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A N
 E N Q U I R Y
 INTO THE NATURE OF THE
 C O R N - L A W S;
 WITH A VIEW TO THE
 N E W C O R N - B I L L
 PROPOSED FOR
 S C O T L A N D.

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To
Mr James Gray
Writer
Edin
From
The Author

T O

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

HENRY DUNDAS of MELVIL,

L O R D A D V O C A T E

F O R

S C O T L A N D.

My LORD,

I BEG leave to inscribe this small tract to your Lordship, as to one of whose talents and disposition I entertain a very high opinion. It can lay claim to one merit at least, that of being written with candour, with a cordial desire to promote the real happiness and prosperity of all the inhabitants of Scotland.

IF it shall be found to deserve your Lordship's attention ; and if it shall have the good fortune to obtain a serious and attentive perusal from others who are interested in the subject of which it treats, the wishes of the author will be accom-

plished; for he is not so desirous of having his own ideas on this subject adopted by others, as to induce them to be *certain* that any other system that may be adopted shall at least be equally beneficial to the public.

I have the honour to be, with the most respectful esteem,

My LORD,

Your Lordship's most obedient

and most humble servant,

MONKSHILL, Dec. 15. }
1777.

JAS ANDERSON.

A N
I N Q U I R Y, &c.

THE writer of this small tract has read over with attention all the publications that have come to his hand, relating to the proposed corn-bill for Scotland, in hopes that the subject of the corn-laws would be so fully elucidated by the different authors, as to enable the well-intentioned citizen to know with some degree of certainty in what manner the law ought to be framed, so as to prove most beneficial to the community at large. He thinks this is a matter of too much importance to be looked upon with indifferenc; and as this object appears to him in a light very different from that in which it seems to have been viewed by others, he has been induced at length, though late, to take up the pen, with a view to suggest to his countrymen such remarks as have occurred to himself in reflecting on that subject; which he submits to their consideration with the greater willingness, that he is not conscious of being biased in favour of any party, but is equally desirous of moderating the excesses of the one as of the other. To render this matter the more intelligible, I shall first premise some general observations, and then apply these to our own particular case at present.

P A R T F I R S T.

IN one important particular relating to this question, all parties seem to agree; that is, in admitting that a bounty on the exportation of grain, judiciously applied, may prove highly beneficial to the country. This seems to be so generally the sense of the nation at present, as renders it unnecessary here to take up the reader's time in producing any arguments in support of it.

That the price of grain at home will be regulated by the importation-rate denied, except in certain cases.

IN another particular the writers on both sides of the question seem to be agreed, viz. in believing that the price of grain will be effectually regulated by the rate at which it shall be allowed to be imported. Upon this, as an acknowledged truth that needs not to be proved, both parties reason with much keenness. But here I must beg leave to dissent from both; and if it can be proved that this opinion is erroneous, all the reasoning that depends upon it must fall to the ground; and with it ought to fall all those illiberal prejudices that have sprung from the same source.

THAT the price of grain, in years of great scarcity, must be in some measure regulated by the rate at which importation is permitted, will not be denied: for on these occasions, if there is not enough of grain in the country itself to support the whole of its inhabitants, that deficiency must be supplied by importation from some other country; as that importation cannot be permitted, till necessity has raised the price in the home-market to the rate at which it is fixed by law, however exorbitant that price may be. It does not, however, from hence follow, either that the price of grain will in general be nearly equal to the importation-rate, if that is exorbitantly high, or that it will sink nearly so far, if that should be placed immoderately low; for the average-price of grain must depend on other circumstances that are by no means inseparably connected with the legal importation-rate.

The price of grain is regulated by the proportion between the demand and the quantity brought to market.

THE price of any commodity, but especially of such perishable commodities as grain, will always be regulated by the proportion that subsists between the demand for it and the quantity that can be brought to market at any place and time. If more grain is offered to sale at any time than the purchasers have occasion for, part of it must remain unsold; and if it does not appear that this has been occasioned by circumstances merely casual, those who have immediate occasion for money, or who wish to be freed of the expence and risk of keeping it, will agree to part with it at a very low rate; nor will any purchasers appear unless that rate is extremely low, for fear they may not get it again disposed of with profit. Hence it follows, that a little more brought to market than answers the effective demand, continued for any time, occasions a very great fall of the price. On the other hand, if the quantity of grain brought to market falls

falls but a very little short of the effective demand for it at the time; and if that deficiency shall appear in several succeeding market-days, those who find themselves in want, afraid of being deprived of it entirely, will agree to give for it almost any price the feller chooses to demand. In this manner the prices continually vibrate in every market, and always finally settle according to the rule above mentioned. The price, therefore, at which importation is permitted can never regulate the price of grain in the home-market; except in years of scarcity, when the price of grain rises higher than that for which it can be afforded in other countries, or when the quantity reared at home is not sufficient to supply the whole of the demand. In all other cases it must be the price that can be drawn for it, in some other accessible market, that must finally determine the price at home.

IF it thus appears, that a high importation-rate cannot operate in raising the price of grain, except in years of scarcity, so neither would the importation-rate, if fixed extremely low, insure cheapness to the inhabitants of this country. At whatever rate importation should be permitted, it could have no effect in lowering the market-price, unless corn could be imported cheaper from some other country than it could be raised for by our own farmers; but if, from a superior degree of fertility in other countries than our own, corn could frequently be imported cheaper than our own farmers could rear it, our farmers would be obliged to desert that employment, and betake themselves to some other one, and the country must then be supplied with grain chiefly from abroad. In this case, it would be the price it could be bought for in foreign countries, or the rate at which it could be afforded for by our own farmers that would regulate the price, and not the price at which importation is permitted.

IT thus appears, that those who keenly contend either for a very high or a very low importation-rate, express an undue eagerness for a circumstance that is but very immaterial in itself for answering the purpose each of them have in view; as it cannot have very much effect in regulating the general average price of grain.

NEVERTHELESS it does not follow, that the price at which importation shall be permitted is of little consequence to the nation; for it will require but little trouble to show that if it shall

The rate at which importation is permitted can have but little influence on the average price of grain

It is, however, of importance that the importation-price be neither too high nor too low.

be either unreasonably low, or disproportionably high, it must be productive of very pernicious effects upon the community at large, unless these effects are counteracted by some other means; and that, in both cases, it would tend equally to frustrate the views of the present advocates for the very high or the very low importation-price. This I shall endeavour briefly to explain, by tracing with accuracy the consequences that would naturally result from the one or the other of these regulations.

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AND *first*, Let us suppose that the favourers of the low importation-price had got their wishes accomplished. If that very low importation-rate should be under the price at which the kind of corn in question could be afforded for by our own farmers in ordinary years, (which for the sake of the argument we must here suppose), it would follow, that if corn could be brought from any other country at that low price, many of our farmers would be under the necessity of abandoning that unprofitable employment: that in consequence of this, much ground would be allowed to remain untilled, which in other circumstances might have been cultivated with profit: less grain would thus be produced in this country, and rents in general would of course fall very considerably. All this is supposing, that, in years of great plenty, corn could be brought from other countries at a rate little, if at all higher than the import-price; if this was not so, the low import-rate could produce no manner of effect whatever.

IN these circumstances, the law would seem to favour those who think they espouse the cause of the poor, and who are well pleased at every rub they can give to those of high rank:—but we must trace the consequence farther.

It is evident, that, in consequence of this regulation, the inhabitants would quickly be brought to the necessity of depending on others for their daily subsistence; and although in years of great plenty they might perhaps be abundantly supplied by foreign nations at a low rate;—What would become of them in times of general scarcity? Their own trifling crop would afford but a scanty pittance, and the supplies from abroad must be purchased at what price these foreigners please to demand for it, if they agree to part with it at any price; and that price must be farther heightened by the amount of freight, factorage, and
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merchants profits, not to mention sea-hazard, and the still more dangerous risk of losses in time of war from foreign enemies. In these circumstances famine, with all its direful consequences, would be unavoidable; and the poor would be thrown into a state of distress infinitely greater than any thing we have occasion to fear from laws enacted by a legislature so well informed in general as ours is at present.

LET us now see if the advocates for the high importation-rate would be nearer the purpose they have in view, should the law be made to their liking, and if too high,

IN years of scarcity, it has been already shown, that this regulation would very much enhance the price of grain; and so long as these deficient crops should continue, there can be no doubt but that the home-price would be kept up extremely high. In consequence of these high prices, the farmers would exert themselves as much as possible to raise more grain; and as the profits in that business would be thus increased beyond that of any other employment, others, in hopes of sharing in these profits, would wish to engage in that business; a competition for farms would thus be established, and the rents would be considerably raised (a). So far all succeeds according to the wishes of the advocates for this system. The revenues of men of landed property would indeed be increased; and it is perhaps to them a matter of small concern what becomes of the other parts of the community. But seldom is such selfish policy attended with success; and we must now proceed to view the other side of the picture.

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(a) IN consequence of this competition, it is plain, that although it were possible, by any political regulation, to raise the price of grain to a very exorbitant rate, and keep it so, this would be attended with no permanent advantage to the farmer. A temporary artificial rise of price would, indeed, enrich the tenants at the time; but were this great price to continue, in consequence of the concurrence already mentioned, farms would rise proportionally in rent, and the farmers would reap just as little profit from their business as if the permanent price of grain were ever so low. A temporary rise or depression of price can only affect the farmers; a permanent rise can only prove beneficial to the proprietors: the interests indeed of these two classes of people, as to this particular, are so diametrically opposite, that what proves bene-
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but in years of plenty would make it sink into-lerably low;

and would occasion a perpetual fluctuation between the extremes of high and low prices.

IN consequence of this high encouragement for rearing corn, it cannot be doubted, but that in a short time, much more of it would be reared than formerly; so, that even if unfavourable seasons should continue, the quantity reared would be more than sufficient to supply the home-market. But when favourable seasons should come, the quantity produced would be so disproportionately great, that the price would sink in the home-market immeasurably low, and grain would become a perfect drug on the hands of the farmer, which he would not know how to get rid of. Farmers in these circumstances would be unable to pay a rent, and bankruptcies must follow. That business, which of late was the most profitable, would now become beyond all proportion the least so of any that could be followed; and every person would be now as eager to leave it, as they were formerly desirous to engage in it. The ground would, therefore, be in a short time much worse cultivated than before; less abundant crops would be the consequence, and the former high prices must in course return. Thus would the nation (unless in a long course of settled equal seasons and crops) be kept in a perpetual struggle between the bad effects of high and of low prices.

Agriculture

beneficial to the one can only be so in consequence of its not being beneficial to the other. I take notice of this circumstance here to remove the prejudices of the numerous body of the farmers, whose interest, on a superficial view, seems to be connected with the permanent rise in the price of grain, but which is entirely unconnected with it. Nothing is indeed more common than for artificers of any particular profession, extremely eager to adopt any regulation that seems to favour the particular calling they follow, firmly persuaded that they will be permanently benefited by those regulations. Such hope, however, is vain, and will be found at last illusory. They do not at the time advert, that no sooner shall it appear that their profits are great, than others will crowd into that profession, till in a short time, from the extraordinary competition that this will occasion, the profits will be reduced for a time lower than that of most other professions. Regulations of this tendency, therefore, do never answer the end proposed, and always prove extremely hurtful to the community, as they derange the ordinary course of business, keep the minds of men fluctuating and unsteady, that prevents them from either benefiting themselves or the community, so much as by a uniform steady exertion of industry in one particular line.

Agriculture and manufactures would be equally discouraged; and every person in the state, from the highest to the lowest, would become successive sufferers by this injudicious regulation.

THIS is not a fancy-picture I draw. The effects of a regulation of this kind are just now experienced in some degree in Scotland (a). In consequence of the efforts of farmers, and more tolerable seasons for two years past than had been experienced for near a dozen of years before that period, (which had raised the price of grain on many occasions above its proper medium price), the price of grain, oat-meal especially, has fallen so very low, as to threaten very distressful consequences. It was probably with a view to ward off these threatened ills that the law which gave occasion to the present enquiry has been proposed. Whether, in the form it was originally introduced, it would answer these salutary purposes or not, it imports us next to enquire.

Scotland at present suffers some distress from this cause.

A VERY slight degree of attention is sufficient to discover, that the inconveniences that result from both these extremes, might be effectually avoided, by fixing the importation-rate at a proper medium standard, and by granting a bounty on exportation, properly proportioned to the circumstances of the case. By the first of these institutions, the farmer would be secured against the competition of foreign merchants in ordinary years; by the last, he might be enabled to send his grain to a foreign market in years of great plenty, without being under the necessity of selling at an unreasonably low price. All that is necessary, therefore, in discussing the present question, is to ascertain, upon equitable principles, what might be deemed a medium price at which the particular kind of grain in question should be allowed to be imported, and what ought to be the amount of the bounty, in that particular case, to produce the desired effect, and no more.

An enquiry how these evils might be prevented.

WERE all countries equally fertile, and was commerce free from restrictions in all the nations of Europe, nothing more would be necessary to insure the beneficial effects required, but barely to leave the commerce of grain perfectly free from any restraints, and allow things to take their natural course. But, seeing

A free commerce of grain would prove ineffectual.

(a) THAT these effects have not been more severely felt, must be attributed to some causes that will be explained in the sequel.

seeing that some countries in Europe are so fertile as to be capable of producing grain at half the price for which it could be reared for in others, and since the commerce of every country is encumbered with some restraints either temporary or permanent, it behoves every considerate nation to endeavour to discover some more effectual remedy against the grievous ills above enumerated, than the ideal benefits that would accrue from an apparently free commerce of grain would produce. It was these considerations that determined the British legislature to adopt the idea of first granting a bounty on the exportation of grain; and the happy effects that have accrued from thence, sufficiently evinces the wisdom of that measure. But I must now descend to particulars.

