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FEW OBSERVATIONS,

ACCOUNTING FOR THE

APPARENT APATHY

THAT HAS

PREVAILED

ON THE

QUESTION

OF

UNION.

DUBLIN:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The publication of the following pages was intended previous to the meeting of Parliament, but did not take place so soon from unforeseen accidents. The transactions of the last week render the publication less necessary. They are the commencement of a happy Union between the Parliamentary Anti-unionists and the People. However, the writer still thinks these pages contain principles of genuine patriotism. He is certain they are the sentiments of an heart beating high for the welfare of Ireland.

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

THE zealous opposers of the projected Union, must assuredly experience no little regret and disappointment, when they observe the present state of the public mind respecting that question. Watching, as they must have done, with eager solicitude, the temper with which the people should continue to regard the measure, when the determination to pursue it became notorious, their mortification must be great at finding, that neither the awful import of the measure itself, nor the example of their alert and vigorous hostility, has been able to excite corresponding exertions on the part of their countrymen: that since the first ebullition of resentment subsided in the enjoyment of a temporary triumph, this project, once big with horror, appears to be contemplated with daily lessening inquietude, as if like some of those contagions which attack the body, it had lost it's power of offending the constitution which had once triumphed over it's malignity. Certain it is, that while the advocates of the measure pursue their object with unabating industry, and exultingly parade their growing strength and numbers, a great majority of the country keep altogether aloof from the contest,

which they seem to view rather with the feelings of indifferent spectators, than of deeply interested parties.

But to any one who has given the smallest attention to the progress of affairs in this country for a few years back, and to the policy of those who had the chief controul and influence over them, this inert and debilitated state of the public mind cannot appear surprising. Such a one will readily perceive that this is that very state which it has been the invariable object of that policy to produce—a policy, which in every other view of it, appearing feeble, crooked and inconsistent, must be acknowledged, when connected with this it's object, to have been most elaborate, uniform, and systematic. If there could be any doubt of the existence of an evil spirit predominating in the councils of Ireland, the arguments and confessions of those ministerial writers who have come forward to recommend the Union, have honestly informed us, that since the assertion of our vain and ill-starr'd independance disturbed the pre-eminent claims, and awakened the resentment and jealous fears of England, it has been and must be the policy of her ministers, to cripple the growth and paralyse the efforts of this country, by such an artful management of parties and interests as should keep alive our divisions and animosities. This policy has too well succeeded. The elements of discord were not hard to be found; they were supplied in abundance by a constitution at war in it's practice with all it's own best principles,

ples, and scarcely known to the largest portion of the people, except by the penalties and disabilities it imposed on them. These materials of discontent, jealousy and passion, were diligently and variously wrought upon, and being worked up with a sufficient portion of the prevailing horror of French principles, alarms about religion and property, and whatever else was calculated to distract and confound the public mind, they heaved the whole mass of the people into the most violent agitation, and led at length to that scene of convulsion, suffering, and despair, which terminated in the gloomy languor of wasted strength, the death of public spirit, and the arrival of that crisis, so long fought and so instantly laid hold of, when an exhausted, prostrate, and torpid nation, might submit without a struggle, to this last act and completion of it's wretched destinies.

If it thus appears that the apathy with which the country views her impending fate, is not to be simply regretted as a circumstance in itself unconnected with the project of Union, and conspiring, from a mere accidental concurrence of events, to favour it's introduction; but that it is to be regarded as entering originally and essentially into the plan of the projectors, deliberately sought, and in a great degree prepared by them. If it be true that our unfortunate divisions do not more form the pretended necessity for this Union, than they do the base and insidious means of it's accomplishment— Surely it might be supposed, that when any persons
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conceived the bold idea of frustrating the well laid scheme of the British cabinet, the plan of defence could hardly be mistaken. Knowing what are the most formidable weapons which the minister possesses, his opponents, it should seem, would endeavour to wrest them from his hands. His weapons are, our own dissensions; these, therefore, they would endeavour to heal. They would penetrate deep into the sources whence they spring; and seek to dry up the fountains of these bitter waters. They would dismiss all selfish feelings. They would labour to remove all irritating distinctions—to break down the fences which confine within narrow limits the privileges of the constitution, and to restore to it its lost value, by freeing it from the corruptions which have debased it, and rendering it practically conformable to the free principles on which it professes to be founded. In combining these objects with their opposition to the Union, and pledging themselves to an honest and spirited prosecution of them, they would give to all parties in the country a cause worthy of their exertions; they would see public spirit revive, and flow in its antient channels, which despair has so long frozen up; and thus strong in the people's strength, they would repel, if it yet be possible, the present attack, and would best guard against any other which the persevering hostility of the minister might design in future.

