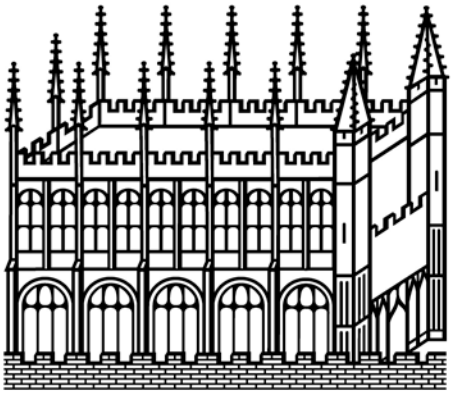

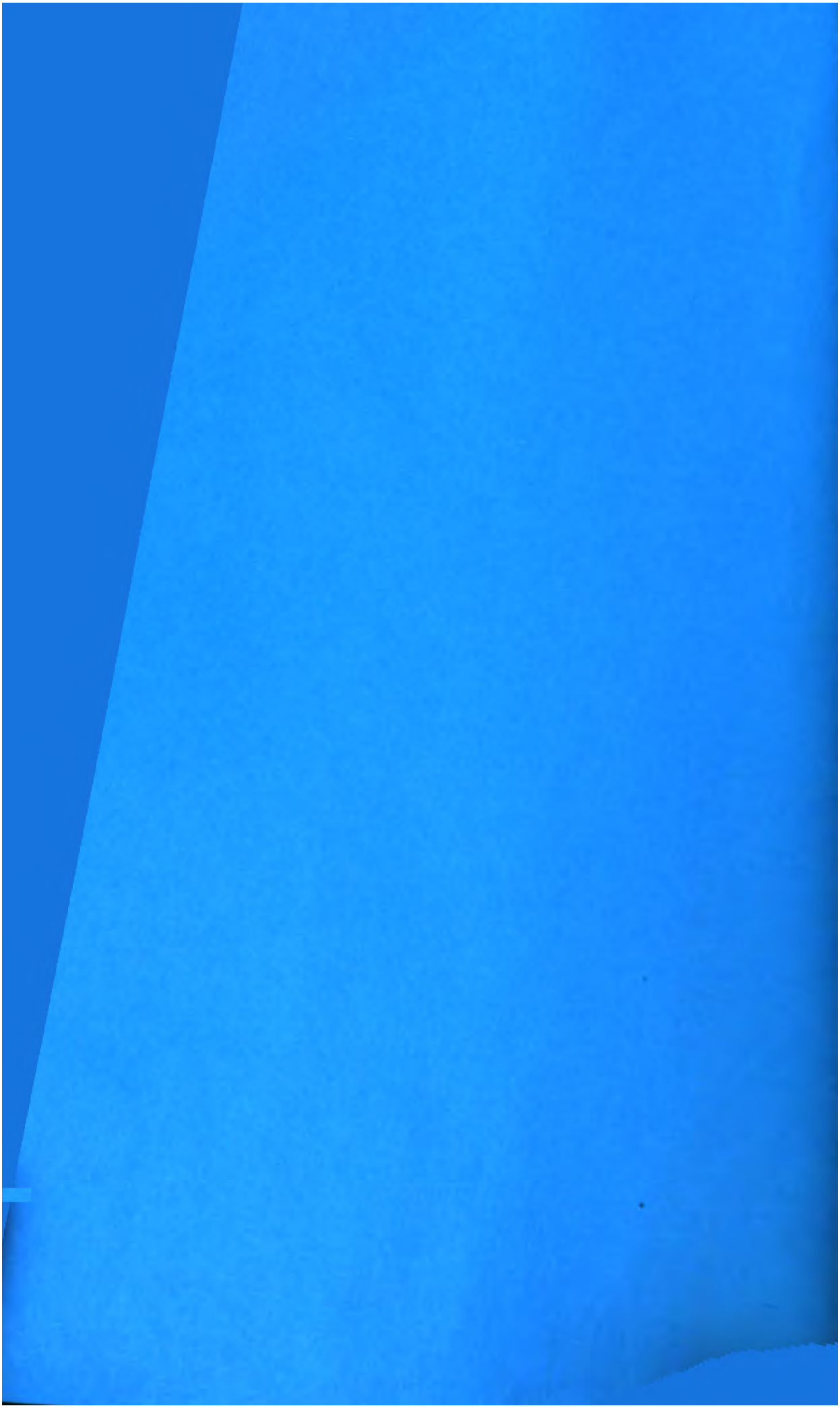

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THE

State of the Country

DISCUSSED,

IN A NUMBER OF

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS;

BY

WHICH SOME PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ŒCONOMY ARE EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

The Whole

BEING AN ARGUMENT FOR

The Abolition of Sinecures and for Parliamentary Reform;

AND IS ADDRESSED TO ALL WHO FEEL

AN INTEREST IN THE WELFARE AND PROSPERITY OF THE COUNTRY.

BY MERCATOR.

"*And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.*" 1 Cor. xii. 21.

"Tu tamen, si habes aliquam spem de republica, sive desperas; ea para, meditare, cogita, quæ esse in eo cive ac viro debent, qui sit rempublicam afflictam et oppressam miseris temporibus ac perditis moribus in veterem dignitatem ac libertatem vindicaturus."

Cicero.

But you, whether you have any hopes, or whether you despair of the commonwealth, nevertheless employ all your faculties and thoughts as becomes a man and a citizen, who is desirous of vindicating the ancient honour and liberty of the state from the corruptions and oppressions of distressful times and degenerate morals.

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PREFACE.

THE Author has taken the following method of communicating his sentiments to the Public, thinking that it will be as intelligible as any other to the capacities of those classes, whose occupations do not give them leisure for the reading voluminous treatises: at the same time it will come more into their power of purchasing. The answers being given to each particular question, has a tendency to give clear ideas of the several topics upon which we converse. That a fair and impartial discussion of any subject tends to promote the final just and proper result cannot be denied: the Public are therefore indebted to all (whatever may be their opinions, or however successful they may be in establishing them), who labour in this object. The awful period of our present difficulties has induced the following remarks and arguments to be written, and the author would wish, that every man, who would think himself a friend and lover of his country and countrymen (I think it necessary to add the latter, in order that I

may be better understood), that can put any idea, of which he feels the importance, into a new or impressive form, to step forward at this time, it being by a combination of such endeavours that much good is often done, and much evil abstained from. " Omnium societatum nulla est gravior, nulla carior, quam ea quæ cum republica est unicuique nostrum; cari sunt parentes, cari liberi, propinqui, familiares: sed omnes omnium caritates patria una complexa est: pro qua quis bonus dubitet mortem oppetere, si ei sit profuturus."— *There is no connection of more weight or importance than that which every man has with his country, which unites all the endearing relations of parents, children, kindred, and acquaintance; and for whose service what good man would not even consent to die?*

AN

INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSES

OF THE PRESENT

National Distress.

