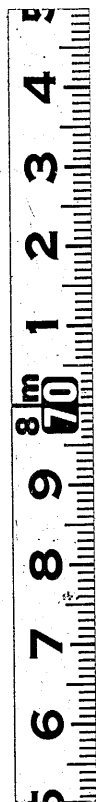


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OBSERVATIONS  
ON  
THE CORN LAWS,

ADDRESSED TO  
W. W. WHITMORE, Esq. M.P.

IN CONSEQUENCE OF  
HIS LETTER  
TO  
THE ELECTORS OF BRIDGENORTH.

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## OBSERVATIONS

ON

## THE CORN LAWS.

SIR,

Your Letter to the Electors of Bridgenorth is distinguished by a fairness and liberality, which give it every claim to attention on the part of those, to whom the corn question is a subject of interest. Agreeing with you in many of the positions which you support, but being of opinion that there is much danger, in the present state of public feeling, of precipitancy in the alteration of the corn laws which are now in force, I take the liberty of addressing to you, as one of the most able and candid supporters of the commercial interest, a few remarks on the subject, to which an attentive perusal of your letter to your constituents has

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given rise. You state, in unequivocal terms, your "*fear*" of "the immediate effects" to be produced by an alteration of the present system of corn laws, unless we proceed in the measure "with great prudence;" and that, in amending such laws, it is "most desirable" that we should not expose, to unnecessary "hazard, an interest so extensive and so important as the agricultural interest of this "kingdom."

When a gentleman like yourself, of independent character and circumstances, and eminently conversant with the philosophy, if not the details of commerce, comes forward as the champion of the mercantile world, and, with a candour and ingenuousness which are highly creditable to you, makes the admission which I have now mentioned, it ought fairly to be expected to curb the impetuosity of those, who are disposed to overlook practical considerations of expediency, in their anxiety to conduct legislation on philosophical principles.

The reign of ultra-ism in politics is over; but there is, in fashion, a species of ultra-ism in political economy, which requires the more attention from practical men, because it is thought to evince, in the possessor, a somewhat flattering degree of liberality and freedom from pre-

judice, which may be safely indulged in by the most cautious politicians, because it does not carry with it the indications, or obligations of party.

Landholders have been represented as a proud and interested body of men, having the power to check improvements, and the disposition to make laws in subserviency to their own purposes. Farmers have been described as mercenary and discontented, as making the most of their grievances, and watchful for opportunities of sounding them to the world. Agricultural meetings and petitions have been condemned as an unnecessary interference with the progress of liberal opinions, and decried as unworthy attempts to excite warmth, and to raise up an improper influence in the consideration of an important national question. And yet who were the persons that commenced the discussions on the corn laws two years since? It cannot be denied, that agriculture had been in a state of extreme suffering for some years previously, and that it was then just beginning to emerge from a state of exhaustion which had scarcely ever a parallel. It is likewise very well known, that at that time, manufactures and commerce were in a high, and I believe, unexampled state of pros-

perity, founded, in a very important degree, on the increased consumption which the improvement in agricultural affairs produced at home; and yet this was the period chosen for commencing an outcry against landholders and farmers, which could not, when soberly viewed, but be regarded as premature and mistimed. They were represented as gorged with the spoils of the public, though their prices were not one half what they once were; and the most sensitive feelings of our nature were excited against them, though every one at all conversant with the subject must have known, that such prices, for the short period of their continuance, and you yourself admit the fact, could not, by any means, make up the severe losses of former years.

It is not to be wondered, then, that meetings should be held in the country as well as in towns; and that associations should be formed for the protection of agriculture, when a single movement of the corporation of London, or of any principal manufacturing town, excited, perhaps, by the exertions of a single bustling individual, is able, in an instant, to sound an alarm through the whole kingdom. Agriculturists may be unreasonable in their claims and expectations, and many of them are so;

but they would really be the stupid and doltish individuals which some are inclined to represent them, if they did not see, that the simultaneous efforts which the activity and union of commercial men are so readily capable of making against their interests, aided, as they generally are, by much of the powerful exertions of the daily press, can alone be met, and counteracted, by activity and union on their part.

The most important part of the discussion which is carried on in your letter to your constituents, relates to the *necessity* for certain alterations in the corn laws, and the *advantages* which such alterations would be likely to produce.

You give it as your opinion, that the landed interest attach far too much consequence to the present corn laws; and that their fears are greatly exaggerated, as well respecting the quantity of wheat that could be furnished to us by foreign countries, as the price at which it could be introduced into Great Britain. But, supposing this to be the case, are not the advantages to be derived from the admission of foreign corn, overrated in precisely the same ratio?

If your statement is correct, that the free importation of corn is so small a boon, as far as agriculture is concerned, as not to be worth refusing, how are we to reconcile this view of the subject, to the magnitude and importance which it is represented to possess in commerce, and which makes it dangerous to be withheld?

In optics, it is well known, that indistinctness of vision produces many errors in the estimate of the size of bodies; a crow, in a mist, appearing as large as a man, or a horse as a castle. With men of less clear understandings, I should be inclined to refer, what appears to me so material a defect in the main argument of your letter, either to that species of optical deception which I have just mentioned, or to the microscopic influence of a fervid imagination.

Importation of corn is considered as operating in two ways; first, by reducing its price in this country, and thus allowing British manufacturers to diminish the wages of labour, and therefore to compete with other countries where the prices of labour are less; and, secondly, by enabling our manufacturers to transmit to such countries as send us corn,

an equal amount of their manufactures, which could not be purchased in any other way.

When you state that 600,000 quarters of wheat are as much, and even more than can reasonably be expected as an average of importation, which, at 24s. per quarter, would cost 720,000*l.* from the grower, it cannot but forcibly press itself upon the consideration, whether this amount of annual importation would be at all likely to remove the difficulties under which manufactures and commerce at present labour, or in any material degree to advance their general interests.

