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LETTER

TO THE

HONOURABLE THE COMMITTEE

OF THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

UPON THE

SCOTCH DISTILLERIES

RESPECTING

Privileges claimed by the Highland Distillers.

WITH

STRICTURES upon a late PUBLICATION, upon the same
Subject, said to be wrote by a SCOTCH NOBLEMAN.

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TO THE
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I Have read a pamphlet, intituled,
“ Observations upon the Privileges enjoyed
by the Highlands of Scotland, under the
present Excise Laws.” In this publication the
author employs a poetical fancy to delude the
imagination, to take the passions captive, and
make his readers forget, that the subject under
review was not to be determined by passion,
but by cool investigation, and upon the most
solid principles. The author himself seems to
forget, that it is a question which involves the

general policy of the country, and that it is now under examination by a Committee of the House of Commons, who are employed with unexampled industry, in the impartial investigation of the subject in order that a just, a wise and permanent law may settle the business to the advantage of the community at large.

Truth needs not the ornaments of fantastic dress; I shall therefore endeavour to bring the subject itself under the review of the Committee, upon a plan, very different from that which our author has pursued; and I shall at the same time, take the liberty to animadvert upon such parts of his publication, as seem chiefly to merit attention.

To lead his readers to the great point which he wishes to establish, our author endeavours to impress them strongly with the persuasion, that the Lowland distillers are men who have formed designs, very injurious to the public. Amongst other things, he tells us, "That credulity itself can hardly doubt that they have formed a plan, by the subversion of the Highland distilleries, to secure to themselves a monopoly of the whole corn market in Scotland;" but I confess, I don't believe any such plans were ever

ever formed by them; nor would it be within their power to carry them into effect. Permit me, in a cursory manner, to explain my views, and I have no doubt but the Committee will join with me in the conclusion I have formed.

Monopolies are of two kinds, the first is legal, such as is held by charter, whereby is secured to any individual, or body of men, privileges in trade or commerce, to the intire seclusion of every other person; such are the monopolies enjoyed by the East India Company, and Corporations in Boroughs. The second kind of monopoly is, when by any influence, other ways than by the exertion of natural or acquired abilities, and honest industry, any person, or body of men, pervert the just and natural course of sales, and take possession of the market.

If this definition be a just one, and the Lowland distillers are to be judged by it, instead of deserving accusation, they will be found highly meritorious indeed. It is hardly necessary to observe, that they never attempted to acquire an exclusive charter to the corn trade of Scotland, and I am sure it is equally certain, that they may defy the whole world

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world to shew, that in any one instance, they have combined to exclude others from the market; for too often have I known their keen competition amongst themselves, so raise the prices, as to prove injurious even to the country at large.

Does this author find fault with them because they made large purchases of barley, and extended their demand to the northernmost coasts? Did he ever know them enter into *combination*, to reduce the prices? Were they ever known to store it up beyond what was necessary for their own consumption? Did they ever store it up, in order to take advantage of a rising market, that they might sell it out for profit to the needy public? Is there one farmer or corn-dealer, from Edinburgh to Caithness, who ever complained that they were guilty of any unfair transaction. *The Scotch farmers, and even their landlords, never found an establishment, to which they have been more indebted, than they have been to the Scotch distilleries*: how uncandid is it then, to accuse them of forming plans to monopolize the trade?

But from this author, it is not only uncandid, but ridiculous in the extreme: the gentleman has forgot that he is pleading in behalf
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of Highland distillers, who by law, are expressly excluded from the low country corn market, and with whom therefore there can be no competition; he pleads for distillers, who are restricted to 500 bolls, for every still of 40 gallons, which they have entered for duty; who, according to their entries, cannot legally exceed 62,500 bolls, a quantity which could hardly be felt in the general market; a quantity, which our author tells us, is produced in a country which yields grain only of the poorest quality, for which the fourth country distillers would hardly offer any price. And, is it for this they are struggling so hard to monopolize the market? *This would not prove a temptation even to a fool*. No such thing has happened, no such thing can happen.

Let a thinking man consider for a moment the nature of this article, and he will immediately be satisfied, that it cannot be a subject of monopoly, especially to distillers. The article is large and bulky, and cannot be concealed. It is found in every corner of Great Britain, and cannot be put without the reach of any individual. It is perishable in its very nature, and cannot be long stored without manifest injury to the holder. It is in constant demand by distillers, by brewers, by maltsters, by manu-

manufacturers of pot-barley, and by almost all the inferior ranks in Scotland, whose jarring interests can never be made to coalesce, and amongst whom no combinations can be formed. And finally, it is an article of foreign and domestic commerce, and in its progress cannot be controuled. As the situation of distillers is fixed by law, and the extent of their consumption may be known, as their demand is perpetual and peremptory, it is easy to conceive, how the farmers and corn dealers might, upon occasions, have art sufficient to bring them into difficulties, in order to raise the price against them; but by no means can the distillers be the occasion of distress to those persons, for from some quarter or other, the necessary and constant consumption of the distilleries must be supplied.

I have heard the low country distillers complained of upon very different grounds, when it was said, that detaching themselves from the Scotch market, they had their supplies too frequently from England, and this was certainly true, before the licence act took place; and the Scotch landlords and farmers may rest assured, that to that market they will again resort, if their manufacture is put under survey; for the best of English barley will only answer the

the mode of working, which will be then required. Our author upon the whole wishes to attach an odium to the low country distillers, whom he stiles his enemies; but let him beware lest so unjust an attempt should recoil upon himself; for that reader must have little discernment who has not discovered that all this is intended to create a prejudice, and not really to expiscate truth.