Q. In what situation is the country of Great Britain at present?

A. In a very distressed and critical situation of things.

Q. How is it in a distressed and critical situation?

A. Many of its inhabitants are deprived of the comforts they possessed, and are in want of the means of supporting their existence; and, it is a critical situation of things, when much good is to be hoped,

or evil to be dreaded, from the measures of those who are to steer the vessel of the state.

Q. What is the principal cause of the present distressed state of the country?

A. A change in the national affairs from a long continued war to a state of peace.

Q. What other causes have operated to bring about the present state of things?

A. Many, consequent upon the transition from war to peace, such as a continuation of war taxes, and a great quantity of money being withdrawn from those channels through which it passed during the war.

Q. What is money?

A. It is the circulating medium, which is taken, by the general compact of society, in exchange for whatever we sell or purchase.

Q. Does it always retain the same value?

A. No; it will buy more or less goods according to its plentifulness or scarcity, and is liable to be increased or decreased in quantity.

Q. So, then, it becomes an article of commerce, like any other commodity?

A. It does.

Q. What conclusion do you draw from the consideration, that money is an article liable to fluctuation in value like other commodities?

A. The conclusion I draw is, that the terms high and low, applied to any thing, being comparative terms, are often misused.

Q. But, certainly, there is some meaning in the terms high and low prices, and things being dear and cheap?

A. Yes, there is: but the misuse of these terms consists in not comparing

proper things together, and generally comparing them to the amount of money they cost.

Q. Is not the value of any thing the amount of money it will bring?

A. No: the real value of any article is what that article will procure in exchange for other goods, and money is only the circulating medium between the parties*.

Q. How, then, am I to know whether a thing be dear or cheap?

A. By comparing things together, which have a relation to each other: necessaries of life should be compared to necessaries of life, and other things to the nearest related to them.

* The necessaries of life are the correct measure of the value of money; and corn being the principal of these, is also the principal measure of value. Those persons, who formerly let their farms at a corn rent, showed their wisdom, and their confidence in this opinion.

Q. Explain this a little more: what is the meaning of bread being dear?

A. Bread is dear at twenty pence the quartern loaf when beef or mutton is five or six pence per pound, and beef or mutton is considered dear at ten pence per pound when the quartern loaf is at one shilling.

Q. How is money liable to be increased or diminished in quantity, as you before stated?

A. More gold or silver may be imported: bankers may lend more or less money, as the general credit is good or bad: government may raise money upon securities; and upon these securities paper money is issued, which increases the quantity of capital in circulation.

Q. What effect has this?

A. It has the effect of raising the prices of things, and diminishes the value of every pound note before in circulation.

Q. How does it raise the prices of things?

A. The more capital we have in circulation, the more of it, for several reasons, will go to purchase the necessaries and conveniences of life?

Q. What are those reasons?

A. It is more easily obtained; which, with many, causes less work to be done and less produce grown. People are not generally disposed to work hard for money if they can obtain it by easier methods. Sometimes therefore, indeed generally, the facility of getting or borrowing money leads to combinations to raise prices, of which we have had sufficient evidence.

Q. Pray what is the meaning of the cry out about low wages?

A. The spirit of speculation has ceased in a great measure with the war, and manufacturers and commercial people are

retrenching in their manufactures and shipments, on account of a decreased demand. The mode by which many of them were paid during the war being by government bills bought abroad, which cannot be done now. Money, therefore, for these goods is not so easily procured, and shippers cannot take goods in return for their shipments, owing to the uncertain state of the markets at home. Therefore there is less work for the manufacturer; he makes a less quantity of goods, and employs a less number of hands; and there being so many out of employ he can reduce the wages (in fact they will compete with each other to get employment) of those he continues to employ, and he must be content to take a less price for what he does manufacture. But if the necessaries of life generally bear the same proportion to the amount of wages that

they did during the war, that is, will buy as much of them, then there is no cause for complaint on the part of the labouring classes.

Q. But are the wages now in the same proportion to the necessaries of life as during the war?

A. No: every class of the community must suffer for a while the effects of the change. The labouring classes, by being thrown out of employ, suffer more than the rest; they therefore particularly require the interference of the legislature on their behalf: and besides that the necessaries of life are not in the same proportion to wages, other articles than food, such as clothing, rents, &c., do not fall or rise so suddenly as what will not keep.

Q. From your former answers it would appear, that the price of every thing is

very much regulated by the price of the necessaries of life?

A. Yes, it is; inasmuch as the price of the necessaries of life regulates the price of labour, which is a very material item in the charge of any thing manufactured.

Q. But I can quote you instances, when the price of provisions has not regulated the amount of wages: for instance, in the years 1814 and 1815, when wages at Manchester were about sixteen and seventeen shillings per week, and the average price of corn for the four quarters was sixty-six shillings; and in 1812 wages were twelve and thirteen shillings, and the average price of wheat was one hundred and thirty shillings. How can this be accounted for?

A. This is always to be accounted for

by particular causes — a reversion of the natural state of things; a rise in either article being occasioned by speculation, by competition, an extraordinary or slack demand, a season of scarcity or a productive season?

Q. Pray is war a natural state of things?

A. Among some barbarous states, who are almost always at war, it may be considered so; but in civilized countries, who have the happiness of having the Christian religion established and professed among them, it cannot be, and may therefore be called an artificial state of things.

Q. Then it might follow, that the same causes may operate differently in time of war to what they do in time of peace?

A This is very possible, and has been the case; which, not being sufficiently

considered, has rendered some recent publications of less utility than they might have been.

Q. Then I am to understand, that it is your conviction, that, in a natural state of things, the prices of the necessaries of life regulate the prices of labour, and accordingly the prices of our manufactures; for this is a question of great importance?

A. I am not aware of any thing being written to refute this opinion: if there has, I wish to be corrected; and if it has not been refuted hitherto, I think it may be determined to be correct; and besides that, it is agreeable to reason that this should be the case.

Q. If this be true, how comes it that a great many things keep up their prices at present, when we are at peace, and the

necessaries of life are a great deal lower in nominal price than they were?

A. It is impossible that so decided a change in affairs, as from war to peace, should bring on all its concomitant changes immediately; but this will certainly be the case in time, and as quickly as the nature of things will admit: it is impossible to date that time, but it may be sooner than some are disposed to imagine.

Q. Then in this time, whilst things are getting settled, many things may happen, which are not generally expected to happen; and it therefore becomes a period of uncertainty?

A. It certainly does; and particularly to those engaged in commerce: agricultural persons may live upon the produce of the soil, and not be very anxious about the means of sustaining life; but with

other persons the times wear a more serious aspect. It is a period of convulsion, and requires much ability at the head of affairs so to regulate their measures, that one class of subjects shall not be more protected than another (which creates jealousy and disaffection), but that all should equally feel the blessing and protection of a wise government.

