

FREE TRADE AND FOUL TRADE.

The recently received Indian journals afford instructive examples of the results of these two modes of directing the industry of nations. They will be found in a comparison of the import and export trade of the little island of Singapore, compared with those of the whole of the Netherland possessions in India. Let us first sketch the two places compared. Singapore is a barren island with an area of about two hundred square miles. When founded thirty-four years ago, it was a primeval jungle, with no more cleared land than was necessary for the huts of 150 beggarly and piratical Malay fishermen. It contains now 60,000 inhabitants,—on an average, the most industrious and well-to-do of all the British subjects of the Crown in India. During the whole period of its existence it has had neither import nor export duties, nor tonnage or other dues, and has been equally open to the commerce of all nations, on the same terms: in a word, has been a perfectly free port. Yet, notwithstanding its freedom from customs, Singapore yields a revenue of 50,000*l.* a-year, sufficient to cover the whole of its expenditure, public and municipal.

Let us now turn to the Netherland possessions. The whole territory claimed by the Dutch exceeds 500,000 square miles; Java, with some 40,000, and ten millions of inhabitants, being part of it, an island, and probably the most fertile portion of the globe of equal extent. In these immense possessions there are import and export duties, and tonnage dues throughout, their amount being double to strangers to what they are to natives of Holland. The government is itself a trader in certain staples, and under its wing there is a large privileged commercial association, with a rather hard name, instituted by the first William of the Netherlands, that royal personage having been himself a leading, though a sleeping partner. Of the 10,000,000 of the inhabitants of Java, about 9,000,000, the immediate subjects of the Netherland crown, are subject to *corvée* labour; and by this *corvée* labour the sugar, coffee, indigo, and other products of Java, especially suited to the European market, are raised. But besides these products of Java, there are produced by similar labour elsewhere, tin, cloves, and nutmegs, the whole value of all such forced products amounting yearly to about two and a half millions sterling! Such *corvées*, it is hardly necessary to add, are but a barbarous and improvident form of taxation. More regular taxes are, however, not wanting, and these yield an annual gross revenue of about 3,250,000*l.* The Dutch possessions were restored in a tolerably improved condition, after some six years of British occupation, three years before the foundation of Singapore; or in other words, the close system of the Dutch has been in operation for thirty-seven years, and the open one of the English for thirty-four.

Now, here are the results, as far as they are expressed by the import and export trade of the two parties. In the year 1852-53, the imports of Singapore amounted to 3,487,695*l.*, and those of all the Netherland Indies, centring in the Vort of Batavia, to 3,301,545*l.*, or 186,350*l.* less. The exports show a very different result, those of Singapore being 3,025,980*l.*, or by 460,715*l.* less than the imports. Those of Java, on the contrary, amounted to 4,841,662*l.*, or were in excess of the imports by the enormous amount of 1,540,317*l.*, the balance of course being not honest trade, but clumsy tribute. The united exports and imports of Singapore were by 600,000*l.* more in 1852-53 than they were in the preceding year, and those of the Netherland Indies less by the frightful sum of 1,466,186*l.*! The demerit of establishing this modified revival of the commercial policy of the sixteenth century belongs to King William the First, of restoration and uxorious memory; and that of perfecting it to a certain Governor-General named Van den Bosch, of whom nothing else is known. How long the Dutch nation will be content to lie in the slough, into which such men as these have thrust them, it is impossible to say; for the present, they do not appear to be making any effort to extricate themselves.

The Dutch, after eight-and-twenty years' mature deliberation, have just declared the Spice Islands "free ports," with the exception of their cloves, mace, and nutmegs,—their only staples, and the only things for which they are worth visiting,—which, as for the last 250 years, are to continue monopolies. This is as if our transatlantic cousins, taking leave of their senses, were to declare a free trade in all things excepting corn, cotton, and tobacco. As connected with this subject, the question was lately put to the Colonial Minister in the Chambers, "What is to be made of our island of New Guinea?" It was evaded, but the frank reply ought to have been, Nothing at all can be made of that huge sow's ear—a malarious jungle on the equator, without a single acre of cultivated land, inhabited by ferocious negro savages, stark naked but for a crust of dirt and a bit of palm leaf. The naturalists, the antiquarians, the geographers, and the engineers of Holland are on a par with those of the other civilised countries of Europe, and have greatly distinguished themselves in the East; but in so far as commercial policy is concerned, its public men are greatly indeed below those of Constantinople.