Our author seems from the beginning so violently agitated with his subject, that his impetuosity has not left him sufficient time for reflection, and he has not been aware, that this would prove more hurtful to his cause, than even stupidity itself. Under this influence he seems to have compiled, what appears to me to have been intended by him, as a narrative of steps, which he alleges have been pursued by the low country distillers, to deprive the Highlanders of the indulgences which they have enjoyed; but the account is so strangely given, that the simplest way in which I can lay it before the reader, will be considered as a caricature description.

He makes the low country distillers say, that the Highlanders distil as expeditiously as themselves; if indeed they said so, they were
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wrong, for it is not true. He tells us, that they pasted up advertisements in retail shops in Edinburgh, for sale of Highland whisky, when in fact no such whisky was there to sell. I find it disgusting to give place to such *trifling*. He adds, that they produced samples of barley from the Highlands, alledging, that they were as good as the Lothians could produce; here I suppose they may have been in the right: and he now thus elegantly concludes the narrative. "The town of Edinburgh was bored with tricks of this kind of charlatanry; they made calculations from maximum to minimum, in combinations infinite, to demonstrate the magical dexterity of Highland stills. All this they did to work upon the passions of the gentlemen; they even called in the aids of religion and morality, and whined most methodically, which procured them many advocates. But the Highland powers were quickly rallied in their own defence, came boldly forward, and denied the whole *point blank*. They caught the Proteus in his tortuous march, and have already secured to themselves the victory, by obliging the enemy to stand still, and examine a few decisive facts." This in substance is his narrative, very nearly in his own words, and I leave it with the reader without remark. But I must be per-

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mitted to look back to one passage, which merits more serious animadversion. He says in his 7th page, "that it is not surprising that
 " men so devoutly given as distillers, should
 " acquiesce in the appellation of slow poison-
 " ers; this is to them become a kind of *nom*
 " *du guerr*; but it is really wonderful, that
 " such religious gentlemen should *become direct*
 " *poisoners*, should use mineral acids in their
 " business, and manufacture *a horrible murderous*
 " stuff, called Turk."

It is not enough for the distillers to come forward here, and by the feeble powers of any pen, give the direct lie to the assertion. For as it is a base, a false, and scandalous libel, a libel which charges a respectable body of men with crimes most black and infamous; a libel which deeply affects their honour and estate; in justice to the public and themselves, they ought not to suffer the matter to rest here. Were I a distiller, no concealment should hide the author from my search; no name, no power, no interest should screen him from the punishment which he so justly merits; and though he were hid in the most inaccessible mountains of the north, he should feel that there were laws by which this country are governed, for *anonymous calumny is the stab of an assassin*.

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After we have seen these specimens of our author's powers, little I am afraid can be expected from the sketch of facts which he has presented to us, as the criterion upon which the great question, as he says, must be decided. *He looks with prejudice, and he deliberates in anger.* I am not therefore much surpris'd to find, that in this sketch, he neither exhibits a fact nor principle, upon which the matter in dispute can rest; for the four heads which he proposes to discuss, and his whole consequent reasoning, may be fairly compress'd under this simple *unconclusive* proposition. That if the circumstances now exist, which induced a former parliament to grant indulgence to the Highlanders, the present parliament ought to continue with them the same indulgence; nothing surely can be more inconclusive, for each of these circumstances may actually exist, and yet the present parliament find good reason to refuse the boon.

Whilst thus I reprobate the plan which is proposed to settle the dispute, I intreat the patience of the Committee, when I endeavour to discuss it upon principles more obvious and conclusive. In this discussion, I will not make use of declamation, I will not endeavour to cast reproach upon the Highlanders, by giving them

them invidious names, by imputing to them intentions, at which their honest hearts would certainly revolt. I will not stile them by the bitter appellation of enemies, and thereby endeavour to beget an animosity, which I hope has no existence in the breast of either party. I will give my opinion plainly; and I wish it only to have influence, in as far as it shall be supported by truth and sound reason,

The first proposition which I shall beg leave to state to the Honourable Committee, as directly in point, and which I intend to illustrate, is this, THAT IT IS CONTRARY TO JUSTICE AND GOOD POLICY, TO GRANT SPECIAL INDULGENCE OR EXEMPTIONS TO ANY SET OF MEN, FROM ANY TAX IMPOSED UPON ARTICLES OF GENERAL CONSUMPTION. Every experienced and just financier makes it a great point to which his attention is directed, that every duty imposed upon the community shall be extended equally over all, and shall oppress no individual. Taxes upon luxuries in whatever manner they are imposed, can never be oppressive, because any man who pleases may forbear the use of them. It could not be deemed oppression, for example, if Government had taxed the person using hair powder at ten guineas instead of one, for any one might
forbear

forbear to use it. Taxes upon the necessaries of life, in whatever manner they are imposed, in a very little time will equalize themselves, for all must have them, and all must pay for them. Difference of situation may render it more difficult for a consumer of any article, which is liable to duty, to acquire possession of it in one part of the kingdom than another, and in consequence the price must vary according to circumstances; but it would be an attempt equally ridiculous and impracticable, for any government, by any plan of equalization, to endeavour to balance to that man the inconveniency of his situation, and enable him to purchase that article as cheap as it can be obtained by his more fortunate countrymen. If government was to embrace such an idea, it would involve them in inexplicable labyrinths of discussion, and it would be found impossible to balance the claims of parties. Besides, it is not the duty imposed, which creates the inconveniency, the situation, the unpropitious circumstances existed before any tax was laid on; and it is a strange idea indeed, that a tax should be so modified, as to render a situation better than it was before it was taxed. But if the principle was to be admitted, that a mitigation of taxes must be allowed, as a premium to bring things to a level,

level, where nature has refused her favours, it would be found, that there are many situations, where the paternal interference of government would be necessary to effect that purpose, and to equalize articles of necessary consumption, even when no duties are imposed upon them.