We are informed by Mr. Jacob\*, that in the year 1810 our exports (setting aside fractions) amounted to sixty-two millions; and that a deduction of fifteen millions of colonial produce re-exported, left an amount of forty-seven millions, which consisted entirely of British produce and manufactures. This sum is not far, I believe, from the truth at present, though I have not at hand the full opportunities of ascertaining the point. It is apparent, however, that if this is at all near the average of our exports, an addition of 720,000*l.* to

\* Considerations on the Protection required by British Agriculture, and on the Influence of the Price of Corn on exportable Productions, by W. Jacob, Esq. F. R. S.

them, would be only a sixty-fifth part of the whole; and it is difficult to see how an increase of our exports to this extent, though, of course, useful as far as it goes, can be the means of rescuing our manufacturers from a state of utter depression and debasement, to that of the high prosperity which, we are told, would be the effect of repealing the corn bill.

You are too candid to insist, that the distress of the manufacturing districts is mainly attributable to the corn laws. You admit that it is *not* strictly dependent upon them; and speak with a feeling of doubt on the extent to which they are even accessory, in increasing the difficulties which our manufacturers have so largely experienced. It can hardly be questioned, that the great cause of those difficulties is the weight of goods with which machinery and enterprise have loaded them; and it does not appear, on any calculation of the amount which a probable annual importation of corn bears to the probable mass of accumulated production, that the relief to the manufacturer would be very sensibly felt, by an importation being permanently allowed by law, to the extent which you mention. In point of fact, an experiment has been made, as you yourself state, of an admission into our

markets, of corn from Canada, or from bond, during each of the two last years, to an extent nearly equal to that for which you contend, and yet without any material influence arising from it, in either preventing, or removing the evils complained of.

It seems, indeed, to be apparent, that no permanent extension of trade can keep pace with production, which is conducted as if demand were interminable, and unlimited.

In reasoning from the past to the future, you appeal to the period between the years 1773 and 1815, as proving the very high state of prosperity which Great Britain enjoyed, in all the particulars which constitute the greatness of a country; and you connect this with the existence of a principle of law, relative to the importation of corn, which was interrupted at the latter period. I have no difficulty in admitting the correctness of your statement, as to the rapid strides which this country made during the period mentioned by you, and particularly the latter part of it; but cannot consider this as having any thing to do, either with the facility of importing corn, or the quantity imported.

It is rather the year 1767, than 1773, that should have been mentioned as that in which

a greater than ordinary importation commenced; for the average excess of annual importation, up to the latter year, was nearly as great as that of the first five years of the halcyon period mentioned by you, and was much greater than that of the third and fourth five years; while, in the second, it is to be observed, that the exportation exceeded the importation, nearly as much as the importation did the exportation at any, and more than at two, of the periods just mentioned.

This will be seen more distinctly from the following tabular view: —

From 1767 to 1772, both inclusive, the annual average excess of imports above exports, was.....	120,778
From 1773 to 1777.....	149,588
From 1778 to 1782 excess of exp. 95,930 ... ..	—
From 1783 to 1787 excess of imports .....	84,577
From 1788 to 1792.....	70,123
	425,066
Deduct excess of exports .....	95,930
	329,136
Annual average of the 5 periods.....	65,827
From 1793 to 1797.....	482,620
From 1798 to 1802.....	779,597
From 1803 to 1807.....	439,012
From 1808 to 1812.....	454,067
1813 & 1814.....	370,544
	2,471,640
Annual average of the 5 periods.....	494,318

It appears, therefore, that for twenty-six years, viz. from 1766 to 1793, in which twenty-two of the forty-two years quoted by you are included, the average excess of importation was not quite 70,000 quarters per annum, a trifle not to be named as having any sort of palpable national operation.

From the year 1793, up to 1814, inclusive, the importation of corn increased so as to make the annual average nearly 500,000 quarters, or, reckoning the value paid for it to the grower at 24s. per quarter, a seventy-fifth part of the exports of the country. The national population was, without doubt, at this period rapidly advancing; and this, with the exigencies of war, produced a greater than ordinary demand for agricultural produce. But the real cause of such an importation, small as it must be considered in a national point of view, is to be seen in the bad harvests, and deficient crops, which so frequently occurred between the years 1793 and 1812. On referring to Mr. Tooke's valuable work on high and low prices, you will find, that during this period, amounting to twenty-two years, there were no fewer than eleven years of scanty harvests.

Deficient production was therefore the ultimate cause of this increased importation; and,

in reasoning from effects, it would be just as philosophical to refer the prosperity of that period to bad harvests, without which such an extent of importation would not have taken place, and to advancing prices, which were the consequences of increased demand for corn in this country, as to a system of laws, which would have had no palpable operation, except under the uncontroulable circumstances of seasons.

An increased importation would have occurred on any necessity for it arising, if the change of law effected in 1773 had not taken place. Such was the fact after the deficient harvest of 1765; such was likewise the case after that of 1757; and those were two of the only three bad seasons which had occurred from the year 1715 up to the first mentioned period. The third was in the year 1740; and then it was found, that the extra supply wanted, was produced from our exports of corn being diminished from an average of above 300,000 quarters per annum, (as occurred in the preceding five years,) to less than 50,000 quarters.

It is a favourite idea with yourself, and other modern political economists, that a valuable result of a freer importation of corn, will be that of removing a principle of fluctuation

in the price of the article, which is regarded as materially depending on the present laws, and as equally unfavourable to the farmer, the landlord, and the consumer.

But I would appeal to the experience of the whole period to which our documents extend, whether it is possible, by any human efforts, to prevent fluctuations in the price of corn. A glance at Mr. Tooke's Tables will demonstrate that the thing is impossible; and that the effects of seasons, whether bad or good, will set at nought the pigmy efforts of human skill to counteract them.

