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A *Borthwick.*  
**LETTER**  
IN  
DEFENCE OF THE CLAIM  
FOR  
AN INCREASE  
ON THE  
**IMPORT DUTY OF GRAIN.**

ADDRESSED TO  
**THE HON. GEORGE ABERCROMBY,**  
OF TULLIBODY, M. P.

BY  
**N. LOWIS,**  
OF WEST PLEAN, ESQ.

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1814.

TO

THE HON. GEORGE ABERCROMBY.

SIR,

In addressing this Letter to you, on the proposed alteration in the Corn Laws, I feel no further apology necessary, than for my want of ability to give that weight to the subject which it so well merits, as I know you are at all times ready to receive any information that may be thought useful,—that few are better qualified to judge of what is correct,—and none more able to give effect to any measure that promises to be beneficial to your country. I have also another advantage in addressing you, which is, that even the most violent opposers of the proposed alteration must be sensible that it will never meet with your support, if you are not convinced of its general utility; and if you could, for a moment,

suppose that the interests of the middle classes, or more particularly the poor, were to be injured by its success, you would spurn the proposal with contempt.

I shall now proceed to take a general view of the subject, as connected with Scotland,—and state the claim which, in my opinion, the landholders have for the support of Parliament upon the present occasion.

Most of the public bodies in Scotland have met upon the question of the proposed alteration in the Corn Laws, not to weigh it in a great national point of view, or to consider the fair claim of the landholder to the protection of the capital employed by him in land, but to petition Parliament against any alteration; and, in doing so, have adopted resolutions, in which they charge the landholders and farmers of Scotland with a wish to oppress the poor, and all the lower classes of society. That the different corporate bodies have a right to petition Parliament against any alteration, there can be no doubt, whatever their motive may be; but they have no right, by injurious charges, to raise a popular clamour against the landholders of Scotland, who are the natural supporters of the poor, and who have, at all

times, performed that part of their duty in a manner highly creditable to themselves.

As such heavy charges have been brought against the landholders of Scotland, and as I have reason to believe that the question respecting the proposed alteration in the Corn Laws is not generally understood, even by those most interested in its success, it may be in some degree useful to state what the existing Corn Laws are, what change is proposed in them, and the grounds upon which such change is thought necessary. It is, indeed, probable, that no argument which can be used on this subject will have much weight, as it is more by popular clamour than sound reasoning that the commercial interest wish to carry on their opposition; but it may at least be of some benefit to state facts, and to give that part of the community, who are disposed to give a fair and candid decision upon a measure of such importance to the empire at large, an opportunity of judging how far a change in the present Corn Laws is necessary, and what that change ought to be.

It appears that the first marked attention paid by the Legislature to the agriculture of the country, was in the reign of Charles II. By an act

in 1663, which gave freedom to the inland corn trade. The benefit resulting from this first step, soon led to another; and an act was passed in the year 1665, laying a duty of 16s. the quarter on wheat imported, when the price at home did not exceed 53s. 4d. At that period, when the price of labour, and value of money, in Britain, bore a much nearer proportion to foreign countries than at present, this must have been equal to a prohibition. Exportation was also allowed when wheat did not exceed 48s. the quarter; and, in the reign of King William, a bounty of 5s. the quarter was allowed on exportation. These laws continued in force up to the year 1765; and, under their influence, the agriculture of the country flourished, great quantities of grain were exported, and the price at home kept moderate; the average 33s. 3d. the quarter. In 1765 a new system was adopted, exportation was prohibited, and importation allowed duty free. The bad consequences of this system were soon felt, and the agriculture of the country suffered severely. It then became necessary to return in some measure to the laws of Charles II, and in the year 1773, a duty was again imposed of 16s. the quarter, but only until wheat was 48s. not, as formerly, 53s. 4d.; and the bounty was stopped when wheat was 44s. instead of 48s. as formerly. This, from the change which

had taken place in the country, seems to have been but a kind of half measure, and had not much effect, so that in the year 1791, another small change took place, continuing the duty until wheat was 50s. Under these changes the average price of wheat rose to 44s. 7d. the quarter; and in the year 1804, the present Corn Laws were passed, merely extending the duty of 16s. the quarter, until wheat was 63s. and the bounty of 5s. if under 48s. the quarter.

