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THOUGHTS

UPON THE

Present State

OF OUR

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS;

SHEWING THE NECESSITY OF AN

ADMINISTRATION

FORMED ON THE BASIS OF AN

UNION OF PARTIES.

Quilibet nautarum vectorumque tranquillo mari gubernare potest :  
ubi saeva orta tempestas est, ac turbato mari rapitur vento navis, tum  
viro et gubernatore opus est. Non tranquillo navigamus.

TIT. LIV. lib. 24. cap. 8.

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1809.

THOUGHTS

BY

WILLIAM LUTHER PIERCE

AND

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

SHOWING THE NECESSITY OF AN

ADMINISTRATION

OF THE

UNION OF PARTIES

THE

BY

WILLIAM LUTHER PIERCE

1864

THOUGHTS  
UPON THE  
PRESENT STATE,

&c. &c. &c.

When we consider the ingenious and persevering attacks which have been for some time past directed against the general system of our government on the one side, and the supineness and impotence exhibited by those to whom its defence more particularly belongs, namely, those who actually administer it, on the other; the contrast can hardly fail of exciting both surprize and alarm. Their language also is that of alarm, but the real cause of alarm is their conduct. It is not the strength of the attack, but the feebleness of the defence, which is formidable. The country is in the nature of a patient who has less to apprehend from his disease than his

physician. It is from the ignorance and inability of the government to administer the proper remedies to our disorder that the danger arises. They are therefore in fact, though not in intention, the worst enemies of the constitution for which they profess an almost exclusive veneration, and the real friends of those revolutionary doctrines to which they oppose—nothing but their alarms.

A very few reflections upon the scenes passing before us will suffice to prove these assertions. But this is not the whole of my design. A more material part is to shew the causes which have rendered, and must continue to render the talents and integrity, which it would be unjust and illiberal to deny to several members of the present government, unavailing to repel the danger and save the country; and, as contrary causes produce contrary effects, we shall thence be best able to discern by what means this end, which every honest man and real patriot, whether he approves or disapproves the measures of government, must equally have at heart, may be effected.

There is no feature in the present times more deserving our attention than the existence of what is emphatically called a 'third party' in the state; inasmuch as it professes principles and entertains designs distinct from those of all

public men, living or dead, who have hitherto administered the affairs of the country. What those principles and designs are, as far as they have been hitherto developed, is to be learnt from the Political Register, the source in which they originate, or at least the channel through which they are conveyed; a work whose increasing influence upon the public mind is sufficiently demonstrated in general by its extensive sale, and by this remarkable fact in particular, that almost all the resolutions of thanks which have been voted from various places to Mr. Wardle on a late occasion, not only express the general principles, but employ the very tone and language of that publication. Besides some other writings of the same tendency, though less noted, I must mention, and with regret, an article in a late number of the Edinburgh Review. Whether it is judicious in the conductors of that Review to change their literary into a political censorship, and risk the just reputation they have acquired by the former in the new field of speculation presented by the latter, they must decide for themselves. Some persons, however, may think the sharp edge of their criticism had better be used upon the bad writers than "the privileged orders" of the country, and wish to see it again employed against, rather than in conjunction with, the barbarous opposers of polite

literature, of Athens and of Rome; "utinam nova incude diffingas retusum in Massagetis Arabasque ferrum."

That the alarming influence which this third party has acquired, and which seems to be hourly increasing, is principally attributable to the present government, I shall have no great difficulty in shewing. For this purpose I shall begin with one or two observations upon the general nature of the reasoning employed in the writings of that party. Their constant policy is to identify the abuses of particular governments with the general system of government itself. For instance, has a case of speculation been discovered in any department of the state? a conclusion is immediately drawn against the whole system of government, as a conspiracy to plunder the people, from the very case which ought rather to be considered as establishing its excellence, by the proof afforded of its inability to protect delinquents. Is a law of penalty and proscription suffered to remain upon our statutes after the cause of its enactment has ceased, the repeal of which liberality and policy demand,—every law found in the same book is supposed to be tainted with the same infection, though Magna Charta itself were among the number, and the whole code is doomed to the flames or the hangman, "sicut in agris grex

