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LETTER  
TO  
THE AUTHOR  
OF  
STATE OF FACTS,  
RESPECTING THE  
*Scotch Distillery.*

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EDINBURGH:  
PRINTED FOR A. LAWRIE,  
PARLIAMENT-SQUARE.

1798.

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LETTER, &c.

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SIR,

I ADDRESS you personally, because I cannot presume so far upon the patience of the public, as to suppose they will give attention to any thing which can be said upon your last trifling publication. It is of no consequence to me whether you are an Excise Officer or what you are, it is not with you, but with your publication I have any concern; and if it were not, that the time is critical, when unfounded assertions may lead to pernicious conclusions, I would have neither read nor wrote upon a second publication of yours.

I at first considered you as a feeble minded man, who had rashly undertaken a cause, concerning which you was entirely uninformed;

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ed; and I did not account those your friends, who persuaded you to obtrude yourself as an author upon the public: to the production therefore of a man of this description, I formerly addressed my answer; but you now appear to me in another point of light, for I find you persevering in asseverations which have been tried, and seen to be without foundation, and in statements which have been demonstrated erroneous; I am constrained therefore in this address to assume a very different stile. I pay no regard to the scurrility with which you treat me personally, I would merit contempt, did I make either your scurrility or affectation of wit, an object of imitation. You have indeed thought proper to pay me many ridiculous exaggerated compliments upon the powers of my mind, on purpose I suppose to impress more deeply the idea, that my mind is depraved, and my heart devoid of rectitude; but the truth is, you have not capacity to judge of the powers of my mind, and your own publications completely vindicate me from the imputation of want of candour. I indeed was persuaded that you would have rested yourself quietly, after the severe chastisement which you received from Mr. Burns, of Hamilton, by whom you was convicted of having come forward

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to the public with asseverations for which you had no authority, and *which were not true*; but though I find you have hitherto been incorrigible, I will once more endeavour to lay you open to yourself, for I am sure if you once know yourself, you will not again solicit the notice of the public.

I know not well where to begin with your pamphlet. In taking a review of it, we cannot find arrangement where there is none, and as to the sentiments or ideas it contains, they are so rare, so scattered, that it will make very little difference, from what corner I begin my observations.

I find you are exceedingly displeas'd with me, because you say I have *garbelled* your sentences, whereby you alledge I have industriously perverted your meaning, or kept the strength of your reasoning out of view; but you have mistaken me entirely, in supposing, that by quoting a part, I considered myself bound to publish a new edition of your pamphlet; I am afraid no circumstance will give it a chance of obtaining that degree of celebrity; but more especially in the first instance which you give of this *garbling*, you have completely misunderstood my intention.

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By examining the passage, you will find, I there quoted not your *words*, but a *principle*, and that not because it was *yours*, but because it was *true*, viz. *that a manufacture should be carried on and encouraged only where it can be done at the smallest expence to the public*. I did not then quote your exception to this principle, because your exception was *absurd*; for the principle itself is general and unexceptionable, and is in an especial manner applicable to the distilleries in Scotland. This you deny for reasons in which no man of sense can join with you; for you say, "that distillation ought not to be encouraged, but in as far as it promotes the agricultural interests of the country."

Are the purposes of distillation in England or Holland confined to that object? have you not discernment to perceive, that distillation of spirits is in itself a manufacture profitable to the community; or are you so confined in your ideas, that you could not see, that if in any place you balance accounts with the public by agricultural or any other advantages, *whatever the expence may be*, in that place, the manufacture ought to be encouraged. Such investigation seems too deep for you, and the truth is, if you had enquired thus minutely, the

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the result would have completely destroyed your most favoured conclusions; but at any rate you seem neither to have understood my reasoning, nor comprehended the object I had in view. You suppose that I wish to deprive the Highlanders of the privilege of distilling in small stills, but I have no such idea; I wish them not deprived of the privilege of using small or great stills; or any agricultural advantages which may be derived from the manufacture of spirits: all I contend for, is, *that they shall be prevented from smuggling, under the covert of exemptions or reduced duties*, and thereby injuring the revenue of the crown, and excluding the fair trader from the market; and this object cannot possibly be effected, but by an equal and universal law.