But has any thing of this been done or proposed? nothing like it. However extraordinary it may be, these powerful means of defence seem to be

be entirely overlooked. From the indignant votes of Parliament to the high-sounding resolves of a corporation, no where can we discover a hint of the necessity of consulting the wishes of the people, and restoring their confidence in the constitution, when they are called upon to rally round and save it. What do the Anti-union leaders propose? What is their plan? Do they desire the support of the people? Or do they flatter themselves they can dispense with it? is it in political intrigue; in the dexterous management of corrupt factions; in sagaciously balancing the profits of the borough-monger and parliamentary jobber, that they place their hopes of victory? if so, it is plain, that whatever their success may be, the people are little interested in it, and will decline involving themselves in a quarrel, whence they can expect so little advantage. But let these great leaders consider, whether the popular support may not be of service to steady their wavering partizans. Whether they do not require some more honourable and energetic bond of Union, than their discordant selfish interests. Whether in the computation of profit, the balance may not easily be turned against them,—and finally, whether the feeble efforts of a puny party, or the mighty energy of a powerful people, be best suited to meet the magnitude of the danger.

'Tis true that to act the part here recommended, may require no small portion of firm virtue and bold independence. In times of national debasement, when servility assumes the tone of arrogance,
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and allows currency to no opinions which have not received it's stamp, it is not to be expected that any the strongest minds will dare to stem that foul current of opprobrious calumny, which seeks to overbear every thing that rises above the level of prevailing degeneracy. He who now ventures to touch on the subject of popular claims, or to hint at a defect in our constitution, unless it be to promote the present scheme of the minister, is sure to be assailed with a whole battery of names of tremendous import, republican—jacobin—democrat—traitor. The very words parliamentary reform, which once gloriously shone in the banners of distinguished statesmen, now made to denote every thing of base and criminal, which they who maliciously cast about those damning appellations, can possibly include in them. But we may safely affirm, that if the ranks of the Anti-unionists cannot supply men of principles sufficiently elevated and generous, to press forward fearlessly in the path of honourable and manly patriotism, superior at once to petty interests and illiberal obloquy, they are little fitted to be the champions of a nation on an emergency like the present, or to contend successfully with a minister, distinguished by inflexible perseverance, a haughty confidence in himself, and a contemptuous disregard of his opponents.

And what is there in our situation, if we do not allow ourselves to be scared by perverted or unmeaning terms, which should deter us from honestly investigating, what views in our political system

system have been the causes of our misfortunes, and what remedy may be discovered for them, more efficacious and palatable than that desperate one prescribed by the minister. The danger of French principles and the horrors of Jacobinism are indeed loudly and incessantly proclaimed, but the real danger is not to be estimated by the noise and outcry which is made about it. What, after all, is this Jacobinism which thus frights us with endless alarms? If it means, as seems intended, some hideous monster, which opens its ravenous jaws to devour all establishments, and is never satiated with destruction, perhaps no danger was ever less to be feared than this by a wise and upright government. It is true that establishments are now examined with a more inquisitive and daring eye than in former ages; but nevertheless, there are few men, whose opinions are of any consequence, who do not readily acknowledge, that established institutions are entitled to considerable respect, merely because they are established; and that it is better, if it be practicable, to amend them according to circumstances, than to subvert them. But establishments then provoke their own destruction, when identifying themselves with their corruptions and abuses, they leave no other means of removing the latter. This is a truth which cannot be too often repeated: all experience confirms it, and we ourselves afford a melancholy proof of it. Whoever traces, in a spirit of candour, the progress of discontent in this country, till it reached the fatal period of open hostility, will be convinced, that the design of forcibly overturning

