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PAPER READ

BY

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BEFORE

THE BRITISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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MR CHAIRMAN & GENTLEMEN,

On principle I am a Free Trader. This is a phrase we often hear which is frequently qualified by others such as :

“ But not a one-sided Free Trader. ”

“ But not while other countries put duties on our exports. In that case I want to hit back, as I am tired of “ *taking it lying-down.*” *See Chamberlain*

It is here, at this BUT, where the paths of Fair Traders, Retaliators (fiscal pugilists) and Protectionists branch off from the high road of Free Traders.

On principle I am a Free Trader *without any BUT*, and on principle I will remain one.

The principle is that of LIBERTY.

I cannot admit that anyone, or any power, has the right to dictate on what conditions I may be allowed to trade. I recognise but one condition, that is: the willingness of the person with whom I desire to trade.

I place this Liberty of Trading on the same high ground as those sister Liberties, viz : Liberty of conscience, of thought and speech ; all limited only by the Liberty of Others. FREE TRADE is then perfect freedom in our business life. No interference by customs. In this unshackled way the commerce of a country will grow and modify itself, as the human body does when its limbs are left free. Do any of us, engaged in commerce, need the guidance or interference of an outside power to

accomplish our daily task ? Each of us, in his sphere, knows or should know, what he has to do.

We are sometimes told that we are not Free Traders, but merely Free Importers ; because other countries do not allow our goods to enter free. As well tell me that I cannot speak freely because some of you close your ears and refuse to hear the truth. It is quite true that our joy would be greater if other countries possessed the same advantages that we are blessed with ; but, because others refuse to be enlightened, is not a reason for saying We are in darkness.

This Liberty of Trading has been challenged by PROTECTION.

The Cavaliers of this old worn-out creed are apparently ashamed of it, for they endeavour to smother its real name under a mass of new titles. Notwithstanding all their efforts it will remain branded on the forehead, by that word which recalls bygone horrors. Put it back to its congenial abode : Madame Tussaud's famous Chamber of Horrors. Close fast the doors and put up this epitaph.

HEREIN LIES PROTECTION

a great liar.

A thousand-headed monster.

The dark-ages of commercial history.

The taxer of doors & windows. i, e : the air we breathe.

The taxer of Earth's produce . . . : the food for the body.

The taxer of the public press . . . : the food of the mind.

May he remain here, out of sight, for all eternity.

Requiescat in pace.

I have delineated, somewhat crudely, the two commercial policies and will proceed to study them, at work, in the two countries we know most of, viz : England and France. We can

say that for the last 30 years the population of the two countries has been fairly equal. It was about two millions *less* in England, **in 1870**, and now it is two millions *more*. I ask your particular attention to this point because population is the chief factor in all the calculations of Export and Import figures; for without hands you cannot have manufactures. As population has been equal, so do I consider has been the natural intelligence of the two people. Bearing then in mind that we have to do with two countries, equal in population and intelligence, having a similar geographical position and near neighbours, let us give a glance at a few figures. The first are those concerning IMPORTS into England.

In the year 1902 England imported the enormous sum of £ 528.000.000. It will help you to have a better idea of these figures if I say, at once, that France imported £ 174.000.000 or about *one third* of England's amount.

Observe that I use the word imported instead of *purchased*, and for this reason.

Did we purchase that astounding amount we should have to send payment abroad in the shape of merchandise or gold. It is an admitted fact that no gold goes abroad for any such purpose, for we actually receive more gold than we send away. Against these colossal import figures we have to reckon England's exports £ 278.000.000
The cost of freight that foreign countries pay us = 90.000.000
The difference is what other countries owe us for interest on our capital that has been placed at their disposal; as well as the profit which has been realised on our exports. . . = 160.000.000
Total. . . £ 528.000.000

We sometimes hear it said (but only by novices in the study) that a country that purchases more than it sells is "on the road to ruin." But no country purchases or sells. It is a simple exchange of merchandise or service. Here is the proof: no

money leaves our shores for the settlement of any commercial transaction. Such being the case it is as clear as noonday that : the country which receives more merchandise than it sends away adds, by so much, to its wealth. I recently endeavoured to make this simple fact clear to some of my French friends by placing in one match-box 4 matches representing England and in another box 8 matches representing all foreign countries. I then, as it were, sent the 4 matches over to the foreign box and brought to England's box the 8 from abroad ; thus showing the transaction. No ; it was too simple to be comprehended by our over-logical neighbours.