The prevalence of smuggling is indeed a perpetual source of emolument to an honest active Excise Officer, and may be a reason why some of them may wish to support the present pernicious system; but it is not to such private perquisites, but to the general interests of the community, to which the unchangeable principle above stated applies.

You say expressly in your sixth page, "that it is almost impossible for an anker of Highland

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land whisky to be smuggled from the Highlands into the low country." I am sure you do not expect that one person in Scotland will give credit to this averment, for from Edinburgh to John of Groat's house, there is not one of the dealers, scarcely is there a man, who does not know the contrary to be the truth: the dealers boldly advertize Highland whisky for sale, and sell it avowedly, and yet not one of them has been prosecuted for this transgression. These facts are notorious; do not again suffer yourself to forget what you owe to yourself, and to society. Every interest of man is sacrificed when truth is betrayed to serve a purpose, or even to serve a friend, or support a system of unlawful traffic.

In the same place you farther tell us, "that whatever expence Highland whisky may occasion to the public, to the manufacturer, or to the consumer, the spirit itself is so good, so pure, and so palatable, that it deserves and brings the high price of eight shillings per gallon, whilst the low country whisky sells at three shillings and ten pence." You further add, "that if an anker of Highland whisky should by any means find its way into the low country, and be divided amongst an hundred persons,

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persons, it will destroy the low country distillers;" your meaning probably is, that no person having once tasted of the one, will again drink of the other, and that this is the great object of apprehension to the low country distillers in the present struggle; you confirm the whole, by saying, "that in these points, no man can impose upon your credulity, for you know both low country and Highland whisky." There never surely was any man more unfortunate in his statements than you have been, when you would thus argue for the Highland exemptions; for if this account of the matter is true, *which in fact it is not*, in that case, every man of common sense must allow, that receiving a price so much higher, *profits so exorbitant*, the Highland distillers are enabled, and ought to pay a much higher duty than the Lowlanders, and cannot possibly complain if they are only taxed equally with them. But more especially, if your statements can be depended on, you have shewn to a demonstration, that there ought to be no restrictions, *no lines of demarcation*; for an article of general consumption, so good, so pure, so salutary, should be under no restriction, it ought not to be confined to a corner. It would be barbarous in the legislature to oblige the inhabitants of the low country to

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drink what you elsewhere call *poison*, when our Highland friends are so able and willing to circulate the salubrious beverage; the interests of humanity, the interests of the Highlanders themselves require, that there shall be no restrictions, but that by one law and one duty, the trade may be laid completely open; and as no person will then drink the *poison*, such as you say is now vended in the Lowlands, the Highland distillers must engross the trade, and with their whisky spread health and happiness throughout every corner.—*Did you, sir, intend to induce this conclusion?* I suspect you did not know you had reasoned so justly.

You go on giving high encomiums to your favourite Highland whisky, but you had better have avoided giving any other reason for your predilection, than that *it pleased your taste*; for the reasons which you have thought proper to assign, are not tenable upon any principles. You say the superiority of Highland whisky, arises from its *being extracted entirely from malt*, from its being *distilled slowly*, and from the Highland distillers not *squeezing* their grain.

It is true the Highland whisky is often made very good, and I have also seen it very bad, but no part of its perfection arises from  
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slow distillation; the flavor and taste depends entirely upon the quantity of the essential oils, which are carried along with the spirits, when discharged from the still; but they are ignorant of their business, who do not know how to disengage the spirits from the coarser parts of these oils, during the process of distillation; and indeed experience has proved, that slow distillation has no effect upon the quality of the spirits produced; for the low country distillers, who at present work against time, with as much expedition as they possibly can, now manufacture spirits, of a quality far superior to what they made before the licence act took place, when they wrought more slowly. As to *squeezing* the grain, you surely have no meaning when you speak of it, for it is literally a thing never done, it is impracticable; but if you mean by this, taking all the spirits they can from the grain, it might have been expected from a person who speaks so highly of his opportunities of information, that he would have known, that the Dutch ferment their wash and grain together, and throw the whole mass into their stills, and thereby extract the spirit completely from the grain, and yet it is thought in general, that their gin is a spirit, superior even to Highland whisky.

