effects produced in respect to the latter by the want of professional capacity and of proper moral conduct on the part, in too many cases, of the shipmasters, which injures the discipline of the crew, and is the cause that proper care is not taken of the cargo. One can scarcely read a page of the documents I have just referred to without being struck by the painful description of those matters. I will not go further into this part of the subject at present, but I have thought proper to call the attention of the Committee to it, because it is my firm conviction that these evils have grown up very much in consequence of this principle of protection, which has led shipowners to believe that they may depend upon that, and need not exert themselves otherwise to improve the condition of their ships, and I believe that the effect of the stimulus of competition would be, that the shipowners would take care that those they employ should be men of improved character. There are other questions connected with the merchant navy of this country which ought to receive the attention of the Committee. Two of those questions, which I propose to submit to the House in the course of this session, relate to the Light Dues, and to the Merchant Seamen's Fund. There are other measures, which, though not brought before the House in the present session, will, I trust, before long, be dealt with by Parliament in a manner advantageous to the merchant navy of this country,—I allude to the pilotage question : to any measure

that can be adopted for insuring a better description of shipmasters, and other measures for the improvement of our merchant navy. With respect to the present system of restriction, considering it in connexion with the effects produced by it to which I have referred, I am convinced, though many persons believe that their interest is promoted by it, that they would find it ultimately nothing but certain ruin. This system of protection and monopoly will avail them nothing for the remedy of the evils to which I have referred, but will only narrow and confine the general commerce of this country. The navigation of this country must depend upon its commerce; and to suppose that anything which cripples and narrows that commerce can be favourable to the navigation of the country is an idle illusion; and the class connected with navigation, as well as every other class, will find their true interest, in the long run, in being allowed to compete with other countries, in being relieved from as many fetters as can possibly be removed from them, and, above all, in not being incumbered by a protection which does them no good, and is deeply injurious to other classes.

I have now gone through, though I am afraid imperfectly, this great subject, and I humbly and respectfully recommend the proposals I have made to the deliberate and impartial consideration of Parliament. I believe that their effects will be greatly beneficial to this country at large, and to no interest more beneficial than to that which I

value as much as any man can—I mean the commercial prosperity and maritime greatness of the British empire. I feel convinced that the tendency of these alterations will be, instead of producing discontented colonies, jealous rivalries among foreign nations, crippled trade and contracted manufactures, to give us good will from other countries, union among ourselves, and the extension of commerce upon a sound and a permanent basis; and I believe that we shall be placing the prosperity of England on the safest as well as on the noblest foundation, if we connect it, as we shall do by these measures, with the general interests, with the expanding trade, and with the continued peace, advancement, and well-being of the whole civilized world.

The Right Hon. Gentleman concluded by moving the following resolution:—

“That it is expedient to remove the restrictions which prevent the free carriage of goods by sea, to and from the United Kingdom and the British possessions abroad, subject, nevertheless, to such controul by her Majesty in Council as may be necessary, and to amend the laws for the registration of ships and seamen.”

Mr. ELLIOT inquired, how far the proposed alterations would affect the law requiring the employment in every ship of a number of men proportioned to the amount of tonnage?

Mr. LABOUCHERE thought his Honourable Friend was mistaken as to the present state of the law. He believed that, according to the existing law, pro-

vided a British ship maintained the proportion of three-fourths British seamen to one-fourth foreign seamen, it might carry as many or as few seamen, in proportion to the tonnage, as the owners pleased. It was only when the first-mentioned proportion was violated, and more than one-fourth foreign seamen were maintained on board a British ship, that it became necessary to have a certain number of British seamen to the tonnage. But he apprehended that this latter restriction would practically be found seldom to come into operation.

Mr. FORSTER had expected that the Government would have taken advantage of the present opportunity to explain their intentions with respect to the light dues.

Mr. LABOUCHERE observed, that he did intend in the course of the evening to call upon the House to take some preliminary steps to enable him to bring in a Bill with respect to the light dues, but he thought it best not to mix up the one subject with the other.

In reply to Mr. HUME,

Mr. LABOUCHERE said, that Ceylon would be treated as any other British colony.

Mr. GLADSTONE said that he intended to act in accordance with the general feeling, not to enter into a discussion until after the plan of the Government was laid before the House, and some short delay allowed for consideration, and would now only ask, for the further elucidation of the Government plan, for information on one or two points.

