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**FEW OBSERVATIONS**

UPON THE

**VALUE AND IMPORTANCE**

OF OUR

**NORTH**

**AMERICAN COLONIES.**

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BY **LIEUT.-COLONEL OLDFIELD, K.H.,**  
**CORPS OF ROYAL ENGINEERS.**

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*C'est le nombre du peuple, et l'abondance des alimens, qui forment la vraie force et la vraie richesse d'un royaume.*

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*The Fisheries of Newfoundland are mines of wealth superior to those of Mexico and Peru.—ABBÉ RAYNAL.*

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A FEW OBSERVATIONS  
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NORTH AMERICAN COLONIES.

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The assertion that our North American colonies are a burthen and expence, rather than an advantage to the mother country, has been so frequently made, that it appears to have gained some degree of credit ; a few facts which I propose to state in the following pages, may possibly tend, in some slight degree to dissipate this illusion.

It is true that Her Majesty's North American possessions do not afford the same pecuniary advantages, as Her West Indian colonies, yet they are not deficient in this point ; but it is, as connected with our maritime prosperity, that they are of the greatest value, and of the most vital importance to Great Britain.

It must be remembered, that previous to the loss of Canada, France was enabled to contend with us at sea, with a force, somewhat approximating to-

wards an equality, from the period of her losing Canada, her naval power has gradually declined, a second and almost death blow was given to it, by the loss of St. Domingo, which valuable colony gave employment to fully ten thousand seamen, and may serve as a warning to us, with respect to our West Indian islands, whose prosperity is closely allied to that of our North American provinces. Napoleon had ships in abundance, but he wanted sailors, when we entered Antwerp in the year 1814, thirty-three sail of the line, were on the stocks, several more in the basin, and others afloat in the Scheldt ; it was easy to build ships, but to man them was a much more difficult task. Aware of the impossibility of maintaining a military, without possessing a commercial navy, France has never failed to use her utmost endeavours to foster the latter, regardless of expence. Before Jacques Cartier entered the St. Lawrence in 1534, France had sent her ships to take cod on the banks of Newfoundland ; subsequent to the loss of Canada, additional encouragement was given to the fishery, which in 1775, employed five hundred and sixty-four vessels, and twenty-seven thousand seamen ; the value of the trade was calculated at one million sterling ; and the extent of the fishery, enabled France in the American war, to con-

test with us the sovereignty of the sea. After the peace of 1763, the French fishery declined, and with the fishery the French marine. Since the treaty of Paris of 1763, the Government of France alive to the importance of the Newfoundland fishery, as a nursery for her navy, has supported it by considerable bounties, amounting in some years to £60,000. However, extravagant this method may appear, of forming a marine, it is certainly more economical than that which Napoleon adopted from necessity, of training his sailors, in ships of war, and supporting them in this unproductive labour, entirely at the expence of the public.

Mr. Bliss in his interesting pamphlet, on the colonial system, tells us, that the number of seamen employed by the French in their Newfoundland fishery, exceeds one half of the whole number employed in her commercial marine.

Of the importance attached by France, to her North American colonies, we have a proof, in the immense sums expended on the fortifications of Louisburgh, in the island of Cape Breton, which island was occupied by the French, in the year 1713, during the regency of the Duke of Orleans.

Raynal tells us, "the necessity of bringing stone from Europe," and other materials proper for these

great works, sometimes retarded their progress, but never made them to be discontinued ; more than thirty millions of francs, or £1,250,000 stg. were expended on them. This was not thought too great a sum for the support of the fisheries, for securing the communication between France and Canada, and for obtaining a security or retreat to ships of war coming from the southern islands ; nature and policy required that the riches of the south should be protected by the strength of the north."