P A R T S E C O N D.

Particular observations. Oats and oat-meal can be raised cheaper in some other countries than in Scotland; therefore it is necessary to prohibit the importation of these till the price is above the medium rate they can be afforded for in Scotland. The medium price of oatmeal in Mid-Lothian found to be about 2s. or 2s. 6d. per boll.

WITH respect to the commerce of oats and oat-meal in Scotland, (the only object of the proposed law, and the only particulars intended to be narrowly enquired into in this tract), there can be no doubt that there are several countries in which these articles could be reared at a much smaller expence than in Scotland; so that if there was no law against the importation of oats, &c. at any time, into this country, oats, or oat-meal, could be brought from these countries, and sold in our market cheaper than they could be afforded for by our own farmers; which would unavoidably discourage our agriculture, and bring us in time to be in some measure dependent on these foreign nations for our daily bread: the consequences of which circumstance have been already enumerated.

FOR these reasons, it is allowed, by most persons who have reflected on this subject, that foreign oats, or oat-meal, ought not to be allowed to be imported and sold in our markets, unless when the price rises somewhat higher than it can be afforded for by our own farmers in ordinary years. If so, it will be necessary to ascertain what is the price it can be afforded for by our farmers in ordinary years.

THE only natural rule that I can think of applying, with a view to ascertain this question, is to look back and see at what price the kinds of grain in question have been actually sold for by our own farmers for a reasonable number of years past. Upon these principles, on looking into the fiars of Mid-Lothian for twenty

twenty years backwards, it appears, that the average price of the best oat-meal during that period, amounts to about thirteen shillings per boll, reckoning eight stone Scots troy a boll. From whence I think we may reasonably infer, that oat-meal could not be reared for much less than that price, and that it might in general be afforded by our farmers at I suppose, about twelve and sixpence or twelve shillings, were the market-price steady (a).

IT does not, however, follow that importation ought to be permitted, whenever the price should exceed twelve shillings: for as this is the rate at which it can only be afforded by the farmer when he has a middling crop; if he should not receive a higher price for his grain in a scanty season, to make up for the deficiency in quantity, it is plain that he would, on these occasions, be a considerable loser, and therefore be unable to carry on his business properly. On this account, it is just and expedient to prevent foreign grain from coming in competition with him in the home-market, till the price shall rise to such a rate as to indemnify him for his deficiency in quantity.

IT has been computed, and I think with some degree of justice, that the greatest variation between a scanty crop, and one of great plenty, may amount to a fourth part nearly of a medium crop. Supposing this calculation to be just, the farmer to be indemnified, ought to receive one eighth of the average price more for each boll of his grain in the greatest scarcity, if he can sell it in years of the greatest plenty at not above one eighth of the same average price lower than the same medium price. At this rate, the ports ought to be shut against foreigners, until the price rose at least one shilling and sixpence higher than the medium rate, that is, to thirteen shillings and sixpence at least, or fourteen shillings per boll; and the farmer ought at the same time to be secured against being ever under the necessity of selling his oat-meal at a lower rate than ten shillings and sixpence, or eleven shillings per boll: for if he is in the one case under the necessity of selling at any time below that price, there will be an equal necessity of insuring him a proportionally higher price in years of scarcity; and therefore that the ports ought not to be opened for importation till the price should rise to that higher rate.

FROM this view of the matter, it appears, that unless a market be opened for the farmer, to which he can carry his surplus produce

(a) THE reasons for supposing the average might be lower, if the selling price was steady, will appear from the sequel.

The import-rate ought to be placed as much above the medium selling price, as the lowest price in years of plenty is below that medium price.

Necessity of providing a market for the surplus produce in years of plenty, to prevent an excessive lowness of price.

produce in years of plenty, without allowing the price ever to sink immoderately low, there will be a necessity of suffering the price to rise very high in years of scarcity. But as nothing can be so destructive to the interest of agriculture or manufactures, as great variations in the price of bread-corn, it ought to be the chief concern of a well informed legislature, to prevent, if possible, these variations of price. And as it is not possible to effect this, without providing a steady market for grain at a reasonable price in years of great plenty, their chief efforts ought to be directed towards that object.

An enquiry where that market is to be found.

IT cannot be denied, that the home-market will never be abundantly supplied in ordinary years, or in those in which the crop is scanty, unless much more is produced in favourable seasons than is sufficient to answer the home-demand abundantly. To prevent, therefore, the unreasonable degradation of price that must necessarily ensue from this superabundance, that surplus produce must be carried to some foreign market. But when we look around us to discover where that market for oats or oat-meal is to be found, the prospect is extremely discouraging. Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, with their dependencies, are the only countries where these products are ever in request; and these may be equally supplied from Poland as from hence (a). The price of these articles too, in these countries, is often so very low, as affords but small prospect of relief to our farmers, without the powerful support of the legislature, by granting a very high bounty, when the circumstances are such as to make this necessary. That we may be able to ascertain the amount of that bounty so as to make it prove effectual, and the variations that would be necessary to prevent it from being hurtful, we must here enter into some unavoidable details.

Norway, Denmark, or Sweden, the only market for oat-meal.

The price in these countries is sometimes extremely low.

It is, in the first place, necessary to enquire, what is the lowest price at which oats or oat-meal is ever sold for in these markets, to which we must send our surplus produce in years of plenty. Upon enquiry, I have been assured by a sensible man, who resided many years in Norway as a merchant, that the price of oat-meal there is frequently as low, as at the rate of eight shillings our boll; but that it is subject to, considerable fluctuations of price in different seasons; and the markets in Denmark and Sweden

(a) I do not mention Holland as a market; because her commerce of oats, &c. is merely as an entreport between Poland and the northern countries.

den are nearly the same. Supposing then, that the amount of insurance, commission, merchants profits, freight, &c. in carrying oats or oat-meal to these markets, should be one shilling and sixpence per boll, it would follow, that in years of plenty the price must fall to six shillings sixpence per boll in Scotland before we could sell any of it in these markets. This is supposing no bounty to be granted.

BUT six shillings and sixpence is a price so inadequately low as could afford no relief to our farmers. And if it be true that twelve shillings or twelve shillings and sixpence is the medium price for which it can be afforded by our farmers; and if it be likewise true that the interest of the community would be most highly promoted by keeping the price of grain at all times as near to that medium standard as possible, (which will not be denied by any thinking person), it will follow, that a bounty ought, in this case, to be granted so high as to raise the price sufficiently in the home-market, while it permitted it to be sold in the foreign market at that low rate. Let us, for example, suppose it were required to prevent the meal in our home-market from ever falling below eleven shillings per boll on the one hand, or of rising above thirteen shillings on the other; it is plain, that when prices are as above stated, it would be necessary to grant a bounty of no less than four shillings and sixpence per boll to produce the desired effect.

Therefore they on these occasions could afford no effectual relief to the farmer without the aid of a very high bounty.

A LITTLE reflection, however, will convince us, that there would be no necessity for granting the same bounty in other cases, but that it would rather frustrate the design of granting it. Let us suppose, for example, that the price in the foreign market should at some times be ten shillings instead of eight, it will appear, by a chain of reasoning similar to the foregoing, that if the same bounty of four shillings and sixpence were then continued, instead of eleven shillings, the price in our home-market would be raised to thirteen shillings per boll. And if the price abroad should be twelve shillings per boll, and the same bounty continued, the price at home must in this case be raised to fifteen shillings, unless some means were fallen upon to correct it. But as it never could be the aim of a wise legislature to expend the public treasure, by granting bounties with a view to enhance the price of grain beyond its natural value in the home-market, it is not to be supposed that ever a law of this nature would be allowed to pass, even if a bill for this purpose should be preferred; as it is plain, that

This high bounty would only be necessary on particular occasions.

that all the beneficial purposes proposed by the bounty, that of affording a steady market to the farmer, and of keeping the price of grain as free from variation as possible, would be effected by granting, in the two cases above mentioned, the following bounties; viz. when the price abroad should be ten shillings, a bounty of two shillings and sixpence; and when the price was twelve shillings abroad, a bounty only of sixpence *per* boll; as, in both these cases, the price in the home-market would be kept steadily from falling below eleven shillings *per* boll.

Hence it appears that the rate of the bounty ought not on any occasion to be fixed invariably.

BY this train of reasoning we are led to draw a conclusion relating to the influence of bounties in general, that is of importance to be attended to, viz. that one invariable bounty, granted in all cases wherein it can be at all claimed, will not so effectually answer the beneficial purposes for which bounties deserve applause, as if the rate of that bounty should be properly varied according to the necessity of the case. This doctrine has been illustrated in the foregoing paragraph; and the justness of it will be farther apparent from any other cases that may be selected for that purpose. Let us suppose another case, and try it by the same test.

The bounty proposed by the new law would on some occasions be too small, and on others too great, so that it would prove ineffectual for relieving the farmer.

It is proposed by the law depending in parliament, that a bounty of two shillings and sixpence shall be granted on the exportation of every boll of oats or oatmeal, while the price of the last in the home-market does not exceed fourteen shillings *per* boll. Now if this bill should pass into a law, it is plain, that when the price in foreign markets is so low as eight shillings *per* boll, the price in the home-market must fall as low as nine shillings, before our farmers can carry any of their grain to these markets. So that if the plenty of grain is produced in this country, which the supporters of this bill flatter themselves will be the case, it must frequently happen that the price of oat-meal will sink below that rate. On the other hand, when, from any accidental failure of crop abroad, the price should rise these to twelve shillings *per* boll, the price in our home-market would be raised to thirteen shillings; and so on of higher prices. By this means the bounty, while it affords no effectual relief to the farmer in plentiful years, will only tend to enhance the price at home, without any necessity or utility on other occasions. I say without any *utility*, because according to this supposition, the high price at home will not in many cases be so much influenced by the deficiency of our own crops, as by that

that of our neighbours; it may therefore happen that our farmers will on some occasions receive a very high price for their grain when they have an abundant crop, and a much lower price for it at another time, though their crop should be more scanty; by which means they would have an unreasonable plenty at one time, and as unproportioned a scarcity at another; a circumstance that could not fail to be attended with very baneful consequences. Let any other rate of *fixed* bounty be proposed, and the same consequences will be found to result from it.

THERE is still one other inconvenience that results from an invariable bounty, that deserves to be taken notice of. As the quantity exported appears thus to depend rather on the price abroad than on the amount of our own crop, it must frequently happen, that, in consequence of a sudden demand from abroad, great quantities might be shipped off, even in a scanty season, before that scarcity was perceived, so as to raise the price above the rate at which exportation is prohibited; and as the exporters, according to this system, would be entitled to receive the full bounty, even when the price at home was but one half-penny below the prohibited price, they would continue to export as fast when it was at that rate, as at any other, if the price abroad was such as to afford them a prospect of profit. But in consequence of that great exportation in a scanty year, it would come at length to be discovered, that there was not enough of grain left in the country for the support of its inhabitants; the price of course must rise till it should come to the rate at which importation is permitted; and it might thus happen that the same grain, which in the beginning of the season was exported, and a bounty paid for it, would in the end of the season be reimported for our own use.

And would prove an unnecessary drain from the public revenue.

THIS is an evil of which the English have often complained, although they have not hitherto been able to discover any better cure for the disorder, than to enact temporary laws, by which exportation has been for a time prohibited when the danger became apparent. On many accounts, however, the English could not be subjected to such inconveniences from this cause as Scotland would be liable to. The market for wheat, the principal article of export from England, is much more steady than that for oat-meal from Scotland would be; on which account the bounty may with safety be placed lower, in proportion to its

This evil has been felt in England, but no remedy for it has been yet discovered.

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value,

value, than for meal, which will diminish the temptation. This alone; not to mention the smaller chance of getting the distress of the country so quickly known, so as to obtain a remedy, with some other inconveniencies not necessary to be here enumerated, should make the legislators for Scotland extremely careful, if possible, to adopt some contrivance by which these evils may be obviated.

These evils might be removed by making the rate of the bounty depend at all times on the market-price of grain.

ALL these evils might be effectually obviated, with a considerable saving to the revenue, by the simple contrivance of granting, instead of a fixed bounty, one that should vary always according to the exigency of the case; being highest when grain is cheap, and lowest when dear. It would be an endless task to ascertain the prices in foreign markets, and proportion the bounty to these prices, as in the foregoing examples: but that is not necessary. A much better rule would be, to make the rate of the bounty vary according to the selling price in our own market; for this price, it is plain, must first depend upon the abundance of our own crop, and next upon the market-price abroad. If our crop is no more than sufficient to supply the home-demand, the price will not fall extremely low, however low the price abroad may be; but if there is more than can be consumed at home, then, and not till then, the low price abroad will begin to be felt in our own markets. It is fit therefore that on these occasions the bounty should be such as to force our corn into these markets, without too much raising the price at home. But if the bounty gradually encreases as the price decreases, and as gradually sinks as the price rises to a certain rate, exportation would always take place when it was necessary, and on no other occasion. To illustrate this, let us endeavour to ascertain what would seem to be a reasonable bounty, and how it ought in equity to vary in proportion to the price.

An enquiry into the proportion that ought to obtain between the market-price of grain and the rate of bounty, so as to produce the desired effect.

IT appears reasonable, that no attempt should be made to raise the price of grain higher than the medium rate. If so, it will follow, that when the price rises to that medium rate, the bounty ought not to exceed the amount of the charges necessary to carry it to a foreign market. From these *data*, it will follow, that when oat-meal sells for twelve shillings and sixpence *per* boll, the bounty should not exceed one shilling and sixpence; as the first of these has been already fixed as the medium price, and the last the average charge of freight, &c. to a foreign market.

