

Transcription, June 2016:

*Daily News* (London) No. 8547 (17 September 1873) (Harry Wallis).

‘Coal.’

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS.

Sir,—In your impression of this morning I read the very able letter of Mr. A. R. Wallace, entitled, “Free Trade Principles and the Coal Question,” and while agreeing with many of the arguments brought forward, I think some of the deductions are founded on somewhat imperfect knowledge of the facts, commercially. I leave it to politicians and philosophers to decide whether or no it is an infringement of the principles of free trade to restrict trade, and go at once to the question of advisability, commercially or socially, of endeavouring to reduce the exportation of coal. Coal is so essential to our well being and the price lately has so exceeded moderation, that the subject has become one of the great social questions of the day. But in discussions of this kind, facts must not be ignored. The great thing complained of by Mr. Wallace is the rash exportation of an article we need ourselves, thus ruthlessly depriving future generations of a necessity in our eagerness for profit. Reference to a table of statistics shows that during the first six months of this year the exports of coal were less by 350,000 tons than during the same time last year. Of the total output of the British collieries only about 20 per cent. is exported, which proves that 80 per cent. of the coals raised here is consumed by the British public. This 20 per cent. exported includes all coal sent to our stations abroad for the supply of our numerous mercantile steam fleet. And when we consider the large number of steamers trading under the Union Jack, laden with necessaries for our use, and if we make some small allowance for the comfort of British subjects abroad, it scarcely appears very rash to permit exportation of coal. I cannot think that we are exhausting our coal fields simply “for the purpose of lighting South American cities with gas, or building railways in every insolvent South American Republic,” and our reason for shipping coal is not because we are greedy of gain. We send coal away in the interests of trade, more or less, in order that we may receive in return things we absolutely need perhaps quite as much as the coal we have. That other countries ought to develop their resources is an undoubted fact, but mining speculation is attended with so much risk, and investors have so often been deceived, that it is generally found difficult to raise capital sufficient for the opening up of hidden wealth. Eradicate roguery from the mining world and more mines will be developed; but, as this seems impossible, we must, in the interests of our own comfort, send coal to bring us other things which we have learned to call necessities. If free trade had not been established and we had had to depend upon our own resources, we should starve. Therefore, if by sending a portion of our coals abroad, we are able to obtain supplies of the means of life, it surely is not very wrong to do so within reasonable limits.—I am, Harry Wallis.

Grays, Sept. 16.

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2017.