For example: coal at the coal-pits, twelve miles south of Edinburgh, are sold at two-pence halfpenny per cwt. From those very coal-pits, coal is carried full forty miles to the south country, where the inhabitants have no other supply of fuel, and there they are sold at one shilling per hundred weight, making a difference of nine-pence halfpenny per cwt. to the consumers there. To counteract the *forwardness of nature*, as our author calls it, by the smiles and indulgence of Government, in order to equalize their different situations, it becomes necessary to lay a tax of nine-pence halfpenny upon coal at the pit, or more properly, of four-pence three farthings, which sum, when collected, should be given in premium to the more distant inhabitants, that they might find coal as cheap as others; and a variation must also take place, to equalize all the intermediate distances.—The case needs only to be stated, and the absurdity

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furdity is seen; this reasoning applies completely to the Scotch distilleries; whether spirits are considered as a luxury, or as a necessary of life; for surely the imposition of the duty did not create the distinction, nor upon its being imposed, is it to be supposed, that Government is bound to equalize to them the difference. The Highland distillers come forward and say, we are placed in a poor country, our grain is weak and unproductive, our fuel bad, and ill to be got; in short, we are placed in a situation very unpropitious for distillation, but we still wish to drink whisky, and to be distillers; and in order to enable us to do so, Government must give us a premium, that we may drink it cheap. Let any man of common sense say, if upon that ground the demand is tenable? Arrangements of a nature similar to this, would baffle the powers of an angel to adjust.

If Government would say peremptorily to me, you shall drink whisky, and you shall pay a tax for doing so, in that case they would be oppressors; but the case is directly otherways; for Government finds Scotch spirits a fair subject of taxation, and therefore say to the community at large, if you think proper to drink whisky, you must pay a certain tax for
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that privilege, but if you chuse, you may let it alone. The low country distiller comes then forward and says, I understand distillation well, and I am in a situation very propitious for carrying on the trade, I accept your offer, and will pay your demand; and I have no doubt my sales in the country will reimburse me with a profit. On the other hand, the Highland distiller says, I do not understand the business of distillation properly, I am not possessed of an apparatus sufficient for carrying on the manufacture, I find myself surrounded on all hands with discouragement, I cannot therefore agree to your proposal, because I would find it a losing trade; but if you will give me such a mitigation of duty, that is, such a premium, as will balance my unfortunate circumstances, and enable me to procure better grain, and plenty of fuel, in that case I will distil to please my own taste.

This statement speaks plainly the language of both parties, and must, with every candid man, decide the question, that a plan of equalization would be a romance in Legislation, equally impolitic, and impossible to be accomplished.

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But I go on to observe, that in the case of the Highlanders, the experiment has been tried and found a system, not only calculated to produce, but necessarily productive of fraud and injustice.

This part of the subject requires very little illustration. The Lowland and Highland distillers, by the last Act of Parliament, were considered as completely equalized. The high duties paid by the former, gave him a full right to possess the market to a certain extent; whilst the Highlander, paying a very low duty, was restricted in a variety of respects; every deviation therefore, of which the Highlanders have been guilty, from the restrictions enforced upon them by the statute, was an incroachment upon the privilege which the Lowland distillers were intitled to possess, by Act of Parliament, and must be considered as an act of material injustice. But besides, every breach of the restrictions, under which the Highland distillers were laid, was a breach of their faith to Government, and a fraud committed upon the public revenue. It remains then only that it be proved, that they have in fact been guilty of such offences, and the conclusion must follow, that the equalizing experiment has failed, and is impracticable.

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I cannot easily imagine, in what country our author has resided for years past, as he seems so ill informed of the truth of the matter. I am persuaded, he has never seen the Highlands, nor even the map of Scotland, or else he never would have said, that betwixt the Highlands and the Lowlands, there are few points of practical contact. In truth, the idea is only sported by him, to persuade the ignorant, that it was impossible for the Highlanders to smuggle their spirits, the two countries having hardly any possible means of communication. To increase our persuasion of this impossibility, he tells us, that the whole spirits cannot possibly be *sweated* down by the Highlanders into the low country. To complete the figure, he should have added, that the climate being cold, it is rather unfavourable to *perspiration*. This may be wit, and let the author have the praise of it; but if by this deceptive language he means plainly to aver, that the Highlanders do not smuggle their spirits into the low country, I scorn to answer him; the Highlanders themselves, though constitutionally attached to Chieftains, are too honest to support him here; the fact is incontrovertible, it is proved, it is acknowledged.