cadit unius scabiæ, aut porrigine porcil." How then is this sophism to be refuted? Certainly by separating the abuses which have crept into the system from the system itself; by giving up the former, and thereby taking away from the opponents of the latter the only ground on which they are able to attack it; as a prudent general destroys the suburbs, though many pleasant villas and spacious gardens may be involved in the ruin, for the security of the town. Is this the course pursued by the present government? or is not their conduct calculated to strengthen rather than expose the imposture, to identify the abuses with the system, by shewing the same partial affection for the one as for the other, the same blind veneration for both, or, if they make any distinction, by a perverse preference of the abuses of the constitution to the constitution itself, by neglecting the walls and ramparts, where the strength of the city lies, in their care to maintain and increase the suburbs, which are calculated only to cover and protect the approaches of an enemy? Preposterous as this conduct appears, it is correspondent with the language of those who tell us sinecures are the bulwarks of the constitution; that corruption is necessary to government; and the influence of the crown can never be too great; sentiments which put one in mind of the answer of an

over-zealous candidate for ordination, who, on being asked by the bishop which of the thirty-nine articles he preferred, replied that he thought them all excellent, and only regretted that there were not many more of them.

Another fallacy which pervades the same writings is one of so gross a kind as must demonstrate either a bad reasoner or a bad cause. I mean the confounding a question of a general nature with a question of degree. Thus, because the number of placemen in the House of Commons may possibly be too great, it is very logically and very wisely concluded that they ought to be entirely excluded from it; because the sinecures and pensions in the disposal of the crown may be too large or too many, it is proposed to take away the power of rewarding merit, which is essentially necessary to the interests and honour of the country, or to take it from the only hands in which it can be safely placed, those of the sovereign. By a parity of reasoning every thing useful and illustrious amongst mankind might be arraigned and condemned, the talents which may be misapplied, the virtues which may be carried to excess, the monarchy which may become despotic, the liberty which may degenerate into licentiousness; and the golden mean, the principle of moderation, which is the anchor of this mixed

government, thrown away in the storm and fury of contending factions, as a piece of useless lumber, if not a dangerous possession.

Every impartial reader must perceive that there is in the writings to which I allude, some truth mixed with a great deal of falsehood. Now it is the former which gives currency to the latter; and, as a little leaven makes the whole lump easy of digestion, so this modicum of truth fits the whole composition for the public market and taste, and may render it, as we have already too much reason to apprehend, not wholesome nourishment indeed, but the common food of the people. You cannot contradict with effect the much that is false, because you cannot contradict at all the little that is true. Can we wonder then if the people conclude that those who tell them some truths can speak no falsehood, especially as the same sort of inference, though an erroneous one, was attempted to be established on a late occasion by persons of superior understanding, who contended that a witness who told some falsehoods could speak no truth.

As for the coarse and vulgar style employed to bring arguments more home to the comprehension of the lower orders of the people, and as it were within striking distance, I admit that there is a great difference in the effect produced

by a different manner of stating the same proposition; for it is a rule long ago given to orators to adapt their speech to the prejudices and passions of those whom they address. But I doubt whether the style alone, either of speaking or writing ever produced any serious and permanent effect independent of the matter. I suppose, however, the writer to whom I particularly allude has no exclusive patent for the use of this weapon. At all events, I trust, that the class of readers in general have too much good sense to be deluded by the mere dexterity of putting arguments which have no solid nor plausible foundation to rest upon; and that there is no such secret and irresistible charm in the most accomplished scurrility and abuse, as to overcome the influence of reason and justice in the minds of an enlightened and liberal nation. Let us take, for the sake of illustration, too different cases in which the influence of the crown may be conceived to be exerted. Let us suppose that the members of a family, who have for more than one generation devoted their time and talents to the service of their country, which has acquired reputation abroad and prosperity at home under councils in which they assisted or over which they presided, let us suppose, I say, that this family, by places given through the course of the last forty years to

its various branches, as the remuneration of public services, is on the whole in the receipt of a considerable income from the public revenue, all of which ceases with the lives of the present possessors. What is there here to warrant the invidious and inflammatory phrases of corruption, plunder of the people, public robbery, and the like? Is there a man, however low the condition of life in which it has pleased Providence to cast his lot, with a heart so callous to the honor of his country, with an understanding so blind to his own interest, as to repine at the payment of his small portion of that sum; as not to think it the lightest tax which is imposed upon him, the cheap purchase of that triumph which falls to his share in the successes of his country, of that benefit which he partakes in its general prosperity; of the pride and pleasure of saying,

“That Chatham’s language is his mother-tongue,

And” Nelson’s “name compatriot with his own.”

