

Lord William Wyndham Grenville

Commerce of the Country
(1810)

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COMMERCE OF THE COUNTRY.

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Lord Grenville rose, for the purpose of submitting to their lordships consideration some remarks upon the observations made by his noble friend, and also upon the papers, which had just been laid upon their lordships' table. It was not only surprising but it was a species of conduct of which no example was any where to be found but amongst his Majesty's pre- [347](#)sent ministers, that papers of such importance, should be laid upon their table, and a commercial question of such magnitude and detail should be brought into discussion without any previous notice. However, if it was not the noble earl's intention to move that the papers mentioned be printed; he should think it a duty incumbent upon him to make that motion himself. Did the noble earl, under all the calamity and disgrace brought upon the country by the ignorant and absurd measures of the administration, think it necessary to encourage the country to resist the power of France? Why there was not a man in whose breast the heart of an Englishman could be found to beat, who could ever entertain a doubt on the subject. God forbid that England should ever entertain the question, whether she should resolutely maintain her power, or sink beneath the power of France. As to the trade of the country, he was as much convinced as any man could be, that it was, in regard to our internal situation, increasing in prosperity. We had no occasion to be told that such prosperity was owing to our happy laws and constitution, and the industry of our people: the reason was an obvious one, and not more true than it was universally felt and acknowledged. But this prosperous increase of trade, so much, and so triumphantly spoken of by the noble earl this evening, was not to be taken as resulting from the measures of that blind policy adopted by noble lords opposite. It was a prosperity arising from the extended commercial genius of the country, from the benignant influence of our happy constitution, and the unexampled industry of our population; and happy for us it was so, because we thereby saw that our commerce could flourish in spite of the barriers opposed to it by the frail, imbecile, and mad proceedings of those who framed the Orders in

Council. It would be useless at this time to enter into the detailed accounts given by the noble earl, for it was impossible for him to carry in his head all the numbers, sums, and figures mentioned, and as much so for those who heard him. But what did all this superficial and unsatisfactory statement of accounts amount to? Did it shew that our commerce had increased, because of its restrictions? The whole amounted to this and to this only, that, in consequence of the political situation of Spain, the Spanish colonies of America had been laid open [348](#) to our merchants; and, although we had lost our trade with the United States, this new intercourse, arising from an independent and distinct cause, had given it considerable increase. But, perhaps, were we rightly to estimate the consequence of these colonies being suddenly opened, upon the decrease of our trade to the United States, when there was a general effort to supply the market to an overflow, it might be a most damning proof of the injury which our commerce had sustained by means of the conduct of administration. He would ever maintain, that all legislative interference with the interests of commerce must invariably produce injurious consequences; but no legal fetters were so galling to commercial success, as those to which he alluded. If it was intended that trade should flourish, we ought to have it open and free to flow in its own course. Commercial policy, in these days, was better understood than heretofore; we ought not now to talk of - the balance of trade, a doctrine so antiquated, and so proscribed by all men of enlightened views, that it was only fit for dark ages, and ought to be exploded by the philosophy of modern governments. So long as the Orders in Council were acted upon, so long they were found to be destructive to trade; and even their lordships, who were called upon, as friends of the ministers, to sanction the measure, as one of the soundest policy, soon afterwards had an opportunity of seeing those ministers themselves abandon that system. The result was, the moment a partial relaxation was adopted, the commerce of the country was benefited in the same proportion.