

<http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article3196>



Annex 9 (Book XX, chapter 5)

- The Spirit of Law - Annexes to the edition of 1758 -

Date de mise en ligne : samedi 8 septembre 2018

Copyright © Montesquieu - Tous droits réservés

Some effects of extensive navigation

It sometimes happens that a nation that engages in commerce of economy, needing from one country a product that can be traded for products of another country, is willing to make little profit, and sometimes none, on some of them in the hope or certainty of making a good deal on the others. Thus, when Holland was plying almost alone the route from the south to the north of Europe, the wines of France, which she carried north, served her simply, in a way, as an asset to trade with in the north.

To be sure, in Holland some types of commodities from afar do not sell for any more than they cost at the point of origin. The reason given is this : a captain who needs ballast for his ship will take on marble ; if he needs wood to load his cargo with, he will buy some ; and provided he lose nothing on the deal, he will be very pleased with it. That is why Holland also has its quarries and its forests.

Not only a trade that yields nothing, but even a disadvantageous trade can be useful. I have heard it said in Holland that whaling in general almost never yields what it costs ; but those who have been employed in the construction of the vessel, those who have furnished the rigging, the paraphernalia, and the provisions, are also those who take the principal interest in whaling. Were they to lose on the whaling, they have gained on the supplies. This commerce is a sort of lottery, and everyone is taken in by the hope of a winning ticket. Everyone likes to gamble, and the wisest people gamble willingly when they do not see the appearances of gambling : its excesses, its violence, its dissipations, its loss of time and even of a whole life.