But let us suppose the different case of men who have no claims upon the gratitude of the public, either from their own services or those of their family; (for it is just to reward the relations of an illustrious servant of the public as well as himself, for this plain reason, that men of great minds are usually careless of profit for

themselves, but solicitous for the welfare of their families.) Are there no instances of such persons receiving large sums from the public money? And, when such are found, can we say, however we may condemn the exaggerations employed in representing their cases, however we may be disgusted with the sophistry and vulgar rhetoric resorted to, in order to bring them home to the feelings of the populace, are we wholly prepared to say, that there is no cause for discontent, no ground for reform? I am aware that there are persons of the best understandings and purest independance, who think, that the sum which appears by a late Report of the House of Commons to be the annual income of sinecure places, or places executed by deputy in the three kingdoms, is not too large to be placed at the disposal of the crown for those numerous objects of reward which must occur in this populous state, and who are confirmed in this opinion by the small proportion which this sum bears to the general income of the country; and by the consideration that the utmost saving which could reasonably be made in its amount, when divided amongst the number of persons, from whose pockets it is taken, would not make any sensible diminution in the taxes of any individual. Besides, however, that no saving, however small, ought to be deemed insignificant,

because all economy consists in small savings, they ought to consider not only the advantage of the measure in itself, but of the principle which it establishes. And surely at this particular crisis, when the people are called upon to endure burthens and privations, not indeed peculiar to them, but shared in common with all orders of the state, for the common defence; when there is little probability, under the relative circumstances of Europe and Britain, of those burthens being soon removed either in peace or war; or of any safety for the country but in the active unanimity of an armed and disciplined population, a facility of concession to the desires of the people, in every instance where it is not incompatible with the essential interests of the country, is the true policy which ought to be pursued. It is one truth told us by the before-mentioned writers, that the people, in order to defend the constitution, must feel that they have an interest in its preservation. If it is meant to infer from this position that they have no such interest at present, this is a gross and mischievous falsehood. But if it is only meant that something remains to be done to conciliate their confidence and attachment to the government and to the institutions of the country, to make them execute the measures enacted for its defence with the same ardent

alacrity, with which they would contend for their own personal security, to make them undertake cordially and for a long continuance those sacrifices of time, property, and comfort, those watchings by night and day, those tedious bodily exercises and military services, without which the country is at the mercy of the winds and waves, the position is most true and most important.

In proportion as this is true, in the same proportion is the conduct of government alarming. For, what has that conduct hitherto been? A shifting and temporising policy; an union of temerity and cowardice, of temerity the result not of bravery but blindness, of cowardice equally in the defence of right and wrong: a system tending to inflame rather than conciliate, unsatisfactory even to their friends, contemptible to their enemies: a system of concession without grace, and resistance without consistency. That I may not appear to assert what I am not able to prove, I will beg leave to call the reader's recollection, though it may be perhaps unnecessary, to the Reversion Bill, and to the late inquiry into the affair of the Commander in Chief.

A Bill was brought into the House of Commons in the last session of Parliament but one by Mr. Bankes, founded upon the recommenda-

tion of the finance committee, to take from the crown the power of granting offices in reversion. This measure, besides other advantages, had this great one; that it rendered the abolition or reform of useless offices feasible, to which such reversions were an insuperable impediment. If ministers approved this bill, they ought to have supported it: If they disapproved it, they ought to have opposed it. But they did neither. In the House of Commons, indeed, they gave it a cold and reluctant assent, but in the House of Lords they threw it out. And how did they throw it out? Equally afraid of risking their popularity by opposing it, and incurring the displeasure of the crown by supporting it, they absented themselves, but took care to put others forward by whom the odious task of rejection was performed, while they themselves stood behind the curtain in a station, as they flattered themselves, where the king might see them, but the people could not. Has the crown reason to be satisfied with these courageous servants, or the people with these conciliating governors? Are these the men who will stand by the former in the hour of need, or direct successfully the energies of the latter in the approaching contest of self preservation?

Let us now take a view of their conduct in the late inquiry concerning the Commander in



Chief. If it is true that Mr. Wardle owes part of his present exaggerated credit to his own courage, it is also true that he owes part to the defiance thrown in his teeth in the outset of the business by ministers. It seems to have been a sufficient reason with the people to sympathize with the man who had incurred *their* displeasure. He had half proved his case when he had ensured *their* opposition. With the same total want of foresight, which they have uniformly shewn, they actually refused to appoint a committee to conduct the investigation, with which Mr. Wardle would have been satisfied, where the interests of justice would have been at least as well promoted, with the same publicity after the inquiry, but without that publicity pending it, by which the character of the Commander in Chief was exposed, as it were, to die by inches, and to a slow torture, in the House of Commons, and, in the intervals of their session, in all the streets and alehouses of the metropolis: as if it was their design, by a theatrical exhibition, to inflame the passions of the people to the highest possible pitch, and force by this artificial heat the growth of those seditious and disorganizing principles which had otherwise in vain been sown throughout the community. We are now witnessing the luxurious harvest rising around us, and may know whom to thank for the bless-