Q. Pray is it your opinion, that any class of subjects, in our existing state of laws, are benefited or protected at the expense of the rest?

A. Yes, the owner of land at the expense of the manufacturer, merchant, shop-keeper, &c.

Q. What reason have you for saying so?

A. Though the affixed limit to prevent importation, and to keep up the price of corn to eighty shillings per quarter, might,

at the time the law passed, appear to ministers to be a proper and protecting price to the farmer (though, in my opinion, it was passed solely to enable him to pay a high rent and high taxes), things are very much altered now, and this price of eighty shillings does not bear the same proportion to other persons' property that it did then; and therefore this limit requires a revision, and may require another revision by and by; besides, when things get up it is not so easy to fall the price, especially in an article of general consumption, as speculators will generally be found to keep up the price *.

Q. How does this protecting price of eighty shillings to the farmer hurt the other members of the community?

A. It is in this way: raising the price

* It is in this way that the evil resulting from the Corn Bill will be more particularly felt.

of any one article of general consumption raises the price of another: this must be allowed. The butcher, whose family consumes a quantity of bread, will put a profit upon his meat to cover the extra cost he is at to procure that bread; setting aside the increased demand for butcher's meat, or other articles of consumption, when bread is dear.

Q. If, then, this Corn Bill raises the price of meat, what effect must it have upon the manufacturer, &c.?

A. It must raise the price of labour; for the manufacturer cannot employ men without feeding them, and the more it costs him to feed them the more it will be out of his pocket: perhaps the profit on his goods is so small, that he cannot afford to pay an increased rate of wages, and therefore he ceases to employ them.

Q. It is objected to this opinion, that

it is the demand and supply of any article which regulates the price, and that the price of the necessaries of life have very little to do with it: What have you to say against this?

A. It is certainly the demand and the supply, which regulates the price any thing will fetch; but, if that thing cannot be supplied under a certain rate, when the present stock is off hand, let it be sold at what price it may, you will have no more of that article than the manufacturer can help (he may supply a little more merely to keep some of his workmen on), without paying him what it costs him to make it, and his profit likewise. And, as wages are a very material item in the cost of manufactures, and the cost of the necessaries of life of very great consequence to the working man, who is contented to labour, if he can procure that share of conveniences he

has been accustomed to, and who, perhaps, will not work without being able to obtain it, and certainly he cannot continue to work without receiving enough to support existence; then, I say, manufacturers will compete as to who shall supply this article at the lowest rate; but the consumer must pay for it, and that too, more or less, according to the price of the necessaries of life*.

Q. What effect has a high price of corn upon the farmer?

A. In the first instance, he experiences a benefit from the high prices; but not so eventually, to the extent he thinks he does. The people, unemployed, most probably come upon the parish, and the farmer has

* The profit on labour is the cause of wealth, and is in proportion to the ability with which that labour is applied. Whatever, then, tends to lessen this profit on labour is a disadvantage to commercial wealth.

to pay very heavy poor's rates, in proportion to this number unemployed.

Q. Does not the farmer prosper when trade flourishes?

A. Yes; he experiences a more ready sale for what he grows: he perhaps has to pay a little more in the expense of labour, but this he is enabled to lay on the price of his goods, and he is more likely to get a good price because of an increased demand; and as more persons will engage in commerce he has less competition to strive against.

Q. Is it not absurd then to raise any article to a price which the community cannot afford to pay?

A. Yes; it certainly is, and the measure must recoil with great injury to both parties.

Q. Can you show, in any other way, the impolicy of a high price of corn?

A. I remember a fable, which, I think, applies to this subject, about the body, the head, and the limbs, in which the members refused to work for the body, though they were dependant upon it as much for nourishment and doing well as it was upon them: in this case the body began to suffer first, but the members soon suffered with it.

Q. How do you apply this?

A. I think the commercial part of the community the great body of the people. If one man can grow corn enough, and other articles in proportion, to maintain twenty people (and that he can do this, I think, cannot be disputed), or even ten persons, there are nine tenths of the people otherwise employed; as it is absurd to suppose that there are more people employed in agriculture than necessary, it follows, that the rest must be employed in

shops, manufactures, &c. It must, moreover, be allowed, that we are a great commercial nation; that it has been by our commercial prosperity, that we have been enabled to effect such changes on the continent of Europe, principally by our money; therefore, if our interest be greater as a commercial nation than an agricultural nation (though we must be thankful our country is so fertile, that we can grow sufficient corn for its inhabitants), it would follow, that it ought primarily to be protected, it having been always a maxim in state policy that, when two interests clash, the lesser should never be benefited at the risk of the greater. If the national power and influence cannot be attributed to the cultivating the soil, but to the commerce of the country, it is as impolitic to protect the farmer (or to endeavour to do so, for it is a vain attempt) at the expense of other

classes, as before shown, as it was contrary to the interest of the limbs in the fable to refuse to fetch and hand sustenance to the body.

Q. Having given your opinion of the Corn Bill, what is your opinion of the taxes: Is taxation an evil or a benefit?

A. Taxation is no evil, if not excessive; but then it is a great evil.

Q. Why?

A. Because it operates like a high price of provisions (if occasioned by particular laws) to check trade and industry, and to encourage idleness and vice.

Q. Pray who pay the taxes of the country?

A. The farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, and the shopkeeper.

Q. Do no other classes pay any taxes? Does not the fundholder, or the gentleman, who lives upon his income?

A. No: the fundholder pays no taxes, because he only pays back a small part of what he receives from the public; and the gentleman, who lives upon his income, if derived from property in this country, does not contribute to the taxes, for the same reason as the fundholder; if his income be derived from abroad he becomes a merchant.

Q. Then it appears, that all, who are industriously and successfully employed, viz. the farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, and the shopkeeper, pay all the taxes of the country?

A. Yes: the industry of the country pays all the taxes.

Q. What is the effect of taxing that industry too much?

A. It has the effect of lessening it, and that very materially — an effect pregnant with the greatest evils to the state, and

what every wise statesman would do his utmost to avoid.

Q. Pray do you think the interests of the industrious part of the community sufficiently attended to?

A. I think they are not. It is a vain assumption to believe, that our skill and industry will triumph over every difficulty that can be opposed to them; and at the same time highly impolitic to strain the energies of the country to the utmost.

Q. What can be done to relieve these people, who are now in so great distress?

A. Render the expenses of the nation as easy to them as possible. Nobody should be paid out of their industry for doing nothing; and all should be paid in proportion to the importance and value of those services they render. This being done, it will be in the power of government to lessen the duties and taxes, and

so encourage the industry of the country; for if one or two industrious men have to maintain another idle man out of the profits of their industry, they have a good deal of reason to complain; nay, they will be discouraged from pursuing their avocations, from a consciousness of its injustice, and will endeavour to obtain the immediate abolition of all sinecures.

