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*Art. XI.—Papers relative to the Sulphur Monopoly  
in Sicily. Presented to both Houses of Parliament  
by Command of her Majesty.*

THE Sulphur-Monopoly Question having recently occupied a considerable degree of public attention, even at a time when a diversity of most important topics, both foreign and domestic, has appealed to the national mind,—not only as regards interest but patriotic feelings,—we shall take advantage of the information furnished by Papers mentioned at the head of our paper, and some other sources, in order that our readers may understand the merits and the bearings of the particular case. Every one who is in the habit of looking into newspapers must have read many and sweeping charges therein brought concerning the bad faith, the breach of treaty, and the tergiversation of the Neapolitan government, manifested upon the Sulphur question: but it is only after some degree of minuteness, and some regard to consecutiveness and development have been observed in the account of this shameful, mean, and paltry display of trickery, dishonesty, and folly, that any one can be led to comprehend with any degree of adequacy its real character.

The two Articles in the commercial treaty of 1816, on which England mainly built her arguments and at last her energetic measures, with regard to the sulphur-monopoly, and which may be found in the *Annual Register* for 1817, are in these words:—

"Art. 4. His majesty the king of the two Sicilies promises that British commerce in general, and the British subjects who carry it on, shall be treated throughout his dominions upon the same footing as the most favoured nations, not only with respect to the persons and property of the said British subjects, but also with regard to every species of article in which they may traffic, and the taxes or other charges payable on the said articles, or on the shipping in which the importations shall be made.

"Art. 5. With respect to the personal privileges to be enjoyed by the subjects of his Britannic majesty in the kingdom of the two Sicilies, his Sicilian majesty promises, that they shall have as free and undoubted right to travel and to reside in the territories and dominions of his said majesty, subject to the same precautions of police, which are practised towards the most favoured nations. They shall be entitled to occupy dwellings and warehouses, and to dispose of their personal property of every kind and description by sale, gift, exchange, or will, and in any other way whatever, without the smallest loss or hindrance being given them on that head. They shall not be obliged to pay, under any pretence whatever, other taxes or rates than those which are paid, or than hereafter may be paid, by the most favoured nations in the dominions of his said Sicilian majesty. They shall be exempt from all military service whether by land or sea; their dwellings, warehouses, and everything belonging or appertaining thereto, for objects of commerce or residence, shall be respected. They shall not be subject to any vexatious search or visits. No arbitrary examination or inspection of their books, papers, or accounts, shall be made under the pretence of the supreme authority of the state, but these shall alone be executed by the legal sentence of the competent tribunals. *His Sicilian majesty engages on all these occasions to guarantee to the subjects of his Britannic majesty, who shall reside in his states and dominions, the preservation of their property and personal security, in the same manner as those are guaranteed to his subjects and to all foreigners belonging to the most favoured and most highly privileged nations.*"

We have put into italics the last sentence of *the fifth* Article, as bearing most pointedly upon the question, although Lord Palmerston founded his argument, at first, on the terms employed in *the fourth*.

Throughout the whole of this disgraceful affair, the Neapolitan government had recourse to the most crooked and absurd measures. In its greed and neediness, future interests were sacrificed to present paltry profits; nay, there is reason for believing that the prosperity of Sicily was totally disregarded, not to speak of national faith with a friendly power, which could speedily and signally assert its rights, merely to serve the purposes of certain individuals. But we must sketch the history of the question.

A large amount of British capital and enterprize had been expended in the sulphur trade, our merchants relying upon the terms of the treaty of 1816, which fairly read and construed guaranteed to British subjects equal privileges to any enjoyed by the most favoured nations, and therefore protecting them from every sort of commercial monopoly, whether that monopoly might be granted to foreigners or Sicilians. The contracts in this trade were simple and convenient, the article being put on board the buyer's vessel, and the custom-house passport handed over, all at the risk of the seller; the payment being similarly downright and intelligible.