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The same has happened in all cases, where indulgences have been granted, they have become prejudicial to the revenue and country. —The district of Fairtooth possessed a right of distilling the barley of their own growth, without paying duty; the consequence was, that the whole district became like one distillery, and from thence the spirits were sent over all Scotland; the privilege given them was abused, and they all became smugglers. In order to remedy this abuse, Government was under the necessity of purchasing that right from the proprietor of Fairtooth, which was found so injurious to the public. This case is directly similar to the present, only the evil would now become more extensive.

To obtain a small revenue, where none was got formerly, Government granted the Highlanders licences to distil, under certain restrictions, at a very low duty. This has been converted into a covert for smuggling, to a great extent; notwithstanding this, the Highlanders not only insist upon a renewal, but even an extension of their privileges; they say that they have not grain in their country, sufficient to serve them, yet they now insist for leave to manufacture double their former quantity, and farther, that they shall be

be permitted to sell their spirits wherever they may find a market. Thus would they incroach, till they would occupy the whole trade of Scotland, till at last they would compel Government, in self defence, and to preserve the revenue, to purchase from them privileges, which at first were granted contrary to justice and sound policy.

I will conclude this argument with the opinion stated by Mr. Corbet, general supervisor, who was long employed, to put a stop to those illegal practices, and whose opinion must be esteemed, not merely disinterested, but to have been formed upon the most perfect information.

“ Were it, says he, possible to confine the
 “ Highland districts to the legal regulations
 “ and restraints, at present in force, respecting
 “ them, it would be matter of little impor-
 “ tance to the revenue, or Lowland distillers,
 “ whether they should continue on the present
 “ footing or not. But all former experience
 “ goes to shew, in the clearest light, that
 “ this *is impossible*. No legal restrictions, no
 “ vigilance on the part of the revenue officers,
 “ are able to prevent, both the introduction
 “ of low country grain into the Highland
 “ countries,

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“ countries, for the purpose of distillation,
 “ nor the transportation of Highland distilled
 “ spirits, to the low country; the matter
 “ therefore comes to a short issue, and the
 “ conclusion must be obvious.”

These facts are so strongly stated, the consequences so justly deduced, and the question decided with such precision, that he has left me no occasion to say any thing in addition.

Permit me only to take notice, that our author has made several calculations upon hills, and gallons, and population; but to all his calculations, I answer in a word, they proceed upon the idea, that the Highlanders did adhere to legal restrictions, and did not smuggle their spirits into the low country; but the fact is now put beyond all dispute, and therefore those calculations are at an end.

Our author now steps forward, upon what he seems to think a firmer ground, and presents before us, his distillers, in a more important relation to society, than merely as distillers; and in his argument, he thus, in their name, addresses Government: “ It is very true, that as distillers, we can administer nothing to the immediate support of the State, as the revenue

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nue we are able to pay is so extremely trifling; but we present before you, highly meritorious improvements in the agriculture of the Highlands, and arrest your wondering attention to the increase of population there; now to our interposition and influence alone, are these blessings to be attributed; we have wooed Ceres, under most inauspicious circumstances, and she has not refused her favours; human industry and perseverance have here exhibited the highest specimens of what may be effected by their united powers. In opposition to the phrenzy of emigration, and notwithstanding the devastation of two bloody wars, by Highland distillation, the strength of the kingdom has been maintained, and the population of the country has increased; we therefore now claim our exemption, as the reward of the benefits which we have conferred upon the community;” Such is the proud language, and such are the demands of our author, in behalf of the Highland distillers; but the facts are assumed, they are not proved; and our author often contradicts himself; in opposition therefore, to all this, I offer to prove, to the satisfaction of the Committee, the following proposition, as very decisive in the present question. THAT THE HIGHLAND DISTILLERS

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TILLERS NEITHER EVER HAVE COMMUNICATED, NOR ARE CAPABLE IN THEIR RESTRICTED STATE, OF COMMUNICATING ANY REAL PERMANENT IMPROVEMENT TO THE HIGHLANDS, OR OF INCREASING THE POPULATION OF THE COUNTRY.

It will be an amusing relaxation for the Committee to take a view of the Highlands in its improved state, as it is described by this author. He tells us, "that the Highland distillers are poor men, working their stills without aid of machinery or buildings, without the necessary implements of their trade; working in black huts, remote from roads where wheel can pass, obliged to use the dearest and the worst of fuel, without any just idea of the nature of a still, drawing the spirits, and catching them in bottles:" this he says is all done in a poor, and barren, and mountainous country, producing grain in many places fit for nothing but distillation; planted here and there with colonies of desperate men, who were just about to emigrate and forsake their native country, but were retained by permission to rest themselves upon some black and barren moor, where with infinite labour they prepared themselves a spot, hardly sufficient to preserve existence,

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It would surely require the fascination of exuberant fancy, to make us believe that he is in earnest, in presenting such improvements, as intitled to a premium; surely it would require a double degree of fascination to persuade us, that these distillers can possibly wish to continue in their forlorn situation. Cruel would I think the law which would chain them to that spot, for it is in the tempestuous north; and our author tells us, "the roofs which cover the works and workmen consist of fods, supported by a few sticks, the whole raised upon the margin of a spring, the stock in trade consisting of a still, a worm, a few dozen of bottles, and two or three small tubs; the kettle of the still placed upon a few loose stones, and the fire consisting of fuel which will hardly burn." I absolutely could imagine he was describing the miseries of a Laplander, instead of a country or people, who merited a premium for spirited improvements. Yet, notwithstanding the absurdity of the picture with which he has entertained us, he has helped us to some interesting facts; he tells us, that the distillers in the country thus described, have excited a passion for the cultivation of corn, though they still raise grain of the poorest quality, and have had influence sufficient to chase back the grazings to the mountains,