Q. What is the situation of the country at present, in regard to taxation?

A. It has to raise a sum of forty millions and upwards to pay the interest of its national debt, besides a very heavy state establishment of perhaps twenty millions more.

Q. This sixty millions is an enormous sum: how can it be reduced?

A. By the abolition of sinecures: by the reduction of the national expenses: by the reduction of the military establish-

ment*; and by future œconomy in our resources.

Q. What would you do to reduce the national debt?

A. I must state, that though money is more scarce now than during the war, owing to particular causes, the profits of money, on account of the disadvantages commerce is labouring under, are less also; and the country is paying the interest of the national debt at the rate of upwards of five per cent., whereas money may now be had at the rate of from three and a half to four per cent. per annum, upon good securities: here, then, is an evident loss to the country of eight millions annually in interest, taking the amount of interest at forty millions, which will just serve as

* Standing armies in time of peace are inconsistent with a free government, and quite contrary to the spirit as well as letter of the English constitution.

well for the argument as the exact sum: therefore it is the interest of the country to buy up a good deal of the principal at the present prices of stock, or to pay off the five per cent. stock, and hereafter, if necessary, to issue a fresh loan. Government might very well borrow the money from the Bank of England for this purpose, as it does for many others, to be repaid when government could mend the bargain they have made during the war. This would be a great benefit to the community. In addition to which, a tax of ten per cent. on all property, which would be fair and equal, and for the benefit of all, would materially contribute to effect this end. The objection to this tax is the difficulty of taking it fairly, but this I do not think insuperable. This would be a just measure, inasmuch as it is unjust to borrow and spend money, the interest of

which posterity must pay; and we are not to determine for them, how far the policy of the war we have engaged in and terminated will hereafter be approved or condemned.

Q. While the fundholder, then, upon the good security of the faith of the country, enjoys such an advantage in his income above other classes, is it a fair thing to reduce his interest?

A. Certainly not, without other property were taxed in a similar proportion. Besides, there is no necessity for this, the remedy being before proposed.

Q. Pray is the change we have experienced on the whole a desirable change?

A. Undoubtedly.

Q. Why?

A. Because when nations are occupied in aggression or self-defence, they have not time to cultivate those arts of life,

which contribute to their comfort and happiness, and especially that friendly intercourse with other nations, which tends so much to the benefit of commerce and the improvement of mankind. A savage, who is obliged to be constantly on his guard against the attacks of wild beasts, cannot find time to cultivate his garden, or ornament his dwelling. Besides, peace is the time in which we should reform our domestic economy, revise our laws, and amend what is defective*.

* I would particularly recommend to the legislature to attend, as soon as circumstances will allow, to the suggestions of those gentlemen, who had the trouble of examining into the increase of juvenile crimes, whose report came out some months ago. The pains taken and ability shown by those gentlemen, who undertook this important business, which are evident from merely reading their report, entitle them to the thanks of the country.

Q. But pray what is to be done with that numerous class of subjects now out of employ*: are they to be fed, or are they to be starved?

A. They are to be fed, certainly; and employment should be found for them by the legislature, or else they will find some employment for themselves, injurious to the peace and quiet of the country. We have kept a great many French prisoners during the war, and it will be very hard if we cannot maintain our own countrymen during the peace.

Q. But it is said, that a great many

* The people employed in manufactures are said to be a disorderly, profligate, immoral set of persons. If this be the case, it is at the same time a reproach upon the higher classes. It is certainly true in a great measure: but ignominy and reproach are not very good correctives, and come with a very bad grace from the patrons of the war.

persons will not work at the present rate of wages, but will rather become paupers to be maintained by the parishes to which they belong.

A. This, in some, is the case; but I hope very few. It is a disgrace to the national character in men to prefer idleness to useful employment; neither do I believe that this is general; but rather, that the rate of wages they can get, if they can get any, will not maintain them; which evil is increased by the necessaries of life not having experienced that fall, which they ought to have done. But supposing this to be the case, a remedy is at hand in a revision of the Poor Laws*; and much good might be done by a fund to be raised for the purpose of national improvements, and the employment of such persons as

* Vide Postscript, on the operation of the Poor Laws.

were able to work. Much mischief might be prevented, and the great burthen of the poor rates be alleviated, which must now be paid by the industrious to maintain the idle classes of society.

Q. Having thus touched generally upon the effect of the taxes and the prices of provisions upon the industry and prosperity of the country, what is your opinion of the great question of the present day, as to Parliamentary Reform?

A. I think it necessary.

Q. Why?

A. Because I venerate the constitution of England, as established by our ancestors, as being the wisest fabric of laws and government that was ever enjoyed by any nation, affording more liberty to the subject than any other, and to the excellence of which we may in a very material degree attribute our power as a nation, our im-

provement in knowledge and in arts, our prosperity and happiness.

Q. Why then do you want a reform?

A. Because the constitution is not at present what it used to be, the people not having their just share of representation in parliament.

Q. In the present house of commons are the people represented?

A. No: a great many respectable persons and many large towns having no members to represent them.

Q. Is it not fair, that the commercial part of the community, whom we have shown to be of such importance to the state, should be represented in the house of commons in an equal proportion to the landed interest of the country?

A. Yes, it ought to be so, which is not the case at present: this then is one reason for reform: besides, many boroughs,

which used formerly to be places of consequence, and sent members to parliament, still retain this privilege, though now they are places of comparatively no consequence at all.

Q. What is the cause of the corruption, which is said to have crept into our constitution?

A. Successive wars, which have always given the reigning minister great patronage, which has always had more or less influence on the voices and consciences of men. Most men (I do not say all, though this has been asserted) have their price.

Q. What is the best remedy for this?

A. The restoration of parliaments to their former and constitutional limit of three years*, and a reform in the repre-

* Previous to the revolution, annual parliaments were the constitution of England, after that triennial became the constitution of this realm.

sentation as to what places shall send members to parliament. If this constitution, as established previous to the septennial act of George the First, has been of such inestimable value to us, we cannot do better than by restoring it, as near as possible, to its former efficacy; that being the best safeguard of our rights and liberties, which has formerly been the means of protecting them against the encroachments of the crown*: and this restoration of the commons' house of parliament to its former character and office will be sufficient to check the great influence of the minister's patronage.

Q. Is there any other reason why a reform is necessary?

A. Yes: the rejection of petitions, which is the only legal and constitutional

* See Postscript, on Parliamentary Reform.

method the people have of addressing the crown. These petitions, causing a great deal of trouble, which, when general, may be inferred would not be taken without some motive or cause, may be rejected on account of some trifling informalities; and the greatest honour they receive is to lie on the table of the house, where they remain a long time unnoticed and unavailing*.