SUPPOSE also it should be in general admitted, that exportation

tion ought to be entirely prohibited after the price at home rose to fourteen shillings *per* boll; it is consistent with reason, and would perfectly agree with the spirit of our corn-laws, to make the bounty gradually decrease as the price should rise, so as to fall to nothing at all before it reached the rate at which exportation ceases entirely.

ON these principles it would seem quite consistent with equity and sound policy, to make the bounty fall sixpence for every sixpence *per* boll that the price in the home-market should rise; at which rate the price and the bounty would vary as follows: *viz.* when the price is twelve shillings and sixpence *per* boll, the bounty should be one shilling and sixpence,—when the price rose above twelve shillings and sixpence, and did not exceed thirteen shillings, the bounty should fall to one shilling; when it rose above thirteen shillings, and did not exceed thirteen shillings and sixpence, the bounty should be only sixpence; and when it rose to fourteen shillings, exportation to be entirely prohibited.

IF it be allowed that the rate of the bounty ought to decrease as the price rises *above* the medium rate, it will be impossible to deny that it ought to rise in proportion as the price sinks below that medium rate, if we hope to preserve the market-price of grain always very near the medium standard price; which is the great object that ought never to be lost sight of in regulating the commerce of grain. This being granted, we are led to conclude, that the amount of the bounty granted on exportation, ought to be proportioned to the price; as in the following table:

Result of this enquiry with respect to oats and oat-meal in Scotland.

When oat-meal is at or above 14 s. *per* boll, exportation prohibited;

between 14 s. 6 d. and 13 s. exportation permitted without any bounty;

between 13 s. and 13 s. 6 d. a bounty of sixpence *per* boll to be granted on exportation;

between 13 s. and 12 s. 6 d. a bounty of 1 s. *per* ditto;

between 12 s. 6 d. and 12 s. ditto of 1 s. 6 d. *per* ditto;

between 12 s. and 11 s. 6 d. ditto of 2 s. *per* ditto;

between 11 s. 6 d. and 11 s. ditto of 2 s. 6 d. *per* ditto;

between 11 s. and 10 s. 6 d. ditto of 3 s. *per* ditto;

between 10 s. 6 d. and 10 s. ditto of 3 s. 6 d. *per* ditto;

between 10 s. and 9 s. 6 d. ditto of 4 s. *per* ditto;

between 9 s. 6 d. and 9 s. ditto of 4 s. 6 d. *per* ditto;

and when at or under 9 s. ditto of 5 s. *per* boll. (a)

THE

(a) IT would be more equitable, and would more effectually insure

Objection to the plan here proposed for regulating the amount of the bounty in all cases.

THE above is the best plan that at present occurs to me for regulating the bounty upon equitable principles, so as to make it prove at all times beneficial to every order of citizens, at a small expence to the fisk, without being partially favourable to any one; but I doubt much if it will meet with the approbation of any one order in the community. The air of novelty that it bears, will displease some; the apparent extravagant rate of the bounty proposed in some cases, will frighten others; the care that is taken to guard against very low prices on any occasion, will disgust a third party; and the equal attention that is bestowed to prevent prices from ever rising extravagantly high, will make the plan be contemptuously rejected by a fourth. But reason is for no party; and therefore will naturally be opposed by the partisans of every side. Hoping therefore that these observations may come to be re-considered in some future period, when experience shall have in part confirmed or refuted the justness of the principles on which they are founded, rather than entertaining any sanguine expectation of this influence at present, I calmly proceed to point out some of the benefits that would accrue from this system of legislation, should it ever be adopted.

Answer.

I WOULD wish to obviate all the above exceptions, because I believe they may severally occur to many individuals who are actuated by the best intentions. To those who are startled with the novelty of the proposal, no other answer needs be given, but merely to beg that they will lay aside their prejudices, and calmly consider whether the proposal is in itself reasonable or not. Every improvement that the experience or ingenuity of man suggests on the practice of his forefathers has the same objection to encounter; yet no man will say that this ought to deter us from endeavouring to make still greater improvements than are yet known. Among all the political innovations of modern times, none was more bold, or more contrary to the general ideas of superficial observers, than the granting a bounty at all on the exportation of grain; as it apparently encourages a commerce that seems naturally calculated to enhance, instead of lowering

a steady market-price, to diminish the bounty still more than in the above table when prices are high, and to make it still higher when the prices are low; but this I dare not at present propose. The minds of mankind must be gradually prepared for it, before they could perceive the utility of such a regulation in its full force.

This plan would effectually remove a very material defect in the corn-laws which has never yet been obviated.

lowering the price of grain. Yet the experience of near a century has now shown, that those who reasoned otherwise were right; and England enjoys the fruits of that liberal reasoning. It is not, however, surprising that experience should discover some defects in the mode of proportioning that bounty, which did not occur to the first proposers of that law; but it would be not a little surprising if these improvements should be now disregarded, merely on account of their novelty.

THAT the proposed amendment is entirely consonant to the spirit of that law which originally granted a bounty on the exportation of corn, will not be denied by any attentive observer. The bounty was evidently intended to help our grain, to find a market in years of great plenty, without depressing the price to an unreasonable degree: and although it may, on some extraordinary emergencies, according to the present mode of granting that bounty, be the cause of raising the price in our home-market higher than it otherwise would have been, this arises entirely from an oversight in our legislators, which ought to be corrected, and not from any defect in the institution itself. It was evidently the intention of that law to prevent, as much as possible, prices from rising very high in times of scarcity; with which view the bounty is not only withdrawn when prices are high, but exportation itself is entirely prohibited. But if it is not only reasonable to withdraw the bounty, but is also necessary to prevent exportation entirely, when the prices rise to a certain rate; surely it would be prudent to diminish the temptation to export grain before it came to that high price: and every person must be sensible of the absurdity of granting to-day a very high bounty on exportation, although the grain is considerably above the medium price; and to-morrow, when the price has not risen above a penny higher, that the liberty of exporting, and the Power of demanding the bounty, should both fall together. This surely could never have been so long permitted, had it not been overlooked

SHOULD it be said, that when prices are high in the home-market, there will be little temptation to export to other countries, because it is probable the prices may not be so high in these markets as to indemnify the merchant for the charge of transporting it to these foreign markets. I answer, that this may be sometimes the case; but that the bounty prevents this in as far as its amount. But when there is a scarcity in foreign markets

markets at the same time that the scarcity is felt at home, it is evident the consequences may be very prejudicial. An example will prove this undeniable.

SUPPOSE that, in consequence of a general scarcity throughout Europe, the price of oat-meal should be in the markets abroad at thirteen shillings *per* boll, and that Scotland should have had such a crop as was quite sufficient to supply its whole inhabitants, and no more. At that rate, were no exportation to take place, the price would settle at twelve shillings and sixpence, and not be affected by the foreign prices. But if a fixed bounty of two shillings and sixpence *per* boll be granted in all cases when the price did not amount to fourteen shillings *per* boll, merchants would then be tempted to export a great deal, as they would, in this case, be able to draw fourteen shillings *per* boll in a foreign market. In consequence of this considerable exportation, the prices, after some time, would be raised at home to fourteen shillings; but towards the end of the season, the deficiency occasioned by the exportation in the beginning, would be felt, and then prices would rise so high, as to pay for bringing it from foreign countries. Thus, instead of twelve shillings and sixpence *per* boll, which it would have been at but for the high bounty and exportation occasioned by it, the price might be raised perhaps to seventeen or eighteen shillings *per* boll. For the price at last would depend entirely on the rate it was selling for at the time in foreign markets.

BUT if the bounty had been regulated as in the table above, these inconveniencies could not have been felt almost at all. In consequence of the very first demand for exportation, the price would have been raised above twelve shillings and sixpence; at which rate, a bounty of one shilling *per* boll only could have been demanded: but with this bounty the merchant could only receive twelve shillings and sixpence clear in the foreign market. And his profit being thus reduced to nothing, the exportation would of course be stopped, and we would enjoy plenty, with moderate prices, at home.

THE same truth might be exemplified, by assuming other prices at pleasure, either higher or lower than this one here selected: from all of which the beneficial consequences of this regulation would appear incontestibly evident: but as any reader of the most moderate capacity can compare the effects of a fixed bounty in every case, with that suggested in the above table,

I leave it as a praxis for himself, supposing that the general fact is sufficiently demonstrated by the above example.

TO those who are startled by the apparent greatness of the bounty on some occasions, and who may from thence infer, that it would become extremely burdensome to the revenue; I would beg leave to suggest, that the high rate of bounty could only take place when the prices were extremely low; a thing that can but very seldom happen, and must be of short continuance whenever it should accidentally occur. For if a very moderate exportation were to take place on these occasions, the price, in consequence of that exportation, would gradually be raised, and with it would fall the rate of the bounty. Any one who bestows but a very slight attention to the prices in Scotland for many years past, will easily satisfy himself, that, by the aid of a bounty nearly equal to what is here proposed, it would not perhaps be once in twenty years so low, or at least below ten shillings *per* boll; and I myself am so much convinced that this would be found to be the case in practice, that unless it had been for shewing the equity of the principles on which this table is constructed, I should hardly have extended it below ten shillings. If then we have reason to suppose, that grain would seldom be below that price, it must follow, that the bounty, when at the very highest rate, would only be one shilling higher than that which is proposed, in all cases, by the present bill. So far, therefore, would this plan be from squandering the public revenue, that I think one of its principal advantages would be that of saving a great deal of money that would be unnecessarily expended by the proposed law. For as there would be, according to that bill, an equal temptation to export grain when at thirteen shillings and tenpence as when at ten shillings, it might be concluded, that exportation would equally take place at all these prices; although it might often happen, that it would be necessary to supply the deficiency occasioned by an over-exportation, by a subsequent re-importation. But as there could be no temptation by this plan for pushing exportation too far when prices are high, we must conclude, that more would be exported by the scheme proposed in the new Corn-bill, than by the other. And as the bounty on every boll, in the first case, would be two shillings and sixpence, and the average bounty, in the other case, would not be much more than one shilling and sixpence, there is the greatest reason to believe, that not one half of the revenue

It would prove a great saving to the revenue.

would be expended in putting this plan in execution, that would be required annually, if the proposed bill should pass into a law (a).

It would effectually prevent the price of grain from ever falling unreasonably low. IN answer to the next objection, that, by this regulation, prices would never be so low as they have sometimes been known on former occasions (b). The fact is acknowledged, and it is believed, that every impartial person will admit, that many would be the benefits that would result from hence to the community. I do not think myself a foe to humanity; yet I am so sensible of the

(a) But if the bounty should to some appear still too high by this scheme, it might be made a little lower, without any other disadvantage accruing from it, save only that the prices in our home-market would be subject to greater variations, merely by making the bounty rise sixpence for every eightpence of fall in the price of meal; at which rate, the proportional bounty would be as under.

WHEN the price was from fourteen shillings to thirteen shillings and fourpence, exportation to be permitted without bounty.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| from 13 s. 4 d. to 12 s. 8 d. | a bounty of 6 d. per boll to be allowed. |
| from 12 s. 8 d. to 12 s. | ditto of 1 s. per ditto. |
| from 12 s. to 11 s. 4 d. | 1 s. 6 d. per ditto. |
| from 11 s. 4 d. to 10 s. 8 d. | 2 s. per ditto |
| from 10 s. 8 d. to 10 s. | 2 s. 6 d. per ditto. |
| from 10 s. to 9 s. 4 d. | 3 s. per ditto. |
| from 9 s. 4 d. to 8 s. 8 d. | 3 s. 6 d. per ditto. |
| from 8 s. 8 d. to 8 s. | 4 s. per ditto. |
| from 8 s. to all lower prices. | 4 s. 6 d. per ditto. |

THIS alteration might be agreed to, not as an amendment, but the reverse. It might, however, be adopted rather than lose the amendment altogether. One step towards improvement is always something gained; others in time would follow.

(b) THE author of, *Thoughts respecting the proposed Corn-bill, &c.* 4to, Edinburgh, 1777, imagines that many benefits would accrue to Scotland, if the price of oat-meal should be always at, or below ten shillings per boll. He seems also to think, that the price of grain is a thing merely arbitrary, that may be permanently raised or depressed in any country, almost at pleasure: but, happily for mankind, this is a matter of much greater difficulty than he seems to apprehend.

THERE are, no doubt, some fertile spots in Scotland, in which, if the rents were properly diminished, oats might be reared at ten shillings per boll. But all the grain that these spots could produce, would

the many inconveniencies that result from an unreasonable lowness of price, that I know of nothing that is more pernicious to society, or that ought to be guarded against with greater care, unless it be an inordinate highness of price, which is equally provided against in the proposed plan.

I AM afraid that the last objection, though not the most difficult to refute, will be the most difficult to overcome. High prices are so agreeable in idea, to those who would pocket the money, if it could be obtained, that the most sophistical argument, when it seems to point that way, assumes the mask of Reason herself; and reasons, when they have an opposite tendency, although supported by the certainty of demonstration, are too apt to be disregarded as dull and stupid, or stigmatized as petulant and impertinent.

ALTHOUGH it should be possible to keep the prices at all times very high, it would admit of a doubt how far it would be beneficial, even to men of landed property, to have it so; but if I shall be able to show, that the proposed bill, even if allowed to pass in the form its warmest advocates wish for, would not keep the prices in general so high as by the plan here proposed, it will be unnecessary to enter into that discussion.