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which are fit for nothing else; that the distilleries hold the balance betwixt the cultivators of corn and of sheep; that as sheep afford most profit, corn would be deserted, unless supported by their influence. If I have formed any just ideas of agriculture, and of the country described by this author, I would in the strongest manner reprobate his ideas of improvement, and tell him, that the best improvement would be, *to undo what he had done.* This reasoning applies to the mountainous parts of the Highland district; for there to introduce a corn husbandry, into a foil and climate, which produces grain only of the poorest quality, and to persevere in such a plan, is to pervert nature from her purpose; and in order to obtain some bastard, sickly, ill-nurtured plants, exclude the productions, by which, even in that climate and barren foil, nature wishes to comfort her children. For the ridiculous idea of encouraging distillation, and a most imperfect husbandry, the flocks and cattle are driven to the mountains to perish with want, their natural situation being occupied by what may be truly stiled the *dwarfish exotics*, which have been introduced. Every intelligent farmer knows that nature can be assisted, but cannot be forced; there are many climates and foils
congenial

congenial to pasture husbandry, in which an attempt to cultivate corn would ruin the rash enterprising farmer, and in which no improvements upon that plan will repay the expence. In high, cold, wet situations, the only improvement possible is upon the stock, and not upon the corn: he talks of balancing in the Highlands, the winter and the summer flock of cattle, but a moment's thought, and a very little knowledge of the Highlands, and their interests, will tell him, that to them the English and Lowland markets can alone create that balance. The sooner therefore that these boasted improvements are banished, and the fields restored to the pastoral plan, it will be more profitable to all concerned. It is true under that œconomy, the numbers of mankind may be diminished in that particular place, and the half-starved farmers will be seen no more; but as the foil is made more productive of food for men, men will arise in another corner in greater numbers, and be more profitable to society, than if they had vegetated in the midst of the mountains, as slovenly, imperfect, and unprofitable distillers. It must therefore be obvious, *that distillation has not been, and cannot be the means of improving these countries.* I am the more confirmed in this idea, by what I have observed in the south, where in large
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sheep wakes, the intelligent farmer carefully abstains from the cultivation of corn, even in the most favoured and sheltered spots, because such fields were found absolutely necessary for the safety and prosperity of his flocks, in certain seasons of the year; and the most intelligent farmer with whom I was ever acquainted, having got a lease of a very extensive farm, as quickly as possible ploughed up and fallowed every part of it where plough could go, filled it with lime, and with one crop, laid the land down with grass, and preserves it to this day, an improved, a rich pasture for his flocks and cattle.

But I have been led to go deeper into the subject than our author has done; he has talked at random, of improvements and of profits, of desolation, poverty and ruin, without giving us any facts upon which we can fix our attention, but such as make against his argument; his contradictions harrass the imagination, and whilst we wish to explain them, we are involved in utter darkness.— He tells us that the country is in poverty, in misery, is barren, wild, and uncomfortable; at the same time he says, that thousands of acres are improved, capitals are raised, markets are established, in short, a new
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face is induced over the whole. At one time he tells us, that the distillers are miserable, and their dwellings, hovels; and yet in the same instant, he points out those very distillers as the great pillars which sustain the prosperity of the Highlands. In one place he says that their capitals consist of some fods, supported by a few sticks, a worm, a few bottles, and tubs; and yet the next instant he tells us, that their stall fed oxen have created markets in the north, and furnish the country with a weekly supply, where none was formerly to be obtained: thus would he delude our imaginations, by holding forth the ideal effects of a power, *hardly in existence*. But if instead of galloping along with our impetuous author, we look at things distinctly as they are, the delusion vanishes in a moment, and we discern objects in their natural forms: the fact is, that the Highlands, especially the intermediate parts, are very much improved, and very unlike the gloomy picture given us by our author, who seems only happy, when contemplating black moors, tempestuous mountains, or miserable hovels: but the improvements in the Highlands are real; and I now propose to prove to the Committee, this proposition, respecting them, THAT THEY HAVE ORIGINATED FROM, AND MUST STILL BE INCREASED

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AND MAINTAINED BY CAUSES INDEPENDENT
OF THE DISTILLERIES.

I dare say there is no person who is versant in the state of general society, but will readily acknowledge, that in the last fifty years, mankind have discovered powers and resources which were formerly unknown; their knowledge is enlarged, their minds more cultivated, and their manners more civilized: the sciences are now more applied to use, and infinite ingenuity and art have been employed to encrease to men the means and the facility of enjoyment; an improved agriculture has become the necessary consequence of this revolution; improvements have extended with knowledge, and their rewards have stimulated industry; new modes, and new implements of husbandry have been employed with success; new manures have been found out, and the former resources have been more carefully attended to, and applied upon more sound principles, and with greater œconomy; the communication amongst men has become more open, and they are more desirous of mutual intercourse.