Q. Is the present a favourable time for reform?

* I see the word *intimidate* often made use of in the present day, in the house of commons; it seems to be made use of as a by word, and seems to imply, that a member is not to vote the popular way, whether right or wrong, for fear of being thought to be intimidated. Is there nothing due to public opinion? Is it of no value? Or do the honourable gentlemen, that compose that honourable house, think, that all the sense of the country, both refined and common sense, is impaled within its honourable walls?

A. The opposers of reform will say it is not; but, upon a general position, whatever is right, and proper, and necessary to be done, the sooner it is done the better *.

Q. How is it to be effected?

A. By the union of all classes, and perseverance in those measures, which our laws allow, with temperance, moderation, and firmness, to obtain this object †.

Q. What is your opinion of the notion of universal suffrage?

A. To expect a wise council to be chosen, or wise measures adopted by a council, who would be returned to parliament by the most ignorant among us (the most numerous class of people being of

* See Postscript, on Parliamentary Reform.

† The friends of a rational and temperate reform will have much to contend with; probably the wit and pleasantry of gentlemen, who have received a good deal of the

this description), is too absurd an idea to gain ground but with those who think it will strengthen their own importance. The right of voting will certainly require regulation. Respect ought to be paid to property, in such manner as to make a small portion of it the basis of the right.

Q. Is it not possible we may go on very well without any reform whatever?

public money, whose jokes may be retorted upon themselves with effect. Their enemies, too, will endeavour to couple them with some zealous individuals, who recommend the people to accept nothing short of annual parliaments and universal suffrage. It is necessary that they stand independent of these persons, whose indiscretion may very much retard the progress of the cause of reform. They may find many persons, in whom they expected great assistance, lukewarm and wavering in their opinions. Corruption, spreading its baneful influence, may relax others. *It is because iniquity shall prevail, that the love of many shall wax cold.*

A. It is to be apprehended not, for the power of the minister is so great at present, that he can do what he pleases*; and there is great reason to fear he might engage in fresh wars upon slight grounds, or keep up a too expensive state establishment, to the detriment of the prosperity of the country, without taking into the account the unequal representation of the commercial and landed interests.

Q. From the whole of the foregoing argument, and the state of this country at present, which almost every one knows, what may be said to be the effects of war?

A. Great changes and convulsions to states. The injury of a great many for the

* So great is the danger of power, that when a king or a ministry can do what they will, they will do what they can; and there is no security of property under arbitrary governments.

benefit of a few. The destruction and misery of those, in whose country it happens to be engaged: and its termination brings with it such a long train of evils, as threaten to destroy the foundation of social order.

Q. Is it not an evil very much to be dreaded?

A. Certainly it is; and I am sorry this country has been so foremost in promoting it. Its effects are now being visited upon us. It is in vain to say to the starving labourer, Be ye filled and clothed, and ye give him not those things which are necessary to feed and clothe the body. And there appears to me to be an unfeelingness displayed to that class of subjects, who have been our shield and our defence; who, by their conduct, have inspired such a sense of their steadiness and valour into their enemies, as probably to render us,

for a considerable time, secure from the aggression of foreign foes; and even to those persons, by whose industry we have reaped so much riches, in their rulers not proposing some plan of employment and honest industry, by which the poor man might eat his meat, obtained by his own exertions, with a relish, which he cannot now feel for that which the hand of charity perhaps provides for him. And here I would wish to inculcate a maxim of great importance to statesmen, governors, and masters; viz. that it is a much more rational way to make people good, by first endeavouring to make them happy, and then teaching them what you wish them to attend to, than by instructing them in all the maxims of virtue, that were ever laid down as rules of conduct, without giving them some evidence of the existence of these principles in ourselves. The hungry

man is too much absorbed in the desire of satisfying his hunger to attend to your lessons; neither will an act of parliament, which stops his mouth, convey nourishment to his bones; and it is in vain to teach the neglected mechanic order and obedience to the laws, and attachment to his country, when he feels his rights trampled upon, his family starving, his house and furniture taken by the king's order for taxes.

"England, my beloved country, industrious, brave, patient in suffering, fruitful in thy soil, healthy in thy climate, and rich in thy productions," Is this thy situation? Wherefore is this distress come upon thee, and whence this lamentation among thy people? War, the scourge that Heaven employs to punish and reform the nations of the Earth, this has not been visited upon thy land; but its effects thou

art sharing. Thou hast exalted thyself among the nations of the Earth; thou hast established monarchs upon thrones; and thou hast assisted to apportion the territory of Europe. And must thy lofty, towering spirit be brought low? Where is the glory thou hast acquired? Is it in the establishment of the inquisition in Spain? Is it in the safe possession of a prisoner in St. Helena? Do these repay thee for the blood of thy sons, shed in the field of victory, or for the treasure thou hast expended? Lo, if it did all this, where is the glory thou hast acquired, if thine own countrymen are starving, if their misery produces desperation, and they lift up their arms one against another, and conspire to plunder and destroy all that is held dear and valuable among us?

Q. But having stated and deplored the

situation of the country (for persons of your opinions are always charged with representing things to be worse than they really are, and of depreciating the merits of ministers, who have shown so much foresight and wisdom, and so much knowledge of trade), What measures ought to be adopted in the present state of affairs?

A. It is very unfair to deprecate measures without proposing remedies. Our advantages, as a nation, are abundantly great, to insure us a share of prosperity equal to any other nation; but the greatest advantages may be abused or neglected, or rendered comparatively useless. There is a tide in the affairs of nations; their advancement and prosperity, or their decline, may be rapid or gradual. There is no resting place; we are either going on well or ill: but the decline of nations is

always more rapid than their rise, if the tide turns against them.

It behoves us to take what care we can of ourselves; and, if our legislators are inattentive to our interests, it is necessary that we call their attention to the subject, and not let our supineness be instrumental to our ruin. The first essential is to uphold the national credit. This is to be done by reducing our expenditure to our means, but not by borrowing farther sums of money. The Bank of England should be made liable to furnish specie for their notes in circulation, for a pound note will not be always worth twenty shillings without twenty shillings can be legally demanded for it. The public ought to have a statement yearly or half yearly of the transactions of the national bank, as far as regards the quantity of capital in cir-

culation, with the quantity of specie there is to provide for it, and to know the quantity of new coin issued*.