It sounds very plausibly, too; that by a freer importation of corn, we allow the plenty of one country to counteract the scarcity of another; whereas, it is found, that Great Britain is very much an epitome of Europe; and that, from the best evidence which can be obtained on the subject, as given by Mr. Tooke, and as sanctioned by the high authority of the House of Commons itself, there is a prevalence of a general similarity of seasons, over the whole of Europe, within certain latitudes.

Mr. Lowe's information is highly important on this subject.\*

\* The present State of England in regard to Agriculture, Trade, and Finance, &c., by Joseph Lowe, Esq.



“ The public,” says he, “ particularly the  
 “ untravelled part of the public, are hardly  
 “ aware of the similarity of temperature pre-  
 “ vailing throughout what may be called the  
 “ corn-country of Europe, we mean Great  
 “ Britain, Ireland, the north of France, the  
 “ Netherlands, Denmark, the north-west of  
 “ Germany, and, in some measure, Poland  
 “ and the north-east of Germany. All this  
 “ tract is situated between the 45th and 55th  
 “ degrees of latitude, and subject, in a con-  
 “ siderable degree, to the prevalence of simi-  
 “ lar winds. Neither the superabundance of  
 “ rain which we experience in one summer,  
 “ or its deficiency in another, are by any  
 “ means confined to Great Britain and Ire-  
 “ land ; while in winter, both the intensity and  
 “ duration of frost are always greater on  
 “ the Continent. Exceptions certainly exist  
 “ in particular tracts ; but in support of our  
 “ general argument, we have merely to recall  
 “ to those of our readers who are of an age  
 “ to recollect the early part of the war, or who  
 “ have attended to registers of temperature,  
 “ the more remarkable seasons of the present  
 “ age : thus, in 1794, the spring was prema-  
 “ turely warm on the Continent, as in England ;  
 “ there, as with us, the summer of 1798 was

“ dry, and that of 1799 wet : again, in 1811,  
 “ the harvest was deficient throughout the  
 “ north-west of Europe, generally, from one  
 “ and the same cause, blight ; while that of  
 “ 1816 was still more generally deficient, from  
 “ rain and want of warmth. In regard to a  
 “ more remote period, we mean the seven-  
 “ teenth and eighteenth centuries generally,  
 “ if the temperature has not been so accurately  
 “ noted, we find, from the coincidence in  
 “ prices, that it is highly probable that there  
 “ prevailed a great similarity in the weather  
 “ of the Continent ; thus, in France, the latter  
 “ years of the seventeenth century, the sea-  
 “ sons of 1708 and 1709, as well as several of  
 “ the seasons between 1764 and 1773, were  
 “ as unpropitious, and attended with as great  
 “ an advance of price, as in England.”

Similar statements are given by Dr. Adam  
 Smith, as noticed by Mr. Tooke.

The forty-two years which you mention, as  
 being remarkable for the prosperity of the  
 country, presented a greater extent of fluctu-  
 ation in prices, than any which has been expe-  
 rienced since ; the lowest prices having been  
 36s. in the year 1779, and the highest 128s. 6d.  
 in the year 1801. Here was a fluctuation to  
 more than three and a half times the extent ;

whereas a fluctuation to only about double the extent occurred since the year 1815; the highest price, 94s. being in 1817, and the lowest, 43s. in 1822.

Not less remarkable are the fluctuations which have occurred in the price of corn, from the year 1646, at which the registry begins, to the commencement of the period from which you date your calculation. A slight inspection of the table of prices will prove this to be the case; and the following are some of the most striking differences: —

	s.	d.	s.	d.
From 1648 to 1654, 6 years, the price varied from	75	6 to 23	'1	
From 1655 to 1659, 5 .....	29	7 to 58	8	
From 1662 to 1666, 5 ..	65	9 to 32	0	
From 1672 to 1674, 2 .....	56	5 to 61	0	
From 1674 to 1676, 2 .....	61	0 to 33	9	
From 1676 to 1679, 3 .....	53	9 to 53	0	
From 1687 to 1688, 1 .....	22	4 to 40	10	
From 1689 to 1693, 4 .....	26	8 to 60	0	
From 1695 to 1696, 1 .....	47	0 to 63	0	
From 1698 to 1702, 4 .....	60	9 to 26	0	
From 1706 to 1709, 3 .....	23	1 to 69	9	
From 1710 to 1715, 5 .....	69	4 to 38	2	
From 1716 to 1719, 3 .....	42	8 to 31	0	
From 1723 to 1725, 2 .....	30	10 to 43	0	
From 1727 to 1728, 1 .....	37	4 to 48	5	
From 1728 to 1732, 4 .....	48	5 to 23	8	
From 1740 to 1742, 3 .....	45	1 to 22	1	
From 1743 to 1746, 3 .....	22	1 to 34	8	
From 1755 to 1757, 2 .....	30	1 to 53	4	
From 1757 to 1761, 4 .....	53	4 to 26	9	
From 1761 to 1765, 4 .....	26	9 to 48	0	

It seems to be demonstrable, therefore, that no alteration which can be made in the system of corn laws; no assimilation to what has been regarded as the practice of former periods, will, in any material degree, prevent that fluctuation of prices, which, though depending mainly upon the season, you are disposed to regard as very much the fruits of the present system. In considering the subject of fluctuations, you are, indeed, a little hard upon state doctors, without considering how natural it is for doctors to disagree, and how difficult is a decision as to the judgment exercised, either by the medical or political physician, when it is by the result, not by the means employed in effecting it, that ability is for the most part estimated; — “*ab eventu, præcipue, honorem aut dedecus reportant.*” But when you charge the Parliamentary faculty with throwing their patient, the agriculturist, into an ague, you appear to forget that there is such a thing as mistaking an ague, which is generally considered as an innocuous and manageable sort of complaint, for a more formidable disease, and thus endangering, by severe or mistaken remedies, the production of a more severe malady.