The £ 160.000.000. I take credit for, as interest and profit, will appear a very large sum ; but when you consider that merchandise enters free into England you will easily understand that, for insurance purposes, the amount declared is very often far above the actual value landed ; indeed I quite believe the £ 528.000.000 would be materially reduced if an *ad valorem* duty were applied. As to profit I will only mention the example of the Birmingham manufacturer who ships £ 10 worth of trinkets or beads to Central Africa. The natives will give more than their weight in ivory for them ! so much more that, when the ivory is declared in England's imports, it attains the value of £ 1.000. Thus England receives 1.000 for 10 sent away and so gradually ruins herself ! England has been acting in this foolish way to such an extent that, according to experts in figures, she has received in the last 30 years about £ 4.000.000.000 more than she has sent away. Yet, still we think England is at the top of commercial nations !

The next figures to look at are those of Exports.

ENGLAND exports	£ 278.000.000	being	£ 6.8.0	per head of population
FRANCE	» 160.000.000	»	4.1.0	» »

The Merchant Shipping of ENGLAND is 9.608.420 tons.

» » FRANCE » 1.110.988 »

We see then, for a population fairly equal,
the foreign business of ENGLAND is £ 806.000.000.

» » FRANCE » 334.000.000.

ENGLAND being 5 as against 2 for FRANCE, and her merchant shipping 9 times greater.

Now we come to figures that appeal to everybody ; Man, Woman and Child ; viz: those concerning the food of a country.

	in ENGLAND	in FRANCE
The average price of wheat, per quarter, is.	28/1	38/-
» » sugar, per cwt. . . .	15/8	38/10
The consumption of sugar, per head, is . .	79 lbs	27 lbs
The average weekly income of a workman's family is .	33/10	25/3
Their » » expenditure on food is. . .	15/8	11/6

Imagine what the poor French working-man can purchase with 11/6, seeing the price of wheat and sugar quoted above.

In all European countries the necessaries of life have become cheaper since 1870, but England has benefited much more than other countries, thanks to the absence of customs duties. The position is this.

That which cost an Englishman, in 1879, 143 now only costs 100.

 » » a Frenchman » 115 » » 100.

So that the Englishman gains 43, against the Frenchman's 15. Further, the Englishman who earned 83 now earns 100. Unfortunately the figures, for the Frenchman, are not obtainable.

I will not trouble you with any more figures. It is needless to tell you that I did not manufacture those I have just given you. I give them on the authority of the English Board of Trade, taken from the large Blue Book issued by the English Government last September. At the risk of being considered presumptuous I will yield to no one, be he a Chamberlain or a Devonshire, in my ability to understand what those figures teach.

Let us now see something of the condition of the British workman, in the years preceeding the repeal of the corn laws. This book "SYBIL" was written by Lord Beaconsfield in the year 1845. In the preface he assures the reader that it is a true representation of the state of things and in no way exaggerated.

In pages 76, 100, 101, 102, 119, 120, 149, 150, we have vivid pictures of the deplorable living conditions of the town

work people. Whole families herding in one hovel situated in "close courts and pestilential culs-de-sac; communicating with the streets by narrow archways, like the entrance of hives, so low that they have to stoop for admission". These hovels had only one aperture to admit light and air, the sun never being able to penetrate their habitual gloom. "It was a single chamber of which he was the tenant; in the centre, placed so as to gain the best light which the gloomy situation could afford, was a loom; in two corners of the room were mattresses, placed on the floor, a check curtain hung upon a string concealing them. On one was his sick wife; on the other three young children: two girls, the eldest about 8 years of age; between them their baby brother"..... "The man seated himself at his loom; he commenced his daily task. Twelve hours of daily labour at one penny per hour; and even this labour is mortgaged; how is this to end"? His sick wife peevishly remarks. "What sort of work is it that brings one penny an hour"?

