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BRITAIN'S HAPPINESS,

AND ITS FULL POSSESSION OF

CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY,

BRIEFLY STATED, AND PROVED.

By THE LATE REV. DR. RICHARD PRICE.

WITH



AN INTRODUCTION

BY THE EDITOR.

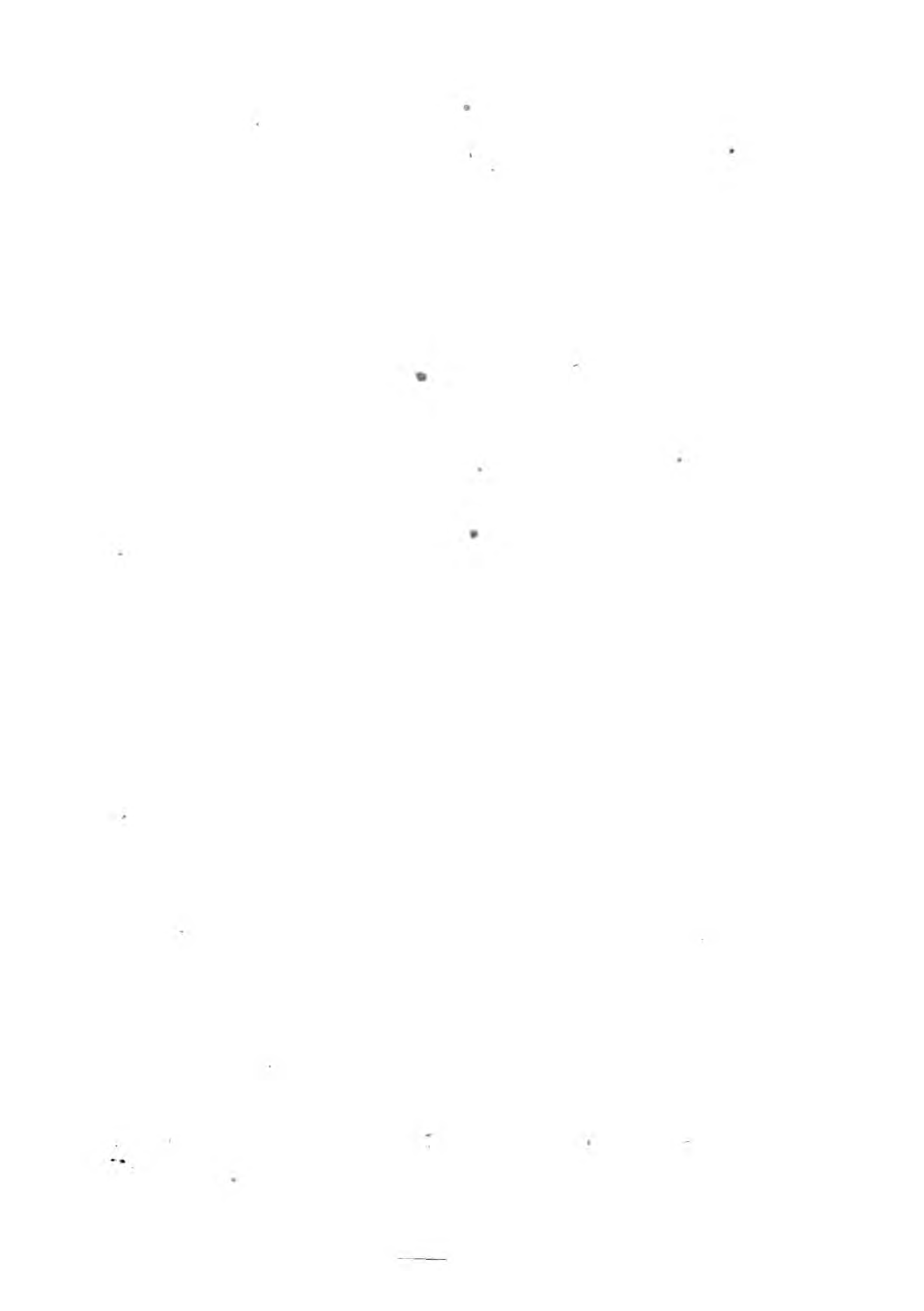
L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR J. F. AND C. RIVINGTON, N^o 62,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

M. DCC. XCI.

[Price Six-pence.]

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INTRODUCTION.