It would have been miraculous indeed, if the Highlands of Scotland, which sends forth her enterprising sons to every quarter of the globe,

globe, should have felt nothing of the beneficial influence of a revolution of things, that has been productive of such signal blessings to the human race. *But it is not so.* The Highlands of Scotland has felt that influence almost in every corner, and every where displays the marks of an improved husbandry; and it is evident in all their exertions, that it is neither want of information, nor want of industry which retard the Highlanders in their progress, *but want of capital, and a jealous dislike of strangers.* Notwithstanding this, their improvements are not as this gentleman represents them, only "hot-beds cultivated by the landlords," for in the Highlands there are extensive tracts of country, which yield to few in beauty and cultivation. I speak here of the intermediate district, and the reasoning applies particularly there; but there are even in the Highland district, extensive tracts, which are scarcely exceeded in beauty and richness, by any lands in Scotland. Our author is so enamoured of black and barren moors, that he remains not an instant to contemplate the delightful banks of all our great and many smaller rivers, where are not only spots, but tracts of country of above fifty miles extent, where nature smiles in full luxuriance upon her sons, and where nothing is wanting but humane landlords to give leases to their tenants, animation
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to hope, and permanency to property ; besides, in many of these districts, there are already established many manufactures of considerable importance : for example, manufactures of linen, for exportation ; bleach fields, print fields, cotton works ; these have given vigor to agriculture, have increased the population of the country, and given to industry the profits and comforts to which its children are so well intitled. I speak only of countries with which I am personally acquainted, and whose plans of management I have often observed ; from this review, it is not possible that the committee, that any man will allow himself to suppose that the improvements of the Highlands have been derived from a few still pots seated upon a few loose stones, in a black hut, or from their owners, whose capital extended only to their bottles and their tubs.

But, in proof of my proposition, I have farther to observe, that the love of luxuries which ever have been, and ever will be pursued with keen avidity by all mankind, has in the south countries converted many of their richest fields into pasture ; and besides, in these countries, the very poorest ranks of mankind, eat bread from flour of Wheat, and many thousands of quarters of that grain are now sown, where fifty years ago, they
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did not sow one bushel ; these circumstances have occasioned a very great diminution in the culture of barley, a great part of what is raised of that grain is consumed by porter and ale brewers, and manufacturers of pot barley, which is sent in great quantities to the London, Dutch and American markets, and all put together, have induced a scarcity of that article in that part of Scotland. When the Scotch distillers began to extend their manufacture, they applied to England for a supply of barley, as the grain from thence suited their purpose best, whilst they wrought under survey ; but when this mode of taxation was changed, they found some cargoes in the north which gave them great content ; they increased their demand, and the attention of the farmers there was excited, their application was redoubled, they found their industry rewarded, their crops of bear were liberal, for the cultivation of it was congenial to the soil and climate ; with the increase therefore of the demand, the article became more plentiful, and it became the favorite with the farmer, because it paid him best. *Thus the market from the south country distillers, contributed to the cultivation and prosperity of the north.*

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How much is this account of the matter more just and natural than that which would attribute the improvements of the north, to a few unhappy distillers, who, from their black huts, their miserable stills and score of bottles, could not possibly extend their influence one mile beyond their dwellings.

But we are told, that all improvement would be attempted in vain, unless the farmers found a market at home, and this market their own distilleries could alone furnish; for their distance from the shore cannot be remedied, and their remote, sequestered glens are not to be explored. It is true, in some places they are very distant from the shore, but distant as they are, I will take upon me to say, that until they make themselves familiar with the shore, their improvements will neither be extensive, effectual, nor permanent. In discussions of this nature, I have not observed the idea sufficiently attended to, but I am satisfied that it is true, that in whatever situation we are placed, it is communication, it is commerce alone, which makes us know the value of the goods which we possess; the value of the land itself is only known by means of commerce. Whatever tends to pave the way to mutual intercourse,

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intercourse, to more frequent and intimate communications of mankind with each other, improves the man himself, enlarges his power of action, his farm participates of its influence, and a general prosperity and comfort is the result. In this point of view, what a detestable system is that system of Excise, in which the Highlanders are presently involved; this to them is the language of the law, for which they are contending: *You shall not use one quarter of bear, or barley, which grows without your boundaries; you shall not carry one drop of your spirits into the Lowlands.* By these restraints, communication is dissolved, rivalry in improvements is at an end; a certain morose and sulky jealousy prevails; and had the wall of Adrian been placed across the line of demarkation, it could hardly have been more effectual, to keep the country in barbarism. But when circumstances, *I will even say necessity,* impels mankind to mutual intercourse, how quickly does their situation change? Commerce is a chain, which connects together the corners of the earth, unites contending nations, and binds societies together in indissoluble bands: for whilst it tells the individual that he is not *insulated*, and makes him feel that he is not *independent*, it at the same time pledges the united powers of man for his prosperity,

prosperity, whilst it teaches him, by industry, to contribute towards the general good.

When the Highland farmer first emerges from his sequestered glen, a timid jealousy of all he meets with, makes him disposed to shrink back, and hide himself in his miserable hovel; but after being a little accustomed to society, the moment he reaches the shore, he is astonished to find, that half the nations of the earth have been labouring for his benefit, and are inviting him to partake of the blessings they are ready to confer. There he finds an infinity of implements prepared to facilitate his labours, and secure his success; there wood, iron, lime, grass feeds, &c. &c. are offered him, in barter for his grain. Having got possession of those, and money besides, in return for his barley, he goes home delighted; he returns empowered to renew and extend his exertions, and make them more effectual.

