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THE
FRAUDS and ABUSES
OF THE
COAL-DEALERS
Detected and Exposed;

IN A
LETTER
TO AN
ALDERMAN of London.

Nebulo Carbone notandus.



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A

LETTER

TO AN

Alderman of *London.*

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S in all popular Assemblies, it has been found necessary to place some Man of Weight and Dignity in the Chair, for the Preservation of Order and Decorum, so such Discourses as relate to public Grievances, can be address'd, with Propriety, to none but such Persons as by their Influence and Authority can contribute to remove them.

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It is for this Reason I have taken the Liberty to submit the following Thoughts to your more immediate Consideration: My own Eyes have convinc'd me that you are not only an able, but an active Magistrate.

Under your Direction I have seen what us'd to be an annual Voyage of Amusement and Recreation, restor'd to the serious and laudable Ends and Purposes, for which it was, at first, so prudentially established; I have seen a due Respect requir'd and paid to the Laws, without rendering them a Terror and Grievance to the Subject; I have seen Justice temper'd with Mercy; I have seen Mercy season'd with Justice.

As, therefore, it is from this Experience of your Character, that I am encourag'd to make this public Address to you; so it may be presum'd, that, out of a due Regard to my own, I shall not venture to set forth in Print any one Fact which cannot be proved; or take up your Time with Trifles, when you expected Matters of some Importance.

I must, however, premise, that tho' I profess to treat of the Grievances which fall on the Consumers, as well as the Traders
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in Coals, I do not design to enlarge on the peculiar Hardships arising to the Cities of *London* and *Westminster*, and the many great and populous Towns and Villages in their Neighbourhood, from the various Impositions on that Commodity: I shall not make it my Business to complain, that the growing Produce of this Tax has been anticipated by way of Mortgage, which cuts off the very Prospect of Relief: I shall not insist, that, as long as this Tax continues, it may be said, that the calamitous Fire of *London*, which furnish'd the first Pretence for laying it on, continues still to be felt, and to be deplor'd.—The Grievances which I am to confine my Reflections to, are of an inferior Nature; and I have only mentioned these others, as serving to shew how extremely necessary it is, to take the proper Precautions, that private Villainies may not inflame and increase public Misfortunes.

I am extremely sensible, that it is not in the Power of any Magistracy, or even any Legislature, to make all Men honest: But certainly 'tis in the Power of the One, so to multiply Checks and Restraints on the Dishonest, and of the Other to make so pertinent

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ment an Use of them, that Fear may, in a great measure, do the Work of Virtue.

Felony is so coarse a Sin, and obnoxious to so heavy a Punishment, that even bad Men start with Horror at the very Name of it; but those who are thus scrupulous as to *Thefts*, scarce boggle at *Frauds*; tho' the last is apparently a Crime of the deeper Dye, as adding a Breach of Trust, to an Invasion of Property.

It has ever been the Reproach as well as Misfortune of Trade, that Persons have been found in every Branch of it, who have acted, as if their Profession was but a Licence to cheat with Impunity.

Hence arose false Weights and Measures, and all those innumerable Devices with which the Crafty deceive the Credulous, and at once grow rich and insolent, in defiance of Law or Religion, Shame or Conscience.

It is true these Abuses were soon discovered and complain'd of; and as every Year almost produc'd some new Species, so every Year, likewise, produc'd some new Expedient by way of Prevention or Punishment.

To false Weights and Measures a very early and peculiar Attention was paid; and
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if Laws could execute themselves, scarce any Trespas of that Nature could pass undetected, or unpunished: But this is one of our national Inconveniencies; and nothing is more common than to see a Law, that was levelled at some notoriously-wicked Practice, sleep in the Execution: Tho' all are Sufferers, nobody will complain; and the Knavery which was modest or timerous at first, grows harden'd by degrees, derives a sort of Authority by Custom, and, at last, pleads universal Practice, in Abatement, against the very Statutes themselves.

To apply what I have said to the Frauds of the Coal-Trade.

About half a Century ago this Business was carried on in a manner very different from what it is at present: The Dealers in that Commodity had not then lost their antient Name of *Woodmongers*; which it is obvious had been given them, when Wood was the principal Fuel of the City: The more pompous Title of Coal-Merchant had not then been thought of: They lived on the Wharfs, kept Horses and Carts of their own, bought their Coals at *Billinggate* of the Masters of the Ships, and were there
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plied by the Lightermen for their Business, that is to say, for the Carriage of their Coals from the Ship's Side to the Wharf, as Watermen now ply for Passengers at the several Landing-Places.