ing. If ministers had been influenced to adopt this line of proceeding by a real desire to promote impartial justice, they might have some credit for their intentions, though certainly none for their wisdom. But it is sufficiently evident that they expected the piece to be got up would be acted for their benefit; and were extremely surprized, when they found themselves in the course of it received with hisses instead of plaudits. And when they are reduced to the necessity of proposing a vote (which they would have avoided, at least in the first instance, had they referred the investigation to a Committee) they pursue the same weak and temporising policy as on other occasions. In alternate sentences they praise the king, and censure the Commander in Chief; congratulate the former on his virtues, which were never called in question, and express a *firm confidence* that the latter would imitate them in future, because he had not done so in time past; as if their province was not judicial, but prophetic; or to judge the King's virtue, and not the Commander in Chief's conduct. But their intention was to satisfy the King by the flattery, and the country by the censure; to keep the Commander in Chief in office whatever became of his credit, and themselves in office whatever became of the Commander in Chief. It remains to be seen whether

the latter expectation will be justified; we have already seen that the former has been disappointed. For the good sense and moderation of the House drawing a proper line between corruption, which, under favor of those great detesters of abuses, the Common Councilmen of London, was never proved against the Commander in Chief, and the possession of that public confidence without which any great officer in this country is disqualified for his situation, concurred in Mr. Bankes's motion, which was substantially founded upon this distinction. Nay, I will venture to assert, again humbly asking pardon of the Common Councilmen of London, that the resignation of the Commander in Chief was owing not to the 125 who voted with Mr. Wardle, but to the 199 who voted with Mr. Bankes. Those, however, who take a middle course must be content to go without the thanks of those who take an extreme one: but they may find some consolation, besides the lasting approbation of their consciences, in the superior security and stability of their condition; in reflecting upon the near affinity which all extremes bear to each other, and the great versatility of popular clamour. Whoever, indeed, recollects the extreme vicissitude of the reception which Mr. Pitt, experienced from the "detesters of abuses" in the city of Lon-

don in the various visits which he made them, if he cannot imitate the profound and sovereign indifference, the generous disdain, the immovable equanimity, with which that great man treated the low abuse which assailed him on the one day, and the lower flattery which besieged him on the next, may at least learn to moderate his ambition for popular applause, and form a more accurate estimate of its durability and value. Perhaps,

*If old experience may attain  
To something like prophetic strain,*  
we may venture to predict, that the sunshine of civic favor may not always gild the brow of Mr. Wardle, nor the cloud of disgrace hang upon the front of Sir William Curtis. The latter may again become lord of the ascendant, and the ephemeral splendor of the former be absorbed in the superior brightness of a new or a returning luminary.

But while we condemn the violence into which the City of London, and other places, have been hurried on the present occasion, let us not forget that it is the weak and irritating policy of administration, which has given aid and effect to the delusion by which they have been misled.

And this brings me to the consideration of

the most material part of my subject; the causes which have rendered, and must continue to render, the present administration incapable of conducting our domestic affairs with safety to the country.

In taking this view, which, limited as it is, is unfortunately but too pregnant with matter of regret and alarm, I hope I shall not be deemed insensible of the misconduct of government in foreign transactions; wherein we trace the same mixture of rashness and weakness which characterizes them at home, and renders them equally ignorant what to concede and what to insist upon in negociation, and when, where, and how to act with effect in war. But this topic embraces too wide a range to be discussed at present. It may, perhaps, be reserved for a future occasion; if their incapacity is not sufficiently demonstrated by the actual state of our domestic affairs.

The causes, to which I allude, may be divided into three kinds: the manner of their coming into office, the general opinion entertained of them, and the character of the opposition.

With respect to the manner of their coming into office, I shall content myself with one short remark; that it was founded on proscription and artifice. A whole administration, of ac-

knowledged talents and political experience, was branded with the imputation of hostility to the Established Church, for acting upon opinions notoriously entertained by at least half of their successors. But the artifice, as it is now, I believe, considered by all parties, has been attended with the inevitable consequence of detected delusion, the forfeiture of the public confidence. The result is that the present Government is weak in a double sense; from want of ability in Parliament, and of authority without.