You seem not to bear in mind, likewise, that the mere difference of feeling, which is experienced in a variable climate; or, perhaps, the little chilliness, or slight cold, to which the most healthy, in our insular situation especially, must be subject, may be conjured up to the most formidable symptoms, calculated to excite alarm through the whole kingdom, and to accumulate prescriptions and exorcisms from every part of the empire.

“ Et Metus, et malesuada Fames, et turpis Egestas,  
Terribiles visu formæ.”

The ague-fit is, however, nothing more, in fact, than the *maladie du pays* of this and of every other country; and, unless a process can be invented for changing climate, and producing a sort of artificial temperature in the atmosphere, it will be in vain to expect to submit it to Parliamentary authority.

In representing the natural progress of nations to be from the agricultural to the manufacturing state, you employ a very common and a very specious view of the subject. America should, therefore, according to this hypothesis, be solely, or principally a grower of corn, which she should dispose of to Great

Britain for manufactures, which ought to be the chief objects of our attention.

But, because we have extensive manufactures in this country, is this a reason why farming is to be a secondary consideration with us, when, according to your own estimate, we are to depend for twenty-two parts out of twenty-three of our consumption of wheat, and of course for an equal, or even greater degree, of many other articles of growth, on the production of our own country, or of Ireland?

Would it be politic, likewise, in America, because she is a new country, to lend herself to this hypothesis, and to give up to old Europe, all claims to commerce and manufactures, and trust to the sale of her corn, for procuring manufactures, colonial produce, and the luxuries of the East?

America has good ports, and an active enterprising people, and it would be bad policy in her not to direct part of her energies to the production or procurement of various articles of importance in life, with which to exchange, as we do in this country, for the product of her own soil.

You state the various circumstances which prevent America from exporting much corn,

and England from receiving much ; and to what use, therefore, unless the hypothesis can be applied on a large scale, is the hypothesis at all ? England ought to be, by calculation, the largest corn-importing country in the world, and yet you consider the importation of one twenty-third part of the produce necessary for her subsistence, as carrying your views into effect. The general experience of the world, indeed, seems to indicate, that no country which has soil enough, and that of sufficiently good quality to grow corn to feed its inhabitants, will depend, for any large supply, on foreign countries.

I know that with many, however, it is a common notion, and particularly with the political economists of large towns, that the cultivation of corn, in this country, should be entirely a subordinate consideration ; and that it would be the best policy for a nation such as ours is, which is largely concerned in manufactures, to trust for our principal supply of grain to other countries, which could grow it at a cheaper rate, and which would at all times be glad to exchange it for our manufactures.

If we consider your statement, and that of Mr. Jacob, as to the probable amount of im-

portation of corn into this country, to be at all correct, and compare this with the greatest importation which has taken place, under every temptation of gain to the foreign grower, it will be seen that this view of things is of a very extravagant nature, and is a deduction of mere theorists.

It would be difficult to define the precise kind of land to which alone the attention of the farmer ought to be directed, in producing corn in this country.

During the very high prices of grain which existed some years since, all sorts of artificial manure were employed, at a very heavy expense which could not at present be borne, in increasing the productive powers of every description of land ; but we may, I think, safely infer, on the subject of cultivation, that if a farmer depends for his manure, on stock which he is able to support by hay, natural or artificial grasses, or green crops grown in rotation with white ones, on his own ground, without having recourse to oil-cakes, or to the production of other farms, he will not be carrying on his husbandry at such a rate as will require exorbitant prices to remunerate him. There is unquestionably a value of production, at which land of an inferior quality will not

only afford no rent; but not pay for any sort of cultivation bestowed upon it; and of the policy of reducing prices, so as to throw such land out of cultivation, you express your decided disapprobation. You doubt, indeed, whether a single acre, now cultivated with profit, would cease to be cultivated, after such an alteration of the corn laws has been made as you consider necessary; but, at the same time, you very forcibly and feelingly observe, that if the consequence of the admission of foreign corn would be the driving the poor land of this country out of cultivation, your zeal for a change of law would be "considerably abated," by the dismal prospect of the "misery and desolation" which must be produced throughout the country by such a measure.

Some of our modern political economists consider the devastating principle against which you so properly contend, as a trifling little occurrence in society; a mere balancing of accounts between agriculture and commerce, in which the one or the other may happen, as the case may be, to be the debtor or the creditor.

It must unquestionably be from an ignorance of the extent of the evil, that such

gentlemen could view it with indifference, either as far as individuals, or the public are concerned. Theorists will go far in support of their opinions, and ultra-economists further than most men; but it would be difficult to conceive, that any could be found of such imperturbable coolness of mind, as to console themselves amid the misfortunes of any class of society, by the consideration, that they may have been produced according to true principles of philosophy, and with due regard to the symmetry of hypothesis; and that they ought, therefore, to be cheerfully submitted to, as necessary and unavoidable dispensations of Providence. Such politicians may be classed with those described by Bacon, as "gerentes se pro centro mundi, ac si omnes lineæ in se suisque fortunis debeant concurrere;" but it is not the good cheer, or the fascinating discussions of Political Economy Clubs, those noctes cœnæque Deorum, which, I am persuaded, will induce any Englishman, when it comes to the push, practically to concur in opinions, which would lead to that extent of evil which you have so strongly deprecated. During the years 1813 and 1814, we are told by Mr. Jacob, that an eighth part of the produce of the country in wheat, arose from cold

clay, and light sandy soils, which had recently been brought into cultivation. But an eighth part of the wheat consumed by the country is not less than 1,700,000 quarters, and this is equal to the whole amount of importation, even including the corn from Ireland, which has ever been produced from every stimulus which extravagant prices have given; and it exceeds, by three times, the quantity on which this country, according to your view of the matter, and that of Mr. Jacob, is able permanently to depend, for its supply of the prime necessary of life. Government, fortunately, form a third, and independent party, between those who push agricultural claims to an inordinate extent, and those who set them at nought, as antiquated and obsolete, and as being out of fashion in all good society; and, I think, we may fully depend upon their discretion and judgment, for not making near 2,000,000 of the population of this country, dependent on other countries for their principal subsistence.