« Work that you have often admired Mary, and has before this often gained a prize; but if you dont like the work I'll let it alone. We must starve sooner or later; »

« No, No, Philip! work. Let us break our fast. I will not taunt you. I was wrong but I am very ill. It is not for myself I speak but the children went supperless to bed and they will wake soon. »

« Mother, we aint asleep, said the elder girl.... No, we aint asleep Mother, said her sister. We heard all that you said to Father. »

« And Baby?

« He sleeps still.

« I shiver very much, said the Mother, pray shut the window Warner. I wonder if the person below would lend us one block of coal. »

« We have borrowed too often, replies the husband. »

The difficulty in obtaining any livelihood in those days was so great that the increase of population was looked upon as a curse. *What concerns me most, said Gerard, is the Serfs I live among. I have heard, in the course of years, of specifics for this constant degradation of the people. There was Reform, Paper Money, no Machinery; but I never had much faith in any of them. There is*

something going on in this country, of more efficacy ; a remedial power, irresistible ; but whether remedial or not, a power that will mar or cure all. I speak of the annual arrival of more than 300.000 children in this island. How will you feed them ? How will you clothe them ? How will you house them ? They have given up butcher's meat, are they to give up bread also ? As for raiment and shelter, the rags of the kingdom are exhausted ; your sinks and cellars already swarm like rabbit warrens. »

« Look at the average term of life. The average term of life, in this district among the working class is 17 ! What think you of that ? Of the infants born in Cowbray, more than a moiety die before the age of 5. Why, typhus alone takes every year, from the dwellings of the artisan and peasant, a population equal to that of the whole county of Westmoreland !

« But I sometimes think I hear a little bird who sings that the long frost may yet break up. »

Thank God this long frost did soon break up when a new life appeared for the toiling wretched millions through the abolition of the Corn laws.

Now let us hear something of the French workman, in the year of grace 1903.

The Great French Socialist orator Monsieur Jaurès pronounced a remarkable oration in which he used the followings words :

« Lorsque nous avons pénétré dans l'intérieur de ces pauvres ménages d'ouvriers lisseurs, lorsque nous avons vu ces pauvres appartements exigus, minuscules, de quelques mètres carrés, où des familles misérables de sept ou huit enfants sont accumulées sans air, sans lumière, sans mobilier, sans rien de ce qui fait que la vie humaine a quelque dignité, a quelque prix, ah je l'avoue ! je me suis reproché la sorte d'indifférence égoïste où nous vivons.

« C'est là ce que j'ai vu hier à Houpelines, c'est là ce que j'ai vu hier à Armentières, et qu'on m'entende bien, il n'y a dans mes paroles aucun excès, aucune déclamation. Je ne prends pas pour type, je ne prends pas pour mesure les ménages les plus pauvres que nous avons vus. Je sais que pour quelques-uns une rencontre exceptionnelle de maladie avait aggravé la condition commune ; mais ce qui m'a le

plus bouleversé, c'est dans l'ensemble des ménages qui représente non pas un degré exceptionnel de misère, mais qui représente la condition moyenne des ouvriers, il était visible qu'il suffirait du plus léger surcroît de misère pour que toutes ces familles soient acculées à un degré d'abjection et de désespoir où la pensée de l'homme ose à peine descendre.

« Oui il y avait des ménages perdus, des familles perdues qui étaient comme des cadavres de noyés au fond d'une eau trouble de misère, mais au-dessus de ces cadavres de noyés, on voit des milliers d'hommes et de femmes qui surnagent à peine, tout prêts à être engloutis à leur tour.