AT whatever rate the importation-price be fixed, it has been shown,

would be far from being sufficient to sustain the whole of the inhabitants of Scotland; and as the greatest part of the oats that sustain our inhabitants at present, are reared upon soils that could not admit of being cultivated, unless the price of oats be rather above the medium price than below it, should the price be reduced to ten shillings per boll, there would be a necessity of abandoning all these barren soils by the plough, and our inhabitants would then be reduced to the necessity of depending on foreign nations for their bread-corn: the consequences of which have been already enumerated.

HE thinks, that by thus lowering the price of oats, greater encouragement would be given for rearing wheat. But the superior profit that arises from a crop of wheat, when compared with a crop of oats, upon a good soil, is already so great, as to be a sufficient temptation for rearing as much wheat as is possible, on soils that are proper for producing that kind of grain. He is not perhaps aware, that on moorish, rude soils, upon which tolerable crops of oats could be reared, by good management, at a moderate expence, it often happens that it would require an expence equal to what might be sufficient to purchase the soil in perpetuity, to bring it to a state capable of rearing abundant crops of wheat.

It would as effectually prevent it from ever becoming intolerably high;

and would thus prevent the great variations of price that must naturally be expected if the proposed bill should pass into a law;

shown, that the price in the home-market can never be influenced by it, *when our own produce is sufficient to maintain all our inhabitants*; and if, in consequence of the high encouragement given in years of scarcity, much more corn should be produced than was sufficient for that purpose, it will be the price in foreign markets that will regulate the home-price, and not the importation-rate. The author of *an Essay on the Corn-laws*, argues with the greatest keenness for raising the price of oat-meal in Scotland, which he thinks will be fully effected by fixing the importation-rate at sixteen shillings *per boll*. In consequence of this high price, he argues, that agriculture would be encouraged, and more and more of our barren wastes be improved. He is very right in attributing these effects to the rise of price, supposing it should take place; but he has forgot to tell us who is to pay that price. If Scotland at present produces as much grain as is sufficient to maintain all its inhabitants in an ordinary year, it follows, that it would *then* produce more than was necessary for that purpose: the home-market will therefore be more abundantly supplied than at present; which is not the way to raise the price here. And if oat-meal be in general higher in Scotland than in many other parts of Europe, it is not to be supposed that the inhabitants of these countries will agree to give that high price for it. Who then is to take this extraordinary quantity of grain off the farmer's hands at the exorbitant rate he proposes? it is plain that no one will agree to take it, unless such a high bounty is granted as to force it to a foreign market at their own price, while the farmer in Scotland receives the high price proposed to be given him. But as it has been already shewn, that if the bounty proposed, viz. two shillings and sixpence *per boll* were granted, it might frequently happen that our farmers would be obliged to sell their grain at nine shillings *per boll*; it follows, that the proposed bill would not be effectual for ensuring the high prices that are expected from it. And as, by the scheme here proposed, a bounty of five shillings is allowed if ever the price should fall so low as nine shillings, it follows, that the prices would be more effectually kept up by this scheme than by the proposed bill.

IF those who expect to derive great advantages from the proposed bill, in the way of raising the price of oats and oat-meal, argued consistently, they ought therefore to insist for a much higher

By the plan proposed in the new bill, oat-meal could not be kept steadily as high as fourteen shillings *per boll*, without the aid of a bounty of seven shillings and sixpence at least.

higher bounty than that which is therein proposed; because without this aid the high importation-rate, *supposing it could be effectually adhered to*, would be of no avail. There is no doubt, however, that if importation could be effectually prohibited till oat-meal rose to sixteen shillings *per boll*, and if an adequate bounty were granted, the price might be effectually raised to the rate proposed. But what would be the amount of that bounty? From the *data* already given, it will be found, that the bounty, to keep our oat-meal constantly as high as fourteen shillings, could not be less than seven shillings and sixpence *per boll* (a). A rate that no sober man would seriously propose; especially when it is considered, that this extravagant bounty could only be granted with a view to benefit one small part of the community, at the expence, and to the ruin of all the rest.

THE rearing of corn is no doubt a manufacture from which profit, in a commercial view, may be drawn, in proper circumstances, in the same manner as for any other manufacture. But as it would be vain to hope for making any nation thrive by encouraging a manufacture for which there is not a general demand, and which must at all times be sold below prime cost; and as it is plain that this must always be the case with regard to the commerce of oats or oat-meal from Scotland, nothing could be more absurd than an attempt to encourage that manufacture, *merely in a commercial view*. It is *for our preservation alone*, and for providing a reasonable security against want, or exorbitant prices of the necessaries of life, that we can, consistent with the dictates of prudence, give such high encouragement to that manufacture, as all ranks of persons at present are willing to admit is reasonable. All, therefore, that should, in our circumstances, be attempted, is to secure to the farmer a reasonable price, and steady demand for his produce, that he may be encouraged always to rear abundance to supply the home-

As it would be vain to propose to rear oats in Scotland, merely with a commercial view, the bounty should only be adopted to preserve ourselves from dearth.

(a) This is upon the supposition, that the price in foreign markets should never be below eight shillings *per boll*. But, even in the present situation of affairs, the price is often below that rate; and if Britain should force their grain in great quantities into these markets, they would be so overstocked by it, that the prices would of necessity fall very much below that rate; so that a still higher bounty would become necessary. In that case, it is probable that a bounty of ten shillings *per boll*, at least, would be necessary to produce the desired effect.

home-demand sufficiently, in the scantiest seasons. To do more would be manifestly hurtful, instead of beneficial to the state.

In the present state of Scotland, the price of grain could not be materially raised, even if the import-rate should be fixed at sixteen guineas per boll.

IT does not appear to me that those who favour the new Corn-bill, in the hopes that it will be the means of raising the price of oat-meal, &c. have examined the operation of the proposed law with any degree of attention. The rate of the bounty, which could only effectually answer their purpose, is so much neglected as hardly to be mentioned in any of their pamphlets; and they seem to rely on the importation-rate alone (a). It seems

(a) THE author of, *An Essay on the Corn-laws*, 8vo, Edinburgh, 1777, seems to be one of the most sanguine advocates for this rise of price. Arguing on that head, he observes: "If it be reasonable, when the riches of a country are greatly encreased, that the proprietors of land should participate the effects thereof, as well as other citizens, (and it does not occur how this can be denied), it follows necessarily, that the prices of grain ought not to be always the same. If this was to be the case, the landed men would have reason to grieve, in place of rejoicing, at the prosperity of their country; they would be no better than mere beasts of burden to the trading and manufacturing parts of this kingdom; the more the latter flourished, the more hard would be the condition of the former. Whilst the prices of other things encreased, in proportion to the riches of the country, grain, the commodity, or manufacture, or what you please to call it, by which they live, would always continue the same; and thus these gentlemen, amidst the greatest prosperity of their fellow-citizens, would every day be becoming more poor, because, whilst their income continued the same, they would have higher wages to pay their servants, and higher prices to give for all the commodities they wanted."

THIS author seems here to forget, that although the riches of England has been much encreased within the last hundred years; and although the price of grain has even *decreased* within that period, we do not meet with any complaints of a decline in the revenue of men of landed property: his argument, therefore, is contradicted by experience. The truth is, if farmers meet with proper markets, and due encouragement in other respects, they will be able to pay advanced rents, although they receive no greater price for each boll of their grain than formerly. And if the farmers *can* pay an advanced rent, there is no danger that the landed gentlemen will not obtain it.

IN arguing for a rise of the importation-rate of oat-meal in Scotland,

seems surprising, that those who think this a matter of so much importance should not have adverted, that, in the present situation of Britain as to the other corn-laws, if the importation-rate had been fixed at sixteen guineas instead of sixteen shillings, it

land, the same author is also unlucky; as the example of England directly contradicts his reasoning. The importation-rate in England for wheat was originally placed very high, in compliance with prejudices then generally entertained of the same kind with those at present current in Scotland. But experience showed the futility of this reasoning; and the importation-rate has been lowered from four pounds to forty-eight shillings per quarter: nor do we find that the smallest inconvenience has been felt from that alteration.

IN another part of his essay, the same author, supposing the price of oat-meal would be raised in consequence of the high importation-rate contended for, is at the pains to enter into a comparison of oat-meal and wheat-flour, with a view to show, that the poor in Scotland could live cheaper if the oat-meal should be at sixteen shillings per boll, than those of England could do at the ordinary price of their wheat. In this comparison he proceeds upon the supposition, that all the people in England eat only wheat-bread. But it appears from facts produced by the well-informed author of the Corn-tracts, published many years ago, that in many countries of England the people live as much upon oat-meal as they do in general in Scotland; and it is well known by every one who has been in England, and has attended to that matter, that in very few places do the ordinary people live entirely on wheat-flour, rye-bread being very common in many other counties: so that were the matter in point, his arguments would not be admitted as fairly deduced.

IT deserves likewise to be observed, that there is a natural difference between the value of oat-meal and wheat-flour, that no political regulation could ever entirely remove, where they can both be obtained. In the *first* place, flour is universally prized as most delicate and palatable, and therefore it will always fetch a greater price in any free market than oat-meal: and in the *next* place, wheat, in most places, but especially in a barren country, cannot be reared at an expence nearly so small as oats may be reared for. An attempt therefore to bring the one to a permanent price nearly equal to that of the other, must always prove abortive, as contrary to the established order of things. If therefore the people, in some counties in England, do in general eat wheat-bread, it is because they are in general so rich as to be able to afford to purchase it; and those

it could have operated very little in raising the price of oat-meal in Scotland; for as the intercourse between Scotland and England is entirely free with regard to the commerce of grain, and as oats may be imported into England when the price amounts to fifteen shillings *per* quarter, about eleven shillings our boll, and oat-meal apparently at all times, without any limitation of price; is it not plain, that if ever the market-price in Scotland should rise a little above sixteen shillings *per* quarter, we could be abundantly supplied through England, although we could not import any grain directly from any other place?

It is therefore foolish to express so much anxiety about the import-rate, as the writers for and against the bill have done.

FROM these considerations, I cannot help thinking, that all the writers for and against this bill have shewed an inordinate zeal for a circumstance, that, according to the light in which they seem to view it, could be, in the present state of this country, of very trifling importance. And were it not from other considerations, that it is perhaps unnecessary here to explain, I would think it a matter of no earthly concern, whether the Glasgow merchants were to be indulged in their favourite importation-rate of thirteen shillings and fourpence; or whether the other party were to get it fixed at sixteen shillings *per* boll. But as the prices can never be very materially affected by the importation-rate, although fixed very high; and as, in the present situation of Scotland, if the prices were fixed very low, it might give rise to a very destructive kind of corn-trade in some cases, especially if an invariable bounty at all exportation-prices were granted, it would seem to be safer to keep it pretty high, rather than to make it too low; although, in compliance with the prejudices of the vulgar, it might perhaps be placed a little lower than was originally proposed in the bill: but, in tenderness to the manufacturing

those who are in indigent circumstances, if they cannot afford to purchase wheat-bread, may have recourse to the cheaper and more despised, though equally nourishing and wholesome, meal of oats. But if oat-meal were in Scotland at sixteen shillings *per* boll, while the same meal in England was at eleven shillings, the persons in indigent circumstances in the one country would suffer much greater hardships than in the other, whatever might be the selling price of wheat at the time. As I am sensible that this argument is rather foreign from the subject of this Essay, I shall not pursue it farther.

manufacturing parts of the nation, it ought to be but very little lower than that (a).

ALTHOUGH I have ventured to dissent from the favourers of the new Corn-bill in some particulars, yet I am satisfied it would in the main be an amendment of our present corn-laws; and, in some respects, the improvement would be so great, as to deserve a very high degree of applause. Of this kind I consider the alteration it proposes, in the mode of regulating the importation or exportation of oats and oat-meal, by the price of oat-meal, instead of oats in substance. Nothing could be more judicious than this alteration; because, instead of making that important commerce depend upon a standard that is so difficult to ascertain, as oats must always be, on account of the great variations in the quality of different parcels that pass under the same denomination, it substitutes a standard, the quality of which is very little subject to variation, whose price may be ascertained with much greater ease and certainty, and which of course gives less room for frauds and abuse, by interested individuals.

The substituting oat meal instead of oats, for regulating the prices, a judicious improvement.

I AM likewise satisfied, that no material inconvenience could arise from making the price of oat-meal in Mid-Lothian be considered as a general standard for all Scotland: for although a trifling inconvenience might sometimes be felt from a small difference between the market-price at Edinburgh, and at some other parts of Scotland; yet this would be far more than counterbalanced, by its preventing those frauds in ascertaining the price in different places, which are next to unavoidable, as the law at present stands with respect to that article (b).

It is also proper to make the prices in Mid-Lothian be a standard for all Scotland.

I WOULD, however, object to the mode of ascertaining the price of oat-meal, especially in Mid-Lothian, proposed in the present

objections to the mode of ascertaining the price of oat-meal proposed in the bill.

(a) I have just now learned, that the gentlemen of Mid-Lothian have agreed to recommend fourteen shillings and eightpence as a proper rate for permitting importation. As this is perfectly consistent with the idea above expressed, it will be believed, that I approve of it as a just one. Indeed if we were perfectly unconnected with England in the present case, I think it would be a very equitable price.

(b) A GENTLEMAN of my acquaintance proposed a method for ascertaining the prices in Scotland upon a plan extremely equitable, to which I would have no objection, save that in this case it is hardly necessary to be at so much trouble to ascertain a circumstance that may

may

present bill, for the following reasons: *First*, Because it throws upon the judges in the Court of Session and Exchequer, a piece of business that does not properly belong to them, which they will look upon as the more burdensome, as they must be sensible it is quite unnecessary; and *secondly*, Because it excludes all persons from being examined as evidence, in ascertaining these prices, except gentlemen of great landed property. As the multitude are apt to imagine, that this is purposely so ordered, with a view always to keep up the prices at the highest rate possible, it tends to augment those jealousies that so much prevail between the gentlemen and the commonalty in Scotland: it were better therefore to avoid giving the most distant occasion of offence to these weak minds, by throwing it into another channel, as it could only be attended with trouble, without profit, to the gentlemen of Mid-Lothian (a).