But there is something besides putting land out of cultivation, which would be of the most unfavourable nature to a country. It is well known, that the productiveness of land mainly depends on keeping it clean and dry,

and in manuring it. If agricultural profits are much diminished, the farmer, in the first place, necessarily keeps down his labour as much as he can. In this way he lessens his growth. He is also able to keep less stock; and then he deprives himself of the very life's blood of production. But does not he likewise diminish the production of the country? and every one, who is the least conversant with agriculture, knows how readily this could go to the extent of half a quarter per acre in any description of land; and yet such a diminution would amount to a seventh or eighth of the whole produce of the country.

I cannot agree with you in the propriety of the blame which you throw against government, for having delayed, for two years, to bring forward any specific measure for altering the corn laws, after admitting that the law required alteration.

It is not an unfrequent subject of remark, that defects are sooner discovered than remedies; and government are surely not to be blamed because they took time, not only to obtain information on the general circumstances which were to direct their opinions on a momentous question, but to consider how

any changes were likely both to be received, and to operate.

They have instituted a very prudent and necessary enquiry as to the extent, as well as the price, at which supplies are likely to be procured from abroad; and, I trust, that such enquiries are still going on.

But, in order still further to pave the way for the alterations which Parliament may think necessary in the corn laws, they have admitted, as a preliminary measure, the importation of Canada and bonded corn; and in doing so, they have unquestionably prepared the market for that moderate and regular supply of the article, on which alone free importation can be permitted with safety.

This appears to you to be an excess of prudence; but with the necessity for caution which you so candidly admit, and with the portion of uncertainty which must attend all the data on which Parliament reason on the subject of the corn laws, I cannot but express my surprise, that you should have been an advocate for that precipitancy which an earlier alteration in them would have indicated. The fear is not unreasonable, you readily allow, that if our markets were open for "the wheat of the whole world," we should be

liable "to be inundated by it; and that changes of a fearful nature might consequently take place in our agricultural prospects." Is not this, therefore, a good reason for the corn laws being touched with caution? If the question related to letting off a large accumulation of water, particularly when you could not ascertain its depth with precision, you would not hesitate in the choice of gradual, or sudden means for effecting it. You would not endanger the inundation of a country, merely because a certain portion of irrigation was necessary, when, by the formation of proper pipes and sluices, you might accomplish all which we have occasion for, with safety? There is a growing conviction, that the present corn laws will soon be repealed, or essentially altered. This very conviction prepares for the change; and the decided infractions of law, which you view as irrational and unstatesman-like, are to be regarded as so many experiments, first to remove difficulties existing, and then to try the effects of future changes.

Farmers have a right to fear an inundation of corn; and you admit that it is natural for them to do so. They are, therefore, entitled to expect that such shall be effectually guarded

against. They have just begun to recover from a state of suffering; but they are told, that they must prepare for a little more of the same species of discipline, which brought so many of them to ruin.

The progress to health through augmented suffering, is not quite apparent to them; and it is not extraordinary, that they should have some difficulty in discovering the sagacity of that practitioner, who, when a patient was just obtaining a recruit from a severe illness (such as that from which you admit that agriculturists have not yet recovered), should, instead of continuing the regimen by which convalescence has been advanced, see, in the good appetite and improving looks of his patient, a melancholy presage of future ailments, and direct his view rather to keep down, than promote strength. Such a plan would savour of the discipline of Barataria; and would soon be felt, no less sensibly by the agricultural community than it was by the renowned governor, Sancho Panza himself. Sancho's stomach was in the habit of frequently speaking very intelligibly to him; and, as he had not gone deep into political economy, he was at a loss to understand the doctrine of his physician, "many thanks to him," who, as he

said, would have him "die of hunger, in order to live." "God grant the same life," cried the famished governor, "to Signor Doctor Pedro Rezio Tirteafuera, and all those of his tribe; I mean bad physicians, for good ones deserve palms and laurels."

But the delay which you blame government for conceding, had likewise this advantage attaching to it, that it afforded an opportunity of examining into, and, if necessary, of correcting, by the result of all those enquiries which an active-minded public have opportunities of making, Mr. Jacob's reports as to the quantities of corn which the northern parts of Europe are capable of furnishing for exportation; and though I think we ought not, for various reasons, implicitly to rely on the correctness of his statements, even if not contradicted, yet their remaining unimpugned, after a sufficient period has elapsed for ascertaining their accuracy, is unquestionably a circumstance materially in their favour.

You mention, as a powerful reason for altering the fabric of our corn laws, that they are a flagrant deviation from our ancient scheme of policy. There is not much to be hinged upon an argument of this kind, because the change of circumstances which



time, the great innovator, produces, renders it necessary to accommodate laws to the existing state of society. But, in fact, our forefathers deemed it proper, by a statute passed so early as the 3d of Edward IV. ch. 2. (A. D. 1463) to prohibit the importation of corn when below a certain price, which continued till the reign of James I., and has occasionally, I believe, been resorted to since. This act\* is

\* "Whereas the labourers and occupiers of husbandrie within this realme of England, be dayly grievously endamaged by bringing of corne out of other lands and parts, into this realme of England, when corne of the growing of this realme is at a low price: our redoubted Sovereigne Lord the King, considering the premisses, by the advise, assent, and authoritie aforesaid, hath ordained and established, that no person from the Feast of Saint John the Baptist next comming, shall bring, or convey into any place or porte of this realme, by way of merchandize, nor otherwise, any wheate, rye, or barley which is not of the growing of this land, or of any ile pertaining to the same; or of the growing of the countries of IRELAND or Wales, at any time that the quarter of wheate doth not exceede the price of 5s. 8d.; the quarter of rye doth not exceede the price of 4s.; and the quarter of barley 3s.; of lawful money of England, within the place or porte where such wheate, rye, or barley shall happen to be brought, upon paine of forfeiture of the said wheate, rye, or barley. The one halfe to the use of our Sovereigne Lord the King, and the other halfe to him that shall happen to seise such wheate, rye, or barley.