After the discovery universally made of the imposture by which they obtained power, can we conceive them to be the most likely persons to convince the people of the imposture of others; and when we couple with the mode of their obtaining power, the painful experience we have had of their conduct in it, can we hesitate in pronouncing upon the opinion generally entertained of them? Are they in possession of that public confidence without which they cannot conduct the administration with honour to themselves or advantage to the country? If we can doubt for a moment what answer to make, we may read it in the votes and addresses which are pouring in from so many different parts of the kingdom. Is the conviction so generally expressed of a system of corruption and peculation in the administration a proof of the con-

fidence which the people are disposed to place in them, or a very promising symptom of the effect which they are likely to give to their councils? I am not contending for the justice of that conviction, but for the inference to be drawn from the fact of its existence. One thing, however, I must say for the people. If, after the ingenuity and address with which suspicions of the general system of government have been infused into them, having seen no steps taken to satisfy or undeceive them, they should not have been able to distinguish for themselves between just and unjust suspicions, but implicitly believed the truth and the falsehood, they are not so much to blame for at length yielding to the delusion, as the Government is for taking no measures to enable them to withstand it.

With respect to the character of the opposition, while I decline the unnecessary task of estimating the relative merit of individuals, of comparing Lord Grenville and the Duke of Portland, Lord Grey and Mr. Canning, Lord Henry Petty and Mr. Percival, I must contend that the country have a right to expect that those statesmen, whose singular attainments and experience peculiarly qualify them for the task of managing the resources and directing the energies of the nation, should be called upon for their assistance in repelling the unexampled

and hourly increasing dangers, from which no man can foretell whether the best councils can save us, but every man is beginning to perceive that the present cannot.

The inconvenience arising from an opposition so powerful in rank and talents is already sensibly felt by the Government; but they attempt to throw the blame, which is imputable solely to their own weakness, upon their opponents. As if the latter could discharge their duty to their country by a silent and passive acquiescence in measures which they believe in their consciences fatal to its interests and honour.

Having now shewn what the conduct of ministers has been, and what are the causes which must render them incapable of averting the calamities which threaten us, it remains to be considered what means we have of obtaining the protection which their councils cannot give us. If a weak government, without the confidence of the people, has brought us into difficulty and danger, a strong government, possessing that confidence, must afford us the best chance of extricating ourselves from them. In short, a change of administration formed upon the principle of uniting in the government those statesmen, who are most able to conduct it, is imperiously demanded by the necessity of the times.

I may, perhaps, be told that the opposition are hardly more popular than the administration; that the people are suspicious of both; and referred, for the proof of this fact, to the political writings before alluded to, which complain not merely of the abuses of this or that particular government, but of the general system of government which has for a long time prevailed in the country. I am not only ready to admit that the invective of these writers is directed equally against all administration; but I will go further. I have no doubt they had rather see the present administration, with all its imbecility and unpopularity, continue in office, than the strongest possible administration in its place. And this for the most obvious reasons. A weak administration constitutes their strength; a strong one would ensure their weakness. Such an administration would confute their sophistries, and take away the ground on which they stand by removing the real abuses which exist. They would draw the teeth of the serpent which contain the venom, and render it a worm. With ability to discern the necessity of reform, with strength to overcome opposition to it, and with prudence to limit it within just and moderate bounds, they would in time persuade the well intentioned and awe the designing. The sale of the Political Register might suffer,

but the country would gain infinitely by the exchange. I have no doubt that the first persons to congratulate His Majesty upon the formation of such an administration would be the citizens of London; and I am led to think so not only from their notorious "detestation of public abuses," but from their laudable custom of giving His Majesty joy upon *all* changes of administration. Indeed, in these days of public virtue, we are often reminded of that propensity of the Roman people, not indeed in the time of Brutus, but of Juvenal, which the poet thus describes, "quid nunc turba Remi? sequitur fortunam, ut semper, et odit *Damnatos*!" I am also inclined to think that, under such an administration, the common council would have seen nothing "equivocal" in a vote of the House of Commons, although a considerable number of members "holding lucrative appointments" had concurred in it; because, however that court may have "on frequent occasions evinced its detestation of public abuses," as they assert they have, I am not aware that they have ever before attached any suspicion to such votes, though they have been very frequent indeed; and still more am I inclined to believe, that under the administration of Mr. Pitt, or Mr. Fox, or Lord Grenville, the common council would have hesitated in determining that a decision of the House

of Commons had been given "in direct contradiction to the evidence produced." It might then, perhaps have occurred to them that it was not extremely reasonable for those who did not examine the evidence to pretend to understand it so much better than those who did; nor extremely modest for the *common council of the city of London* to arrogate to itself such superiority of discernment over the *common council of the nation*. But like good traders, they acted upon a knowledge of the character of those with whom they had to deal: They foresaw that ministers were bankrupts in vigour; that the stock, with which they originally embarked in government, was exhausted by foreign and domestic failures; and that they had none left to answer the demand made upon them by the honor of Parliament, to which such an indignity was never offered since its first institution. The tyrannical line of Tudor treated the House of Commons with neglect; the imperious Elizabeth prohibited them from discussing matters of state; and the pedantic James exercised upon them the rod of his scholastic discipline: but it was reserved for the *Common Council of London* to declare them incapable of discharging the common duty of every petty jury in the most trivial cause, that of deciding according to the evidence produced.