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the constitution, had either never been conceived, or had never been embraced by any considerable number, had not the failure of repeated attempts to correct and restore it to its genuine principles, finally produced a settled conviction in the minds of all persons that such attempts were hopeless; and will confess that had our rulers more affectionately cherished the sound, and less obstinately clung to the rotten parts of the constitution, we should have had no disturbances—no United Irishmen—no republicans—no rebellion.

So far from any extraordinary hazard accompanying the introduction of political reform at present, it might perhaps with more reason be alledged, that if among those who take the lead in public affairs, there yet remained any of the spirit of enlightened freedom, and any sincere desire of securing its blessings to their country, they would regard this as a most favourable opportunity for accomplishing the generous purpose. What moment more favourable for conciliation and concession than that of victory? And now when the higher classes have successfully vindicated their privileges and maintained their rank in the state, they would seem best to consult their safety as well as dignity, by attending without delay to the neglected claims of national right: thus laying a firm foundation of tranquillity, before the broken materials of civil war are moulded anew, and the storm again rises to overwhelm them. If popular expectations were too highly raised, past defeat and disappointment must have lowered

lowered their tone. All parties would meet with tempers chastised and moderated, and disposed to adjust their differences by mutual compromise—and all would prefer a peaceable settlement, though falling short of the extent of their wishes, to a renewal of those scenes of blood and desolation, which experience has shewn are so frightful in the acting, and so uncertain in the event.

Other circumstances of the present period, are equally favourable to the work of reformation. The danger of French principles, artfully magnified, and incessantly inculcated, has raised in many such exaggerated terrors, that the very name of liberty, as being apparently connected with those principles, has become odious and disgusting to them. It will belong to the future inquirer into the causes which have influenced the events of these extraordinary times, to vindicate that sacred name from the stain and scandal of those atrocities which have sullied some periods of the French revolution. It is sufficient here to observe, that the intemperance and wild extravagance which characterized it for a time, seem to have been chiefly occasioned by, and proportioned to, the difficulties it had to conquer. When the combined legions of Europe poured into France to crush her infant liberty, it was evident that the common efforts of prudential wisdom and ordinary courage were insufficient for its preservation. The stronger energies of enthusiasm were to be excited. Boldness and vigour were the qualities chiefly valued; and men of in-

trepid but wicked minds rose into consequence, while they conceived and executed those daring plans, which more scrupulous and cautious characters shrunk from. All the jargon of revolutionary and insurrectionary rant was then invented to heat the passions of the multitude; and the language of the French rulers in those days, seems as if intended rather to swell the song of the warrior, and the cry of battle, than to express the sober decrees of the legislator, or the principles of any system of civil society. In like manner, the murderous atrocities of the same period, were not so much the offspring of any mistaken theory of government, as the savage acts of frantic desperation, which, while it shook off its assailants with a force that seemed more than human, exhausted the violence of its disordered strength on its own bosom. But as the pressure of the danger became lessened, the ferocious spirit of unbridled Democracy gradually abated, till it seems at length to have entirely disappeared: and certainly, if the impression of French principles were to be taken only from those which are now predominant, it would contain nothing to alarm any government which could justly pretend to the appellation of fear. Whatever opinion may be formed of the new order of things which has arisen in France, it is at least evident that the principles of democracy are not pushed to excess, and that the famous declaration of the Rights of Man has not been much consulted on the occasion. Abandoning the equality of rights as the only legitimate foundation of government, the French seem
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now to be satisfied with the more moderate theory, that the only essential political right of a people, is to possess a good government, best adapted to their circumstances and character, in whatsoever way such government may have arisen. What then has this country to expect or to fear from the introduction of French principles? Much, perhaps, if a constitution, loaded with abuses and inconsistencies, is still to furnish matter for discontent—nothing surely, if we were in possession of a truly free and national government, adopted to *our* circumstances, *our* habits, and *our* feelings. Is property alarmed? The security of property is the foremost object in the contemplation of the present French law-givers. Is rank alarmed? We see the French nation separated into classes, no matter by what titles, and a selection made of the most eminent to enjoy the offices, dignity, and power of the state.

