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R E P O R T

OF THE

SELECT COMMITTEE

OF THE

General Chamber of Manufacturers.

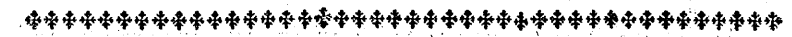
R E P O R T

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THIS Committee, who sit every day for the purpose of receiving and communicating information on the important business of the Irish Resolutions, have lately turned their thoughts more immediately to some dangerous consequences, which, in their opinion, will arise from the proposed alteration of the Navigation Act in the Second of those Resolutions.

The local situation of the Irish ports will hold out strong temptations to the merchants to form warehouses there, making

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making them repositories to assort cargoes for the American and West India markets, where they will not only trade, equally with ourselves, for their own and foreign consumption, but likewise for the supply of Great Britain herself: And two cargoes can often be brought across the Atlantic into the Western ports of Ireland, in the same period that will be required for lodging one cargo in London; almost any wind serving to bring their vessels into or out of those ports. These circumstances, united with the greater cheapness of the articles of outfit, and the lowness of port charges of every kind, will give the Irish such decided advantages over us in their commerce with America and the West Indies, as must ultimately throw the greatest part of that commerce into their hands. And whether our *shipping* and *naval strength* will not follow, this Committee apprehend to be well worthy of the most serious and immediate attention of every order of men throughout Great Britain; for this is a stroke at the root of the tree, and, when that is materially injured, the branches, every one of them, must wither and decay in proportion to that injury.

This Committee further apprehend, that, when the latter clause of the 4th Irish resolution is viewed in its true light, and the real consequences which must follow from it attended to, it will be evident, that though, at first view, it seems calculated merely for encouraging the export trade

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of the manufactures of each kingdom into the other, reciprocally, we shall find, that, under this specious appearance, it will greatly facilitate and hasten the evils which we have to fear, from the abolishing of the true construction, or rather power, of our navigation act. For, unless the ships bound for the American and West India markets can be completely assorted in Ireland, they must go where they can be so accommodated; and this circumstance has hitherto obliged the Irish merchant to resort to British ports, for such completely assorted cargoes for America and the West-Indies. But this necessity will no longer exist, when warehouses are established in Ireland, for the sale of British goods for exportation, under all the privileges of Irish manufactured goods, which the Committee apprehend must unavoidably be allowed them, under the resolutions above mentioned, namely,

“ That all such articles, the growth, produce, or manufacture of either country, shall be exportable from the kingdom into which they shall be imported, as free from duty as the similar commodities or home manufactures of the same kingdom.”

It will readily be acknowledged, that the British manufactures will, for a while, form a considerable part of the export cargo from Ireland: But as the demand, thus opened and created in her own ports, cannot fail to increase

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the Irish manufactures, *they* will, by degrees, be substituted for British ones of the same kind: And in the same proportion as the Irish manufactures increase, those of Britain must necessarily decrease; no new market being opened by this resolution, but merely a change of hands in supplying the present.

And when this Committee consider the many and great advantages which the Irish manufacturers, or perhaps, as they may more justly state it, the English manufacturers settled in Ireland, will enjoy over those who still remain attached to their native soil; such as the cheapness of labour, the almost total exemption from taxes and poor rates, and, above all, from that most oppressive and vexatious of the evils he labours under, the extension of excise laws into his manufactory;—when this Committee consider these circumstances, they cannot hesitate to declare it as their opinion, that it will be impossible for the English manufacturer long to support so unequal a contest; and they farther apprehend, that those evils, which to many, who have not thought much upon these subjects, may appear to be at a considerable distance, will be at our very threshold, when these most impolitic and unequal resolutions are passed into a law—Resolutions by which Ireland is to enjoy a new privilege in almost every instance, without any additional advantage to ourselves; where no cer-

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tain or solid advantage is conceded by Ireland; but every thing is conceded by Britain.

This Committee would add further upon this subject, what may not have been generally attended to, that in the migration, which must take place, of the artists and manufacturers of this country to Ireland, it will be chiefly the most valuable, the ingenious, and active of those classes, that will leave us: For the auxiliary multitude,—*the greatest number*,—which may be met with in any country, will be left behind; and being so left, they will prove a body without a head, a body deserted by its animating spirit. But they must, nevertheless, eat, and the land, which will likewise *be left behind*, must furnish them with their food; and not them only, but those in Ireland, who, after having spent the prime of their life for the benefit of a country which makes no provision for the poor, must return to England when disabled by age, accident, or infirmity, and become a heavy burden to their exhausted parishes.

The Committee cannot finish this Report without expressing their firm confidence, that the Gentlemen possessed of landed property in this kingdom will attend to the ruinous consequences of the measures now depending, and will no doubt see, in a much clearer, as well as stronger point of view than this Committee can, whether the Land-

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ed Interest is, or is not, connected with the Manufacturing Interest of this kingdom, and will act accordingly.

(Signed) JOS. WEDGWOOD, Chairman.

George and Vulture Tavern, }
Cornhill, 21st April 1785. }

Q U E R I E S

ON THE

Proposed Commercial Treaty with Ireland.

Query 1. In the proposed commercial treaty with Ireland, Is it not understood that both countries negotiate with one another as *independent kingdoms*, having separate legislatures, and enjoying political privileges distinct from each other?

