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SINGAPORE AND THE ARMS TRADE.

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We published on Monday some correspondence between the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and the Government in reference to the prohibited export of arms from Singapore to other parts of the East.

Singapore, as some of our readers doubtless know, is a free port situated at the extremity of the Malay Peninsula. From its proximity to the main route from Europe and India to China and Japan, as well as on account of the convenience of the harbour, it is visited by a great amount of shipping. The steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Company call there twice a month outwards and homewards. Not less than twenty-three European steam vessels and sixty-nine ships arrived at or left the port between October 22 and November 4. Besides this, Singapore is the great mart to which the native traders bring, in their prahus the produce of the islands of the Eastern Archipelago, and exchange it for European goods. For some years Singapore has had a trade in arms and ammunition. The arms consist of muskets and field pieces, and these are regularly quoted in the trade circulars. We are not in a position to state the proportion the muskets bear to the field pieces, but of the latter we note that in 1859 there were more than 500 in store. It was stated the other day at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in Liverpool that a firm, whose head-quarters were at Liverpool, received in one year consignments of arms to the extent of £20,000; but this statement is probably exaggerated. Though Singapore is a British port, yet the bulk of the small arms exported thence are not of English make, but come chiefly from the Belgian gun factories. We call special attention to this, as it may be worth the while of the gunmakers of Birmingham, masters and men, to enquire why to so large an extent we are beaten out of this market. That such is the fact is beyond question. Late returns prove that in 9½ months of 1862 the total number of pieces of both kinds imported from England was 6,500, whilst the number imported from the Continent was 39,776.

In the 9½ months of the present year 5,048 pieces were imported from England, and 44,923 from the Continent. As would be seen from the correspondence above referred to, the Council of the Chamber of Commerce had under its consideration a notification from the Governor by which an embargo was placed on the export of arms and ammunition from Singapore, unless under very stringent regulations. This measure was most likely prompted by some information which the authorities either at home or at Calcutta, had received to the effect that the Rebels in China were deriving their principal supply of arms from Singapore. This, however, is doubted by well-informed persons, who assert that the Rebels are not short of arms—but stand in greatest need of gunpowder. What the merchants in Singapore feel aggrieved about is that the ordinary course of trade should be interrupted at their port, whilst, with the exception of Hong Kong, the trade is free at every port in the Empire, and that this should be effected by the instrumentality of a law which was intended only for the Continent of India.

As might be expected, the newspapers of Singapore warmly support the views of the mercantile community; and the *Free Press* points out with special force the inconsistent policy of the Home Government, which allows arms to be freely exported from England to America, and yet forbids, or did until recently forbid, the export of the same class of merchandise to Chinese ports. It now appears that the authorities are disposed to abandon this policy to some extent, and to permit the exportation of arms from Singapore to any part of the East, other than China. It may be worth while, therefore, for the Birmingham trade to look sharply after a trade which is at present nearly monopolised by our Belgian competitors.

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