

The GrEco Project

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Grenville's Economics

Lord William Wyndham Grenville

Irish Commercial Proposition  
(1785)

Source: Cobbett, vol. XXV, pp. 644-6

## **IRISH COMMERCIAL PROPOSITION**

HC Deb 12 May 1785 vol 25 cc644-6

Mr. W. W. Grenville said, he had waited with great anxiety for an opportunity to deliver his sentiments on these propositions, in which he felt a deep interest. When he considered the relative situation of England and Ireland, he should have conceived it impossible, had he not heard the noble lord in the last and present debate on the Irish measures, that any man in his senses could have maintained in a serious manner, that the present system of intercourse between the two countries could possibly subsist much longer; much less that it might continue for ever, with mutual advantage to both countries. He confessed he was much surprised at the general argument of the noble lord: it was, the noble lord had said, in perfect unison with the whole tenor of his political life: it was so; but was that, he asked, a reason why it should be better intitled to consideration and respect? Was it because it breathed the same spirit with those arguments by which he supported the American war, that grand criterion of the noble lord's principles and abilities, that a House of Commons should, at this day, with all the experience they have had of the noble lord, suffer themselves to be imposed upon by him on the present occasion, because he had formerly found means of imposing on another parliament? The noble lord seemed to imagine, that Ireland did not call for any alteration in the system of commerce with this country, and that it was offered to her, and pressed upon her by the government of England. From the opportunity he had from his connexion. with the noble person (earl Temple) who had been in the lieutenancy of that kingdom some time ago, he had an opportunity of feeling the disposition of the people there; and he was so thoroughly convinced of the necessity of altering and amending the commercial intercourse between them and the people of this country, that he had written over to his Majesty's then ministers, his sentiments on the subject; and they would no doubt have turned their attention to so important an object as soon as the conclusion of the peace had left them

a moment's respite from the other weighty concerns of the empire, had they remained in office: their successors this day had taken it up, and it would afford him unspeakable pleasure, if he should have been in any degree, however humble, instrumental in restoring harmony and union to the two kingdoms; and, as his right hon. friend (Mr. Pitt) had said on a former day, in knitting together the remaining limbs of the empire. Had the noble lord been but as well informed on the subject as he ought to have been when he was in office, he would not have stopped where he did in the plan he had laid down for the commercial concerns of Ireland; nor would have waited to produce his plan, such as it was, until it had been forced from him by the point of the bay net: the *lucida tela* had made him do on a sudden, what sound policy should have made him do long before. The noble lord seemed to think, that in the propositions then under consideration, the reciprocity was all on the side of Ireland; but his lordship must have hazarded the expression without reflection. If England should prohibit the importation of linens, the noble lord thought Ireland would retaliate only by prohibiting the exportation of provisions: but here the noble lord had surely forgotten the evidence that had been given at the bar; where it had been asserted, that the raw materials of many of the great manufactures of England were brought from Ireland: should the latter, then, prohibit the exportation of them, what would become of the English manufactures? Should she prohibit the exportation of woollen yarn, how greatly would the staple manufacture of this country suffer? Should she do the same with respect to raw hides, the different branches employed in the leather trade of Great Britain would be utterly undone. He observed, that however fortified the noble lord might think this country against any hostile proceedings of the Irish merchants, by the power which she had of prohibiting the importation of Irish linens, this was no security; seeing that such a prohibition would operate as much against England as Ireland, and ultimately more; because, by that means we should be injured in the article of our shipping, and lose the carrying of the Irish linens to the foreign markets. Nor would this be the only bad

consequence; this carrying trade being thus thrown into the hands of the Irish, they would thereby contract habits of intercourse with the States of America and with other foreign nations, that would by degrees undermine us in our trade to those countries. Thus, it would appear, that though a war of bounties would be highly prejudicial to Ireland, it would be little less so to England. The noble lord was of opinion, that the cheapness of provisions would enable the Irish to undersell the English manufacturer at his own door: but he had brought no proof of this; indeed, it would have been wonderful if he had, for nobody knew where to find any such proof: on the contrary, it had been proved at the bar, by captain Brooke, who had set up an extensive cotton manufactory in Ireland, that he had always given the same wages that were given at Manchester, and that he had, on more occasions than one, with difficulty escaped with his life from his workmen, who had confederated in order to compel him to raise their wages higher than those that were paid at Manchester. So far, no greater cheapness of labour appeared in one country than in the other: but supposing the wages were somewhat lower in Ireland than in England, he would not admit that as a proof that labour was in fact cheaper; for the true way to estimate that point would be to see what work was done for the money, and if the work was not proportioned, or equal to the price, then labour could not be said to be as low as from the wages it might appear to be. The noble lord had said, that this country contributed immensely in taxes towards the support of government, whilst Ireland was comparatively untaxed. To this he would reply, that if England was heavily taxed, she had now, and had had the benefit, for a whole century past, of a widely extended trade, from which she had excluded Ireland; and the latter had already given to England, all that she would have made, if she had not been debarred from those advantages that God and nature had given her. Her poverty occasioned by this country was one ground of her claim to a participation of that trade too long engrossed by England; but this was not all, for exclusive of the army, which she kept up in time of peace, and the 3,000 men she constantly lent to Great Britain, and paid for

the defence of the colonies, in return for this final adjustment, she would make a contribution to the support of the navy, by which the trade, to a share of which she was to be now admitted, would be protected.