There should be no premium given upon the growth of corn until the ounce of silver or gold, in this country, will buy as much corn as in France, or any neighbouring country. Our trade should be encouraged by an enlightened and liberal system of

* The connection between government and the bank directors is an evil, which ought to be closely watched by the public. Government have no right, but the right which power conveys, to borrow money from the bank to uphold the sinecure system; and whatever interest they may pay for the sums so borrowed is a bonus to the proprietors of bank stock, at the expense of the public. Moreover, it has another very bad effect; if the public, by the agency of government, become debtors to the bank of England, they have not the same hold upon them to require them to pay their notes in specie, for which it is very necessary they should be liable, though if this were done it is probable they would not be much called upon.

policy with other nations. The restrictions and duties imposed during the war should be lessened: this is what is most essentially necessary to our commerce. And for our happiness and quiet at home, it is necessary, that employment and food be found for those who are out of employ, without their having recourse to their own parishes; that the price of the necessaries of life, and the excess of taxation, be immediately taken into consideration. Our police system should be reformed: our prisons better regulated: our countrymen treated as the inhabitants of a free country; and, though we have lately been successful in our endeavours to abolish Christian slavery, by the bombardment of Algiers, do not let us practise the doctrines of Mahomet and the Dey at home, for I am inclined to believe these will not be very congenial to this climate.

That this may be the case, and our domestic policy as well as our trading interests be better attended to, I have said a few more words, in the following pages, respecting Parliamentary Reform, as being the most probable means by which we may obtain these advantages.

Postscript,

ON

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,

AND ON

THE POOR LAWS.

ON

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.

THERE is a certain class of persons with whom it is in vain to argue. If you collect and lay before them a number of facts, which cannot be disputed, or lay down some propositions, which they cannot refute, yet the results, which are deducible from these, though to an impartial person it would appear they must be admitted if the premises were allowed, they will either deny or refuse their assent to. They like their friend Plato better than truth. Perhaps truth is not their friend, but their enemy. What can be the cause of all this? It seems to be declared in those lines of Hudibras,

> He that's convinc'd against his will,
> Is of the same opinion still.

Self interest seems to be the guiding passion of men. No doubt it is, and that it is right it should be so. I am not one of those, who expect or would have mankind to act differently from the principles implanted in their nature; but I would have them to reflect and consider well what their real interest is, and to acquire the necessary information upon all political as well as other subjects; for it never can be substantially, however it may appear to be, a person's real interest to maintain a falsity. But it is the narrow view, which many are apt to take of things; a kind of present selfishness actuates them; they provide for to day and do not think of the morrow. They will not sacrifice the least temporary convenience, though their own understandings, if they reflected at all, would convince them it would be for their future good. This description will apply to a very extensive class of persons,

who, contented with the share of prosperity, which they individually enjoy, are wholly averse to any reform of abuses in government. The public good is sacrificed, or not considered, in their deliberations; and, though the welfare of society generally must depend upon the welfare of its constituent parts, they will uphold despotism and anarchy against the proposal of reformation, and see the rights of their countrymen sold without raising their voices, which might be effectual in stemming the tide of corruption. To this class of subjects there is another to be added, which may be denominated the court party, which rejects without distinction all reform. This party includes every man connected with, or dependent upon, the present administration. It would be vain to expect, that a reform from extravagance to economy should be patronised by them, at the risk of losing their present

emoluments. If we look at the history of all reformations in governments, I know of no instance where it has originated with, or has not been opposed by, the ruling powers. The rights of the people have always been maintained by themselves; and there is every reason to believe, that all they call their rights and privileges will soon sink into nothing if they do not exert themselves to preserve them. The court party, having all civil and military power vested in its hands, must consequently possess great strength and influence, and, being dependent on, and connected with the present administration, have an interest in continuing the existing abuses. Is it at all strange, then, that this party should reject all reform indiscriminately? That it should endeavour to confound the reformer with the revolutionist, and roundly assert, that a reformation will as naturally produce revolution as effect follows cause?

This word revolution was used for court purposes a great deal in the time of war; but now, that the motive for which it was then used having ceased, the inveterate enemy of England being safely imprisoned, and that country now our ally, it cannot be used with the same excuse. Indeed, if a few individuals do propose and teach doctrines inimical to the well being and order of society, is the whole nation to be involved in the blame and punishment attached to their crime? Ought they not rather to be treated as madmen than that their conduct should be made use of as a plea for upholding the present system of things, and that arbitrary measures should be resorted to to support present abuses?

A correction of abuses certainly does not imply a change and overthrow of the constitution. A man may be an advocate for the former, and yet be avowedly hostile to the latter, without forfeiting his claim to

consistency. Sudden and great changes are dangerous, as well to the body politic as the body natural. A reform should be effected in every department of the state, not hastily and rashly, but coolly and deliberately, at the same time with steadiness and vigour.

The opinion of the late earl of Chatham was in favour of a temperate reform; so was the late right honourable William Pitt and the late duke of Richmond, before one was appointed chancellor of the exchequer and the other master general of the ordnance. Such changes of opinion, fluctuating as men are in or out of place, certainly do not tend to create confidence in administration, or to reconcile the people to its abuses. It is this shows the people how the secret springs of government are put into motion, and the necessity of reform. With what propriety, with what consistency, can the house of

commons be called a representation of the people, when we all know, that not one-tenth part of the people are represented at all, but by the figure synecdoche, putting a part for the whole.

"Quietly and calmly," says an able writer, "let us wait until the sword of war be sheathed, and the hand of peace shall wave her olive branch; until the wisdom of the legislature shall be able to apply that serious and close attention to the subject, which its importance justly deserves."

The differences, which have existed respecting reform in parliament, even among the first authorities, have been principally as to the proper time of carrying it into effect; and war has always been urged as the reason for procrastination. Undoubtedly the time of peace is more favourable

than any other for this purpose, and some assurance on the part of the ministry of even future support to the measure, not too long delayed, would be very acceptable to the people. It would contribute very much to allay the prevailing spirit of discontent, and would induce them to bear with more fortitude the distresses and burthens of the times, cheered by the beams of hope. But whether we may expect this assurance from them I cannot determine. It is rather, I think, not to be expected. It appears to me vain to petition the house of commons to pass a censure upon its present composition. We may petition the lords to bring in a bill for this purpose, and should it pass that house we might then entertain some hopes. But even this is hardly to be expected, that the nobles will increase the power of the lower house without it becomes necessary by the united voice of the people.

All the encomiums on the constitution of England have supposed, that it maintained the proper balance of power between the king and the people, and that it was efficient in each of the three branches of king, lords, and commons. But, if any one of these parts is materially defective, its beauty and utility all vanish. And one of these essential branches of the constitution is, that the house of commons should represent the people. If the house of commons does not represent the majority of the people of England these encomiums must all disappear, for they are founded upon this supposition. It has been a fault in the people of England, the boasting so much of their rights, privileges, and constitution: they have been too negligent in guarding it. In a week's time, a bill, annulling their most sacred rights and privileges, may be passed. Where is, then, the great reason

for exultation? Is any thing so fleeting and so uncertain truly valuable? But against this, it is said, that no law can be passed, without the consent of the people by their representatives. This is true, provided they are fairly represented; but who can say they are?