"Provided always, that this acte extend not to any wheate, rye, or barley taken by any of the King's liege people upon the sea, without fraud or couine."

remarkable for the introduction of a kindly feeling towards our sister island, which, as far as corn is concerned, now forms, much to the credit of all parties, and eminently to the advantage of both countries, one of our permanent and unchangeable relations.

An authority, therefore, which is still more ancient than that which you have brought forward, may be pleaded in favour of the enactment of 1815, with all "the parade of patriotism," as you are pleased to term it, with which it was supported. Most men have some interests or other in great questions, and many are improperly biassed by them; but I am not aware of any one who supported the corn laws, on the puerile ground, of having *solely* in view the good of the country. I should be as little disposed to give him credit for ingenuousness, and an absence of all personal feeling on such a subject, as I should the manufacturer, who professes to call out for cheap bread, solely in order that the poor may be better fed, when his real object is, that he may pay them less wages, and have an increased demand for his goods. The interests of both classes are inseparably connected. The manufacturer, merchant, and tradesman, consume the corn grown by the farmer,

who unquestionably owes, to the increase of manufactures, and the extension of trade and commerce, a great increase of demand for his produce; but the farmer, landholder, and all who are more or less remotely connected with the soil, and who form the largest part of society, are the best customers of the manufacturer and merchant; and I think there is no doubt, that if domestic demand is materially affected, the want of it would be little compensated by the foreign market.

The modifications which Parliament have deemed it proper to make in the corn laws of 1815, render it probable, either that these laws will be a good deal altered, or that a constant importation, with a protecting duty, will be substituted for them. The occurrence of heavy crops after the large importations of 1818 and 1819, and the consequent glut of corn, and reduction of price, tended to convey to the minds of agriculturists themselves, doubts as to the policy of a statute, which knows no medium between full admission, and complete exclusion.

If Parliament should, however, be disposed to permit constant importation, with a protecting duty (which is exceedingly probable), it will then be a grave matter of consideration,

what amount of duty will afford a sufficient protection to the British agriculturist. An average price of from 60s. to 64s. per quarter, seems, by the instructions given to Mr. Jacob\*, to be that which Government considers as sufficient to remunerate the grower of corn; and Mr. Jacob thinks, that with a duty of 10s. or 12s. per quarter on imported wheat, it would require an average price of above 64s. to re-establish the trade with the Baltic. You yourself consider an average of 55s. as the utmost to which it would be politic to raise the price of wheat in this country; and view this price as one, which, with 10s. or 12s. of duty, would be sufficient to produce the same effect. But here is a difference in opinion, of such magnitude, as to show clearly, that with the best information, and, I think I may say, with the best intentions, there is a great liability to err in all calculations of this kind. With your strong feelings in favour of change, you admit that we are at present "legislating somewhat in the dark;" and you are so little confident of the propriety of any specific enactment on the subject, as to be favourable, in the first instance, to a graduated scale of duty,

\* See Mr. Jacob's Report, 1826.

which may afford the necessary experience which is now wanting on the subject, and enable us best to meet the difficulties of the case, and to reconcile the conflict of interests involved in the question.

At the same time it is to be observed, that in your regulated scale, you consider 10s. as a sufficient protecting duty when corn is at 55s., and 5s. when it is at 65s.

With a difference of four or five millions per annum, between what Mr. Jacob and you consider, on the one hand, as remunerative to the farmer, and, on the other, as sufficiently encouraging to importation; with a difference, likewise, of nearly one half, between what you regard as a sufficient protection, and what he does, it is quite obvious, that no precise duty can be now determined upon, which can, under every circumstance, be admissible, or which can, in any way, be satisfactory to all parties. It is important, therefore, to feel our way in this difficult species of legislation, and to take especial care that there should be no occasion to retrace our steps.

The late Mr. Ricardo, a gentleman of distinguished talents and acuteness, and, moreover, an enthusiast in the corn question, was of opinion, that 20s. per quarter, in the first instance,

was not too great a protection for the British farmer; and that this duty should be reduced, by the sum of 1s. per ann., till it reached 10s. From an observation contained in the Report of the Agricultural Committee of 1821, it would appear, "that there never was an importation of foreign corn, to any amount, during the short intervals that the high duties were demandable; and yet those duties, at no part of the time, exceeded 24s. 3d. per quarter." This, therefore, seems to be beyond the duty which it would be desirable to fix upon in the first instance. But Mr. Ricardo's proposition of 20s. to commence with, is a prudent and safe one; for a high protecting duty would guard against that influx of corn which is so much a subject of apprehension among agriculturists, while, at the same time, the duty could readily be reduced, either after experience has demonstrated that such fears were groundless, or after any accumulation which there might exist of foreign produce, has gradually come into the market, and passed off.

If the views which you and Mr. Jacob entertain, as to the small probable amount of future importation, be correct, there would be the disadvantage of gradually preparing

the agricultural world for the permanent permission of an importation, bearing so small a proportion as that proposed, to the whole exportation of the country? Prejudices would thus be removed by the delay, and apprehensions allayed. For if next harvest should be a plentiful one, or Mr. Jacob's and your calculations prove a little erroneous (neither of which circumstances are improbable), the most serious and irremediable mischief might be induced by want of caution in so important a subject. It is very well known, and you candidly admit the fact, that "one season of agricultural distress sweeps off numbers of the poorer farmers; and that if it continue beyond that period, as it most commonly does when it once begins, the whole farming body feel it most severely."