THE following little tract consists solely of extracts from a sermon preached by the late celebrated Dr. Price at Newington-Green, Nov. 29, 1759, and as he is well known to have been a most zealous advocate for the *Rights of Man*, his testimony in favor of our form of government, of the civil and religious liberty we enjoy, and the extraordinary degree of national happiness we possess, must be allowed to be of great weight, and cannot be suspected of any design to represent things better than they really are, which certainly was not the doctor's natural disposition. It is true indeed that this discourse was written and preached upwards of thirty years ago. But every thing he

then said is equally applicable to the present situation of this country. Our constitution is in all its essentials exactly the same it was then, and our political advantages are rather improved than lessened. The few alterations that have been made have all been in favour of liberty. Since that period, the judges have been rendered independent, general warrants have been done away, the influence of the crown has been diminished, and the toleration act considerably extended: and that the press is perfectly free from all undue restraint there needs no other proof than the writings of Mr. Payne and Dr. Priestley. Add to this that our agriculture has been highly improved, our wealth increased, our trade commerce and manufactures carried to an extent unknown before in this or any other kingdom. And we are at this hour distinguished above every other nation in Europe by unexampled prosperity at home, and the

highest degree of credit, reputation and consequence abroad. Dr. Price's observations therefore in the year 1759, are perfectly true in the year 1791; and I must desire the reader to compare the blessings he enumerates as peculiar to Britain, with those which our republican writers, and the active partizans of the French revolution are so obliging as to offer us in exchange for them. They offer us a government of societies and clubs like those at Paris, the subversion of all regal authority, the annihilation of the nobility, the conversion of the house of commons into a national assembly, the levelling of all ranks, the invasion both of public and private property, the change of our bullion into paper money, and the entire ruin of our credit, our trade, our manufactures, our commerce, by the banishment of all those noble and wealthy families who now find employ-

employment for the poor both in town and country*.

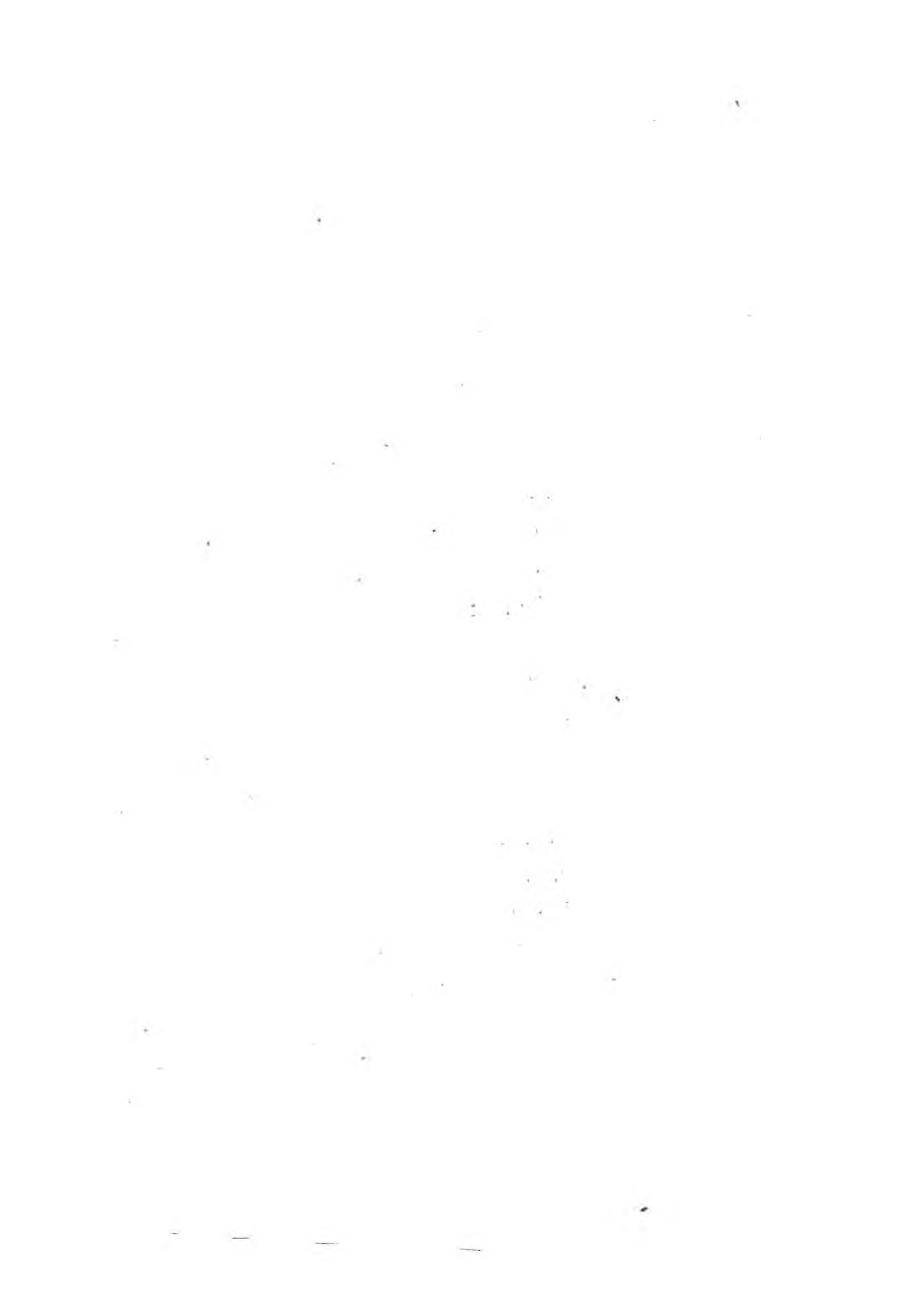
These we all know (for the French writers themselves confess it) are the *present* effects of the Revolution in France, of the *future consequences* no one can foresee the dreadful amount. And these are the comforts and advantages we are to gain by following the advice of those gentlemen who recommend the example of the French patriots to our imitation. What we are to give up for them will be seen in the following pages; and if after perusing them any man shall be of opinion that the present French