It is no doubt true, that when spirits are extracted from malt alone, they are more agreeable to the taste of *persons who are accustomed to the use of them*. Many persons also give a preference to spirits from the Highlands, *infected* with the flavor of the smoke of peats; but all this predilection is local, and *arises entirely from habit*. The people of the south country cannot endure the Highland whisky, when thus infected with smoke; but all this says nothing to the real quality of the spirits themselves, which may be equally good with an infinite variety of flavors; but as to the comparative wholesomeness of the Highland and low country spirits, every man of common reflection must be decided in his opinion, that such as are distilled from a mixture of malted and unmalted uncontaminated grain, are as pure, as safe and wholesome as any spirits distilled from malt, or from any other substance, and will injure the health of no man, *who does not drink of them to excess*. It would be idle for me to reason with you upon this subject scientifically, for you would not comprehend the reasoning; but this plain question is certainly suited to your capacity; What poisonous or pernicious quality, did you ever find or know to exist in barley, which is expelled by the process of malting?

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or if not inherent in the grain, how can such pernicious qualities be acquired by the simple process of distillation? I know of no poisonous or unwholesome qualities inherent in that grain. In my infancy, the bread I eat was almost entirely of it, and one half of the people of Scotland, at this day, eat no other bread but from flour of barley; and yet from the constant use of it, the health, or vigor of their constitutions is by no means impaired. Barley being therefore perfectly innocent and nutritious in itself; is it not physically impossible that the spirit extracted from it, by a plain process of distillation, can have acquired any poisonous or hurtful qualities? Upon this subject you have shewn that you are completely ignorant; I wish that this were all the blame which attached itself to you; but here you evidently wish to create a prejudice, at once injurious to the public, and to many individuals, and detection itself cannot make you modest.

Your asseverations in your 7th page, are indeed very rashly offered to the public; for more than one half of the kingdom know them to be untrue. There you say, that the spirits manufactured in the Highlands, are *wholly consumed* in the Highland districts; that the distillers

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tillers there *submit to the limitations of law*, and use no barley, but of their own growth; and manufacture only the quantity of barley and spirits, *which the law permits them to do*; and that when, if at any time they did exceed, they were always made *fully to pay the duties*. Unhappily for you, sir, the Highland distillers themselves, though smugglers, are not so dishonest as to say that these things are so. I have often conversed with them upon the subject, and never heard them complain of the severity of their surveys; but I have often heard them complain of their being unlucky, in having their spirits seized, in the course of smuggling; but the truth is, the profits of an Excise Officer, do not always arise from his diligence in *preventing* those distillers from exceeding their limits, but often the price of connivance, or the profits of seizures, are the rewards of their good nature or activity; and these are advantages unattainable; when the distillers adhere to the limitations prescribed by law. For your own sake, sir, take some other ground in stating pretended facts, where detection will not bear so close upon you; and yet you here say you cannot be mistaken, having seen with your own eyes what you relate; but you had better have said that you had dreamt it, for the proof against your *very eye-*

*sight*

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*sight* is positive, uncontrovertible, and universally sustained.

In this place also, you again complain of my *garbling your sentences*: I must tell you once for all, that the task of reading your productions, is sufficiently laborious, but to transcribe them all, would be indeed intolerable. Upon the perusal of your pamphlet, I could only find that you started an idea here and there, and this I took up where I found it, if it was applicable to the purpose of the present controversy; but what must I, or any man think, when (as in your 9th page) you would endeavour to persuade us, that the northern farmers are not indebted to the low country distillers, in furnishing them a market for their grain? You surely are not serious here; those farmers know their own situation better than to think so; they annually look to the south, with great anxiety, for a market for their barley, *the most important article of their produce*; and to the goodness and steadiness of that market, they justly attribute, in some measure, the increased prosperity of their agriculture. Your ignorance of the facts, has led you to suppose that it would be preposterous to send barley from the north, to be manufactured by the Lowland distillers, in order that the spirits