The conquest of Cape Breton by the British, in 1745, was considered a most valuable acquisition ; it was restored to France at the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 ; and again captured by the English in 1758 ; after the conquest of Canada, in 1759, Cape Breton lost its importance, in a military point of view ; the expensive fortifications were destroyed, and a quantity of fine free stone, imported from France for the construction of the works, was, as recently as the period from 1811 to 1814, sent to Newfoundland for some defences proposed to be erected on Signal Hill, the progress of which was suspended at the peace in 1815. Should however, at any future period, the Canadas be severed from the British Empire, Cape Breton would resume its military importance, and its commercial consequence which is now consi-

derable would be greatly enhanced. Its valuable coal mines, and agricultural produce, render it at all times, a possession of much importance ; the first as furnishing an abundant supply of excellent fuel, for our steam vessels ; and the last as affording provisions for our West Indian colonies, and Newfoundland fishery, for it must be observed, that Newfoundland, although of such value to Great Britain, as a fishing station and as a nursery for sailors, is almost entirely dependent on external resources for the subsistence of its inhabitants. The island produces little more than a precarious crop of potatoes, hay not sufficient for the small number of cattle on the island, oats, cut green, and used as fodder, and a few vegetables.

Newfoundland has an increasing population, consisting at present, of probably not less than 70,000 ; in 1786, when Mr. Jenkinson (afterwards Lord Liverpool) brought forward a proposition for regulating the fisheries of Newfoundland, an object at that moment doubly interesting from the then recent loss of so many of our trans-atlantic colonies, in a speech in which he evinced a profound knowledge of his subject, he pointed out the unfitness of this island for colonization, and the injury to be apprehended to our fisheries by colonizing it. However, sterile may be the soil, and inhospitable the climate, the value of

this possession to Great Britain, cannot for one moment be questioned ; this island has been justly termed the asylum, and defence of the codfishery, its consequence to a maritime and commercial nation, whose natural defence in her navy is incalculable. /6

The exports of Newfoundland, consist of fish, oil, seal skins, and a few furs ; in some of the bays, remote from St. John's, a small quantity of timber is cut for ship building.

The value of the exports in 1834, the year preceding that in which I left the colony was £826,659 8s. 10d., of the imports £618,757 2s. 4d., the tonnage outwards,

	Ships.	Tons.	Men.
British.....	852	75,394	5,727
Foreign.....	21	3,028	168
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>873</b>	<b>78,422</b>	<b>5,895</b>

the tonnage inwards,

	Ships.	Tons.	Men.
British.....	888	105,570	5,993
Foreign.....	20	2,978	157
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>908</b>	<b>108,548</b>	<b>6,150</b>

An increasing branch of commerce, is that of the seal fishery. In 1796, a publication in speaking of the increasing importance of the seal fishery, in Newfoundland, states, that “ 4,000 seal skins were exported,” in 1831, 604,000 seals were taken. In 1835,

from the port of St. John's, 126 vessels, of 14,167 tons, and with 2,912 men, went to the seal fishery, and from the out harbours, about two hundred sail of vessels, with tonnage and men in proportion. To say more of Newfoundland, would oblige me to extend the limits I have prescribed to myself, in this pamphlet, but I think I have sufficiently proved its value and importance to Great Britain, and I shall only add, that its position at the mouth of the St. Lawrence, with the occupation of Cape Breton and Prince Edward's Island, will always ensure to us the command of the entrance to that river.

The value of Prince Edward's Island is great, not only from its position, but from the richness of its soil, and its agricultural produce, which renders it capable of affording considerable supplies to our West India Islands and Newfoundland Fisheries.

The idea that the Canadas have been productive of a heavy expense to Great Britain, is erroneous; economy has been the order of the day, in these, as well as in the other North American Provinces; but perhaps more particularly so in the Canadas and in Cape Breton. The local government of the latter having, to save expence, been merged in that of Nova Scotia.

