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A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. ROBERT PEEL,

PROPOSING MEANS,

WHEREBY THE IMPORTATION OF FOREIGN CORN MAY
BE RENDERED CONDUCTIVE TO THE RELIEF AND
INTEREST OF THE BRITISH FARMERS.

LONDON :

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LETTER.

SIR,

No one, I should imagine, who has marked the progress of your administration, in that department of Government over which you preside, can be insensible to the readiness and zeal with which you have attended to the correction of existing evils or defects, applying, at the same time, beneficial and wholesome changes, better adapted to the altered character of the circumstances and times in which we live; and, although it may appear presuming, in an humble individual like myself, to address a statesman of such acknowledged and eminent abilities, on a subject of so much national importance as that of the

Corn-Laws, yet I trust that this presumption will be excused, in consideration of the duty which devolves upon every one, to contribute, as far as in him lies, not only to the support of the state to which he belongs, but also to its welfare, by any information or suggestion which he may be able to offer for its advantage.

It is from a conviction of this duty, that I venture to submit to you my sentiments on this vital question, notwithstanding the many able discussions which have already taken place both in and out of Parliament; but it is apparent, that in all these discussions the question has never been set at rest, nor has it received an answer by any means satisfactory to the conflicting interests of those parties for whose sake it has been raised.

The whole population of this kingdom, or nearly so, and manufacturers in particular, are still as urgent and clamorous as ever for a repeal of those laws which restrict the supply, and enhance the price, thereby rendering them

unable to compete on equal terms with those foreign rivals, who can purchase their bread at a cheaper rate, and can, therefore, afford their labour, in the same cheap proportion.

The farmers, with the landed interest, on the contrary, are equally urgent for a continuance of that prohibitory or restrictive system, which alone protects them from a ruinous interference with articles of their own growth, by importations from countries, exempt from the same charge of rates and taxation.

Now, it is very manifest, that both these interests,—the manufacturing, as well as the agricultural,—are too essential to the prosperity and welfare of this empire, to be overlooked, and each requires all the protection and support it can receive, without prejudice to the other.

The question, therefore, naturally arises, how is this to be effected, and how are these interests, which appear to be so much at variance with each other, to be reconciled? It is

the object of this Letter, to suggest an opinion as to the means whereby it may be practicable to give relief and satisfaction to both parties.

The manufacturer, for instance, would at once be relieved and satisfied, by granting what he requires; namely, repealing the Corn-Laws, at present so obnoxious to him, and allowing its free admission, subject, nevertheless, to a moderate protecting duty.

The agriculturist, also, would be greatly relieved, and better, if not wholly, satisfied, if this same protecting duty, which is intended for his benefit, could be made to reach his immediate and perceptible advantage, by reducing, or exonerating him from, some of those charges which it is the especial object of this duty to countervail.

The next question is, what are those charges, and how are they to be reduced? For, already has the Legislature afforded considerable relief to the Farmer, by taking off many taxes, both indirect and assessed, which principally affected

his interest; but still this question meets too ready and too true an answer, in the never-failing necessities of the poor, and the unavoidable heavy rates for their subsistence, which act as a millstone round his neck, in all his attempts to rise to the same level of competition with his foreign neighbours.

I would fain, therefore, submit to your consideration, whether the duty already referred to, may not, in some way, be made applicable towards a diminution of this continual drawback upon his industry; or, in other words, whether productions, similar to those of our own growth, which we import from countries less burthened than our own, cannot be made to contribute, in a direct manner, towards the subsistence of our poor, equally, or in some degree, with the produce of our own soil.

For this purpose, therefore, I would suggest that the duties so arising from the importation of Foreign Corn, Flour, Butter, Cheese, Wool, &c., instead of being included and consoli-

dated, as heretofore, with other duties, should henceforth constitute a separate fund, to be applied, under proper management and regulations, towards the reduction or payment in part, of such a portion of the poors' rate, as is now assessed upon the British Farmer.

I am however aware, that a difficulty will naturally suggest itself, as to the possibility of a fair and just allotment of such a fund; inasmuch as houses, stock in trade, and other property, having no claim whatever upon it, are usually included in the same assessments, which embrace that property which it is the purpose of this measure to assist; but this difficulty, I apprehend, may be easily obviated, by obtaining previous certified returns from every parish, town, or district, as may be thought advisable, of the average amount of poors' rate collected in each, during the last three, four, or five years; distinguishing the amounts assessed upon farming land, from those on other descriptions of property: these re-

turns would furnish sufficient ground-work for calculating an equitable distribution.