You lay great stress on the propriety of conciliating the good opinion of the manufacturing population, by acceding to an alteration in the corn laws; and you apostrophise the agricultural community to agree to their wishes, with a seriousness and pathos, which are hardly justified by the benefit which you assume will be produced by such alteration. But are they not warranted in doing their utmost to prevent any changes being made in the

present system, without a guarantee against the evils which may be produced by them? Is it not fair to expect, that when their existence as an important part of society is at stake, something more than specious assurances should be afforded, that the changes so urgently demanded will not be injurious? A portion even of morbid apprehension may be excusable in men who still smart under recent suffering; and in whose minds, perhaps, a little dread may likewise be produced, on comparing the ardour with which changes are pressed, with the small advantages which, according to ostensible calculations, they are likely to effect. They may be inclined to suspect some ulterior, unknown, and deleterious influence, beyond that which is represented to them; for I am inclined to think, that if a guarantee could be given, that no more importation than 600,000 quarters would, under ordinary circumstances, take place, their fears would be considerably removed.

Now, with regard to the reasonableness of these fears, I would observe, that though great attention is due to the interesting information which Mr. Jacob has furnished, relative to the probable quantity of grain to be afforded by the Baltic, there are many circumstances

which may affect its accuracy, and materially alter or modify the expected results.

In the first place, corn has always been capable of being procured, in very much more than the ordinary quantity, when there was a great demand and a large price. In the years 1801, 1802, 1811, 1818, and 1819, the average excess of importation above exportation, exclusive of Ireland, was 1,283,941 quarters of wheat; though the average excess of importation above exportation, for twenty years, from 1801 inclusive, was 543,179 quarters, and setting aside the five years of large importation, 369,976 only. The average price of the three first mentioned years was respectively, 113s. 7d., 118s. 9d., and 106s. 2d.; but of the year 1817, 94s. 9d.; and of 1818, 84s. 1d. Here, therefore, was an example of a difference of no less than 34s. 8d. between the inducements thus afforded to the importation of corn into this country; and we are hardly capable of demonstrating, in such a way as to remove the necessity of caution, that after the long period at which importation into this country has been prevented, no glut could, under any circumstances, again overwhelm the English market; particularly if Mr. Jacob's calculations, (as I have before

observed,) be a little erroneous, or the next harvest in this country be very favourable.

We do not hear, unfrequently, of goods being sold at a loss, under an urgent demand for money; and though this will not affect the general interests of trade, (for it is clear that no trade will be long carried on without gain); yet it may have an unfavourable operation at a particular period. So it is with a trade in corn; and it is only by insuring, at the commencement of a new system, against an overwhelming glut, that any material changes in the corn laws are admissible. Duties, in this case, ought to be viewed as experiments; but it would be very unphilosophical, in instituting experiments, to contemplate, and to be prepared, for one particular result only.

The Agricultural Committee of 1821, whose Report is distinguished by great judgment and moderation, were alive to the dangers of a glut of foreign corn, after the ports had been shut only thirty months. They have now been shut (except during a short period for oats) for more than three times that period; and the market price of any corn which may be accumulated in consequence, cannot now, any more than at that time, as the committee very properly observes, be considered "as the mea-

“sure of the cost at which it has been produced, or of the rate at which it can be afforded by the foreign grower, but the result of a general glut of the article, of a long want of demand, and of the extreme distress and heavy loss on the part of those by whom it has been raised, and of those by whom it is now held, either in the warehouses of the Continent or of this country.”

You consider the adoption of an improved principle in legislation as important; and you view as a public benefit, the dismissal from our code, of certain laws which you regard as injurious, as contrary to common sense and sound judgment, and as deranging the natural and most beneficial order of things. It surely, then, can be of little moment, at what precise period, whether a year or two sooner or later, so salutary a change as that which you recommend in those laws, comes into full, and complete operation. You admit that we are legislating “somewhat in the dark;” you allow that all calculations relative to the influence of certain changes on the price of corn “are liable to considerable error,” and that “nothing but experience can decide the exact level at which prices would settle, after the existence of the trade for so long a period, as to have

“produced its full effects.” I am justified, therefore, in the expectation, that in waiting for this experience, the agricultural community shall not be placed in a state of unnecessary peril.

It is an ungracious sort of discussion to compare the respective importance of different classes of society. Both parties, perhaps, think too strongly upon this subject, and magnify, to an undue extent, their own consequence. All, however, agree in considering our *home* trade as the most valuable to the country; and a very little consideration will evince to any one, who is at the trouble to examine the question, how much the prosperity of this trade is connected with the fair position in society of the landholder, farmer, and all who are connected with them in the various meanderings and ramifications, into which the landed interest is spread.

The merchant, manufacturer, and tradesman possess more rank and importance in this country than any other. Their talents and energy merit this distinction; but with the rise which they have obtained in the scale of society, it is no wonder that the Agricultural Committee, “looking to the institutions of the country, in their several bearings and

“ influence in the practice of our constitution, should be in a high degree anxious to preserve, to the landed interest, the weight, station, and ascendancy which it has enjoyed so long, and used so beneficially.”