Another mode of doing this proposed, by which all these objections would be obviated.

THESE inconveniencies might be avoided, and the design of the law effectually accomplished, by simply empowering the Lords of Session to nominate a person, whom they shall think properly qualified, for inspecting the prices of meal in the market of Edinburgh at all times. To this office might be annexed a small salary, not under five, nor above ten pounds *per annum*, payable out of the Exchequer, or any other fund that should be thought more expedient; the person to hold it during the pleasure

may be easier done in another way, with sufficient accuracy for the purpose required. His plan was this.

LET five or six counties in Scotland, in which grain usually sells at the most different prices, be selected for this purpose. In each of these counties let the prices of grain be ascertained times every year, in the same manner as the fairs are struck at present. Let each of these prices be transmitted regularly to the Court of Session at the same time; and when these prices were before them, let the Court strike the average, and publish that as the price for regulating the prices with regard to importation or exportation, through all Scotland for the time.

(a) This would be attended with much more trouble to the gentlemen of Mid-Lothian than they seem to apprehend. The number of gentlemen in that county, possessed of the landed revenue required in the bill, is not very considerable. And were two or more of these to be obliged to attend on this business once a-month, it would soon go round the whole, and they would be harassed attending these uninteresting trials.

sure of the Court, and to be at all times subjected to their inspection and controul. This person should have it in charge to attend the public meal-market of Edinburgh every market-day, and there enquire into the general selling price of good oat-meal that day; a true account of which he should deliver regularly in writing, upon oath, on the evening of that day, to one of the principal clerks of session, or some other person properly authorised by the Court to receive the same, with a note of that price, subscribed by his own hand, which should be duly entered in a register, to be kept for that purpose, and published that evening, if possible, in any one of the Edinburgh public newspapers that the judges should nominate for that purpose: this to be done regularly once a-week continually. This price, so published by authority, to be accounted the legal price of oat-meal for the time, through all Scotland, in every thing that relates to the bounty or importation of oats, or the produce of oats for one week, reckoning from the morning of the day after the day of publication of that news-paper in Edinburgh, and from the morning after the usual day of the arrival of the post that brings that news-paper, at every other sea-port town in Scotland respectively. From that period, till the same time next week, let all oat-meal, or oats, &c. actually shipped on board of any vessel, be entitled to such bounty as suffices to the price of that day; and all oats, or the produce of oats, that shall be actually landed in that time, be entirely regulated by the price of that day, without any retrospect to the past, or reference to the future prices.

NOTHING could be more simple than this mode of ascertaining the price of this kind of grain, more easy in the execution, more certain in its operation, and less liable to any manner of abuse than this would be. The price of oat-meal in a public market can always be known with a greater degree of certainty than that of any other kind of grain; as there is so little variation between different parcels of the same kind, that every one is in a manner obliged to sell at the same price with another. And if the person in office should either be partial or negligent in the discharge of his duty, the error would be immediately discovered: a petition could be preferred to the judges, and a proof led before them on the spot, within the space of a few hours after the error

Advantages attending the mode here proposed for ascertaining the price of oat-meal,

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was committed; so that he could not be permitted to hurt the community, either through negligence or fraud.

The rate of the bounty ought always to be regulated by the price of grain at the time the bounty is claimed.

It is likewise more equitable, that the selling price, *at the time*, should always regulate the bounty, than that of any former or distant period. And it was probably from a conviction of this that the statute 14th G. III. cap. was enacted, that the selling price of the respectable kinds of grain, at the market next to the place where those kinds of grain are intended to be shipped or landed, on the market-day immediately preceding the time at which such kinds of grain, &c. is to be shipped or landed, shall determine whether importation or exportation may take place, or bounties be legally demanded. By this law, however, a door was opened for manifold frauds and abuses, which would be effectually avoided by the regulation here mentioned, while every benefit that could be proposed by that law would be as effectually secured.

Objection removed.

It has been objected, that by this method of ascertaining the price at which importation, &c. should be permitted, merchants would, in times of scarcity, be discouraged from commissioning grain from other countries, as it would be impossible for them to foresee whether the ports would be open for its reception, or shut when it would arrive. But if our reasoning in the former parts of this Essay is well-founded, there will seldom or never be occasion to import oat-meal or oats into Scotland: and if it should, on extraordinary emergencies, become necessary, the liberty of storing it on shore under the joint key of the custom-house officer and proprietor, which the law at present permits, would remove every just ground of complaint on this head (a).

ALL

(a) I PERCEIVE that the minds of the people in Scotland at present are in general so strongly prepossessed with an idea of the necessity of frequently importing oats or oat-meal into this country, that I foresee great objections to the amendment proposed in the text. And I am afraid that I shall find great difficulty in persuading many of them, that the short interval here proposed between the different periods of ascertaining the prices, could not possibly be attended with any inconvenience to the inhabitants in general.

BUT every one must be sensible that no possible inconvenience could arise from this regulation, unless when it became necessary to import grain from other countries: and it can hardly admit of a doubt, that

ALL that is said above, the reader will perceive, relates only to the ascertaining the price of oat-meal and oats: as I consider the commerce of this kind of grain as the only one in which Scotland is materially interested; so that if it shall be put under proper

Method of ascertaining the price of wheat and other kinds of grain, excepting oat-meal.

that, in consequence of the bounty proposed, much more grain would be raised in Scotland than formerly, and the necessity of importing any at all would probably be entirely removed. It is well known, that between the years 1707 and 1741, no oat-meal or grain could by law be imported into Scotland; and as grain for all that time, save only the last year, was very reasonable, it appears, that, even at that time, the grain produced was very nearly enough to supply ourselves; and if it be considered that our agriculture is already much improved since that time, and that it would still improve considerably by the proposed encouragement, there seems to be no room to doubt but we would soon raise enough for our own sustenance; especially if we consider the great help we derive from potatoes, which have been introduced into Scotland since that period.

BUT if this argument should not appear so satisfactory to some others as it does to me, and if they should still be persuaded that on some occasions we might be obliged to rely on foreign aid; I would say, that even in this case the inconvenience could not be severely felt. Not to mention the facility with which we might at all times be supplied from England, if ever the scarcity should become real, it would appear evident to every considerate merchant, that the high price would become steady, and be little apt to vary from time to time. If the matter was doubtful, and if the importation-rate were not fixed very high, (which on this account chiefly, if I ever apprehend scarcity, I would think necessary), no capital inconvenience could arise if merchants waited till the price fixed steadily above the importation-rate, before they gave commissions for any to be brought from abroad.

THE above is the only possible inconvenience that could result from this regulation; and this, at worst, is but a mere possibility, and of no capital importance; but the benefits that would result from it are many and real. It is a general defect of our laws, that they are so troublesome to execute, and those who are instructed with the executing them are so little interested in the matter, that they are allowed to fall into disuse almost as soon as they are enacted; they are besides so imperfectly promulgated, that persons interested in them have no easy method of knowing them exactly; which helps likewise to cause them be very soon neglected. Both of these inconveniences would

proper regulations, the manner in which the price of the others shall be ascertained is a matter of much less importance. To make this, however, as little burdensome as possible, and at the same time sufficiently accurate, one of two methods might be adopted, I believe with almost equal propriety. The first is to authorise and require the sheriff of Edinburgh to call before him four times in the year, (as by the 13th of his present Majesty is required), a sufficient number of substantial disinterested persons, who shall ascertain the current prices of wheat, flour, rye, barley, malt, and pease, &c. in the same manner as the fairs are annually struck; and this determination, duly intimated, shall ascertain the prices of these respective kinds of grain for the ensuing quarter, in as far as relates to importation or exportation. This would make Mid-Lothian be the standard for all Scotland.

BUT if it should appear more equitable in the eyes of others to have the real average price of all the counties of Scotland as this standard; let the sheriffs of each county be authorised to ascertain the prices, each in his own district, at the times above specified,

would be effectually removed in the present case. The execution would be so easy, and the intelligence so universal, that it would insure a certain and general attention among all ranks of people to that law at all times.

IT is likewise much to be wished, that every law, on which the welfare of millions immediately depends, should be at the same time constant in its operation, little liable to be essentially deranged by any accidental circumstances, and to afford frequent opportunities of correcting any error before it had time to become pernicious. All these benefits likewise would accrue from this institution. The bounty would be continually regulated by the actual selling price at the time, and not be for a long while influenced, by a rate which had perhaps varied much before there was an opportunity of correcting it.

OTHER advantages might be enumerated; but the note is already too long. If, however, those who are to judge in this matter should be still dissatisfied with the shortness of time, instead of every week, the average prices every month could be taken. But as the lengthening the time between each period for ascertaining the prices can only prove beneficial to corn-merchants, although hurtful to every other person, I would strongly recommend, that the interval between each should be as short as possible; and that therefore the weekly method should be adhered to.

specified, and immediately thereafter transmit the same to the Lords of Session, who should be authorised and required to compare these prices with one another, and to strike a general average for each kind of grain respectively; which average price, duly published, should be accounted the standard price for three months, in every question relating to the exportation or importation of these kinds of grain. This amendment is calculated merely to save trouble to the judges of the court of session and exchequer: but if they themselves should approve of the plan proposed by the present bill for ascertaining the price of the above kinds of grain, it is certain that no inconvenience could result from thence; and therefore it is probable that no other person would object to it.

IT is with great pleasure that I would adopt any useful hints that have been suggested by others who have reflected on this subject: *Plus oculus quam oculi vident*. The following hints, suggested by the gentlemen of Banff-shire, who seem to have attended to this subject with great impartiality and candour, are of such importance, as to deserve to be carefully attended to. There are part of a list of resolutions agreed to by the gentlemen of that county, which were published in the Aberdeen's Journal, November 10th.

“THEY (the gentlemen above mentioned) are of opinion, that the internal corn-trade, that is, the transporting of corn from one part of the kingdom to another, should be made as free and open as possible; and for this purpose all penalties and restrictions upon those described in the old laws, under the name of ingrossers, ought to be removed.”

“THAT bonding at custom-houses, and paying fees for coast-cockets, for transporting grain from one part of the kingdom to another, ought also to be removed.”

The last-named grievance, if not removed on the present occasion, will become more intolerable than formerly, especially to the inhabitants of the west coast of Scotland, who will now, by means of the new canal, be more easily supplied from the east coast, than on former occasions: but if these expensive bonds and cockets are still permitted, the coasting-trade on grain will be much checked, and its price on Carron shore will be more affected by that circumstance, than in any other part of Scotland. This will appear plain to those who attend sufficiently to the nature of the trade carried on in that quarter.

Judicious improvement on the corn-laws proposed by the gentlemen of Banff-shire.

The old laws against ingrossers should be abolished.

as also bonding at custom-houses for transporting grain coastways

Additional reasons for annulling these custom-house bonds.

A GREAT many of the northern and cheapest counties of Scotland, are chiefly supplied with coals, lime, and salt from the Frith of Forth. For some one or other of these articles, there are many vessels daily coming from the northward in ballast. But if, in consequence of the demand from the west coast, a steady market should be established on the Carron shore for all kinds of grain, (a circumstance that must unavoidably happen), private persons in these northern counties would have such frequent opportunities of sending their grain in small quantities, as it was threshed out and swept, by these retour ships, without almost any freight, that none of these vessels would ever arrive without bringing considerable quantities of grain with them; which could not fail to moderate the prices at the Carron market, were they freed of the trouble and expence of these bonds and cockets, which have hitherto put an entire stop to this kind of trade, and must continue to prevent it so long as they are tolerated. The removing of this single grievance, would have been of more consequence to the inhabitants of Glasgow and others, than all the other grievances they have held up to the public attention, with such pomp of declamation, in their noted memorial.

NOTHING can appear more absurd and ridiculous, than the forms required at the custom-house, in the coasting corn-trade at present; and I am convinced they have been only tolerated because they have been hitherto overlooked. At the very time that exportation is not only permitted, but a bounty is also granted for carrying it into foreign parts, no man is at liberty to send a few bolls of grain by sea a dozen of miles to a friend, without entering into a formal bond to the king, with surety; in which the party shipping such grain binds himself, under a very high penalty, not to export the same into any other country, but to land it in some part of Great-Britain; and for this bond, and the certificate necessary for retiring it, a considerable fee must be paid. I believe it is hardly possible to produce an instance of a more absurd regulation; and I am disposed to think, that if it were worth any man's while to stand an action before any court for refusing it, he would be honourably acquitted; (for I know of no law, *unrepealed*, by which they are authorized to demand it). But the sum required from each individual for any single transaction of this kind, is so small, when compared with the expence of a trial, that every man is disposed rather to submit

submit tamely to this imposition; and the interests of the community at large are sacrificed to that of a few custom-house officers.

LET it therefore be inserted as a clause in the present act, ^{An amendment of the law, proposed, respecting this article.} that when the price of wheat, flour, oat-meal, or any other sort of grain, is so low as to admit of such kind of grain, flour, or oat-meal, respectively, to be exported from the country, whether with or without bounty, it shall be lawful for any person to lade, on board of any ship, any quantity of grain, whether for exportation or for transporting to any one part of the island from another, without paying any duty, or any fees, for permission to ship the same. It is imagined this would be sufficient to prevent all manner of fraud; because the clearance of the vessel from the port from which she sailed, would be enough to guard against importing grain from any other country, under colour of a coasting trade; as such a bulky commodity could not be taken up at sea.