In the year 1836, the English houses in Sicily and Naples had contracted to supply large quantities of sulphur, at long dates, even at eighteen months. But how surprised and alarmed were they when the rumour rose, that a company was about to be established, which was to have the exclusive right of purchasing, and at fixed prices, all the sulphur that Sicily might produce, whether in a raw or refined state, the patent to continue for the term of ten years. Of course there could be no equal chance for the subjects of Britain or any other power after the recognition and establishment of such a monopoly.

But British interests were to be sacrificed to the selfish motives of unprincipled individuals and a blind government, in another respect ruinous to some of our enterprising countrymen, and insulting to our nation. Large sums had been expended, and extensive measures adopted, having prospective views; views, too, that while they bid fair to remunerate handsomely the speculators would have results still more manifestly productive of Sicilian and Neapolitan benefits.

Indolence, want of skill, and deficiency of capital, had for a long time allowed some of the richest sulphur mines to remain under water. It needed but the visit of a Glasgow gentleman, Mr. W. J. Craig, and a careful examination, to satisfy him that these immersed mines might be rendered available. This was some time before 1836, when the rumour of the monopoly took wing. On returning to this country he found both in his native city and in Liverpool, liberal and wealthy persons ready to second his views; and, accordingly, in the way of machinery, initiative steps, such as taking immersed mines on lease, pecuniary advances, &c., a body of British subjects were deeply involved and greatly compromised by the monopoly.

Sulphur constitutes by far the most important article for exportation that Sicily now produces. It may be asked then, what could induce the Neapolitan government to drive out of the market the best of all traders, not to speak of the national insult offered to Great Britain, by the patent in favour of certain private French gentlemen?

The reasons both real and pretended are glanced at by Frederick Von Raumer, in his "Italy," which we lately reviewed. Having referred to the complaints which the Sicilian producers of sulphur had been putting forth, in consequence of a depression of prices arising chiefly from over-speculation, and the call which these ignorant and short-sighted people made for measures in order to force the rise of prices and "Act-of-parliament" prosperity, he then goes on to express himself to the following effect:—That certain interested individuals had taken advantage of the delusions of the sulphur producers, which indeed had become popular; that Monsieur Taix, acting upon these, had handed in a grand plan for the relief of the said producers, which, however, was rejected; that undismayed by the fate of that plan, Monsieur Aycard came forward with a second, and also afterwards with a third, in which it was maintained to be extremely foolish to allow the proprietors of sulphur mines to exhaust them by over-working, and that the state ought to interfere to control private interest, and correct the idle dream of a free trade. It was added, continues Von Raumer, that the monopoly of sulphur was one with which nature had endowed the island, and which it was necessary to secure against foreigners: better for Sicily to produce *little*, and for that little to command *much*, than the contrary; and that by means of a privileged commercial company alone could such a good be realized. Accordingly Messrs Taix, Aycard and Co., out of pure magnanimity, agreed to take the onerous task upon themselves, promising at the same time to make roads, distribute alms, indemnify mineowners, and found a mineralogical museum in Palermo! Arguments such as these imposed upon many simple-minded people; other means were adopted to gain over other persons; an investigation in full council was sedulously shunned; and the management of the whole affair was confided chiefly to *one* minister. Such is the import of Von Raumer's understanding of the disgraceful job.

The *one* statesman particularly referred to is M. Santangelo, the minister of the interior, who, like others of the active friends of Taix, the Duchess of Berri amongst the number, proceeded to sell Sicily for the most pitiful considerations.

Let it not be said that there was really anything in the assumption that the sulphur mines might be prematurely exhausted, unless by a monopoly the annual produce was limited. Even although the fact may be as assumed, a more impolitic scheme could not be adopted than that of Taix and Co. First of all, British skill and capital were about to resuscitate, so to speak, several great sources of produce.

But, secondly, the king of the two Sicilies and his advisers appear to have been ignorant that sulphur can be obtained from other quarters and regions; in fact from the vicinity of all great volcanoes. These short-sighted worthies also miscalculated the nature of British enterprize; for John Bull very promptly, began to turn his eyes and thoughts towards these other sources, which but for the foolish and preposterous conduct of the Neapolitan government never would have been seriously contemplated, so long as he could conveniently and upon fair terms be supplied from Sicily, the established mine and mart for that commodity. But our ally will most probably ere long discover that he has evoked a still more formidable rival, than either Iceland, Teneriffe, &c., can be rendered; for it is reported that chemical experiments have led to the discovery that sulphur may be obtained in a very pure state from pyrites, and this too at a cheap rate; and what is more, the substance abounds in Great Britain. But we must proceed with the sketch of the famous job which forms the subject of our paper.