In the Canadas, the only expensive public work,



undertaken by the British Government, has been that of the Rideau Canal, the merits of which have been discussed and decided upon by Parliament ; the French fortified Quebec, built the Chateau of St. Louis, the Jesuit's College, the Cathedral, the Bishop's Palace, and the Seminary at Quebec, the Cathedral, Hotel Dieu, and the Seminary at Montreal, with other public establishments at both places.

Fort Anne, at Annapolis, the former capital of Acadia (as the Province of Nova Scotia was called by the French), was a much more expensively constructed work, than any in my time in Nova Scotia, or I believe since ; the free stone of which the magazine was built, is said to have come from France ; it is similar to that which I saw at St. Johns, Newfoundland, which had been removed from Louisbourg.

In the year 1832, the actual cost of all the military and ordnance establishments in British North America, including the public works, amounted only to £351,819 4s. 11d. In the year 1830, of the shipping employed in the trade of the United Kingdom, more than two fifths of the tonnage of the outward bound was to British North America, and of the homeward bound nearly one half. The value of the imports into the United Kingdom from British

North America for that year, was £1,119,046 3s. 7d. of exports, 2,261,979 17s. 1d., exclusive of the imports to Great Britain, the North American Colonies, and especially Newfounddland, have a considerable colonial and foreign trade ; the latter to Portugal, the Mediterranean, South America, &c.

The consumption of our manufactures and colonial produce exported in British bottoms by a rapidly increasing population of a million and a half of British subjects, is of no small moment : it has been stated by those who hold that we derive no advantage from our North American Colonies, that the inhabitants of the United States consume more of our manufactures than they did when they were Colonies of Great Britain : this circumstance is brought forward as a proof of the inutility of our Colonies : and that the consumption of our manufactures would always be insured by their superiority and cheapness in comparison with other countries, and that we should have an equal trade with the Canadas if dismembered from Great Britain, without the expense of their government ; it may be answered, that the additional demand from the United States arises from her increase of population, and consequent demand for necessaries, as also from the increase of wealth, and the numerous wants arising therefrom, that had the

United States remained as part of British America, the demand would have been greater, as her supplies from other sources would have been less, and moreover, in place of importing these supplies in American vessels, much the largest portion of them would have reached the colonies in British bottoms, thereby benefitting the shipping interest, and above all, our nursery for seamen, consequently, were our remaining North American Provinces, either to become independant, or to become a portion of the United States, it may be inferred that our trade, manufactures, commercial and military navy, must inevitably suffer.

The timber trade of our North American colonies, is one of very considerable importance, for although the superiority of the Baltic timber, is not disputed, yet it must be remembered, that any difference with the Northern powers might close the Baltic upon us, in which case, we should be thrown back upon our own resources, and must then look to the Canadas, and New Brunswick, for a large portion of our supplies ; the effect also which our North American timber trade has had in reducing the price of the Baltic timber, must not be lost sight of. In 1831, the value of the produce of our American forests, exported to different parts of the world, exceeded

one million sterling ; exclusive of the fur trade. In New Brunswick, ship building is carried on to some extent, and from this province, also a considerable portion of the timber is exported. Amongst the branches of Canadian commerce, is to be reckoned the fur trade, the value of which, in 1831, exceeded 200,000. The Mineral productions of our North American Provinces, are of considerable importance. The island of Cape Breton, the neighbourhood of Pictou, in Nova Scotia, the country between the Gulph of St. Lawrence. and the River St. John's, in New Brunswick, and the district of Gaspé, in Lower Canada, contain beds of coal, of great extent : coal is said to exist in Newfoundland, and it seems highly probable, that the stratum of coal which is worked in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, extends to that island ; these mines are a source of great and increasing wealth, and will probably ere long afford the principal supply of the Eastern part of the United States, as well as our own provinces. In Upper and Lower Canada, iron mines are working, indications of this ore have appeared in our other colonies ; copper and lead, are said to exist ; by an official minute, I saw in Newfoundland, dated 16th Sept. 1757, it would seem a copper mine was then open at Petty Harbour, in that island ; gypsum and

grindstones, have long been articles of export from Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, the former, and red ochre are found in Newfoundland. Lime stone exists in Newfoundland, but has not been burnt to any extent ; excellent free stone is quarried in Nova Scotia, and good building stone in the other colonies.