BUT if it should appear to any one, that the simple clearance of a vessel would not be sufficient to guard against frauds when importation was prohibited by law, let it be enacted, That when the price of any kind of grain is below the rate at which exportation is permitted, it shall be lawful for any person intending to ship such kind of grain, flour, or oat-meal, to demand from the custom-house officer, at the port where such grain, flour, or oat-meal, is to be shipped, a permit for shipping the same; which permit the custom-house officer shall be obliged to grant without fee or reward. And when the prices are so high as that any particular kind of grain, flour, or oat-meal, cannot by law be exported to foreign parts, every person intending to ship such particular kind of grain, flour, or oat-meal, to be carried coast-ways, shall become bound to his Majesty, his heirs and successors, with one other surety, &c. (in the same terms as, in the 13th of his present Majesty, is provided for those who shall ship grain for Gibraltar, Guernsey, Jersey, &c.) that the said grain, &c. shall be landed in some part of Great-Britain, under the same penalties, &c. as are provided for this purpose in the fore-said act: especially, "that for taking such security, and giving such certificate, for recovering the bond, (which the respective officers are hereby required on demand to give), *no fee or reward shall be demanded or received.*" I copy this article from the statute itself, to show that nothing new is here required.

Custom-house bonds and certificates to be granted without fee or reward.

I HAVE thus taken great pains to investigate, with all the precision and impartiality I was able, the nature and operation of the law granting a bounty on the exportation of grain, with a view to enable the inhabitants of Scotland to determine what particular regulations it would be most for the interest of the community to adopt in their particular situation. I have chosen all along to explain the general principles upon which the particular regulations proposed are founded, not only with a view to prevent many objections that would have taken their rise from an imperfect examination of the subject, and to enable others to apply these principles to any particular case that may occur on other occasions; but also to put it in the power of every one to correct any mistakes that I myself may have committed in applying these principles to the particular case in question. I am far from thinking, that in this short tract, written in haste, and no time left for cautious revival, all the circumstances necessary to be attended to on this subject have been sufficiently examined, or entirely discussed: for all which omissions, I humbly crave the reader's indulgence. But from what has been suggested above, I am in hopes that the candid reader will be disposed to allow, that the following particulars are clearly demonstrated: viz.

THAT the rate at which importation of foreign grain is permitted in any country, if placed very high, will not of itself tend to insure permanent high prices, nor benefit either the proprietor or farmer, but rather the reverse.

THAT the importation-rate, if placed very low, will not of itself necessarily insure cheapness of grain, but rather the reverse.

THAT the importation-rate of oats or oat-meal, in a nation so situated as Scotland, unless it is placed *extremely* low, cannot materially affect the price of that article in our market.

THAT the price of grain can only be effectually regulated by means of a bounty granted upon the exportation of it, justly proportioned to the exigency of the case, assisted, in a barren country, by an equitable importation-rate.

THAT an invariable bounty on exportation, whatever be its amount, and in whatever manner the importation-rate is fixed, is neither fitted effectually to prevent the prices from falling unreasonably low in times of great plenty, nor from rising to too great a height in times of scarcity; but that such a bounty must

rather

rather in some cases tend to increase this last inconvenience. And,

THAT all the beneficial effects that may be produced by a bounty on exportation can only be fully experienced, when the importation-rate is fixed at a proper medium, proportioned to the particular case in question, and when the bounty is made to vary in proportion to the selling price of grain in the home-market; the amount of which bounty must be proportioned to the nature of the country where it is granted, and the state of the markets to which it can be carried: but that, by a due attention to all these particulars, and by that alone, the price of grain may be kept at all times nearly at one rate, subject to very little variation, and that as low as the nature of things can possibly admit. This therefore is the only proper mode of bestowing a bounty on the exportation of grain.

I HAVE purposely avoided, through the whole of this tract, drawing any parallel between the practice of England in any particular case, and that recommended for Scotland; because, as every regulation ought to be exactly proportioned to the nature of the country itself for which that regulation is made, it is merely accidental if any rule drawn from the practice of others would be proper for ourselves; and as the minds of men might be thus greatly misled, it was judged better to endeavour to discover a rule for ourselves in all cases, so as that it might be fixed according to justice and equity.

FOR the same reason I have paid no attention to the prices at which the bounty is allowed or discontinued in England, nor have expressed any anxiety to proportion the amount of the bounty to any thing that has been established in that country. It is nature that fixes the price in every country; and all that the most perfect political regulation can accomplish, is to remove those obstructions that prevent the uniform operation of natural causes. Our business, therefore, ought to be to obtain a perfect knowledge of the nature and circumstances of our own particular case, and adapt our rules to it, without regard to those rules that others may find it necessary or prudent to adopt.

To conclude, I have enquired with candour, and expressed myself with freedom; and I shall be happy if any thing here suggested shall be the means of making this subject be more generally understood than it hitherto has been.

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S U P P L E M E N T.

Prejudices of the Glasgow manufacturers against the proposed bill.

Manufacturers ought not to be distressed.

SINCE the above was sent to press, I am sorry to observe, that the minds of the manufacturing part of the nation are exceedingly inflamed against the proposed amendment of the corn-laws, thinking it is an iniquitous attempt in the gentlemen of landed property to promote their own interest at the expence of the manufacturers of Scotland; who are, to all appearance, fully convinced, that if the proposed bill should pass into a law, it would be attended with the most ruinous consequences to them. I therefore think it necessary to add a few more observations, with an intention, if possible, to allay these heats, and to induce all parties calmly to view the subject, divested of those prejudices which are so apt to magnify fancied inconveniencies into real misfortunes. And, that what I have to offer on this head may be the better attended to, I beg leave to premise, that no person can be more sincerely desirous of promoting the manufactures of Scotland than myself, and that few have been at greater pains to discover the means by which they may be effectually encouraged, than I have been. Before the present contest was begun or dreamt of, I had demonstrated, with all the force of reasoning I was master of, that the interests of agriculture and manufactures are so inseparably connected, that it is the highest pitch of folly to attempt to disjoin them, and that every such attempt must be attended with certain loss to both parties: I had showed, that the little progress hitherto made in the improvements of agriculture in Scotland is to be in a great measure attributed to the neglect of manufactures, and that there is not a possibility of ever procuring a spirited agriculture in this country, except by encouraging manufactures; but that, by a judicious encouragement of these, the agriculture and commerce of Scotland might be effectually promoted, and all ranks of people in it live in ease or affluence.

THESE being my real sentiments, I would fain hope that the manufacturing part of this country would not suspect, that I would be unreasonably biased in favour of any measure that should have a tendency to hurt them; and if I should say, that after

after bestowing a very considerable degree of attention to the matter in dispute, I can discover no sufficient grounds for their present apparent uneasiness; I might hope they would be disposed to weigh the arguments upon which this opinion is founded, with attention; not as the suggestions of prejudice, but as the result of deliberate conviction, at least on my part, upon the equity of which they might with safety rely, till these arguments shall be disproved by others equally unprejudiced. And I promise, that I shall no sooner be convinced of the fallacy of any argument here advanced, or of its pernicious tendency to any part of the community, than I shall publicly retract such opinion, and correct the error: for I have no other motive for taking up the pen at present, but barely to inform my countrymen of what I am convinced it imports them much to know; and to lend what assistance I can in discovering the truth, on a very important and intricate subject. He who assists in discovering the truth, is of my party,—and not he who shall join in opinion with me, if he is conscious that such opinion is not well founded.

THAT some narrow-minded zealots may have wished and expected that the Corn-bill, as it was originally proposed, would have a natural tendency to enhance the price of grain considerably, and from this consideration alone have been very warmly interested in its favour, I will not deny. Weak men are to be met with in every party, and will reason inconsistently on every subject: and that those who have reasoned in this manner have done so, I have endeavoured to prove in the preceding part of this Essay. But that either the persons who introduced the bill had this object principally in view, or that the gentlemen of landed property in general have the smallest desire to oppress the manufacturing part of this country, I see not the smallest reason to believe. Nay, so far is this from being the case, that, in compliance with the prejudices of the manufacturing part of the nation, rather than for any good reason that can be alledged in support of that measure, the gentlemen of several counties have agreed to recommend fourteen shillings and eightpence as a proper importation-rate, instead of sixteen shillings, as was originally proposed, and as it is at present by law established. Surely any unprejudiced person who attends to this circumstance, must see, that the fears which the lower class of manufacturers entertain of the designs of their superiors, are groundless; and that these fears only take their rise from the malevolent suggestions of designing persons, who neither

The bill is not intended to hurt them

Their fears excited by designing persons without a cause.

ther wish well to the manufacturing nor the landed interest, but who are probably afraid, that if the legislature should adopt a more equitable system of corn-laws than we at present enjoy, they would have less room for filling their own pockets; at the expence of all the other parts of the community, by an iniquitous gainful trade. Every individual in the state must be benefited by having the price of grain as steady as possible; save corn-merchants alone, whose profit is greatest when the markets are variable. No wonder, then, that they should strenuously oppose every regulation that would in any degree tend to make the prices more invariable than formerly. And that the necessary consequence of adopting those measures chiefly insisted on by the people of Glasgow, and the other deluded manufacturers who follow their system, would only be to make the prices more variable than at present, I shall now endeavour to show.

Manufactures would not be benefited, if the Glasgow memorial was complied with

IT is contended for by them, that the importation-rate of oats or oat-meal should not exceed thirteen shillings and fourpence *per* boll; and that this price should be ascertained at Glasgow itself, rather than at Edinburgh, or any other place. The pretext for this proposed amendment, as they call it, is, that it will keep the price of meal very low, which will greatly encourage the manufactures in the west of Scotland. Now, although it be allowed, that it is greatly for the interest of the nation that the price of every necessary of life be *permanently* as low as possible, and that the manufactures of Scotland would be greatly encouraged if the price of oat-meal *had been before, and could still be kept* steadily as low as five shillings *per* boll or under; it does not from thence follow, that it would be prudent in the legislature to attempt it, or practicable in them to reduce it to that rate. It will be allowed, that if our manufacturers could sell their linen at ninepence instead of a shilling *per* yard, the demand would be increased, and the manufacture of course be greatly encouraged; but will any one say, that the price of linen could be reduced from a shilling to ninepence, and kept *permanently* at that price by any decree of the legislature? Supposing it should be attempted, and it should be declared unlawful to demand above ninepence *per* yard for such linens, those linens that were ready manufactured at the time when the law was made, might indeed be sold at that price; but unless the manufacturer should have a sufficient profit, at that rate, it is evident, that in consequence of such

a law, he would quit that employment, and betake himself to another; after which time, there would be a necessity, either of using no more linen, or of giving such a price for it as it could be brought for from some other country. The case is precisely the same in the manufacture of corn. If the manufacturer (that is the farmer), is obliged to sell his goods below the price they cost himself, he will be under the necessity of quitting that employment and betaking himself to another. But as men cannot dispense with the use of grain, the manufacturers would in that case be obliged to purchase from others, not at the low price the legislators had fixed, but at such a price as it could be brought for from another country, however high that might be. It hence follows, that either the farmer must be paid by the consumers of his corn such a price as is sufficient to replace to him, with reasonable profit, the price that such grain costs him in rearing, or the inhabitants be reduced to the necessity of depending on some other nation for their daily supply (*a*). This has been

(*a*) I FORESEE here a popular objection. It will be said, that the price to the farmer is so high only on account of the high rents and avaricious extortions of proprietors. "Lower (say they) your rents, and the farmer will be able to afford his grain cheaper to the consumer." But if the avarice alone of the proprietors was the cause of the dearth of corn, Whence comes it, I may ask, that the price of grain is always higher on the west than on the east coast of Scotland? Are the proprietors in the Lothians more tender-hearted and less avaricious than those of Clydesdale? The truth is, nothing can be more groundless than these clamours against men of landed property. There is no doubt, but that they, as well as every other class of men, will be willing to augment their revenue as much as they can, and therefore will always accept of as high a rent for their land as is offered to them. Would merchants or manufacturers do otherwise? Would either the one or the other of these refuse, for the goods he offers to sale in a fair open way, as high a price as the purchaser is inclined to give? If they would not, it is surely with a bad grace that they blame gentlemen for accepting such a rent for their land as farmers, who are supposed always to understand the value of it, shall chuse to offer them.

IT is not, however, the rent of the land that determines the price of its produce, but it is the price of that produce which determines the rent of the land; although the price of that produce is often highest

been already demonstrated, and I repeat it here only that it may make the stronger impression on the mind of ordinary readers.

But the
reverse.

In the former part of this Essay, it has been shown, that for twenty years past the average selling price of oat-meal has been in

highest in those countries where the rent of land is lowest. This seems to be a paradox that deserves to be explained.

IN every country there is a demand for as much grain as is sufficient to maintain all its inhabitants; and as that grain cannot be brought from other countries but at a considerable expence, on some occasions at a most exorbitant charge, it usually happens, that the inhabitants find it most for their interest to be fed by the produce of their own soil. But the price at which that produce can be afforded by the farmer varies considerably in different circumstances.

IN every country there is a variety of soils, differing considerably from one another in point of fertility. These we shall at present suppose arranged into different classes, which we shall denote by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, &c. the class A comprehending the soils of the greatest fertility, and the other letters expressing different classes of soils, gradually decreasing in fertility as you recede from the first. Now, as the expence of cultivating the least fertile soil is as great, or greater than that of the most fertile field; it necessarily follows, that if an equal quantity of corn, the produce of each field, can be sold at the same price, the profit on cultivating the most fertile soil must be much greater than that of cultivating the others; and as this continues to decrease as the sterility encreases, it must at length happen, that the expence of cultivating some of the inferior classes will equal the value of the whole produce.