« Et voilà le crime, voilà le crime abominable, et c'est là ce que je veux crier, ce que je veux dire aux hommes de bonne volonté, de bonne foi, ce que je veux dire aux travailleurs eux-mêmes dans les industries les plus favorisées. Il faut que cela cesse, c'est une honte, ces salaires de 14 et 15 francs par semaine, ces salaires de famine, ces salaires de misères, ces ménages si pauvres, parqués dans de si petits appartements où la mère, le père, le fils, la grand'mère, la jeune fille et les enfants ; la vieillesse, la puberté, tout cela est couché pêle-mêle dans des promiscuités misérables où ne peut que germer le vice !

« Et dans cette ville d'Armentières, la reine de la toile, nous avons vu des lits qui n'avaient pas un morceau de toile pour couvrir la nudité et la pudeur des enfants ; la reine de la toile ne pouvait pas donner un drap de lit pour couvrir ces pauvres ménages.

Now, gentlemen, we have seen FREE TRADE at work in England and PROTECTION in France and I ask you to judge the Tree by its Fruit. We have also seen the workman of each country under PROTECTION. To-day the French working-man toils longer hours, earns less money and pays considerably more for the same food than his English comrade. England does one half of the carrying business of the World which brings her in £ 90.000.000, as we saw in the early part of this paper. Our working class are comparatively happy and contented. They refuse to follow the continental socialist, who aims at the destruction of Capital. — The Arch-Enemy.

We have no fear of Revolution, as must have the thoughtful Frenchman who has not yet realised the safety-valve, existing in providing the workman with the necessaries of life at their natural cost.

Yet, with all England's grand position, do we see — shall I say Men ! who would reverse the wheels and run her down the hill !

As for myself, I am determined to do all I can to prevent such deadly error from circulating amongst Englishmen in Paris. I feel, intensely, the importance of preserving the glorious commercial position of my country. I will not falter in preaching this emancipating gospel of Liberty of Trading. This is particularly a poor man's gospel even as is that other of which we are told "the Rich have difficulty in understanding". Yes, it is for the poor we should work : for those who have great difficulty in obtaining even a bare existence. We must lend a sad and sympathetic ear to the cry of the little ones, crying for more when the milk jug is empty ; the bread all eaten and the sugar is gone. We must preach the great truth to all around us : that Free Trade is a blessing to the country that puts it into practice. We, Englishmen, are bound in duty to work for the system that confers on humanity the privilege of being able to profit of the produce of all climes ; instead of being obliged, like cattle, to eat only of the one field in which we live. We rejoice in being able to receive, at their natural price, the wheat of America ; the coffee of Brazil ; the tea of India and China ; the wines and fruits of France. We burn with an ardent desire to place this same privilege within the grasp of other nations, beginning with this fair land in which we live. We sigh for the Renaissance of Commercial Freedom in all countries. We have done much for personal, political and religious liberty throughout the World ; and we will strive on till we complete man's emancipation through the abolition of the barriers that bar his commercial progress. I am convinced that by being steadfast in our faith and work we shall see, relatively soon, a great movement in America, Ger-

Free Trade alone explains England's supremacy
in the World's trading

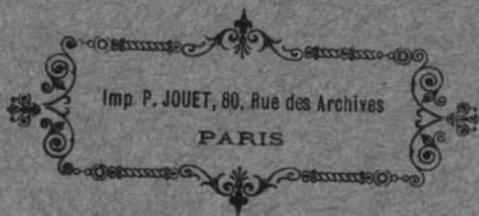
many and France that will justify the prophetic vision of Richard Cobden and John Bright.

In conclusion, I would call upon the Spirit of Freedom to breathe over the dry bones of benighted business ways, bring them together and infuse into them a new and purer life. When that time comes our ENTENTE CORDIALE will indeed be a reality and Arbitration will seldom be required.

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