The alarm which seized our sulphur merchants, at the report of Taix's company being about to be established, naturally made them promptly appeal to Mr. Temple, the British representative at the Neapolitan court; and we regret that neither that minister nor Lord Palmerston vindicated their countrymen's claims with an equivalent or corresponding speed and energy. Not that they neglected the matter, but because they allowed themselves to be hoodwinked and deceived, as respected the policy and purposes of his majesty of the two Sicilies, for about two years, and to be shoved off by procrastinations and delays, which would have roused to action most men similarly situated.

To be sure Mr. Temple made inquiries of the minister for the affairs of Sicily immediately on being informed of the monopoly, or its projection rather; and got an answer to this effect from that functionary,—that he did not approve of the project, as he was hostile to all such monopolies; that the construction of roads was a matter which alone concerned the government and the landed proprietors; and that in short the speculation of the French company would never be countenanced or sanctioned by the government of which he was a member.

These assurances proved in the meanwhile satisfactory, and no doubt were considered for a time as deserving of permanent reliance, seeing that there was no practical violation of them. At length, however, towards the close of 1837, and fully a year after the assurances noticed had been given, it came out that the bargain between M. Taix and Co. and the Neapolitan government was on the eve of ratification. Mr. Temple, of course, was again applied to by our merchants of Palermo, and he lost no time in communicating with our Foreign Secretary. He wrote as follows:—

"I thought it right, in consequence of this information, to call again upon M. Franco and upon Prince Cassaro, when they both assured me that they disapproved of the project. M. Franco repeated tonic his former objections to it, and added as another reason for opposing it, that M. Taix, not possessing any capital, would be unable to give any sufficient guarantee for carrying his part of the contract into effect.

"I represented to Prince Cassaro the great injury which the British, and indeed all other commercial interests, would suffer in Sicily by the proposed measure; and the injustice which would be done to parties who had already made contracts for the delivery of sulphur, and had vested considerable capital in that branch of commerce; and I added, that it appeared to me to be contrary to the stipulations of the treaty between England and Naples, that this government should prohibit British subjects from trading with private individuals in any article of commerce, and should favour other parties, whether foreign nations, or private companies, by granting them exclusive privileges, to the injury of British trade.

"M. de Talleny has received instructions from the French government to use every endeavour to oppose the establishment of this monopoly, and to act in concert with me for that purpose. He has, therefore, also made representations to this government upon the subject. From the language of M. Franco and Prince Cassaro, I do not think it probable that M. Taix will succeed in his applications; but it is impossible to answer for the effect which private influence or erroneous ideas may produce. I wish therefore to receive the opinion of my government upon the subject, and instructions respecting the course I should pursue in case the matter is further proceeded in."

Lord Palmerston replied that her Majesty's government regarded such a monopoly as was contemplated as an infraction of the treaty of 1816, referring specially to the *fourth* Article; and the correspondence that ensued between the ministers of the two governments, both in Naples and in London was sufficiently long-winded; delay, if nothing else could be obtained, being an important object with the monopolists; because in a short time the stock of sulphur in this country and in France would be exhausted, and great advantages consequently would instantly be realized by the monopolists. We therefore think that blame may be imputed to the representatives of England for having yielded to such dilatoriness, although their remonstrances had the effect of considerably modifying the originally proposed plan.

The monopoly company was established by a royal decree on the 37th of June, 1838, which decree about a week afterwards was promulgated in Sicily. But the term *monopoly* was carefully avoided, as if by this silly device the essential question could be blinked.