He did not perfectly understand that part of the Right Hon. Gentleman's statement which referred to the fisheries. He apprehended that the Right Hon. Gentleman said that for the same reason which made it expedient to continue the existing restrictions in respect to the coasting trade, he thought it desirable to continue the restrictions in respect to fisheries, but he did not know whether the Right Hon. Gentleman had only a view to those existing rights to fisheries within certain limits and banks enjoyed by British ships, or whether he extended his view to the restraints imposed by our commercial law on the importation of fish in foreign vessels, the effect of the provisions in the Customs' Regulation Act being to prevent foreign vessels from coming direct from their fisheries to a British port. That was a question of considerable importance, not only with respect to the supply of the markets of this country with fresh fish, but also with respect to the supply of train oil, which was carried on upon a large scale by American ships. He also wished to know whether it was the intention of the Government to propose any measures to Parliament, or to take any measures which it might be within the competence of the Executive to adopt, either in regard to the education of young persons for the seafaring life, or in regard to the examination of masters and mates. He had been in hopes that, on the present occasion, the House would have heard some general statement of the effect of the measures

adopted some years ago for the voluntary examination of the latter. He should have been glad to know whether the Government thought that that system was of an extensive character, and satisfactory as far as it went, or whether they thought it desirable to give it a further extension? In respect to the education of persons for the seafaring life, he was anxious to know whether the Government had that subject under view. It might be matter well worthy of the consideration of the Education Committee of the Privy Council, whether it might not be in their power to give aid from the public funds to a class of persons, at the ports of this country, whose education was at present exceedingly defective? He should also be glad to know whether the Right Hon. Gentleman could give the House some general information of the views and intentions of foreign powers other than those two, Prussia and the United States, to which he had alluded? Could he say that the views of Sweden and Denmark, for instance, were likely to coincide with the general measures he had introduced? This was a matter of importance; and if the Right Hon. Gentleman could answer the question affirmatively, that would give satisfaction.

Mr. LABOUCHERE apprehended that if Parliament assented to the plan of the Government it would undoubtedly be in the power of foreign vessels engaged in the deep sea fishery to bring the produce of the fishery direct to this country; though, with respect to the coast and bank fisheries, he thought

it would be desirable to preserve to our own people the existing privileges. With respect to the intentions of foreign powers, the Government had not thought it expedient to enter into communications with other powers besides those he had alluded to, until they knew the sentiments of that House on the subject. It was better that the House should decide on general views and principles, than that the Government should go through Europe asking, "Who will assent to these principles?" The first was the more likely method to attain the object in view. The Right Hon. Gentleman had adverted to the important subject of the examination of shipmasters. The system of voluntary examination had been in operation for some time, and he was generally able to say that that system had been adopted to a considerable extent. Persons desirous of becoming shipmasters had availed themselves of it, and a considerable number had passed their examinations, and there had been manifested an increasing disposition to take advantage of the system. Under these circumstances he should hesitate to propose to the House that which was very much objected to by persons connected with the merchant navy, a compulsory system of examination. Parliament might be obliged to have recourse to that at last, but he was disposed to give the voluntary system some further trial. With regard to the suggestion of the desirability of encouraging schools in the sea-ports to give useful instruction for the seafaring life, he

attached great importance to the subject, and should be glad to see the House at a fitting opportunity direct its attention to it. He took this opportunity of saying that the Government of this country, part of whose duty it was to protect and promote the interest of the mercantile marine, had not the advantage at present of sufficient professional assistance; and on the occasion of reconsidering the light dues, he contemplated taking advantage of the occasion to propose the constitution of a department of the Board of Trade, to be called the Department of the Mercantile Marine, and to consist of unpaid officers, one of the Lords of the Admiralty, and other competent persons connected with the merchant service, giving it the benefit of their advice. This department would be no additional expense to the country, and would afford the Executive Government the means of considering all questions connected with the merchant service more advantageously. He could assure the Right Hon. Gentleman that no man was more deeply impressed than himself (Mr. Labouchere) that it was the duty of the Government and Legislature to take every means in their power to improve the condition and to promote the interests of the mercantile marine of this country. As he had before stated, he believed that the measures he had proposed would be beneficial to it; for if he thought otherwise, he should be the last man to have brought them forward.

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