Upon the subject of the resolutions and addresses from other places, I should wish to submit some short remarks to the impartial consideration of those who voted for them. Ever since the year 1782 several committees of the House of Commons, and commissions of persons not members of Parliament, have been appointed for the purpose of inquiring into all the departments of government. They have suggested many useful reforms, most of which have been carried into effect\*. And if every useful reform

\* It may not be amiss to call the attention of the reader to the following instances in which the influence of the crown has been diminished since the year 1780.

- 1st. By st. 22, G. III, c. 41, commissioners, and all officers of excise, customs, stamps, salt, windows or houses, or revenue of the post office, are rendered incapable of voting for Members of Parliament.
- 2d. By st. 22, G. III, c. 45, contractors are excluded from the House of Commons.
- 3d. By st. 22, G. III, c. 82, secret service money is limited, and its misapplication guarded against by the strongest checks and the sanction of oaths; many offices, before given to Members of Parliament are abolished; as Lords of Trade, Officers of the Board of Green Cloth, &c. The Pension List is also regulated and limited.
- 4th. Loans and contracts are publicly made by the system adopted by Mr. Pitt; whence they are no longer a source of ministerial favor, as in the time of Lord North.
- 5th. Commissions of inquiry have been appointed into the public offices; in consequence of whose recommendations,

has not been adopted, or those adopted have not been in every instance effectual; what does this prove but that the reform has not been immediate but gradual. It may, however, be contended that since the year 1782 several committees have been appointed, and salaries have been regulated and apportioned, fees fixed established, and a material saving has been obtained for the public.

Several laws have been made for the regulation of public offices, as the Pay-Office, and Treasurership of the Navy. By 38 G. III. c. 86, with respect to England, and by 47 G. III. c. 19, for Ireland, 196 places relating to the Customs of the annual value of £42,655 were suppressed in England, and 38 places of a similar description in Ireland; and by an act of this present year, the office of surveyor of subsidies and petty customs in the Port of London is abolished.

“These acts of Parliament and many others,” I quote the words of the Committee of Public Expenditure in their Third Report, “afford abundant examples of temperate and judicious retrenchment.” Yet we are told that every law which has passed since the accession of his present Majesty ought to be burnt by the common hangman: a proposition so foolish in itself as to excite a strong suspicion that it is advanced only to impose upon the people, and to conceal from them the fact, that these laws, and many others favourable to public liberty, have been made within the above period. Yet let us not disguise from ourselves, that the influence of the crown has been increasing in other quarters to an immense and alarming extent, by the indirect effect of the augmentation of our revenue, taxes, naval and military establishments. If this fact shews the necessity of further reform; the former demonstrates that the “system of government” under which we live, is perfectly adequate to the purpose of carrying it into effect.

pleated by the same means by which it has been begun, provided those means are directed by a wise, a liberal, and a popular administration. In the course of these inquiries some few instances of abuse on the part of public officers have been discovered; of abuse, however, imputable to the misconduct of individuals only, and not to the system of government, to the manifest prejudice of which they were committed. Now the question which I would ask every impartial man is this, Can you say that any case of suspected delinquency has passed without inquiry, or of convicted delinquency with impunity? The individual possibly may not have been punished in the precise way, or by the particular vote, you would prefer; but if the substantial ends of justice have been answered by depriving the present offender of his power, and cautioning future ones by his example; is it fair and reasonable to complain that your representatives, to whom the fullest information was given, and by whom the most diligent attention was shewn to it, have not inflicted so severe a punishment as you, without the same knowledge of the case, and who receive your information, perhaps, from false, at all events from secondary, sources, fancy they ought to have pronounced? But is it not above all unreasonable to accuse your representatives of conniving at abuses, into

which they have instituted the most minute and rigorous inquiry, and screening offenders whom they have punished? If the government have not done their duty, you have a right to complain of them: but do not forget that the Parliament have done *theirs*.\*