Salt springs exist in Upper Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland ; in New Brunswick, specimens of rock salt are said to have been here found ; Manganese is an article of export from the latter Province.

In Agriculture, all our American colonies, with the exception of Newfoundland, are highly productive ; the value of the exports under this head in the year 1831, was £656,584 19s. 2d.

The population in British North America, which was in 1806, only 480,000, in 1832, was 1,204,000. Its increase since that period has been rapid ; the emigrants who have gone to British America, have settled there, with a full persuasion that the property invested in their adopted country, was guaranteed by the parent state, the question might consequently arise, whether in justice to these settlers we could abandon our North American Possessions, without giving them a recompence ; such at least as was granted to the Royalists, who quitted the United

States, when that country was severed from Great Britain—many of these Royalists settled in the British Provinces, where their descendants now remain.

The militia of our American colonies, has been calculated at upwards of one hundred thousand, the loyalty and efficiency of this force has been proved by the good service they performed in repelling the invasion of the Americans in the last war, as well as by their having during the late insurrection, without the assistance of the military, foiled the attempts of the rebels in Upper Canada.

The importance of Halifax, as a naval station, in connection with our transatlantic possessions, has, we believe, never been questioned ; the harbour is always open, it is only 220 miles from Boston ; across the peninsula of Nova Scotia, to Annapolis, the distance is 133 miles, from Annapolis to Digby by water through the Basin, is 18 miles, by land 21, from Digby to St. John's, New Brunswick, 45 miles, from thence to Kamarouska, on the south bank of the St. Lawrence, 315 miles, making the whole distance from Halifax, to the banks of the St. Lawrence, something more than 500 miles, In Nova Scotia, the roads are good ; from St. John's to Fredericton, 90 miles, the communication is easy ; either by the river or the roads, on its banks,

from thence the remaining 225 miles, it is more difficult, but has doubtless, much improved since I left the Province.

The territory claimed by the Americans under the treaty of Ghent, interferes with our communication between Fredericton and Canada ; it brings the Americans within a few miles of the St. Lawrence, about 100 miles below Quebec ; if it should be decided to relinquish this territory, we must establish a communication more to the eastward, by Kamarousky, on the St. Lawrence, the Bay of Chaleurs, Miramichi, Dorchester, Court-House, and so across the peninsula of Nova Scotia to Halifax.

It is unfortunate the boundary question has not been arranged ; nothing now remains but to do it speedily and in good faith ; the straight forward bearing of the American government, with respect to the late insurrection in the Canadas, is an additional inducement to settle the question with that amicable feeling it is so essential to preserve between the two countries.

The fishing boundaries upon the coast of Newfoundland should also be adjusted ; they have been a source of dispute from the time of Louis XIV., as appears by our declaration of war against that Monarch in 1689, when one of the grievances was

the encroachment of the French on our Newfoundland fisheries ; to attempt to discuss this question, would be foreign to our present purpose, which is merely an humble attempt to undeceive those who unfortunately imagine our transatlantic possessions are a burthen rather than an advantage to the state. The memorandum<sup>a</sup> from which these notes have been extracted, were made during a residence in the North American Colonies on military duty ; they claim no merit but that of being perfectly free from political feeling or party prejudice, and of coming from the pen of one who has no personal connection with ships, colonies, or commerce ; and, consequently, can have no interest in the question beyond that of every loyal subject of Her Majesty, and of every well wisher for the prosperity of his country ; to do justice to so important a subject, would require a much abler pen, and a knowledge of the full advantages of the several branches of commerce, which have been cursorily alluded to.

FINIS.