It may be said, that the elevation of the agricultural interest, by the profits of land, has been, of late years, more in proportion than that of other classes. It is quite certain, that though it did not profit by the loans, contracts, and other good things, which have poured wealth so lavishly among mercantile men, and by almost the monopoly of the trade of the world, which the latter so long possessed, agriculturists enjoyed, for a few years, an important advantage in the high price of agricultural produce, and in the increased value which this, and an improved system of cultivation, afforded to them. But then high prices did not depend, in any great extent, as they have been supposed to do, on the protections afforded to them as a favoured class of the community; for on this subject we are informed by Mr. Tooke, (who is the more unexceptionable authority, because he is exceedingly favourable to the commercial view of the corn laws,) that he entertained doubts “ whether the prices of corn, within the last

“ twenty or thirty years, have been kept up so much by the protecting duties, as by the great expenses attending importation, and by the prevalence of bad seasons, both here, and, I believe, taking the majority of years during the period alluded to, on the Continent.”

Bad seasons give a rise of prices; for what would otherwise compensate for the diminution of quantity in corn? But that good seasons alone, will reduce prices, is proved, not only by the table of fluctuations which I have given at a former part of this letter, but, in an extraordinary manner, by the diminution from, I believe, 6*l.* to 70*s.*, in the autumn of 1813, which took place by mere exuberant production, independent of exportation, or any change, either in the value of money, or our external relations.

High rents to the landholder, and high gains to the farmer, have been for many years only a matter of history. The prices of late periods have been occasionally lower than even the average of prices so far back as the commonwealth, and of Charles II., the former having been 48*s.* 1*d.*, and the latter 43*s.* 7*d.*; and even at present, the price, 53*s.*, does not greatly exceed that of the former of those periods, though the difference in the value of money is so considerable. Let not the landed pro-

prietor, therefore, be lowered still more than the late reverses in agricultural affairs have depressed him; let not the cultivator of the soil, the manufacturer of corn, as he may be termed, be forced into the lowest class of our manufacturing population. The manufacturer can, as you very properly observe, apportion his supply to his demand; but uncertainty is the very essence of the farmer's profession.

Great, however, as the rise of agricultural produce, and consequently of the rents of lands had been, in the first twelve years of this century, that did not give the landholder an advantage, in the long run, over the possessor of personal property. Stockholders are said to have had their property reduced during the period of war, from high prices at which they may have purchased, to low ones at which they might be obliged to sell. But is it not apparent, that if there were persons who bought into the public funds at the highest, and were obliged to sell out at the lowest prices, there is an ample set-off in the great depression which has taken place in the value of land, between the prices at which numbers have invested money in the purchase of estates during high prices, and the trifling return with which they are now obliged to be satisfied; or the great reduction at which they may be

compelled to sell them? Laws, it is obvious, cannot be accommodated to extreme cases.

But, in point of fact, the great mass of stock has been funded on advantageous terms to the possessor; some of it at a little more, and none of it at much less than five per cent. A rise, therefore, from an average of sixty or sixty-five, gives an immense advantage to those who may choose to sell out at peace prices; while the alteration of currency which has of late years taken place, is a bonus of a very important character to all stockholders; and is a totally unexpected, and a somewhat unreasonable gain to those, who have invested their money under a great depreciation of value.

There is, however, another circumstance relative to the comparative advantages of the possession of real and personal property, which does not appear to have been attended to.

If we suppose two persons who were possessed, at any particular time — say sixty years ago — of equal properties, for instance, 10,000*l.*, which the one invested in land, yielding three per cent., and the other on mortgage, yielding five per cent., it is by many considered as a circumstance highly favourable to the possessor of land, that his property may now, or might some years since, be worth three times its original value. And



this might certainly be the case; and the possessor of money, or his representatives, be still worth the identical sum which was originally possessed. But then, the incomes, in the mean time, differed materially; and if, instead of spending 200% per annum more than the landholder, the mortgagee (and the same reasoning applies to other possessors of personal property) had made a sinking fund of this extra income, he would have found that his property would have been increased to full as great, or a greater extent, than any rise which could take place on land; and that the longer the period was, the greater would be the difference in his favour. In thirty years, his 200% per annum would double his principal; and if, in the same time, land had a similar increase of value, the one would then possess 20,000% in money, bearing an interest of 1000% per annum; the other, land worth 20,000%, and producing a rent of 600% per annum.

If the mortgagee, in the next thirty years, employed his extra income, (which is now 400% per annum above that of the landholder), he would find, that at the end of that period, his original 10,000% had become 40,000%, and that he had an income of 2,000% per annum; of which, supposing that the estate had

doubled likewise in value and rent, he would have an income above that of the landholder, of no less than 800%. I am satisfied with leaving each of them with four times their original patrimony; but it is clear that the increase of the value of land has a limit, that of the prudent management of money has none. I do not mean to say, that there are not some circumstances in the possession of land, which give it increased consideration with many; but still the question, at present, relates to comparison of pecuniary advantage.

I wished to have said something relative to the deficiency of revenue, which a diminution of home consumption, by an alteration in the circumstances of agriculturists, and all those connected with them, might produce; to notice the great rise which would necessarily take place in foreign produce, on opening our markets to it; and to advert to the bad policy of being obliged to trust to a foreign power, perhaps unfriendly to us, and at all events, disposed, as was Prussia, to take advantage of our necessities, for the support of any considerable part of our population. But this would be to get still further into topics which I did not originally contemplate, and I must have done; for my object, in the present letter, has been prin-

cipally to show, — 1st, That the alteration of law contended for, if its operation has been correctly apprehended by you, is not of the high importance which it is represented to be; and that if it has not been correctly apprehended, the difference affects your whole train of reasoning, and makes the agricultural, a new and more difficult question, as far as you are concerned. 2dly, That in carrying any alteration into effect, the interests of an important class in the community (for which you do not appear to me to have sufficiently provided), should not be endangered; and, 3dly, That if such alteration should be made, a protecting duty ought to be established, larger than that you contemplate, and of a sufficient amount to remove, or quiet, every reasonable alarm of the agriculturists; which duty should be so arranged, as to be lowered if found too high.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

THE AUTHOR.

Feb. 9. 1827.

THE END.

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