* It is an acknowledged fact, that in one single class of manufacturers in France, those I mean who used to fabricate livery cloths and lace, there are at least 20,000 workmen reduced to absolute beggary. What then must be the case in all the different manufactures of that kingdom? Take warning London, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, &c. &c. &c.

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government is better than our own, and ought to be substituted in its room, he must have a most unfortunate and inaccessible understanding, to which I shall certainly not endeavour to make my way by any further arguments. All I have to request of such a reader is, that he will embark immediately for France, to enjoy there upon the spot, in full perfection, and in all their native vigour, the blessings of anarchy and confusion; and that he will permit us sober citizens to remain here quietly under our own vine and our own fig-tree; placed as we are by a kind Providence in a land where, as Dr. Price justly observes, *peace, plenty, knowledge and liberty abound and flourish; a land which has the best constitution of government, the best laws, the best king, and the best religion in the world.*

A BRITISH MANUFACTURER.



BRITAIN'S HAPPINESS, &c.

NOTHING can be more affecting than to think of the dismal state of many of the countries about us, where the noise and tumults of war fill every ear, where powerful armies march in dreadful pomp, spreading devastation around them, and numberless innocent persons are driven from their houses and families, and all that is dear to them. In those countries garments are continually rolled in blood, and none can enjoy any thing in comfort or security. They live in perpetual terror.

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They plant vineyards, without knowing who shall eat the fruit thereof. They carry seed into the field, without knowing who shall gather in the harvest, and their wives, and their children, and themselves, often fall a prey to relentless insult and cruelty.

But WE are exempted from all these miseries. *We can sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and no one maketh us afraid.* As long as we agree among ourselves, it is scarcely possible that we should become the seat of war. The ocean is our wall of defence, which guards us on all sides, and cuts off our communication with the neighbouring nations, so that no hostile fleet or destroying armies can easily alarm our borders. We live in the quiet and full possession of all our properties and blessings, without being in any danger from the inroads of enemies, or the depredations of lawless savages. We *bear* indeed of the
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dreadful calamities and desolations of war, but we *only bear* of them. We neither *feel* nor *see* them.

How great a privilege is this? How distinguishably happy are we to possess thus, among contending nations, and in the midst of desolation and bloodshed, tranquillity and security, and almost all the enjoyments and sweets of peace?

Another part of our peculiar happiness, as a nation, is *the plenty and opulence we enjoy*. God has given us the appointed weeks of harvest. He has satisfied our poor with bread, and crowned our seasons with his goodness. We want nothing that can contribute to make us easy and happy. All the conveniences and even the elegancies of life are poured upon us in the greatest profusion. Such plenty have we, that we help to feed and cloath

other nations. Such is our opulence, that there is not a kingdom upon earth which can in this respect be compared with us. Notwithstanding all the drains of war, we feel no very sensible scarcity of any kind. Our wealth increases continually. Our commerce is extended from one end of the earth to the other. Our naval force is unrivalled. Our enemies dare not shew themselves before our fleets; and we are acknowledged by all the world as the sovereigns of the sea.

But there is a still higher instance of our distinguished happiness to be mentioned; *I mean the Liberty we are blessed with. There is no country where this is enjoyed in such extent and perfection.* The greatest part of the rest of mankind are slaves. They are subject to arbitrary and insolent masters, who say to them, "Bow down before us, that we may go over you," and who have
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their properties and lives entirely at their mercy. How melancholy a situation must this be ; and how disgraceful to human nature is it, that men should be capable of enduring such encroachments on their natural rights ; or that, in so many countries, such slavish forms of government should take place, human beings descend, by hereditary right, like beasts, from one tyrant to another, and the will of, perhaps the most filly and contemptible creature in a nation, be established as its supreme guide and law ?