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Query 2. When the union took place between England and Scotland, was not the independence of both countries similar to what is now acknowledged to exist between Great Britain and Ireland?

3. Are not the commercial privileges, now proposed to be communicated to Ireland, the same in effect as England communicated to Scotland by the treaty of Union?

4. Were not these privileges communicated on the principles of mutual burdens—of mutual and inseparable interests—of perfect union, by one common legislature, rendering it not only impossible to divide the interests thus united; but with power to rectify any mistake that might occur in practical operation of the new commercial system?

5. Did not our ancestors, notwithstanding the ultimate object was to render England and Scotland one nation, without the possibility of a separate interest, proceed in the treaty with a becoming caution, and with a prudent respect to the dignity of both kingdoms, by the appointment of Commissioners to investigate fully the various interests of the public, and of individual classes of

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men, before a treaty was submitted to parliament?

Query 6. Has the same respect been shewn to the dignity, and the best interests, of the people of Great Britain, in the treaty now proposed to be concluded with Ireland, which involves in its consequences objects exceedingly more momentous and intricate, and demands a species of discussion difficult to the last degree, as every negotiation must be where one kingdom confers her whole commercial privileges upon another, *without union, without the burdens of state, with separate governments, and separate interests?*

7. Does history exhibit any example of a treaty, of such magnitude, being settled on the part of a kingdom without inquiry into consequences—without permitting the landed or trading interest to exercise their judgments in a transaction where their best rights are so essentially involved? Would it not have been respectful to the *landed interest* of the country, upon whom all the injuries arising out of this system *must ultimately rest*, to have given them at least a year's previous notice of the intended arrangement; *which, from the reports of the revenue boards, the evidences at the*

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bar of the House of Commons, and the general opinion of the country at large, appears likely to affect the resources and the commerce of the country in an eminent degree, and cannot fail in that view to be ruinous to the landed property?

Query 8. Does not the treaty, upon the terms offered to Ireland by the British Minister, tend, in an eminent degree, to fetter this nation in every future commercial regulation with foreign countries, thereby destroying the interest, and wounding the dignity, of Great Britain, and lessening her importance with the nations around?

9. Does not the monopoly of the linen trade trench upon the resources of Great Britain at home as well as abroad, by depriving the laborious poor of the possibility of employing their industry in this branch, if other manufactures should fail, by leaving it entirely in the hands of Ireland, by an unalterable concession made without a participation of burdens, without an equivalent, and with an existing rivalry arising from separate interests?

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Query 10. While Ireland shall possess every privilege whatsoever which this nation can boast of, will not her situation be infinitely superior to that of Great Britain? Possessing harbours accessible with every wind; possessing a provision trade (which England has not)—with every other benefit communicated in point of trade; Will not the soil, the local situation, the cheap labour, the exemption from taxes, and the bountiful legislature of Ireland, give her a pre-eminence wherever commerce and manufactures are the object?

11. In addition to all these advantages, to have the British market, and the British consumption, opened to all the manufactures of Ireland, fostered and encouraged by the cheapness of labour and provisions, by an exemption from taxes on manufactures and from poor rates, Is not a rivalry to be dreaded, even in the home markets, dangerous to the British manufactures?

12. Does not the evidence already adduced at the bar of the House of Commons prove, that the introduction of Irish manufactures, even with the intended protecting duties, must greatly injure many valuable articles in the home consumption, and actually prevent a competition abroad; and

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must not the great article of their woollens, and woollen mixtures, suffer severely when the Irish come to work up their own yarns, and send such goods to England at so low a duty as 5 per cent.?

Query 13. If, in the operation of practical commerce, under these regulations, the trade and manufactures of Great Britain shall decline, and discontent and distress pervade this country, in what manner is redress to be obtained after the Irish propositions once pass into a law? Can a British act of parliament afford relief? Is there a common legislature (as in the case of England and Scotland) that can repeal or new model any part of the proposed system when found to be injurious or oppressive? Does there exist a necessity at present to incur these hazards, and are the probable benefits to be expected from the propositions balanced by the mischiefs which are likely to result from them?

14. If not—Will there be any hope of prevailing on Ireland to forego advantages which this treaty will have decreed to her? Will not Ireland, on the contrary, find it her interest to adhere tenaciously to this treaty in the same proportion as Great Britain may be anxious to have it relaxed?

Query 15. Will not jealousy, arising from this competition of interests, grow into enmity? and will not that tend finally to produce consequences the most fatal to the common interests of the empire at large?

16. If it shall thus appear that new and unforeseen dangers are likely to arise out of these propositions, highly injurious to Great Britain, and dreaded as a source of evil by the great body of the people—Would it not be *fair, manly, and dignified* in a *British minister* to abandon so dangerous a measure?

17. If it shall appear, in addition to these general questions, that the *very apprehension of danger* to the resources of state in a country so exhausted as Great Britain is, may affect the public credit at a critical moment when a great and productive revenue must be found, ought not this alone to divert the minister from his purpose; and ought not all the mischiefs of a system so new, and so evidently destructive to the best interests of Great Britain, induce the legislature to refuse their assent to any unalterable system of commercial regulation with Ireland until the consequences are fully considered, and until the good sense of the nation

nation shall point out the dangers of a system which has given rise to the present well founded alarm in every part of this kingdom?

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