De Lolme on the Constitution, respecting the power which the people exercise in the election of members of parliament, says, chap. xi, "The English constitution having essentially connected the fate of the men, to whom the people trust their power, with that of the people themselves, really seems, by that caution alone, to have procured the latter a complete security.

"However, as the vicissitude of human affairs may, in process of time, realize events which at first had appeared most improbable, it might happen, that

the ministers of the executive power, notwithstanding the interest they themselves have in the preservation of public liberty, and in spite of the precautions expressly taken in order to prevent the effect of their influence, should at length employ such efficacious means of corruption as might bring about a surrender of some of the laws upon which this public liberty is founded. And though we should suppose, that such a danger would really be chimerical, it might at least happen, that, conniving at a vicious administration, and being over liberal of the produce of the labours of the people, the representatives of the people might make them suffer many of the evils which attend worse forms of government.

" Lastly, as their duty does not consist only in preserving their constituents against the calamities of an arbitrary government, but moreover in procuring

them the best administration possible, it might happen, that they would manifest, in this respect, an indifference, which would, in its consequences, amount to a real calamity.

" It was therefore necessary, that the constitution should furnish a remedy for all the above cases; now, it is in the right of electing members of parliament, that this remedy lies.

" When the time is come, at which the commission, which the people had given to their delegates, expires, they again assemble in their several towns or counties: on these occasions, they have it in their power to elect again those of their representatives, whose former conduct they approve, and to reject those, who have contributed to give rise to their complaints. A simple remedy this, and which, only requiring, in its application, a knowledge of matters of fact, is entirely within the reach

of the abilities of the people: but a remedy, at the same time, which is the most effectual that could be applied; for, as the evils complained of arise merely from the peculiar dispositions of a certain number of individuals, to set aside those individuals is to pluck up the evil by the roots."

And in chapter xiii, on the liberty of the press: —

"Hence, though good men may not think themselves obliged to concur implicitly in the tumultuary resolutions of a people, whom their orators take pains to agitate, yet, on the other hand, when this same people, left to itself, perseveres in opinions, which have for a long time been discussed in public writings, and from which, it is essential to add, all errors concerning facts have been removed, such perseverance appears to me a very re-

spectable decision; and then it is, though only then, that we may safely say, 'the voice of the people is the voice of God.'"

And at the close of the same chapter:—

"But if the measures of government, and the reception of those measures in parliament, by means of a too complying house of commons, should ever be such as to spread a serious alarm among the people, the same causes, which have concurred to establish public liberty, would, no doubt, operate again, and likewise concur in its support. A general combination would then be formed, both of those members of parliament who have remained true to the public cause, and of persons of every order among the people. Public meetings, in such circumstances, would be appointed, general

subscriptions would be entered into to support the expenses, whatever they might be, of such a necessary opposition; and all private and unworthy purposes being suppressed by the sense of the national danger, the choice of the electors would then be wholly determined by the consideration of the public spirit of the candidates, and the tokens given by them of such spirit.

" Thus were those parliaments formed, which suppressed arbitrary taxes and imprisonments. Thus was it, that, under Charles the Second, the people, when recovered from that enthusiasm of affection with which they received a king so long persecuted, at last returned to him no parliaments but such as were composed of a majority of men attached to public liberty. Thus it was, that, persevering in a conduct which the circumstances of the times rendered necessary, the people baf-

fled the arts of the government; and Charles dissolved three successive parliaments, without any other effect but that of having those same men rechosen, and set again in opposition to him, of whom he hoped he had rid himself for ever.

"Nor was James the Second happier in his attempts than Charles had been. This prince soon experienced, that his parliament was actuated by the same spirit as those which had opposed the designs of his late brother; and, having suffered himself to be led into measures of violence, instead of being better taught by the discovery he made of the sentiments of the people, his reign was terminated by that catastrophe with which every one is acquainted.

"Indeed, if we combine the right enjoyed by the people of England, of electing their representatives, with the whole of

the English government, we shall become continually more and more sensible of the excellent effects that may result from that right. All men in the state are, as has been before observed, really interested in the support of public liberty; nothing but temporary motives, and such as are peculiar to themselves, can possibly induce the members of any house of commons to connive at measures destructive of this liberty: the people, therefore, under such circumstances, need only change these members, in order effectually to reform the conduct of that house: and it may safely be pronounced beforehand, that a house of commons, composed of a new set of persons, will, from this circumstance alone, be in the interests of the people.

" Hence, though the complaints of the people do not always meet with a speedy and immediate redress (a celerity which

would be the symptom of a fatal unsteadiness in the constitution, and would sooner or later bring on its ruin), yet, when we attentively consider the nature and the resources of this constitution, we shall not think it too bold an assertion to say, that it is impossible but that complaints in which the people persevere, that is, to repeat it once more, well-grounded complaints, will sooner or later be redressed."

The introduction of septennial parliaments, into our constitution, was an innovation of flagrant importance, and an infringement of the first principles of justice and the constitution. "If it was right," says Goldsmith in his History of England, "to extend their duration to seven years, they might also perpetuate their authority, and thus cut off even the shadow of nomination."

" Frequent parliaments are coeval with the constitution. In the reign of Edward the Third, it was enacted, that parliaments should be holden every year once, and oftener if need be; for prorogations and long adjournments were not then known*."

" The members of this assembly were chosen under the triennial act. Our trust is, therefore, a triennial trust; and, if we extend it beyond the strict legal duration, we cease, from that instant, to be the trustees of the people, and are our own electors. From that instant we act by an unwarrantable assumption of power, and take upon us to create a new constitution†."

* Speech of sir R. Raymond, afterwards lord Raymond, and chief justice of England.—Vide Belsham's Memoirs of the Kings of Great Britain, vol. i.

† Speech of Mr. Shippen.—Vide Belsham's Memoirs, vol. i.

"In my opinion, with great submission I speak it, king, lords, and commons, can no more continue a parliament, beyond its natural duration, than they can make a parliament*."

"A long parliament will encourage every species of corruption, in every class of the community. The value of a seat will bear a determinate proportion to the legal duration of parliaments, and the purchase will rise accordingly. A long parliament will both enhance the temptation and multiply the opportunities of a vicious ministry, to undermine the integrity and independency of parliaments, far beyond what could occur if they were short and frequent. The reasons urged for prolonging the duration of this parliament to seven years will probably be as strong, and by perseverance in the same impolitic con-

* Speech of sir R. Raymond.—Vide Belsham's Memoirs, vol. i.

duct might be made much stronger, before the end of that term, for continuing and even perpetuating their legislative power*."

"In a constitution so complicated as that of England," says Goldsmith, alluding to our voluminous code of laws, "frequent changes must take place, and alterations become necessary to repair the dilapidations of time."

Alterations may become necessary; and the same argument which will hold on the one side for passing new and rigorous laws, will be equally strong on the other side for Parliamentary Reform. You cannot allow that the one may become necessary, without allowing that the other may become necessary likewise.