Whether by design or through oversight we cannot tell, but the *rescritto* was so worded in some of its *articles*, that the professed intention of limiting the exports, with the view of preventing the mines from being speedily exhausted, and of preserving to Sicily its natural monopoly, was rendered nugatory. Thus, "if the company exceed the sale of 600,000 cantars of sulphur, the government is to have one-third of the profits arising therefrom." In the case of violent profits two-thirds are not to be scorned. The proportion was enviable enough to neutralize all private regard concerning the productiveness of the mines in after generations.

We have referred to the lengthened diplomatic correspondence which the sulphur question evoked, and now present a specimen, in which Lord Palmerston shows himself a dextrous combatant when he is aroused to battle upon paper, as we have no doubt he will ever prove himself to be, when he is screwed up to take the actual field of mortal war. The Neapolitan minister at our court, Count Ludolf, very plausibly and ingeniously defended his master's policy in the following communication:—

"The undersigned considers it his duty to reply to the declaration of her Britannic Majesty's government, and has the honour to point out to that government, that no interpretation can be given to the articles of the treaty of 1816, and particularly to the 4th and 5th articles, by which the rights of his Sicilian Majesty can be invalidated; rights which he is fully at liberty to exercise with regard to his own subjects. In fact, whatever may be the interpretation which may be sought to be given to the treaty, and to the articles above mentioned, it can never be contended that his Majesty, in the exercise of his rights, is bound to treat foreigners better than his own subjects. This would be a great paradox in policy; for the purport of every convention ought always, and at the most, to be, that foreigners should be treated and favoured similarly to the subjects of the state. The government of her Britannic Majesty has, without doubt, momentarily lost sight of that which the undersigned has the honour to submit to the attentive consideration of his Excellency Viscount Palmerston; namely, that the question at issue relates to a mineral, which Sicily possesses almost exclusively; the production of which had been reduced to such a state of decline, as to oblige the government of his Sicilian Majesty to regulate the working of the mines, with a view again to raise their value, and to restore the value of this kind of property of his Majesty's Sicilian subjects."

This style of reasoning is reiterated by the Count with consummate gravity: but let us see how our Foreign Secretary meets him:—

"Her Majesty's government," says Lord Palmerston, "do not admit the fundamental position on which Count Ludolf's argument rests; namely, that no sovereign can be expected to grant to foreigners greater privileges or immunities than are enjoyed by his own subjects. For the undersigned must observe, that it is entirely for the purpose of securing in certain cases such greater immunities and exceptions, that treaties of commerce are frequently made. Because, in countries where the government is arbitrary and despotic, and subject to no responsibility or control, it may often happen that caprice, want of political knowledge, private interest, or undue influence, may procure the promulgation of unjust and impolitic edicts, inflicting much injury upon the people of such state, interfering with the legitimate industry of individuals, deranging the natural transactions of commerce, and causing great detriment to private interests and to national prosperity; and foreign governments, whose subjects are engaged in commercial intercourse with the people of such state, are therefore anxious to secure their subjects by fixed stipulations, and by treaty engagements, from being liable to the injuries and uncertainties, which from the above mentioned causes, the people of the state itself are from time to time exposed to.

"Now the treaty of 1816, between Great Britain and Naples, contains a stipulation of this nature, and, according to that treaty, although the Neapolitan government may exercise its sovereign power over its own subjects, and interfere as it pleases with their private and commercial transactions, yet it cannot so interfere with or restrain the private and commercial transactions of British subjects.

"But the monopoly granted by the Neapolitan government to Messrs. Taix and Co. does interfere with, and restrain the private and commercial transactions of British subjects in Sicily, by preventing those subjects from selling as they please the sulphur raised from mines which they have rented, and to increase the productiveness of which they have expended a considerable capital. Therefore, the monopoly of Messrs. Taix and Co. is inconsistent with [the treaty engagements of the Sicilian government towards the crown of Great Britain; and the British government cannot consent that such monopoly shall have any application to the commercial transactions of British merchants in Sicily."

This was firm and decided, containing also some home-thrusts about "caprice, want of political knowledge," &c. And no doubt such a reply had some weight with it, which joined to the departure from, or the non-fulfillment of, certain articles in Taix's engagement, on his part, caused the King of Naples to lay before his council of state a new plan, which the pertinacious and active, but money-less Frenchman proposed for the regulation of the future.