In Process of Time great Ships being employed in the Coal-Trade, whose Ladings were too large for any one or two *Woodmongers* either to purchase or dispose of, the Lightermen took the Hint to do what the *Woodmongers* could not; by which means from Carriers they, at once, became Traders of a superior Class, and found themselves in a Capacity to treat those who had been their Masters, as their Customers; I had like to have said their Dependants and Understrappers.

Nor did they stop here: For having taken Possession of the Hive, they resolved to keep all the Sweets to themselves, which they soon accomplished after this manner:

When a Fleet of Ships was expected in, fifteen of the most considerable of these Upstart-Engrossers used to hold a Cabal, in which having first settled the Market-Price to their own Minds, every one staked a Moidore, by way of Gage, that he would
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not make a Breach in the Combination, by giving more for his Coals than the Standard here agreed upon.

If any Ships had out-fail'd the rest, and the Master had taken the Advantage of his good Luck, to insist on a Shilling or two more in a Chalder than the Cabal had thought proper to allow him, no sooner did the rest of the Fleet come in, but the Purchaser obliged the Master to forego his said Advantage, or else balk'd the Ship, and nobody else would buy the Remainder.

By these and such like Means, in less than thirty Years, those who had begged for a Lading of Coals, were enabled to keep their Coaches, and found themselves Masters of the whole Trade.

But as all who have Power are apt to abuse it, so all Monopolies soon become Grievances.

From the Ship-Masters on one hand, and the Dealers on the other, the Mischiefs arising from the arbitrary Conduct of these Men, at last, affected the Consumer; and that in so sensible a manner, as to give Rise to an Act of Parliament of Queen *Anne*, *cap. 28.* to open the Trade, whereby all Contracts between Coal-Owners, Lightermen,
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men, &c, were rendered void, and all Persons who had Craft, were authoris'd either to work them themselves, tho' not free of the River, or else to employ a Freeman to work them in their Stead.

For a while, like all other Acts of this Nature, this had a wholesome Effect, by putting a Stop to the iniquitous Combinations before spoken of.

But the Reformation did not last long; for the Coal Trade, being still carried on in large Ships of three, four, and five Hundred Tons Burthen, which being two large a Quantity for the *Foreigners*, as they are call'd, or the lower Rank of *Lightermen*, who have neither Craft, nor Customers to dispose of so large a Quantity, the Bulk of the Trade still continued in the Hands of those overgrown *Gentlemen*, for so it seems they must now be stil'd; who dealing for the whole Freight of these Ships, will not suffer any body else to have a Part, but upon such Terms, as leaves the Purchaser, almost as much at their Mercy, as he was before the Act against Combinations took place.

But tho', thus unfortunately, this Act did not remove the Mischiefs before complain'd of,

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of, it made way for others which fall so heavily on the fair Trader, as well as the Consumer, that they ought to be fully expos'd, in order to be speedily cur'd.

The laying the Trade open to all Adventurers invited many Persons to engage in it, who not having been brought up to it in a regular Way, were from thence called *Foreigners*. And this Evil, as in some measure it may be call'd, obtain'd the easier, and spread the wider, thro' the Indiscretion of those that had Wharfs, Carts, &c. who became the Hacknies of any who would employ them.

Coal-Merchants now began to multiply apace: If a Footman had been prefer'd to be a Runner to a Coal-Owner to distribute Bills, and collect straggling Debts, why, in a short Time, he commences Beau, puts on trimm'd Cloaths, and sets himself up for a *Coal-Merchant*. If a Pawn-Broker, by the Overflowings of his Gains, has more Cash in Hand, than he can immediately dispose of, why he gives it vent, by trafficking in Coals, and gilds over his own dirty Business with the more reputable Title of *Coal-Merchant*.

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Thus Persons of all Businesses, and of no Business, have taken Sanctuary in this: But of these new Adventurers, the Servants out of great Families are by far the Majority; and some of these are even permitted to carry on the Business Abroad, while they hold their Places, and receive their Wages at Home; which, if they dealt honestly, they would reap abundantly the most Advantage from: For, on that Condition, I defy the cunningest of these Pedlars, alias *Coal-Merchants* to make above four *per Cent.* of their Money, which every Body will be sensible of, who considers, that they must pay Lighterage, Wharfage, and Carriage, which are the Woodmonger's Profits, before they can put in for their own.