Now, assuming, for the sake of illustration, that six millions a year be the total average sum so collected, and that two-thirds, or four millions, of this sum be raised from farming lands, and the remaining one-third or two millions from various other property; and taking also for granted, that one million a year at least, and probably much more, would be produced by a moderate duty of 10s. per quarter on wheat, and a proportionate duty on other corn, flour, wool, &c.; it follows that, in this case, a fund would be created, sufficient to discharge one-fourth part of the whole amount of poor rates, now chargeable on the cultivators of our own soil: I may be, and I doubtless am, wide of the mark both as to proportions and amounts, having purposely chosen round numbers, in order to exemplify the principle in a more obvious manner; but it is clear, that if the demand or consumption of Foreign Corn, &c.

exceeded this calculation, the means of providing for the poor would be furnished in the same ratio.

I would next draw your attention to the probable, and, I may add, the natural consequences of the measure I have proposed. If 10s. per quarter on wheat, or any other given sum, be a sufficient protecting duty, or an equivalent to the additional cost in the shape of poor rates, which the British Farmer has to incur, beyond that of his foreign competitor, it is clear that a remission of one-fourth, or any other part, of that rate would lessen his outgoings for cultivation in the same proportion; say 2s. 6d. per quarter, and so far give him an advantage over his rival, whose corn would still continue subject to the charge of 10s. whilst his own would be diminished to 7s. 6d.; thereby enabling him, in fact, to meet the market on better terms than the other: and this advantage would be still further enhanced, because his grazing lands would par-

ticipate in the bonus given him by this remission, or abatement; whilst the produce of those lands is but little interfered with by any foreign competition. These circumstances in his favour, combined with the disadvantages on the side of foreigners, for freight, commission, and other incidental expenses, will operate, in some measure, as a set-off against his contribution for tythes.

Many other beneficial effects may be anticipated from carrying this system into execution: amongst others, the certainty of finding, in our ports, free admission for their Corn, although liable to a fixed, permanent, and well-known charge, would stimulate the foreign growers to a more regular, persevering attention to its cultivation, than they could otherwise be expected to do, where the sale of their commodity was dependent on capricious or uncertain restrictions; and it appears advisable, in every respect, to encourage such an enlarged cultivation abroad, as may pro-

duce general abundance; because, it must be recollected, that years of scarcity occasionally occur, the effects of which have been sufficiently distressing, at periods when the population of this country, and, indeed of the whole civilized world, fell very short of its present amount: the possible recurrence therefore, of such a calamity, in the present crowded state of that population, cannot be contemplated without additional dismay; and it is desirable also, that we should have free access to that abundance, which Providence might bestow on more favoured climates, when our own crops may prove scanty; for which reason, independent of all others, it is necessary that the growth and supply of this most essential element of human subsistence, should neither be discouraged nor prevented by excessive duties, or occasional prohibitions; even a superabundance, or glut, if it be an evil, is a salutary one.

At the same time, give our own farmers fair

play, and let them feel that you do so, and that they run the race of competition with equal weights, and on equal ground with their neighbours, and it cannot be doubted, but that their superior enterprize and industry will, in that case, always ensure them an advantage.

Under the present system, however, that equality could neither be realized nor felt, let the duty imposed be ever so great; this, in fact, only serves to create speculation, and enrich monopoly; but the agriculturist himself would find no diminution of his own load, whilst the community at large would be suffering under the weight of additional taxation and higher prices: on the other hand, a moderate duty applied to the purpose I have suggested, would flow in its proper channel, by evidently diminishing that load, and render him conscious of experiencing so much relief as the imposition of a duty ostensibly professes to afford him.

It is needless for me to trespass upon your

time and attention by expatiating upon many other advantages too obvious to require any notice, which must result from opening our ports to the free admission of foreign corn, &c.; creating, necessarily, a revived demand for our manufactures and colonial produce in return for the same, and enabling us, thereby, to exchange human labour and human ingenuity for human subsistence; which, it must be admitted, is the legitimate end and aim of all commerce, imparting, as it does, the principle of perpetual motion to its transactions.

I earnestly hope, that this view of the subject may meet your concurrence, being impressed with a very strong conviction, that an adoption of the plan I venture to recommend, and from which no possible injury could arise, would, at least, silence much clamour, and create a feeling of considerable satisfaction; it would, moreover, place our relations, with regard to the Corn Trade, both at home and abroad, on a permanent and in-

telligible basis. And I am still further assured, that if the principle be approved, little difficulty or expense would be found in its equitable application to the parties concerned.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

THOMAS JOYCE.

Notting-Hill, Kensington;

August 2, 1826.

THE END.

LONDON :

Printed by D. S. Maurice, Fenchurch Street.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 14th inst. in relation to the above mentioned matter. I am sorry to hear that you are unable to attend to the same at this time. I will endeavor to do all in my power to expedite the same as far as possible. I am, Sir, very respectfully,
 Yours very truly,
 J. M. [Name]
 [Address]