But our case is totally different. While other nations groan under slavery, we rejoice in the possession of liberty and independency. Our rights and properties are, in general, secured to us beyond the possibility of violation. Every man among us can enjoy the fruits of his industry without restraint or disturbance. We can have no burdens laid upon

us without our own consent, and the laws by which we are governed are not such as a senseless tyrant may please to appoint, but such as we ourselves by our representatives concur in making. The meanest of our fellow-subjects cannot have the least injury done him without being able to find redress. No life can be taken away, or any punishment inflicted on any one, without a fair and equitable trial. The king himself has not power to touch the person, to seize any part of the property, or to make the smallest infringement on the liberty of any one man in his dominions.

But our religious liberty is the crown of all our national advantages. There are other nations, who enjoy civil liberty as well as we, though perhaps not so completely. But with respect to religious liberty we are almost singular and unparalleled.

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In other countries not only the lives and fortune, but the souls and consciences of men are subject to the absolute will of their governors. In those countries a person dare not speak his mind about religious matters, or avow any opinions different from those commonly received, without exposing himself to the greatest dangers. Nothing, surely, can be more dismal than for men to have their minds thus shackled, to be obliged to receive without examination the decisions of ignorant pretenders to spiritual authority, or to be deprived of a liberty which is the very last thing a wise man would consent to part with, I mean, that of worshipping God according to his conscience, and of professing those principles of religion, which he thinks, come nearest to the simplicity of the gospel.

It is a disgrace to human nature, as I have observed before, that men should
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be capable of enduring *civil slavery*, how much more ignominious and dastardly is it to suffer themselves to be enslaved in religious matters, or to follow blindly the direction of earthly masters in things that concern their everlasting salvation ?

But we, brethren, are unspeakably happier. We see the shameful folly of this. The principles of liberty have been thoroughly explained and are now generally understood and embraced among us. We well know that Christ is the only law-giver of Christians, that there can be no such thing as human authority in religious matters, and that the office of the magistrate is not to interpose in any religious differences, but to keep the peace, to secure the civil rights of men, and to protect and encourage all good subjects of all sects and persuasions. In this nation every one may judge for himself, and act agreeably

ably to his judgment without molestation or fear. A free and public discussion is allowed of all points, even such as in other nations it would be imprisonment or death to discover any doubts about. *All sects enjoy the benefits of toleration, and may worship God in whatever way they think most acceptable to him; and nothing exposes any person to civil penalties or censures, but overt acts inconsistent with the peace and security of society.* The researches of learned men among us have been pushed farther than ever they were in any nation. An absolute and unbounded scope is given to enquiries of all kinds; and the consequence of this has been, that the greatest improvements have been made in all the sciences, and that we are now become the fountain-head of knowledge, and the instructors of the world.

Blessed are our eyes for they see, while those of others are shut. Blessed are our minds, for they are free, while those of others are fettered and enslaved. Here light and knowledge prevail, and from hence the arts and sciences diffuse their influence, and are propagated to the nations around us. *In this island peace and liberty have fixed their abode, and from hence superstition, persecution, and slavery are fled, while in other nations they still remain to confound and terrify and oppress the souls of men. How is it possible to reflect on these things without joy and exultation? How happy is it for us that our lot has been cast in such a land? A land favored with so many invaluable privileges and advantages. A land where peace, plenty, knowledge and liberty abound and flourish. A land which has the best constitution of government, the best laws, the best king, and the best religion in the world.*

The consideration of this our unparalleled happiness should engage us to do every thing in our power to preserve and defend it against all dangerous attacks. Who would not exert himself to the utmost in such a cause? Who would not sooner sacrifice every thing in the world than part with so much bliss? *What shame ought to confound that man who in such a country can entertain one factious thought, or discover the least reluctance in contributing his part towards its support?*

How do I wish that, on this occasion, I had a voice which could reach and penetrate the hearts of all my countrymen, *that I might make them more deeply sensible of their unspeakable happiness, and convince them effectually that there never was a people, who had so much reason to shew themselves valiant; that I might inspire them with the most ardent gratitude to the Author of all good*
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for their blessings, and engage them to pray continually for the peace of our Jerufalem, to forget private interests and party prejudices in zeal for virtue and their country, and to concur, as one man, in striving to exalt this nation to the highest, and to make it an example of all that is great and excellent.

F I N I S.