And here occurs the great Consideration which led me to this Undertaking, *viz.* To detect and expose the Frauds and sinister Practices, by which these People are enabled to turn the Penny so much to their own Advantage.

In the first Place, then, the notable Coal-Merchant-Domestics, before spoken of, set out with obliging all their Lord's, or Master's, Tradesmen, to purchase Coals of them, and likewise to take such Measure as they thought

thought proper to allow, under the Penalty of losing his Lordship's Custom.—

But let the plain Matter of Fact speak for itself, as follows:

I. A certain Person solicited a neighbouring Tradesman to take his Coals of a Friend of his, if he was not particularly engaged already: The Neighbour replied, he was; to a Coal-Merchant, who, tho' himself a Valet de Chambre to a certain Nobleman, had the Modesty to keep a Fellow in Livery to serve Coals by the Peck: That having a Bill upon his Lordship, he had bought several Chalders of him, in virtue of which the said Bill was payed forthwith. But what Measure had you? rejoins the other. — Oh, says the Tradesman, I am under no Pain upon that Head, for I will take care to have Coals cheap enough, as long as I continue to serve his Lordship.

And yet an Information has been lodged against this very Man for taking Money for *seven Chalders* of Coals, which, upon being re-measured, were found to want one Bushel of *six Chalders*.

II. There is one Mr. N—, Butler to — in *Grosvenor-Street*, who, commencing Coal-Merchant,

Merchant, in Partnership with a Man who keeps a *Chandler's Shop* in the Neighbourhood, and having secured his Lord's Custom, and that of the Family's, as well as Tradesmen, under his Lordship's Influence, had the Address to get one Mr. H——, the Under-Butler in the said Family, preferred to be Upper-Butler to a certain young Nobleman, upon his going to House-keeping; it may be presumed, on the *Condition* that he should procure him the Custom of the Family, and all that had any Dependance upon it: For such was the Consequence: And how much the Great and Rich are Sufferers by this indiscrete Indulgence, may be gathered from the Circumstance just related, and from those which are yet to be explained.

III. There was one P——, late of the *Strand*, who, having been detected in selling a Quantity of Coals to a Person of Fashion, which were very considerably short of Measure, pleaded, that it was very hard he should be obliged to pay the Fine; for he had given thirty Guineas to the Steward, and had no other way to reimburse himself.

IV. A certain Person who had purchased the good Will of a Wharf, received
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an Order to send in a Ton of *Scotch Coal* to a Lady, who had been a Standing-Customer to the said Wharf; but not being in the Secret, he sent in the full Weight; which, for the first Time, the Hole would not contain: The Consequence of which was, that the Steward had not the Face to apply for his usual Perquisite, and so thought it advisable to deal for the future with a *Brother of the Cloth*, who understood the Method of Poundage.

V. A certain great Man near *Grosvenor-Square*, had given Orders to one of these *Merchants* to lay him in forty Chalders of Coals, to be in Readiness against his Family came to Town; who took the Opportunity not only to buy them at the cheapest Time of the Year, but of the cheapest Sort of Coals; for, as I have been inform'd, they did not stand him in above Twenty-four Shillings *per* Chalder, one Chalder with another; or, all Charges included, Twenty-eight Shillings and Five-pence *per* Chalder: Now at that very Time, the best *Tanfield-Moor* Coals, were sold at Twenty-six Shillings in the Pool, or Thirty-one delivered in: But, as this honest *Merchant* had great Obligations to the Family, he thought fit
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to charge his L—p Thirty-two: so that the Total of his Bill was Sixty-four Pounds; by which he would have gain'd Seven Pounds three Shillings and Four-pence, even on the Supposition that his Measure had been fair: but instead of sending in Forty-two Chalders, which, at Twenty-one to the Score, he should have done, he actually loaded but Thirty-four Chalders. Add therefore, nine Pound twelve Shillings, for six Chalders short, to the seven Pounds three Shillings and Fourpence mentioned above, it appears the whole Profit upon the Jobb was sixteen Pounds fifteen and Four-pence, which is just nine Pounds twelve Shillings more than the noble Purchaser would have paid, if he had dealt with a regular Trader.

And so I take my Leave of these Coal-Merchants of the Cloth.