Let us not, however, imagine that any reform whatever can completely prevent occasional abuses. We may, perhaps, establish a democracy at the expense of much bloodshed and civil war. But let us not expect that our democracy will be free from abuses, because we know that there have been many such governments in ancient and modern times, and that not only abuses have existed in them, but existed to an infinitely greater degree than those imputed to our present constitution. No! let us take the good and the evil together in all human affairs; let

\* I am aware that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's motion was carried by a majority, and Mr. Bankes's lost. Yet ministers did not dare to act upon their motion, though carried: and the minority in effect triumphed over the majority. Or, perhaps, to speak more strictly, the minority shewed that another motion in a slight degree different, which might and would have been framed, would have been still more numerously supported; a risk which government would not venture to incur. For a minister who gains what is called a government question by a small majority, is looked upon as having *virtually* lost it. And thus the practice of government is in some degree corrective of its influence.

us diminish the evil as much as we can, but not destroy the system because we cannot totally eradicate the evil. The British constitution is on the whole the most perfect form of government which ever practically subsisted in the world. Strangers, usually so bigotted to their own institutions, and so jealous of those of other nations, have all concurred in celebrating its excellence: the wisest men of our own country have died with a wish upon their lips for its perpetuity. It is indeed true, that great statesmen have, upon particular questions, differed very widely in applying its principles; though I do not believe that, except with reference to subjects of political altercation, there would have been any contradiction in their opinions. The reason of their difference I take to be this. The constitution consists of that whole body of laws by which the balance between the democratical, the aristocratical, and the monarchical powers of the state is fixed and maintained; some of these laws of course are democratical, some aristocratical, some monarchical in their provisions; and according as we fix our view more particularly upon any of the three, the constitution naturally appears more inclining to democracy, or aristocracy, or monarchy; though it does not consist in any one of them, but in the balance of all; a balance which



may nevertheless exist, though it may not easily be perceived by those whose understandings are clouded by prejudice or inflamed by passion. This is the theory of the constitution, from which its principles must be deduced. But what is called the practice of the constitution is the actual mode of reducing those principles to practice in all the departments of the state, deliberative, executive, and judicial. In the two reigns immediately preceding the revolution, the powers of the crown were so indefinite as to inspire in Charles II. and his brother, the ambition of reigning independently of the people; while the people, sensible of their danger, asserted powers on the other hand which would have rendered them independent of the crown. So that by their contrary pretensions the mutual dependance of their powers was every moment on the eve of dissolution, and the constitution exposed to suffer shipwreck in another civil war. But this calamity was averted by that grand coalition of parties, which, waving their minute differences of opinion arising from particular partialities to this or that part of our constitution, when the whole was endangered, united for its deliverance, and by their union effected the glorious revolution in 1688: glorious not only because it was the triumph of liberty, but of moderation in the hour of victory; not from

the blood of illustrious martyrs shed to obtain it, but because it was obtained without bloodshed; not because it rejected all appeal to the wisdom and experience of past ages, and all consideration of consequences to posterity, but because it established the rights and liberties claimed by our ancestors, and secured their enjoyment to future generations:—a revolution glorious and successful, because it was not effected by dabblers in politics, without experience, who had given their country no pledge for their probity or capacity; by enthusiasts from the schools, pettyfoggers from the bar, and jacobins from the clubs; by the conflict of the *moleculæ* of a state striving to regenerate a political system reduced to its original elements;—but because it was the work of men acting under known and established descriptions, and in conformity to received laws and principles; of all orders of the state coalescing, not in a turbulent and frantic equality, but in the subordination in which the constitution had placed them, for the restoration of the common liberty. The representatives of the nation did not abuse the confidence of their constituents. The crown was deprived, both by particular enactments, and the solemn declaration of general principles, of those powers which had tended to render it independent upon the people. Since,

however, the power of the people and of the crown was held in equilibrio before, or rather since the people and the crown were before able to exert equal force in opposite directions, it is manifest that this change must have reduced the crown to a dependency upon the people, and rendered its existence precarious and at the mercy of the latter; had not the crown, no longer able to govern by its power, resorted to the expedient of governing by its influence; of selecting for the executive offices those men who stood highest in public estimation, and vesting in them the greater part of the patronage and emolument of the crown in order that, by the distribution of these among their friends and partizans, the measures of government might be carried on more smoothly and effectually; or, in Mr. Burke's\* words, "the court was obliged to delegate a part of its powers to men of such interest as could support, and of such fidelity as would adhere to, its establishment." Hence the change in the mode of reducing to practice the principles of our constitution, not in the principles of the constitution itself, took its rise; and hence we may fairly conclude, that if the monarchical scale was so much lightened by the loss of those real powers