Here, then, is the propitious moment to establish national freedom without revolutionary perils, which must be instantly seized on, or it is irretrievably lost. Our multiplied miseries had nearly convinced us all that some great alteration in our political system was necessary, and the minister came forward to relieve us with his project of an Union. A proposal so mortifying to the national pride, might have been made subservient to the national happiness, by producing a junction of all parties to effect some nobler and more effectual plan of settlement, had those distinguished persons who felt so irritated at the insult, conceived the wise and magnani-

magnanimous idea. But they seem to be influenced by other feelings; and the indignation which was first provoked against the proposers of Union seems to be fast giving way to disgust at the narrow and selfish policy of it's opponents. Will they persevere in so ruinous a course?—Perhaps it is now too late to enter on a better. Their strength seems rapidly declining; yet possibly it may still be sufficient to stave off defeat for a season, and allow them time to take their stand on a more secure foundation. But if they would kindle in the bosoms of their countrymen a warm zeal in their support, they must convince them that their motives are pure and patriotic; and that their success will be something more than the petty triumph of usurping monopolists and intriguing statesmen. The people will not enter the political field, under the colours of any domineering factions; or the unhallowed auspices of corrupt ambition: their spirits will not revive, nor their scattered strength rally, 'till they see the standard of national liberty wave in front of the battle. Open to them that cheering prospect, and the chill feelings of despondency will rise into the glow of ardour: and though they may appear indifferent to the fate of oppressive factions and a borough parliament, they will be found true to Irish independence and national representation.

In the present state of things, the advocates of the Union have this decided advantage over their opponents, that they set out with a principle which
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will scarcely admit of contradiction. They ask, is it possible that the country can long go on under its present system? worn out with sufferings, the feelings of all parties reply, that it can not; and the question that immediately follows is, where are we to find a cure? try, it is then said, the effects of this Union, you will find it of marvellous efficacy; and while no other enemy presents itself, many persons will be inclined to make the experiment, tho' they can discover nothing of it's virtues, except merely that it is *called* a remedy. It may be bitter to their taste; but where shall they find a sweeter? This offers them a chance of safety, and, to try nothing, is certainly to perish. It may be prescribed by those in whose friendship and skill they place little confidence; but if those whom they would prefer to consult, refuse them relief, they must accept it from the hands of any who will offer it. In vain some would tell them, that the constitution is in perfect health; that it has worked well, and must not be tampered with.—It may have worked well for those who made a monopoly of it's favours; who felt themselves mightily at ease in the enjoyment of their places and their pensions, while they carelessly flung around them penalties and death: but the people smarting under the rod of chastisement, and surveying the desolation which every where surrounds them, will still answer, that to them it has worked only ill. Let those then whose voices are raised against the proffered Union, decide in earnest on the part which they will chuse: if they love their countrymen, let them fairly espouse their interests;

interests; if they fear their countrymen, let them patiently bend to the will of England. If they can elevate their souls to that career of glory, to which the liberty of their country beckons them, whether they are victorious or vanquished in the contest, they will at least enjoy the well-earned applause of virtuous patriotism: if with such a cause to sustain, they cannot rise above the low manœuvres of a party squabble, they may fail, or they may succeed, but their failure will not be soothed by the affectionate voice of gratitude; their success will be hailed with little exultation;—I know not if it can justly excite the wishes of—

AN IRISHMAN.