Such is a short history of our Corn Laws; and if we are to judge from past experience, we have a clear proof of the wisdom of our early statutes, in preference to those lately passed. From the year 1665 to 1765, there was a constant *exportation* of grain to a large amount. But from the year 1765, down to the present period, from the change of system, and the encouragement given to *importation*, no less than fifty-nine millions have been sent out of the country for foreign grain, and this in the course of the last twenty years, great part of which might have been kept at home, had it not been for the change which took place in our Corn Laws in the year 1765. Now, Sir, if it required a duty of 16s. the quarter, until wheat was 53s. 4d. to guard the agriculture of the country in the year 1675, certainly in the year 1814, a

duty of 16s. the quarter, until wheat is 63s. is not a sufficient protection. The immense change which has taken place in the price of labour, and the general state of this country during that period, must impress strongly, upon every candid mind, the necessity of something more being done for the capital employed in land; and, I am informed, it is now proposed, by the Select Committee of the House of Commons, appointed to report upon the present state of the Corn Laws, to recommend to Parliament the following alterations: To fix upon 96s. the quarter of wheat, as the price at which the duty is to cease, except what may be merely nominal; and for every shilling wheat falls under 96s. to lay on one shilling of duty. It will be afterwards considered how far this plan will ensure the object for which it is intended.

I shall now proceed to state, at what price wheat, as a general standard, can be raised in this country, and shall then, as far as I have been able to ascertain it, give the price at which it can be imported.

I have adopted every means in my power to collect information (from those best qualified to form an opinion upon the subject), at what price wheat can be raised, and have seen most accurate calculations

of the capital necessary to stock a farm, and the average produce of the best arable land. These calculations have been submitted to the revision of men of the first respectability and agricultural knowledge; and after allowing an equitable rent to the landlord, and a fair profit to the tenant, for his capital employed, it is the general opinion that wheat cannot be raised under 90s. the quarter, or, at the very lowest calculation, 84s.

It is difficult to ascertain at what price grain can be imported, as it varies on the continent with the demand for exportation; but, if we consider the price of labour, with the state of the great corn countries, we have every reason to suppose, that wheat may be put on board from 40s. to 45s. the quarter, and, after paying freight and insurance, with a fair profit to the merchant, be sold at 60s. or 63s. If this supposition is correct, and it will not be difficult for the Committee of the House of Commons to ascertain the fact, it must be evident that the proposed alteration will not be a sufficient guard to the agriculture of Scotland; for if wheat is at 84s. the quarter, the lowest price at which it can be raised here, the import duty, by the proposed plan, would be only 12s. the quarter, being the difference between 84s. and 96s. Now, if we add 12s. the quarter,

*It has been I believe by evidence that  
wheat can be imported, and sold at 56/2d.*

as import duty, to 60s. or 63s. the price at which we have stated foreign grain can be sold here, it would only amount to 73s. which is considerably below our standard. It is therefore my opinion, that an import duty (say 24s.) ought to be laid on, sufficient to guard the home market, until wheat reaches 84s. or 90s. the quarter. It might then cease, as far as the landholder is concerned. But Government ought to consider if it will be wise to remove the duty entirely, to put an additional profit into the pocket of the foreign merchant. It will also be for the wisdom of Parliament to adopt some measure to secure a fixed average price for grain, as it is certainly for the advantage of all parties that the price should be kept as steady as possible, nothing injuring the labouring classes of society more than uncertain markets, as a plentiful season, when meal is very cheap, is often attended with much more fatal consequences than a season of the greatest scarcity.

I have now stated what has occurred to me with respect to the proposed alteration in the Corn Laws, and must now beg leave to add a few observations in behalf of the landholders of Scotland, who have been so unjustly attacked. It certainly will not be denied, even by our most stren-

uous opposers, that agriculture is at least equally entitled with commerce to the protection of Government, and that capital invested in land, has a right to be as well guarded by restrictive laws as any branch of manufacture. From the great increase of our national debt, it has become necessary to levy heavy taxes, of which the land has paid a large share.

The different branches of manufacture in Great Britain have been protected by high duties on the importation of every thing but the raw material, to encourage the manufacturer, and to enable him to pay his proportion of these taxes. But whenever the landholder comes forward to claim equal protection, a general outcry is raised, to prevent, if possible, any redress being granted. So that the landholder is to be left to pay all his taxes, with a very high price for labour, and all other charges incident to the general state of society in Britain, to compete with the landholder on the continent, who has few taxes to pay, and whose labourers are slaves of the soil, or are paid at the rate of sixpence a day. The landholders have at all times paid their full proportion of the duties imposed for the protection of the commerce of the country, and never complained of such protection being granted, being well aware that in this