\* Thoughts on the Causes of our Present Discontents,

of which it was deprived at the revolution, that, without a weight of influence had been thrown into the scale, the balance of the constitution could no longer have been preserved, the same consequence would follow at present were the influence of the crown to be destroyed. This influence may, therefore, perhaps be said to be essential to the constitution. At least it is certain, that the crown would not be able to discharge its constitutional functions without it; and that, as the system itself is coeval with the establishment of our liberties, so the happiest days this country has seen have been under that system. A celebrated writer indeed upon the laws of England has stated the following opinion\*. "Our national debt and taxes," he says, "have in their actual consequences thrown such a weight of power into the executive scale of government, as we cannot think was intended by our patriot ancestors, who gloriously struggled for the abolition of the then formidable parts of the prerogative, and by an unaccountable want of foresight established this system in their stead." If, however, we examine this passage with the context, we shall be convinced that the very learned writer only meant to condemn the excessive influence of the crown, and not such a degree of influence as he himself

\* Blackstone's Commentaries, Book I. chap. 8.

seems to think necessary to the administration of the government. For in a preceding passage he certainly, at least, encourages the opinion, that "the executive magistrate" by the Revolution, "had neither independence nor power enough left to form that check upon the Lords and Commons which the founders of our constitution intended." It is however a laudable and, strictly speaking, a constitutional jealousy to check the growth of that influence, and to reduce it within proper limits by seasonable laws, for this plain reason, that the influence of the crown is virtually the power of the crown; and, if the power of the crown were suffered to increase while the powers of the other two branches remained the same, the constitution would lean too much to the side of monarchy, and the balance would be upset.

I do not pretend to throw any new light upon this subject. The same thing has been said in substance, though much more ably, by every man who has studied it with fidelity. I trust, however, I shall be pardoned for bringing these particular points within more immediate view, because the most false and perverse notions of the constitution have been lately taken up, and industriously circulated. It has been the fashion to cover every wild, dark, indefinite project of innovation with the pretence of restoring the

constitution; and the hackneyed phrase, "the constitution and nothing but the constitution" is a sort of watch-word with those who, if we may judge by the rest of their sentiments, understand by it *revolution, and nothing but revolution*. Whatever confusion of ideas this perversion of words may have excited in the breasts of the credulous and unsuspecting, I cannot help hailing it as a good omen, that even the enemies of the constitution dare not attack it except under the mask of affection for it. It is a proof that the love of the constitution is still alive in the breasts of Englishmen, and that they will not voluntarily exchange the wisdom of their ancestors for any new political experiment, if an administration, in whom they confide, enables them to chuse between both.

With respect to the observations contained in the foregoing pages, I am aware they will not be approved by those who look upon corruption as the legitimate influence of the crown, nor by those who stigmatise the legitimate influence of the crown as corruption. I do not expect that they will be acceptable to the present government; and still less to that third party which has risen in the state, and whose doctrines have spread with such unexampled rapidity and alarming success: doctrines which, representing

all public men now living or who have ever lived as a band of conspirators against the property and liberty of the people, while they disturb the repose of the sepulchre, and taint with a poisonous breath the laurels which the just gratitude of a nation has consecrated to the memory of its guardians and benefactors;—deprive at once the dead of their honors, and the living of their hopes. Contrary to the policy of all states which have hitherto existed in the world, they acknowledge no distinction in statesmen; they have no reward for the good nor punishment for the bad, and no remedy for the errors of government but anarchy. Whatever the motives of those who disseminate such doctrines may be, their tendency unquestionably is to convert that public opinion, upon which authority is founded, into the means of its overthrow; to render the people systematically hostile to all government, and in some measure to justify their hostility by excluding good and wise men from its administration; to render us, in short, a divided nation, and an easy prey to that implacable enemy, who can never destroy us but by our own divisions. But I submit my opinions to moderate and enlightened men of all parties; to whose exertions the country has on former occasions owed its safety, and by which alone it can now be preserved.

I am certainly not sanguine enough to expect, that the formation of such an administration, as I have endeavoured to prove to be essential to our preservation, would in a moment remove the disorders which have been so long suffered to increase without resistance; that it would be able by a "Quos ego"—to smoothe the political ocean now agitated from the surface to the bottom, and silence the noisy winds which have excited the storm; but I contend that such would be the gradual effect of the policy which we might expect such an administration to pursue; that in short it affords a chance at least, of which there is none without it, of giving tranquillity to the declining years of the King, and satisfaction to his subjects; of in time restoring to us the blessings of peace, and enabling us to live in security either in peace or war.

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