This was the first time that the insidious and faithless concoction had ever been submitted to the ministers as a body, the one interested diplomatist having succeeded hitherto in keeping its entire management in his own hands.

When the council were appealed to, the result was so indefinite, —no decision, in fact, having been arrived at by that body, although there was none to back Santangelo's views,—that the King referred the entire subject to his council of ministers. Here too the *one* minister found himself without a supporter, the more moderate of his colleagues being of opinion that Taix and Co. should be called on to fulfill the terms of the contract of 1838, but which fulfillment all seem to have known to have been impracticable, owing chiefly to the projectors' want of funds; while the more independent and spirited, although a minority, maintained that Taix had not performed his part of the engagement, insisted that he should be called on to do so to the very letter, and that if he failed, the whole contract to be null, and of course no further concern to be had with him.

The course which the affair had now taken was calculated to inspire Mr. Temple and the Secretary of Legation, Mr. Kennedy, with the hope, that the Neapolitan government would seize the favourable opportunity of getting entirely rid of it; although these gentlemen ought, by the time we refer to, March 1839, to have better understood the character and the principles of the parties they had to deal with; for, as already mentioned, whatever might be the results of British remonstrance, delay was of great moment, because but a short period of exhaustion of stock in foreign markets would admit of the most extravagant prices and profits being demanded by Taix and his interested supporters.

We now come to note some of the most glaring proofs of the tergiversation and procrastinating policy of the King of Naples and his influential advisers; and at the same time cannot but wonder that our representative at the Neapolitan court, and our ministers at home, should have been so long and placidly trifled with.

Whatever might have been done or promised in March, Mr. Kennedy found himself obliged in May to write in these terms:—

"Had the rest of the Neapolitan ministers been really as desirous of getting rid of the monopoly of Messrs. Taix and Co., as Prince Cassaro, opportunities would not have been wanting, and I am obliged to admit, that I no longer entertain any immediate hopes of the contract being annulled, notwithstanding the wishes of the king."

But in August this is the same gentleman's new representation:—

"I have finally the satisfaction of informing your lordship, that his majesty the King of Naples has decided that the contract between his government and Messrs. Taix, Aycard, & Co., for the monopoly of the sulphur trade in Sicily, shall be set aside."

We shall soon see what was the value of "the wishes of the king," of the writer's "finally the satisfaction," and the "has decided." But in the meanwhile, and not to notice a variety of little incidents and mean transactions connected with the history of this pitiful affair, we copy out what Mr. Kennedy communicated to our Foreign Secretary, dated the 29th of August:—

"I waited on the 24th early upon Prince Cassaro, and found that his excellency had been with the king, and spoken with more than ordinary energy.

"The king assured the prince that the monopoly should be set aside; that he would support him in taking proper steps to that effect; and adding, with great feeling, 'I really thought, when I sanctioned the measure, that I was doing a good thing for Sicily; hardly had I approved of it before I regretted it, but I shall never regret the first motives which induced me to sanction it.'

"Prince Cassaro immediately sent to M. Taix, desiring him to come to him on the following morning, when he communicated to him the determination of the king to get rid of the contract, and insisted upon his at once making his proposals. M. Taix asked leave to refer the question to Paris; but Prince Cassaro observed, that the Neapolitan government knew but him, with whom they had made the contract. That, if the proposals were reasonable, the king would take them into consideration, if not, other means would be resorted to.

"M. Taix mentioned that the company had made immense purchases of sulphur in Sicily, and that there still remained six months' consumption in France and England (over which, I believe, the company has got controul). Prince Cassaro promised that a certain time should be allowed the company to get rid of their stock.

"Mr. Taix, in the course of the day, sent in a calculation of 4,000,000 of ducats, equal to about 666,000/., as a valuation of the present loss, and of the profit they would be deprived of. This calculation is grossly exaggerated.

"There has been little outlay beyond the purchase of 450,000 cantarsof sulphur (equal to 39.) tons 14 cwt.), and the price of that article has risen sufficiently to indemnify them, even should it fall considerably as soon as it becomes known that the contract will be annulled."