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may be returned for their consumption; but I beg leave to inform you, that this idea is so far from being preposterous, that I have purchased the barley in the north of Scotland, and sold the spirits produced from it, in the same country; which yielded a comfortable profit in every step of its progress, to all concerned. Though you affect ignorance of this, the country knows it well; and if you were capable of reflection, you must have noticed, how this very season, the gentlemen and farmers in the north were alarmed on account of their want of a market for their barley, which was occasioned by the Lowland distillers being prevented, by the *uncertainty of the law*, from making their ordinary purchases. Though all this is undoubtedly true, I am far from forming so much as a wish that distillation was banished from the north country, or that they should not find at home the certain advantages, resulting from that most profitable manufacture; but in this I am perfectly decided, that it is the impolitic division of districts, and distinction of duties, which cramp their exertions there, and prevent their success. So well am I acquainted with the north country, that I could point out situations there, every way so favourable for distillation, that under an equal, steady law, an intelligent distiller

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distiller might compete with any manufacturer in Scotland. You say, they must first get stills of more improved construction; they must understand their business better; they must work more regularly: Now, can any man be at a loss to see, that it is the restrictions upon their trade, which are the occasion of these defects, where they exist? A man of capacity cannot endure such fetters; a man of understanding and liberality of mind, cannot suffer himself to wade through the puddle of a smuggling business. Let a good, steady law, abolishing restrictions, be once established, and you will soon see men of a good capital, men of capacity, undertake the business in that country; and the distillers there would soon be found as skilful, as diligent, and as successful, as the distillers in the low country.

In your 12th and 13th pages, you again attempt your calculations upon data, which you said you received from Mr. Burns distiller at Hamilton. Your conduct here is most extraordinary indeed: Is it not true, that in the public news-papers, Mr. Burns, declared that he never had furnished you with any statements; that your's did not accord with his practice; that indeed your account of the matter was entirely false: How, after this, can you expect attention to your asseverations? You

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say that I change my shape like a Proteus; I wish you also would adopt the practice, and for once take to yourself the *form* of truth. You tell me you are disposed to sift my calculations; but surely your memory is gone a wool-gathering. Do you not recollect that I told you, that the calculations I offered, were founded upon premises, established by yourself, and that your premises were erroneous; and that I only held up your ideas to ridicule, and amused myself with your absurdities; for I am sure, that neither within nor without the line, was distillation ever carried on with the rapidity which you supposed. There is one thing, of which you gentlemen of the Excise do not seem to be sensible, and that is, that as you are always unwelcome visitors, when you are pleased to call at any distillery, whether the distillers are acting legally or not; and as every person there, is disposed to disappoint your views; masters, servants, all conspire together, to delude and deceive you; and you are therefore often led to think you have made discoveries, when you are only laughed at; and you appear still more ridiculous when you repeat them. But whatever there is in this, I know for certain, and you know likewise, that it is idle to make calculations upon the supposition, that the Highland distillers do submit to the limitations of the present laws;

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laws; for every person knows that they smuggle, as much as they can, into the low country. Yourself being judge then, say, is it decent that you, an officer of Excise, should be the champion of a system, which can only be successful by the success of smuggling, which is ruinous to the fair trader, and the revenue?

In the conclusion of these your idle calculations, you tell us, that at last you have made *one* important discovery, which is, that in the struggle upon this business, the low country distillers have for their great object, to secure to themselves a complete monopoly of the trade. You are very singularly happy in the time when you have made this discovery; it is even when they are exerting themselves, to obtain a law to abolish distinctions, to lay the trade open to every one; that every man who pleases, in every place, may commence distiller, may partake of every privilege which they themselves enjoy; and this is what you call desiring to monopolize the trade. I am afraid you do not understand the word monopoly. Is it, sir, monopoly for a man to understand his business better than others, and in consequence, to carry it on with greater wisdom, vigour, and success? Is it monopoly for a man to possess a greater capital than his neighbour, and, by wisely applying it to

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the purposes of his trade, to become more eminent, more useful, and more successful in his line? I say finally, is it monopoly for a man to have more sense than his neighbour? I am sure however, it is very disgusting to converse with, or to write to, a man who is but scantily furnished with that article. Before you say the low country distillers wish to become monopolizers, go and learn the meaning of the word; no, sir, they have no such desire, they wish all to be comprehended under one system, but they do not wish to have to combat in their business with a race of smugglers, under whatever form they may be patronised.