island no branch of manufacture could flourish, if not guarded by restrictive laws. Had the manufacture of cotton goods at Glasgow been exposed to a competition with India, duty free, it would have been crushed in its infancy. Or if a free importation of China ware had been allowed, we could not now have supplied every quarter of the world with an article which does so much credit to the English manufacturer. The shoemaker would have great reason to complain, if, while he is paying a heavy duty upon leather, besides a proportion of every other burden, the landholder was permitted to import ready made shoes, at five shillings a pair; and every other tradesman stands much in the same situation. But every restriction is thought by these gentlemen wise and necessary, which is to protect manufacture or trade, and only becomes a hardship when the agriculture of the country is to be secured. The landholder has, of late years, seen barley almost taken out of the rotation of husbandry, to encourage the West India planter, by a distillation from sugar; and the Scotch farmer has still further to complain, that almost every brewer in Scotland uses English barley, which they import, and convert into malt, at the inferior duty paid by Scotch barley. If the farmer wishes to export his wool, "No," says the manufacturer,

"you must keep it at home, that I may make a profit by working it into cloth." Or if a scarcity of grain had taken place on the continent, and the farmer had talked of exporting corn,— "O no," say all the commercial interest, "you cannot do that: you must supply us at a low rate, that we may get a greater profit on our goods." Yet, under all these disadvantages, with a bad climate, and a poor soil, the farmers of Scotland have, within these few years, by their energy and economical management, improved the face of the country in a most surprising manner; and, by a spirit of inquiry and liberality of sentiment, which does them honour, have acquired a rank in society, from which, I hope, they never will be removed. Still, if any application is made to Parliament for redress by the landholder, an immediate outcry is raised, and the popular clamour of cheap meal is brought forward; and such is the blindness of popular clamour, that even those whose existence depends on the encouragement of agriculture, join in the cry. The farm servant, the labourer, and every man connected with husbandry, think, if they get cheap meal, all will be well. They do not consider, that if it was possible for meal to fall to 1s. a-peck, their wages must fall in an equal proportion; and if they would not work for lower wages, the con-



sequence would be, nobody could employ them. If the landholder is to get no return for improving his land, he will not employ labourers; and the tenant cannot afford high wages, if he takes a low price for his corn. The whole population, therefore, connected with agriculture, must suffer equally, and the land will return to a state of barrenness, unless the commercial interest apply to Parliament to force the landholders to improve, and the farmer to cultivate, for the good of the state, whatever return they may get for their money or labour.

On many parts of the continent, the lower classes are slaves of the soil; and it will be only necessary, in passing such an act of Parliament, to include the landholders with their tenants, and oblige them all to bear a part in raising cheap corn for the benefit of the other branches of the community; or rather for the supposed benefit, for I hold it to be impossible to impoverish so large a part of the population, without injuring the whole. If land is to be forced down below its fair value by an importation of foreign grain, those connected with agriculture will not be able to purchase from the manufacturer, and a great part of the home market will be lost, which is the best and speediest return for capital; and it

is equally certain, that if grain is raised above its fair value, the manufacturer cannot afford to buy. The great point, therefore, to ascertain is, What ought to be the price of corn at present, so as to protect the rights of all parties, and how an equitable price is to be secured in future, to prevent such frequent applications to Parliament, which always leads to discord?

It is well known that, notwithstanding the rise of rents which has taken place in Scotland, that land in general yields but a small return for the capital employed in it, and that no merchant or manufacturer would be satisfied with so small a profit as the landholder. But a great outcry has been raised upon the late rise of rents, without taking into consideration the consequences which led to it, and indeed from total ignorance or wilful blindness on the subject. The commercial man, or manufacturer, accustomed to large profits, and a great command of money, if any check comes to impede his progress, immediately cries out against the high price of provisions, and complains of the want of encouragement and protection: if he ruins himself by entering into speculations much above his capital, he makes an arrangement with his creditors, and begins again with renovated vigour. The cautious stockholder, who sits down snugly, without risk or



trouble, and receives his half-yearly dividends, rails at the high price of bread, and complains bitterly of the increased rents of the landholder, without ever taking into consideration the expence attending a landed property, or the duties which a landholder has to perform. The tradesman is equally loud in his complaints; and while he is charging the landholder and tenant one hundred per cent. upon his former prices, exclaims against a rise on bread or meal. In short, the landholder is the great evil of which they all complain, and that only because he will not lie down, and allow himself to be stripped of his fleece, like his own sheep, for the benefit of those who have not a preferable claim to protection.