Compared with this true description, how blasted appear the images of despair, which our author has obtruded upon our imagination, and which he would make us believe were the irremediable circumstances, with which the Highlanders of Scotland were cursed; though
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at the same time, he would persuade us, that they deserve a premium for their patience, in enduring misery. Difficulties subside, as hope is nourished, and still more do they vanish beneath the powers of animated exertions. I am told, the distance of the Highlands from the shores is immense, and the roads are impassable. But in Perthshire, I know the roads are excellent; and at present, in Aberdeenshire, they are making roads, upon the highest scale of perfection. In this respect, similar improvements are going on in every corner; and the patriotic zeal of Gentlemen, would be much better employed in obtaining for the Highlanders good roads, in opening communications to every corner; and they would thereby, *more effectually improve their estates*, than by anxiously supporting a system, which tends to keep the inhabitants of the Highlands in a state of sequestration, of slavery, and barbarism.

I have seen, in the south country, lime carried forty miles, for the purposes of husbandry, and applied with great success; and I know for certain, that the lime to be had at the Pallian lime works, is intrinsically so superior to the lime in Mid-Lothian, that the difference of quality will nearly defray the
expence

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expence of carrying it by sea, to Aberdeen; and it is clearly evident, that shipping barley, and other grain, to the south country markets, and carrying home lime in return, has done infinitely more to the improvement of the Highlands, than could possibly be effected by all the distilleries within their bounds. I will even go so far as to say, that of all the land improved in the north, and Highlands, not one acre of ten thousand, owes its improvement to the Highland distilleries.

But why have I thus suffered myself to be misled by the violent declamation of this author? why have I, for a moment, suffered the idea to be entertained, that it is my opinion, that the annihilation of the present system of Highland privileges, and lines of demarkation, would deprive the Highlanders of their distilleries, and a market at home for their barley, when I am so decided, that the effect would be directly the contrary. I therefore beg leave to recommend to the particular attention of the Committee, this other proposition, so material to the subject under discussion; it is this: THAT THE ABOLITION OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM, AND PUTTING ALL SCOTLAND UNDER ONE LAW, RESPECTING THE DUTIES ON DISTILLATION, WOULD GIVE A
DECIDED

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DECIDED SUCCESS TO THE DISTILLERIES OF THE NORTH COUNTRY, AND SECURE TO THE INHABITANTS EVERY ADVANTAGE WHICH CAN BE DERIVED FROM THEM.

Our author did not allow himself time to observe, how obviously true this proposition is. He had erected his distilleries upon the Highland plan, upon the bank of a rivulet, in the midst of a barren and sequestered moor, his fods were placed upon their sticks, his still carefully set down upon a few loose stones, his smoky peat stack placed at the door, his bottles arranged to receive the dripping spirits, and his tubs made ready to supply all the defects in this arrangement; and upon those structures, he had placed the strength, the population, the very existence of the Highlands of Scotland. Our imaginations are so intensely stretched by his laboured descriptions, that we feel anxious, lest one rude blast should dismantle the sticks, overturn the stills, and break the bottles to pieces, and we should behold rocks and mountains shaken to their foundations, rolling from place to place, and mixing in chaotic destruction; for we are told, the ruin of the Highlands must inevitably follow, if these distilleries are abolished. An intelligent reader will retire from this confusion, and a little thought will tell him,
that

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parents, with exulting hearts, behold the smiling countenances of their rising progeny, knowing that they could bequeath to them a property, and happiness, better than a *chilling residence upon a black moor*, which would put an end to the passion for emigration, and make them know, and glory, that *they were born Britons*.

I have been much amazed to hear men of sense declaim upon the danger of a few monopolizing distillers, of overgrown fortunes, ingrossing the whole manufacture of spirits in Scotland to themselves; but surely that man's mind must be incapable of forming ideas of large and general policy, who can be thus misled: it is no easy matter for capital, for exertion, or trick, to form a monopoly in a commercial country. There is no person possessed of a capital which can compete with the general stock, and the general stock is in perpetual combination against all attempts in trade to form monopoly; and no sooner is prosperity seen to attend any branch of trade or manufacture, than restless ambition or avarice steps forward and claims their share of that profit, which is open to the industry of all. But in a particular manner the manufacture of spirits in Scotland is incapable of being subjected to a monopoly, for this plain reason, because

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because it may be carried on on a very small scale, as profitably, in every respect, *proportionally*, as it can be by the greatest distiller, and it is impossible to prevent the success of the smallest adventurer in the trade. I am told that it has happened directly otherwise in England, where the London distillers have almost wholly ingrossed to themselves the distillation of spirits in that kingdom; but there is no similarity in the situations of the different countries. I do not mention the superior advantages possessed by the distillers in London, from their situation, as to grain, market, yeast, &c. yet every person who is versant in the business, knows, that the English distillers manufacture a spirit perfectly unfit for present use; it is but like a raw material, put into the hands of other manufacturers, the rectifiers, the compounders, and the wine brewers: with them only have the English distillers to transact their business, and it is not difficult for them to form such connections with these manufacturers, as may secure to themselves a monopoly in their spirit trade: but it was never heard, that these rectifiers, &c. could monopolize the article when it was prepared for common, for general use. It is with the Scotch distillers as it is with the English rectifiers, they prepare their spirits for immediate use, for the general consumption of the

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country, and they are under the necessity of accommodating themselves to the smallest demands of the public. Taste, caprice, convenience, direct the retailers and consumers in their purchases, and the market must be ever open to every person concerned in the trade. That popular clamour may be excited, and names may amuse the multitude, this we experience every day: but in addressing the Honourable Committee of the House of Commons in points like these, we are saved the labour of idle discussion, for they must discern at once the insidious purpose for which the cry of *monopoly* has been endeavoured to be excited against the low country distillers, and they must disdain the feeble attempt which has been made to impose upon their understandings.