THIS being premised, let us suppose, that the class F includes all those fields whose produce in oat-meal, if sold at fourteen shillings *per* boll, would be just sufficient to pay the expence of cultivating them, without affording any rent at all: That the class E comprehended those fields, whose produce, if sold at thirteen shillings *per* boll, would free the charges, without affording any rent; and that in like manner the classes D, C, B, and A, consisted of fields, whose produce, if sold respectively at twelve, eleven, ten, and nine shillings *per* boll, would exactly pay the charge of culture, without any rent.

LET us now suppose that all the inhabitants of the country, where such fields are placed, could be sustained by the produce of the first four classes, viz. A, B, C, and D. It is plain, that if the average selling price of oat-meal in that country was twelve shillings *per* boll, those

who

in Mid-Lothian about thirteen shillings *per* boll; and this we must suppose, in the circumstances in which Scotland was placed during that period, was the average price for which it could be afforded by the farmer. During all that time the price of oat-

who possessed the fields D, could just afford to cultivate them, without paying any rent at all; so that if there were no other produce of the fields that could be reared at a smaller expence than corn, the farmer could afford no rent whatever to the proprietor for them. And if so, no rents could be afforded for the fields E and F; nor could the utmost avarice of the proprietor in this case extort a rent for them. In these circumstances, however, it is obvious, that the farmer who possessed the fields in the class C could pay the expence of cultivating them, and also afford to the proprietor a rent equal to one shilling for every boll of their produce; and in like manner the possessors of the fields B and A could afford a rent equal to two and three shillings *per* boll of their produce respectively. Nor would the proprietors of these fields find any difficulty in obtaining these rents; because farmers, finding they could live equally well upon such soils, though paying these rents, as they could do upon the fields D without any rent at all, would be equally willing to take the one as the other.

BUT let us again suppose, that the whole produce of the fields A, B, C and D, was *not* sufficient to maintain the whole of the inhabitants. If the average selling price should continue at twelve shillings *per* boll, as none of the fields E or F could admit of being cultivated, the inhabitants would be under the necessity of bringing grain from some other country, to supply their wants. But if it should be found, that grain could not be brought from that other country, at an average, under thirteen shillings *per* boll, the price in the home-market would rise to that rate; so that the fields E could then be brought into culture, and those of the class D could afford a rent to the proprietor equal to what was formerly yielded by C, and so on of others; the rents of every class rising in the same proportion. If these fields were sufficient to maintain the whole of the inhabitants, the price would remain permanently at thirteen shillings; but if there was still a deficiency, and if that could not be made up for less than fourteen shillings *per* boll, the price would rise in the market to that rate; in which case the field F might also be brought into culture, and the rents of all the others would rise in proportion.

To apply this reasoning to the present case, it appears, that the people

oat-meal in Glasgow and that neighbourhood has been steadily near a shilling *per* boll higher than at Edinburgh. To what cause are we to ascribe this difference of price between these two places, unless it be to the greater fertility of the soil, or more favourable

people in the Lothians can be maintained by the produce of the fields A, B, C, D, and E, but the inhabitants of Clydesdale require also the produce of the fields F; so that the one is under the necessity of giving, at an average, one shilling *per* boll more for meal than the other.

LET us now suppose, that the gentlemen of Clydesdale, from an extraordinary exertion of patriotism, and an inordinate desire to encourage manufactures, should resolve to lower their rents, so as to demand nothing from those who possessed the fields E, as well as those of the class F, and should allow the rents of all the others to sink in proportion; Would the prices of grain fall in consequence of this? By no means. The inhabitants are still in need of the whole produce of the fields F as before, and are under the necessity of paying the farmer of these fields such a price as to enable him to cultivate them. He must therefore still receive fourteen shillings *per* boll as formerly. And as the grain from the fields E, D, C, B, and A, are at least equally good, the occupiers of such of these fields would receive the same price for their produce. The only consequence, then, that would result from this Quixot scheme, would be the enriching one class of farmers at the expence of their proprietors, without producing the smallest benefit to the consumers of grain—perhaps the reverse, as the industry of these farmers might be slackened by this measure.

If, on the other hand, by any political arrangement, the price of oat-meal should be there reduced from fourteen to thirteen shillings *per* boll, it would necessarily follow, that all the fields of the class F would be abandoned by the plough, and the rents of the others would fall of course: but with that fall of rent, the quantity of grain produced would be diminished, and the inhabitants would be reduced to the necessity of depending on others for their daily bread. Thus it appears, that the rents are not at all arbitrary, but depend on the market-price of grain; which, in its turn, depends upon the effective demand that is for it, and the fertility of the soil in the district where it is raised: so that lowering of rents alone could never have the effect of rendering grain cheaper.

BUT as fields, which were originally in the lowest classes, may, by good culture, be so far improved, as in time to rank among those of

favourable climate in the east than on the western coasts, in consequence of which a boll of meal costs the manufacturer near a shilling more in the one country than in the other. By this test, it appears plain, that the prime cost of meal on the west coast of Scotland

a higher class, if proper measures are pursued to give stability to the markets, and due encouragement to the farmer, it will naturally happen, that the price of grain will gradually fall lower than before, while the rents may also rise. And as this effect can never be produced but in consequence of spirited agriculture, it follows, that the only practicable means of lowering the price of grain to manufacturers, and, at the same time, of improving the revenue of landed gentlemen, is to give stability to the markets, and security to the farmer; which would be much promoted by an equitable system of Corn-laws.

A NECESSARY inference that follows from the foregoing reasoning is, that if manufactures flourish in any particular district more than formerly, so as to make the population increase, there will of course be an increased demand for provisions. But if agriculture has not been duly encouraged, so as to promote improvements in that art, (I call that only an improvement in agriculture, when any particular field is made to afford more sustenance to man on an average of years, than it did formerly), there will be a necessity of raising the market-price of grain so high, as to pay for the expence of cultivating more barren fields, (suppose those of the class G), to supply that increasing demand.

BUT if the population should thus increase, and if, instead of giving a higher encouragement to agriculture, or raising the price of grain, the inhabitants, by any political regulation, should contrive to diminish, for a time, the price of grain, while the demand for manufactures continued as before, the profits reaped by the manufacturers would become so disproportionately great, that servants, and others employed in the labours of agriculture would betake themselves to manufactures, unless the farmers gave them as much wages as they could obtain at these other employments. In consequence of this, the fields which were formerly in the class D, would be pushed back to the class E, and so on of others; so that it would be impossible to rear nearly the same quantity of grain as formerly, even if the price continued the same as before, and the manufacturers would be under the necessity of giving a much higher price for their grain, so as to diminish their own profits, and drive off the labourers to agriculture again, before they could be supplied abundantly with food.

Scotland amounts, on an average of years, to fourteen shillings *per* boll nearly. And I have already demonstrated, upon the most equitable principles, that unless the farmer is insured of never being obliged at any time to sell below the medium price, he must be allowed to receive at *some times* a price considerably above it. Hence it follows, that if the people in that part of the country mean to have any reliance on the produce of their own fields, they must either provide the farmer with a constant steady market, at or near that medium price, or grant him a certainty to receive a higher price in years of scarcity. In equity and in prudence, therefore, the importation-rate at Glasgow ought to have been *at least* as high as sixteen shillings *per* boll. But instead of this equitable rate, without providing any market to their own farmers in times of great plenty, they propose, that the importation-rate should be at thirteen shillings and fourpence *per* boll. I am almost ashamed to repeat arguments that have been already explained; yet I think it necessary here to point out minutely what would be the natural consequence of such a regulation to Glasgow itself and its neighbourhood, should such a law take place.

IRELAND

BUT if, instead of thus foolishly attempting to work impossibilities, a regulation was adopted, by which agriculture should receive a steady support, farmers would gradually render their fields more fertile than formerly, so as to make those of the class F come in time to pass successively through the classes E, D, and C, &c. perhaps to A; in consequence of which, the quantity of grain produced, would become fully sufficient to maintain the whole of the inhabitants, and at a smaller expence also. The farmer, therefore, might have equal profit, although he should at the same time pay an advanced rent for his lands, and sell its produce at a lower rate than formerly. In this manner it appears, that by adopting judicious measures, both agriculture and manufactures may be encouraged. Farmers may become more opulent and independent, the price of grain may be made to decrease, and the rents to increase at the same time.

THE limits to which I must here confine myself, prevents me from doing more than drawing this naked outline. Readers of penetration will be able of themselves to finish the sketch. To others, additional explanations would have been necessary; but these I must at present omit.

IRELAND is a much more fertile country, and enjoys a finer climate than the west coast of Scotland, and therefore corn could be reared cheaper in the first than in the last of these countries: but as Ireland enjoys no steady demand for oat-meal, nor can find a market for it (for want of a proper bounty) in years of plenty, their farmers dare not rear so much as to insure themselves from want in bad years; so that the prices on these occasions rise very high; and as in good years they have much more than enough, and can find no market for it, the price is then extremely low. Hence it happens that, on some occasions, oat-meal can be exported from Scotland to Ireland with profit, even when the prices at home are very high; and on other occasions, oat-meal might be imported into Scotland, in years of plenty, at a lower rate than it then sells for in our own market. That this is a true state of the case, every man in Glasgow and that neighbourhood has good opportunities of knowing; and that this furnishes employment for corn-merchants is not to be doubted, although I am persuaded, the poor in Glasgow and that neighbourhood are better acquainted with these, and the arts they employ to enhance the prices on particular occasions, than I can be.

NOW, if the importation-rate should be fixed at thirteen shillings and fourpence, it would follow, that, in years of plenty, great quantities of meal would be poured in from Ireland, which would at these times keep the price so much below the rate for which it could be reared by the farmers in Scotland, that they would be under the necessity of abandoning an art that could not be practised without loss; so that the manufacturers would then be obliged to rely on Ireland almost entirely for support. But from whence are they to be supplied in times of scarcity, when Ireland is not only unable to afford them any aid, but must herself have recourse to others? A scanty crop, we all know, occasions a considerable rise of price, even in those countries where the inhabitants have nearly enough to support themselves; but the consequences that would result from a total failure of crop, as would thus happen to them, it is more easy to conceive than pleasant to describe. Glasgow is far from any other market, and might be in terrible want before the supplies from thence could arrive; so that intolerable high prices and famine would be the inevitable consequence.

State of the corn-trade between Ireland and the west of Scotland.

Bad effects that would result from the alteration proposed by the Glasgow memorial.

Nor is there a possibility of avoiding that, except by encouraging as much as possible the manufacture of grain at their own doors; which, even, although somewhat scanty, will prevent an intolerable dearth, till supplies can be brought from other quarters: nor can this be done by any other way than by insuring to the farmer, *on an average*, the price at which his corn could be reared for and brought to market. The amendment therefore that they propose, would be productive of the very worst consequences to the manufacturing part of the community, and therefore, in pity to them, it ought on no account to be complied with, although they should be so short-sighted as to wish for it themselves.

Illustrated by a parallel case from the history of France.

THE reasoning from which this conclusion is drawn, is so clear and unexceptionable that it might be safely relied upon, even although we know of no facts by which it might be corroborated: but when we likewise can prove from history, that exactly such consequences have resulted from similar regulations, it acquires, if possible, a still greater force and irresistible authority. About a hundred years ago Mr Colbert, in consequence of an unreasonable predilection in favour of manufactures, desirous of making the manufactures of France flourish more than in any other country, made many regulations exactly similar to those contended for at present by the Glasgow memorialists, in hopes of thus reducing the price of grain extremely low in that country, by which means he expected to enable the French manufacturers to undersell all others in every foreign market. But, unfortunately for them, this measure, which was intended to favour them, became the greatest bane to the manufactures of France. Agriculture was in some measure deserted, the prices having fallen at first unreasonably low; but this was soon after succeeded by prices as extravagantly high, which involved all ranks of persons in the greatest distress, and made France become dependent on others for grain, instead of supplying them with that necessary article, as she used to do before these regulations took place. Would it not be highly absurd in us, who have such a striking example before our eyes of the pernicious tendency of such counsels, to adopt a measure, which, although apparently calculated to relieve the poor, has a real tendency to involve them in the greatest distress?

THE above might be sufficient, one would think, to satisfy any reasonable person of the inexpediency of the measure proposed by the Glasgow memorialists. But it would be attended with so many other inconveniencies, that a volume might be filled with the bare enumerating of them. This I shall not attempt; but shall beg leave to put one case, which will show the real tendency of the proposed alteration in a very striking light, and give the inhabitants of Glasgow a notion of the persons whom alone it is calculated to serve.

A particular delineation of the iniquitous corn-trade proposed to be opened in consequence of the alterations they demand.

IT does not appear that the Glasgow memorialists have made any objection to the bounty on exportation proposed to be granted by the present bill. Nor was it to be expected they should do so, as we shall find, that it would afford the finest fund for the ingenuity of the merchant to operate upon, that could possibly be desired. I do not recollect (for I have not the memorial itself at hand) that there is even any price mentioned by them at which exportation should be stopt, and the bounty be discontinued; but for the present, we shall suppose, that if, according to their prayer, thirteen shillings and fourpence was fixed on as the importation-rate at Glasgow, &c. exportation should cease when the price was as high as thirteen shillings; and upon these data, I shall endeavour to see what would be the immediate consequences.