* Speech of the earl of Nottingham.—Vide Belsham's Memoirs, vol. i.

By the self-constituted authority of septennial parliaments, our constitution has suffered a violation of great importance, in regard to the privileges of the people; and it has been recognized, from a supineness on the part of the people of this country, as first described, who would rather bear the ills they know than remedy, or in remedying run the risk of falling into others that they know not of; and likewise from the influence of the court party, who have constituted themselves interpreters of the words *loyal* and *jacobin*, *reformist* and *revolutionist*, and which they were enabled to do when we were at war; but now, that they can no longer use these words with the same chance of success, the people of England may look for more fair play. Shall it still be the fashion to extol the hero, who sacrifices his life in his country's battles, and shall the man, who proposes something for his country's

good, writes in her cause, who would plead for her distresses, shall he be branded with a title of infamy? Shall he be called a jacobin or a revolutionist? No: the advocates for a temperate reform in the commons' house of parliament by no means would alter the prerogatives of the king or the lords. They have too great a veneration for the pure constitution of England not to defend these branches from any aggression; but the people of England have a right to demand a reform in the commons' house of parliament, if they think it requires it: they have a right to demand, that the former limit of its duration be restored: they have a right to demand, that the nature of its representation be amended: but if they do not choose to exercise their rights, they become passive supporters of whatever measures may be adopted. It has been asserted, by able authority, that when the people of Eng-

land should display an apathy in the defence of their rights and constitution, the constitution was not worth preserving. Hoping, however, that this is not the case, let them persevere, and unite in every way which the laws will allow, to accomplish their object. Tumult, riot, or disturbance, become the signal for slavery; but to the united voice of a people accustomed to freedom, and endowed with knowledge, no monarch, with however large a standing army, can refuse their just demands.

Lastly, the measure of Parliamentary Reform and the restoration of triennial parliaments is so important, that, without it, the eloquence of the senate and the public spirit of some of its members are of little avail to the welfare of the community. It is impossible for them to oppose any measure successfully, however it may strike at the root of our liberties.

It is disheartening to see the labours of some so cast away; but at the same time their diligence and perseverance are highly creditable to them, though they know of how little avail their eloquence is in support of the just rights of the people.

LONDON,
March 4, 1817.

ON

THE POOR LAWS.

Our Poor Laws require much attention and reformation. The alarming increase of poor rates is a very serious evil; and if the present system were abolished, much good might be expected from it.

The only places which seem capable of benefit from poor houses are large manufacturing towns. The employments of the people are chiefly sedentary, and may be pursued to advantage within their walls. The country can reap no emolument: agriculture cannot be taught within the narrow confines of a poor house: that art, which should be the first object of every nation, must in some measure suffer, and be deprived of many valuable labourers.

Population is checked: a bold, hardy peasantry is exchanged for a race of meagre, pallid wretches, broken-spirited by the servile submission exacted by the petty tyrants of those regions. They lose the honest pride, and even the hope of independence by their subjugation. Their offspring, if it be their misfortune to have any, are trained in the same way, and, ignorant of a better state, attempt not to seek one. Their progeny, of course, will follow their example, and future generations will see their descendants in the same servile, disgraceful, and burthensome situation. Institutions, which lead to such consequences, may suit the meridian of despotism, but should for ever be banished from among a free people.

Paupers, when taken into a poor house, are obliged to give up all their little property, to submit to avocations destructive to their health, and to yield up every wish

of liberty, social connections, and domestic happiness, for restraint and correction. In return for all this, they obtain food, raiment, and a shelter; a poor inadequate recompense for the loss of every thing, that is dear and valuable to man. Many poor people, for these reasons, pine in secret wretchedness, rather than apply for relief, which they may not have on any other terms. Humanity shudders at the idea of the distress, which many suffer from confinement, whom no crime, but only poverty, has placed there. Be they ever so profligate, perpetual imprisonment is too severe a punishment. It is also inefficacious: ignominy generally confirms criminal habits. "Britons of the lowest rank," says Blackstone, "hold poor houses in an ignominious light."

Attempts to correct bad habits, and to inculcate moral duties in houses of industry, have often failed. If one is vicious

he communicates his propensities to many of his companions. In common society, vice is but scatteringly found; in a pent up crowd, it pervades and contaminates the whole mass. It is indeed a melancholy truth, that the poor at large are very defective in morals. Every humane mind will attribute it to a repining consciousness of the humiliating inferiority of their condition, and the want of proper instruction. They squander their time in idleness and drunkenness, till, harassed by their debts and necessities, some are driven by despondency to infringe on the laws of their country, and fall victims to their crimes: others drag on a miserable existence in penury and distress, wretched in themselves and burthensome to the community. The gloom attending restraint is more likely to increase than to correct such a disposition.

There are numerous instances of ma-

nagers of poor houses acquiring rapid fortunes in their places: they are more probably embezzled from the overflowings of the fund, the surplus of the poor's allowance, or the profits of their labour, than from any saving they can make out of their own salaries.

Before the reformation, the poor were supplied from the religious establishments; but, after these were abolished, it became necessary to pass laws for their maintenance. It has been observed, that poverty increases where these laws are put in force. In parishes, which have not been burthened with the tax, objects of charity have been few, and have been relieved by the extensive bounty of the opulent, and the cheerful donations of the peasants. It is generally true, that man is so impatient of control, that he will refuse as a duty what he would cheerfully perform from the mere impulse of his own feelings.

This is evinced in observing the different dispositions of people in rated and unrated parishes. In the latter, the benevolence of all ranks to the poor has been very great; their bounty has been dispensed with pleasure, and received with gratitude. In the former, the ear of humanity is deaf, and her hand closed against the intreaties of poverty and distress. If the wretch is a stranger, he is driven out with stripes: if a parishioner, he is directed to his parish officer. The relief, which the overseer hath power to give, is often insufficient; and often the insolence of office spurns the supplicant from his door.

The thing desirable in the poor laws is a mode of universal contribution and relief, in which all poor persons would be interested, by contributing to a common fund, and by receiving allowances proportioned to the contributions. The poor house should undoubtedly be done away

with. It encourages idleness and vice; and, if the character be not already dissipated, it tends to render it irremediably corrupt and base.

If these observations have any truth in them, a revision of these laws is surely very necessary to the well being of any state. The strength and power of any country is in its population, and the attachment which each individual feels for his native country. Let this attachment be encouraged by wise laws and benevolent measures.

THE Author of this Treatise throws himself upon the candour of a British Public for whatever allowances they will make in favour of this publication. All that he has to urge to mitigate the severity of critics is, that he has been a very short time in composing it, and

was induced to hurry its publication, lest some inquisitorial tribunal should be established, whose examination might be required to be held on all publications relating to our privileges and constitution.

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