The only regularity which I have observed in your publication, is, that towards the conclusion you divide your paragraphs by the numbers 1, 2, 3, &c. but I cannot perceive any method pointed out by that arrangement; and notwithstanding its accuracy, I must wade through the confusion, as I have done with the preceding pages. You begin these with labouring hard to prove, that the phrase, *almost every farmer*, does not in reality mean *every farmer*; and also, that there are other inhabitants in the Highlands, besides farmers, who are distillers. You surely do not understand the meaning of common language, nor when a person

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person amuses himself with your conceits. Do you really imagine that either I, or any person of common sense believes, that *almost every farmer* in the Highlands is a distiller, or that there are no inhabitants in the Highlands but farmers? when it is so well known, that there are thousands of inhabitants in the Highlands who are no farmers, and thousands of farmers who are no distillers; and (what you would wish to conceal) that *there are a great number of Highland distillers who do not reside in the Highlands*. But I cannot discern to what purpose you have made these observations, unless it be to shew, that every farmer in the Highlands ought to be a distiller; because, as you suggest, he has no other means for improving his farm but the manure afforded by the distilleries. You are angry because I said you did not understand agriculture: Have you ever computed what extent of ground may be annually manured by the Highland distillers, supposing they are strictly limited to their own district, in their consumption? Have you compared this with the extent of improvable land in the Highlands, and taken your estimate from the comparison? You would conceal from the North country farmers their natural advantages, their being surrounded with shores. You talk of their being seventy miles distant from the county town, as if they had  
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the advantage of no other port, but Aberdeen, and as if every place were equally distant from that port, and thereby you would discourage them from attempting improvement by lime, and consequently from turnips, broad clover, &c. But I have known, in the South country, lime carried by land betwixt forty and fifty miles, in great quantities, and used as a manure with great success; and I hardly think any part of Aberdeenshire, which is worth cultivating upon a plan of corn husbandry, is further distant from a place of shipping; and if once the farmer catches the ardour of spirited improvement, the ideas of difficulty will quickly subside, when every cart which goes out loaded with grain to be shipped, will return with lime to increase the produce of the following year, when neither time nor labour will be lost.

You formerly said, that the Highland distillers pay 4s. 4d. duty per gallon for their spirits, whilst the low country distillers pay only 1s. 10d. and a fraction. Now indeed you have retracted this position, though still you aver, that they pay a much higher duty than is done by the Lowlanders; and you add, that it is better to pay any duty than run the risk of being poisoned with low country whisky; and you appeal to the miserable food and raiment  
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of the Highland distillers, in evidence that their profits are small indeed.—I feel indignation against a man who would support a system which tends to keep worthy men in a situation so debasing. You say, better pay any duty than run the hazard of being poisoned; but I more justly say, better drink no whisky at all, than run that hazard on the one hand, or on the other be subjected to the misery and poverty under which you represent them as lying; but why submit to either? Let one common universal law relieve them from their bondage, and their exertions will be attended with success, and they will prosper as distillers: but if, upon the whole, they should find it impossible to succeed in distillation in the higher parts of the Highlands, when attempting a fair competition with others; whether this failure shall be occasioned from the scarcity of fuel, or from whatever cause it shall happen, I am decided in opinion, that they ought to let distillation alone: and though you should again be offended with my being serious, I must observe, that the great God of nature has given discriminating advantages and disadvantages to different situations on this globe, and he is a wise man who makes the most of the situation wherein he is placed; but he would be a very foolish distiller indeed, who would persevere in carrying on his business,  
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ness, not only at the expence of his expected profits, but even to the ruin of his capital.

But I am almost ashamed of having consumed my time in reviewing so harmless a paper as your last publication, and therefore will conclude this address, not in the same language in which you concluded your address to me: I will not say to you, that you have misapplied your talents, *for as a reasoner and author you have discovered none*: I will not say that you have misrepresented facts, *for they were not facts which you have advanced*: I will not say that you have disguised the truth, for your story has been told so poorly, that *it can deceive no person*: and though you threaten to deprive me of the privilege of clergy, if I should dare to answer you, (a piece of low wit I do not comprehend,) I most sincerely wish you to partake of the best benefits which the ecclesiastical constitution can confer upon mankind, and that is, that they may persuade you to candour, truth, and good manners; and these are the last words which I shall ever address to you.

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