Mr. Kennedy put implicit reliance, it would seem, in the words of Prince Cassaro; but Mr. Macgregor, on his arrival in Naples, shows that he was not to be so easily pleased or put off; for in November the latter gentleman writes that the Prince had pledged himself, in the name of his sovereign, that the monopoly should cease on the 1st of January at the latest. Mr. M. says,—

"The King then agreed to my demand, but in order to avoid committing to writing a censure upon his own act, directed Prince Cassaro to pledge himself to the abolition of the sulphur monopoly before the 1st of January, as named by me. I considered it, however, unsafe not to have the evidence of the representative of a friendly power to this arrangement, and the Austrian ambassador, Count Lehzeltern, who has all along been in perfect accordance with me, was authorized to state also to me, that the Sicilian government stood pledged to that of England to abolish the monopoly before the said 1st day of January. The minister of police went then, as instructed by the King, to M. Taix, and told him that *coute qui coute*, he must prepare himself for the abolition of the monopoly, and M. Dupont, *regisseur* of the customs of the two Sicilies, was authorized to communicate this to me."

One would have thought that after all this no doubt could remain concerning the intentions and the speedy measures of the Neapolitan government. Still the 1st day of January passed over, and the matter continued *in statu quo*; nay, not exactly so, for Mr. Kennedy writes towards the end of that month that "The friends of M. Taix are again full of hopes respecting the stability of their contract, and I cannot learn from Prince Cassaro that this government has come to any serious determination for its abrogation."

Lord Palmerston now adopted a higher and more threatening tone, but still with no other immediate results than methods of procrastination and knavery; till at last Sir Robert Stopford was called in, and our readers know the result. But just to show the character of the King of Naples and the nature, of his professions throughout, we have to add as a fitting termination of his conduct and policy in this shameful business, that even after the Admiral's broadsides were prepared to open upon him, and to speak in another language than what diplomatic notes can convey, the King ordered Prince Cassaro to sign a note declaring "that the sulphur monopoly was not a violation of the treaties with England and France, and that therefore it should be maintained." Who after reading this can avoid regretting that our ministers allowed two whole years to be frittered away in the manner we have seen? British subjects had been grossly wronged; these persons may have been commercially speaking ruined; all hope of compensation probably was given up by them; nay, they may have despaired of ever reaping even their country's sympathy, owing to the want of full and fair information.

The nation, again,—but we need not sentimentalize. We rather, in conclusion, would ask of the King of Naples, what he has gained by his dishonest policy and frivolous tergiversations in this one affair about sulphur? He must by this time be aware that he, for all time coming, has shaken the confidence of a friendly but a formidable power; and what may appeal more directly to his feelings, he must have become convinced that the wronged British sulphur-merchants will have ample compensation. Lord Palmerston cannot have neglected to instruct his majesty to this effect; or if the Foreign Secretary has overlooked this act of duty, the merchants of England and Parliament no doubt will prompt him. The young King requires for his own sake the salutary lesson.

We have noticed what may speedily be the great revolution in the sulphur trade; that is, as respects the sources whence the staple is derived, and consequently glanced at portending ruin to Sicily. That country is already the worst governed and the most oppressed in Europe: worse off, according to Von Raumer, than Ireland herself. Numerous are the schemes which have been resorted to, in order to cripple the energies, and break the spirit of the Sicilian?. They are feared, and therefore they are hated. They are even denied

the opportunities of knowing how to handle arms. But what would this signify to a united nation driven to utter despair! A Iready, it is notorious, they groan and writhe under the Neapolitan yoke. How eagerly by the multitude was the chastisement of their oppressors longed for, when they heard that England was about to vindicate her honour, and see righted her sons ! They were ready to throw themselves into our hands, and co-operate heartily with us. If then, under intolerable wrongs, these islanders should revolt, would England stand aloof and witness their extirpation, if too feeble of themselves? But we are going beyond the record, and only add, that the most pacific personage, the greatest declaimer against war, cannot charge our government with blood-thirstiness or with a wanton desire to pounce upon a weaker power, in the notable sulphur monopoly affair.