LET us suppose then, that a year of plenty should follow this regulation, both in Scotland and Ireland, so that the price of oat-meal might have been, if things had remained in their present state, about eleven shillings *per boll* in the west of Scotland, and ten shillings in Ireland. At this rate, exportation would be permitted from Scotland, and the bounty might be claimed. Now, as I suppose the freight of oat-meal from Port-Glasgow to Ireland could not exceed threepence or fourpence *per boll*, it is evident that the corn-merchants of Glasgow could buy up oat-meal in that country at eleven shillings, ship it off for Ireland, and there sell it at ten shillings *per boll*, with a clear profit to themselves of fourteen or fifteen pence *per boll*. Such a temptation is not to be withstood. Great quantities would be bought up as suddenly as possible, and exported. And such quantities might be bought up by artful dealers, with skilful emissaries, at this low price, before much was shipped off, that when these quantities were collected together and carried away,

the older with six shillings at Glasgow, and the newer with a

a scarcity would be immediately apprehended, so as to raise the price above thirteen shillings and fourpence; which scarcity might be still farther encreased by a skilful management of the market on the Carron shore, a little before the time that the prices should be ascertained by the sheriff. In consequence of these measures, properly concerted and put in execution, there could be no doubt but at the next quarter-day, it would be declared, that importation might be permitted; and as this would be foreseen by the monied merchants, whom the profits of this trade would bring into it, they would take care to have their magazines at Carron, and on the west coast, fully stored, before the ports were opened, to be ready to take advantage of the first spurt at the market. And as this meal would be bought in Ireland at or under ten shillings, and might probably be sold out for some time at fourteen or fifteen shillings *per* boll, their profits would be enormous. In a short time, however, the prices in Scotland would necessarily fall; and the merchants would again prepare for a new exportation. Quantities would be bought up at these low rates, and stored before the next quarter-day, when the ports would inevitably be shut against importation, and opened for exportation. The meal on hand would then be immediately shipped off for Ireland, and the bounty again pocketed by the merchants as before. Prices in Scotland, in consequence of this great exportation, would again rise, while they would fall in Ireland; meal would be again bought in this last country, and stored in Scotland as before, with a view to supply the demand that would arise after the next quarter-day, when there would be again an absolute necessity for opening the ports. And so on the circulation would continue. Was there ever a plan of commerce schemed out that would be attended with greater or more certain profits than this one? Is it then a wonder, that those who have it in view should exert their utmost efforts to impose upon the ignorant, so as to raise a party in favour of a plan which they do not understand? But is it right in men of sound understandings to allow themselves to be imposed on by specious pretexes? or are those excusable, who see through the flimsy veil that covers this iniquitous design, and do not expose the pernicious tendency of it to the deluded multitude; who, like the followers of Circe, adore as gods those who are leading them to inevitable destruction?

Ruinous consequences that would result from it.

I WILL not farther endeavour to pursue this disagreeable investigation

investigation, nor trace with a scrupulous minuteness, the direful consequences that must ensue in *years of scarcity*, should this plan be adopted, hoping that what has been already said, will be sufficient to convince readers of every class, of the exceeding pernicious tendency of the plan proposed by the Glasgow memorialists. Could a legislature, however, be found weak enough to comply with their prayer; it is evident, that the profits of this trade would be so enormous, as to induce men of the first capitals in the kingdom to engage in it. And if two or three capital houses were thus engaged, they could so entirely monopolize the whole, as to have a perfect command of the market-prices at all times, and be able to ruin any private trader who should set up in opposition to them. In which state, the inhabitants of the west coast of Scotland, might in a short time be reduced to distresses almost equally great with those that the natives of Bengal experienced some years ago. Such a thing, however, is not to be dreaded in Britain, as the prayers of the distressed inhabitants would reach parliament long before the grievance had attained its full height. But it is better to prevent than to remove evils; this therefore ought surely to be guarded against.

IN pursuing this argument, I have discovered a circumstance that had escaped me, as well as every other person who has written on this subject, viz. the impropriety of granting the same bounty on exportation to Ireland, as to other places. If the bounty is to be *fixed*, it ought not at most to be above one half of what is allowed for exportation to any other country; perhaps it were better that no bounty at all should be allowed. If a *variable* bounty be granted, as proposed in this work, the inconvenience would be small, if the prices at Edinburgh regulated the exportation-rate; but, even in this case, it ought not to be more than the half of what is granted to any other place.

The bounty to Ireland ought to be lower than to any other country.

I SHALL here also take notice of another small incongruity in the proposed bill, that seems to have escaped the attention of all parties, viz. the making the duty payable on the importation of oats or oat-meal to be regulated by the English quarter; whereas every thing else relating to the commerce of this kind of grain in Scotland is to be regulated by the Scots boll. The inconvenience that arises from the use of different weights and measures is already too great, and ought not to be unreasonably augmented,

The measures ought to be the same for regulating importation and exportation.

ed, which this would do. If this clause did not slip into the bill through inadvertency, it could only have been done with an intention to moderate the duty; but this had better be done by moderating the duty openly. It indeed appears absurd to demand any duty at all on the importation of grain, when the avowed intention of that importation is to moderate the prices in our markets.

Propriety of making the price of grain at Edinburgh be the standard for all Scotland for regulating export and import.

so much for the importation-price. With regard to the expediency of making the prices of oats at Edinburgh regulate the importation or exportation prices over all Scotland, the following remarks at present occur. From what has been just now said, we may perceive what a bad use might be made of entrusting the power of opening or shutting the ports by the sheriffs on the west coast. Were that power confined entirely to those in Mid-Lothian, it would not be in the power of the corn-merchants to regulate that matter at pleasure, as they otherwise could do; so that were there no other reason for it but this one alone, I should think it sufficient to over-rule every objection I have yet seen. But there is another argument of a more general nature, that shows the expediency of it in a still stronger degree. It is this.

SINCE it is impossible for any laws to regulate the price at which corn can be raised by the farmer in any place, as that must constantly depend upon the fertility or barrenness of the particular place, in concurrence with other natural causes; and since it is the interest of the inhabitants of every district to be fed, if possible, by the grain that is raised in that district, it ought to be the study of each to adopt such regulations as shall be best calculated to encourage the production of grain in that district. But as the importation-rate, as well as that at which a bounty ought to be allowed, and every thing relating to the regulating of that bounty should be proportioned to the average price of grain in each particular district; it will follow, that the importation-rate, &c. in a district where the usual selling price of grain is higher than in another, ought in equity and prudence to be also higher there in the same proportion. According to this reasoning, nothing can be more equitable than to fix on any one particular place of principal importance in a country, as a standard for all the rest; and if due pains is taken to fix the importation-rate of that place at a proper medium, and

and to ascertain the prices which are to entitle to a bounty properly; it will be unnecessary to attend to others, as these will be higher or lower than that, in every other place, exactly in proportion to the real exigency of the case. The method, therefore, that is proposed in the present bill for ascertaining the prices, viz. by making these of Mid-Lothian be considered as an universal standard, is at the same time the easiest, and the most strictly consonant to justice and prudence that could possibly be devised. I am afraid that the reasoning in this paragraph will to some appear abstruse, and therefore inconclusive; but on a subject that is naturally involved in such intricacy as the present, and which requires that the strictest attention should be had to very nice distinctions, there is no avoiding something of this nature. It is impossible to give a person, without a proper education, a clear idea of the manner in which inaccessible distances may be measured; but if he insists upon being told in what manner it may be done, something must be said, which, although intelligible enough to those who have had their minds properly prepared to receive such instruction, will probably appear to him abstruse and incomprehensible.

THE subject of the Corn-laws is in itself so intricate, that it is not surprising if different persons should view it in very different lights. I find by the resolutions of the gentlemen of several counties, that many of them imagine, that the permitting the warehousing of grain, as by law allowed at present, is prejudicial to the interest of this country; and although I am at a loss for discovering a good reason for this opinion, I doubt not but there is some reason for this that I have not been able to find out. In hopes that some person will unfold these reasons to the public, I shall in the mean time offer some reflections that occur on that head.

IF, indeed, an invariable bounty should be granted on exportation, and if the importation-rate was fixed very low, I can figure a case in which it might be attended with inconveniences. This has been already taken notice of, when treating of the commerce of corn between Glasgow and Ireland. But as the other countries with which we trade in this article lie at a much greater distance, and as the expence of transporting it to these countries would be much greater than to Ireland, the temptation would be proportionally diminished. For, as the expence

Expediency of permitting oatmeal to be warehoused.

expencc of transporting it to any of these countries; and bringing it back again to Britain, would be at least equal to the whole bounty, merchants never would be under the temptation of exporting with a view to re-import, except when prices were so high at home, as afforded the highest probability that there would be a necessity to open the ports for importation; and if the probability of this was very great, the exportation would almost equally take place with this view, if warehousing were totally prohibited. This therefore is an affair that rather concerns the revenue than the farmer: it exhausts the former very unnecessarily indeed; but as it would rather tend to raise than to lower the price of grain, it does not appear how it would discourage the agriculture of Scotland. I have already shown that this inconvenience might be entirely obviated, by making the bounty vary with the price of grain.

I OWN, that I cannot figure a single arrangement of circumstances, in which the warehousing of meal or other grain could prove detrimental to the country, if *the actual selling price at the time* shall always regulate the importation or exportation; because if, in that case, merchants should import any considerable quantities, it would only be when there was next to a demonstrable certainty that the quantity of grain in this country was so obviously deficient, as to insure the opening of the ports within a short time; in which case, although these quantities imported would lower the price a little, or prevent it from rising so very high, as it might do were we obliged to wait for supplies till they could be commissioned; for after the scarcity was actually felt, this would only prevent the farmer from receiving an unreasonable profit that he ought not in equity to obtain, and relieve the rest of the community from very great distress.

Expediency of ascertaining the prices frequently.

IF, indeed, no person had power either to shut or to open the ports but at the end of three months, as at present, there is a possibility that merchants might contrive means to obtain unreasonable profits by that liberty *on some occasions*; although the difficulties attending the execution of this plan are so great, as to be but little apprehended. For if the prices in our market were tolerably high, while those abroad were low, the merchants, by making very great exertions, might purchase such quantities of meal for exportation as should at length raise the price

price in the home-market so high as to admit of importation, at which time they could bring back the grain they had formerly exported, and sell it without any loss. And although they should have put themselves to a considerable expence in raising the price in the home-market, for some time before the quarter-day, when the prices were to be fixed, so as to get the ports opened for importation; they know, that as the ports could not again be shut for three months, they would have an opportunity of indemnifying themselves abundantly before the ports could again be shut. Thus would the prices at home be reduced unreasonably low so as to discourage our own agriculture, and the design of the law be entirely frustrated. But if the ports could be either shut or opened in the space of one week, there would be no room for practising these arts. These evils, however, as well as the former, would be most effectually obviated by adopting the plan of a *variable* bounty, as suggested in the preceding parts of this Essay.

THE idea of granting a power to open or shut the ports at the end of every week, will probably be strenuously opposed by all those who have any prospect of engaging in the corn-trade; as it would be an insurmountable bar in the way of all their schemes. They have even objected to the new bill, because it proposes that the prices should be ascertained once in thirty days, instead of three months, as they would wish it to be, under the pretext that it allows too little time for purchasing and importing corn from any other country. This objection has been so pertinently answered already in a very well written tract on this subject, that as I am happy to have my own opinion corroborated by such a respectable authority, I shall lay before the reader in his own words (a).

IT is, says he, apprehended that this objection would be almost entirely removed by permission to put the cargo, when it does arrive, without paying any duty, into a warehouse, under the joint lock and key of the custom-house and the importers, there

(a) THIS tract is entitled, *Consideration on our Corn-laws, and the Bill proposed to amend them*, 1777, 12mo, without bookfeller's name, or place of sale. It is a pity that the author should not have taken more pains to have it effectually published, and more generally dispersed.

there to remain till it is re-exported, or till the prices shall rise so as to exceed the importation-price.

THE danger which the merchant complains of, is only, that he may find the ports shut when the cargo arrives, which was commissioned as soon as they were opened; but what is the effect to be expected from this apprehension. It is only this, that unless, by his general correspondence, he finds there is a real want of grain or meal in the country, he will not venture to import. If, notwithstanding the alteration proposed by the bill, there should still be a possibility of bringing a false proof before the judge, (this writer defends the proposed bill in all its clauses), so as to lead them to open the ports when there is no real scarcity, he will see that this may be rectified at the end of thirty (or according to the plan proposed in this Essay at the end of seven) days, and he will not trust to it so far as to order corn from abroad to answer this fictitious want.

THE spirit and avowed intention of the law is to prevent importation, except in times of dearth or scarcity; and if there is a real dearth or scarcity, there is no chance that prices will so soon fall below the limitations.

ON the other hand, the danger to the country, from extending the time for which the ports are to remain open without a proof, is obvious. If by any art the proof should be brought by which the ports may be opened, when there is no real scarcity in the country, and if that shall be without remedy for a longer period, let it be supposed for three months, there is not a doubt but in that time such a quantity may be poured into this country, when prices are low, as to distress and discourage our farmers, and defeat the purpose of the law.

A CLAUSE which gives so much security against those arts by which the ports have been improperly opened, which saves the farmer from being discouraged and hurt, and the purpose of the law from being defeated, without preventing supplies from being brought into the country when they are really necessary,—ought not to be given up.

T H E E N D.

The distance at which the Author lives from the place of printing, and the haste with which this Tract was composed, having been sent off sheet by sheet as it was written, without his having had an opportunity of comparing what was gone with what followed, will be accepted of as an apology for any defects of arrangement, accidental repetitions, or other trivial defects of the same kind. Had he intended to write on the present subject before he thought he saw the immediate utility of it, these defects would have been in some measure prevented; or had he even intended this treatise only for philosophical readers, they might have been diminished; but in attempting to explain such intricate matters to ordinary readers, he was more solicitous about rendering himself in some degree intelligible, than about avoiding a few almost necessary repetitions.

It is hoped every candid reader will make allowance for the errors of the Press, as the haste in which the foregoing sheets were printed, would not admit of that time which is absolutely necessary for correctness in that way.

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