As to all the classes of the labouring poor, their situation is improved, much beyond that of any former period. It has always been understood, that if a labouring man earned a peck of meal by his day's labour, he was well paid. At the Union, the price of labour, was 5d. a day, the price of meal 6d. so that the balance was against him, and continued so for many years, and it was not earlier than 1792, that the price of labour was fully equal to a peck of meal. At present, the peck of meal is 1s. 5d. and labour has risen to 2s. or 2s. 6d. a day, and in large towns much higher. That class of the community have, therefore, no just cause

of complaint. As long as the price of labour keeps above the price of a peck of meal, it is an advantage to them when it is sold at a high rate. When meal was 1s. a peck, and their wages 1s. a day, if four pecks of meal were used by the family in the week, the labourer had only a balance of 2s. Now the meal is 1s. 6d. and the same quantity for the family would amount to 6s.; still at the medium rate of 2s. 3d. a day, the labourer has a surplus weekly of 7s. 6d. But let us now consider what burthens the landholder has to bear, and what duties he has to perform. At present, he has a direct tax of 15 per cent. upon his land, besides the land tax or cess. He has to pay ministers stipend and schoolmasters salary. To build and repair churches, manse, and school rooms; in many counties a poors rate, and in all a heavy tax for the families of militia. He is continually called upon for repairs of fences, and building and repairing farm houses. Also statute labour, for keeping up roads and bridges, not turnpike. He has further to pay rogue money, for the support of criminal prisoners, and is sometimes called upon for building jails and county rooms. He has to perform the duty of a justice of peace, to attend the sessions, and small debt courts, and to be ready at all times to act when called upon. As a commissioner of supply, he has charge of all

turnpike roads, and bridges connected with them, and is often obliged to pledge his own credit for their repair and support, and that frequently with great loss to himself. He has also, with the assistance of the minister and kirk session, the charge of the poor of the parish, and is obliged to raise funds for their subsistence. And after bearing all these burthens, and performing all these duties, he is now held up to the public as an oppressor of the poor, because he goes to Parliament to ask the same protection for his property, which has never been refused to any other branch of the community. It has indeed been stated, that if the duty on corn was entirely removed, it would be a great benefit to commerce, as it would not only procure cheap food, but also enable us to exchange our manufactures for grain, in those countries where nothing else can be procured. Now, Sir, will any man seriously maintain, that we should depend for our subsistence upon foreigners, and ruin the agriculture of our own country, that we might sell a few more pieces of calico, or export some additional hogsheads of sugar? It would make us like the image with the feet of clay, ready to be overthrown with the slightest shock. I have already shewn, that every class of labourers are in a better situation at present, than at any former period. And all master manufacturers and trades-

men well know, that cheap meal does not increase the comfort, or improve the habits of their workmen. But no further argument is necessary on the subject. It is a question worthy of the most serious attention of the legislature, and when considered with that cool deliberation which it so well merits, it will be found, that in supporting the agriculture of the country, all parties will benefit, as fortunately the interests of the whole are so blended, they must rise and fall together. By union among ourselves, we have been supported under one of the most severe struggles for our existence as a nation that stands upon record, and from a continuation of that union, we may still hope to prosper; but if a mutual jealousy takes place, and one party wishes to rise upon the ruin of the other, all must suffer; and if again called upon, we will find, when too late, the evil tendency of such selfish principles. Let us remember the bundle of sticks; united invincible, divided of no strength.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

N. LOWIS.

*George's Square, April 20, 1814.*

# POSTSCRIPT.

Since my Letter went to press, the Committees appointed by the different Incorporations, and other Societies of Edinburgh, Leith, Canongate, Calton, and Easter and Wester Portsburgh, have published the resolutions unanimously adopted by them, after the most deliberate consideration, at a meeting held for the purpose of considering the Bill now pending in Parliament, for increasing the prices at which corn may be imported into Great Britain from Foreign ports. And in these resolutions it is stated, "that they humbly conceive £2:7:7½ per boll, or nearly 96s. the quarter for wheat, is an adequate return to the proprietor for rent, and to the cultivator for labour, expences, and professional exertion." I have reason to suppose that the information collected by these gentlemen must be more correct than mine. I may, therefore, have committed an error in stating that wheat can be raised in this county at from 84s. to 90s. the quarter, as they have taken it at 96s. I hope, therefore, that when the petition of the Incorporations is laid before Par-

liament, proper attention will be paid to this circumstance, as it must appear strange, that after admitting £2 : 7 : 7½ per boll, or nearly 96s. the quarter, to be a fair price for wheat, they should unanimously agree to oppose any change in the existing Corn Laws, when the landholders only request to be guarded up to 84s. or 90s. the quarter. The present price of wheat is 68s. the quarter, and is still falling. The necessity, therefore, of some Parliamentary measure to secure the agriculture of the country, must be obvious.

N. LOWIS.

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Chapman, Thomas  
making to know the  
value of the  
paper