I now hope little has escaped me upon the subject under our review, which merits the attention of the Honourable Committee; but I find myself compelled to incroach a little longer upon your time, as our author, towards the conclusion of his pamphlet, has excited an indignation, which as a British subject I cannot help expressing. He has told us, that the population of the Highlands had been very much increased, but whilst he was entertaining us with the pleasing idea, and was claiming rewards in compensation for the strength and security

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security which was thereby communicated to Government, I did not expect in the end to see him marshal out these multitudes to overawe the deliberations, and compel the determinations of the British Senate. Nothing, surely, but a consciousness that he had undertaken the worst of causes, could have led him to express himself so rashly. This may be considered as the language which he has put into the mouth of the Highlanders: "We are pleading before you, the Honourable Committee, to obtain the continuation and enlargement of a privilege, and we think ourselves well intitled to obtain what we desire. If you will bestow it upon us peaceably, it is well, we will accept of it as a favour; but we must inform you, that if you do refuse, your refusal will be in vain; your civil power is incompetent to the task of enforcing our obedience; an army of excisemen would shrink before us: in the Highlands of Scotland, an host of bayonets will be found incapable of giving efficacy to the decrees of a British Parliament; and we have no doubt, that if we cannot prevail with our Chieftains, the Justices of Peace, to bear the standard before us, their power will not be exerted against us in the struggle." This matter is too serious for me not to lay before you the author's very words, they are as follows:

“ Should

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“ Should the Highlanders be thus cruelly
 “ dealt with, there is every reason to imagine,
 “ that the affections and attachment of that
 “ loyal, hardy, and useful part of the British
 “ dominions, must eventually be estranged
 “ from the Government; for it is certain, no
 “ civil power could enforce the prohibition;
 “ there must be an army of bayonets, to en-
 “ force an army of excisemen.”

How fallen is the British power, when the
 Legislature can be insulted with impunity, and
 dared from doing what they may judge right,
 by bold and peremptory threatening, even of
 an armed disobedience.

What must this author be, what are his feel-
 ings, where is his patriotism, when in a mo-
 ment like the present, a moment so critical to
 British liberty, religion, property, and glory;
 when the restless ambition and mad enthusiasm
 of our relentless enemies threaten to deluge
 our fields with blood; that at such a time, in a
 paper which I may say is addressed to the Par-
 liament itself, he should tell them, that even
 in their own dominions, in the Highlands of
 Scotland, they have not sufficient power to
 enforce obedience to their own commands? I
 formerly observed, that our author yielded to
 the impetuosity of his ungovernable passion:
 I hope,

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I hope, in the present instance, this will be
 accepted as his apology. But may every Bri-
 tish subject know, that it is upon the vigor of
 the British constitution, and upon the firm
 and impartial execution of our laws, that
 our prosperity, our very existence as a peo-
 ple, depends. *Perish the distilleries, and all the*
advantages which can be derived from them, before
 one single person within these realms shall
 have it in his power to say, I will live open-
 ly in Britain, and dare to disobey the autho-
 rity and laws of the British Parliament. I
 would gladly hope, I even think I am sure
 that our author has not done justice to the
 general character of the Highlanders. They
 wish to drink whisky, and they ought to be
 indulged, and that of the quality which
 pleases them best; yet am I well persuaded
 they would not gratify this desire at the ex-
 pence of their loyalty to their King and coun-
 try.—I have no doubt but that both in the
 Highlands and Lowlands, whatever the laws
 shall be, men of certain descriptions will at-
 tempt to smuggle, but their attempts will ruin
 them: a well regulated arrangement will for
 the most part prevent them; at any rate, re-
 peated losses will make them wise, and all
 their efforts will have no effect upon the pub-
 lic interest. No doubt the imposition of very
 high duties would so reduce the profits of
 distil.

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distillation to a fair trader, as might probably disable him from pursuing his business with success, and make him leave the field entirely to the smuggler; and to the smuggler the temptation might prove so strong as to balance the danger of fines and forfeitures, and every thing might be brought into such confusion, that the country in general, and even the magistrates themselves, might be prevailed upon to countenance their frauds; but all such are idle suppositions.

The subject is now under the deliberation of the Honourable Committee of the House of Commons; all these circumstances will be before them, and they will balance them with profound attention; so that from their well digested report, laws and regulations will be formed upon principles of general utility, which will give general content; and I am sure that as these are the great, the only objects which you have in view: you cannot hesitate one moment to decide, THAT TO ABOLISH ALL DISTINCTIONS IN THE EXCISE LAWS, AND ALL LINES OF DEMARKATION, MUST BE ONE GREAT STEP TO PROMOTE THE GENERAL PROSPERITY OF THE TRADE, AND WOULD PROVE, IN A SPECIAL MANNER, HIGHLY ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE HIGHLANDERS THEMSELVES.

FINIS.