I come now to those equally honest Men, who have their Receipt of Custom in such Places as *St. Giles's*, *Tyburn Road*, and the other great Issues of the Town; over whose Doors is writ in Capitals, **COALS SOLD WHOLESALE AND RETAIL AS CHEAP AS AT THE WATER SIDE.**

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The Snares of these People are set for their poor Neighbours, and for Country People, who send their own Carts for the Coals they want; which being generally but a small Quantity, it is not thought worth while to be at the Expence of re-measuring them. There is however one Record forth-coming, which explains by what Method they are thus able to underfell the whole Trade: For in a Quantity of Coals, sold by one of these notable Persons, for eighteen Bushels, it appeared there were but three short: And of what Consequence so immoderate an Excise as a Sixth is in the Course of Trade, there is no need of Figures to demonstrate.

To speak plainly, either the Impudence, or the Generosity of these People is scarce to be parallel'd; for they give Twenty-eight Shillings a Chalder themselves, besides which it is well known, that Wharfage and Carriage, in open Carts, stand them in two Shillings and Threepence a Chalder more: and yet they sell them again for Twenty-eight Shillings; professing, at the same Time, that they follow the Business for a Livelihood, and not by way of Amusement.

We are next to take a Trip across the Park to the Water-Side; and there we shall

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find

find the like Abuse, practis'd in a different Way; that is to say, by *under-fiz'd Sacks*; for which one Man in particular is become so notorious, that he is commonly call'd, the *Pudding-Sack-Man*.

But in order to render this Kind of Fraud more intelligible, it is necessary to observe, that by the Act which obliged the Coal-Dealers to make use of Linnen Sacks, instead of Hair Sacks, not only the Breadth and Length of the said Sacks were ascertain'd, but it was required that they should be stamp'd by Authority. These Precautions, for a while, had their due Effect; the Dealer found himself oblig'd to be honest, and the Purchaser had his Pennyworth for his Penny. But Justice seldom reigns amongst us, for any considerable Term; and Roguery is as often the Parent of Ingenuity as Necessity.

Thus, it being soon discovered, that the piecing these Parliament Sacks, as they wore out, down the Sides, made them look bigger than those, which had receiv'd no such Helps, the New were put to the Torture, and made to undergo the same Operation: For having been first stamp'd according to Law, they were artificially diminish'd

minish'd by contracting the Seams according to the Size of the Owner's Conscience; and then piec'd over like the Old, as if by way of Strengtheners; which at once added the necessary Bulk, and serv'd to conceal the Fraud; which oftentimes amounts to half a Bushel in a Sack.

There is a Jury that goes about occasionally to detect the false Weights and Measures: These happen'd to stop the Cart of a Dealer that liv'd in the *Strand*, and finding the Sack they measur'd to want half a Bushel, they return'd the Man to the Court of *Westminster*: But the Dealer very artfully evaded the Penalty by entering in his Books three Quarters of a Chalder, instead of a Chalder.

By these, and such like wicked Practices, the Town is continually impos'd upon; I believe, I may say, scarce a Day passes without having more or less to answer for: Many have been lately detected; and some farther Instances deserve to be laid before the Public; as a Terror to those that sell, and a Warning to those that purchase.

1. Upon remeasuring a Chalder sold at *Chelsea*, it was found to contain but Twenty seven Bushels instead of Thirty-six.

2. In three Chalders, sold from out of the

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Strand,

Strand, there was a Deficiency of twelve Bushels.

3. In five Chalders fold in the Neighbourhood of *Red-Lyon-Square*, Eighteen Bushels.

4. In two Chalders order'd into the Workhouse, by the present truly humane and compassionate Officers of *St. Paul's Covent-Garden*, eight Bushels.

5. Out of half a Chalder, given by Order of the said Officers to a poor Widow who had three Children to provide for, and a Mother dying before her Eyes, two Bushels were excised.

I have already mention'd *Pawn-Broker-Coal-Merchants*: Of one of these, a poor Man bespoke three Chalders, for a Person who lodg'd in his House; and, at the same Time ask'd him, what would be the Advantage to himself, if he took Five. The Pawn-Broker answer'd, three Sacks: Which encourag'd the poor Man to send his Wife with certain Goods to this very Pawn-Broker's, to raise present Money to purchase two Chalders more: Which he did; but, upon remeasuring the said five Chalders, it appear'd he had reckon'd without his Host; for tho' he had the running Interest to pay
for

for the Money he thus had borrow'd, he had not the three Sacks which was the Motive for his taking it up at so dear a Rate.

There still remains another Path of Mischief to be traced; which I shall but just open, and hasten to a Conclusion, *viz.* The Rogueries practic'd by the Bargemen, who are employ'd by the Inhabitants on each Side of the River upwards, to purchase Coals for them in the *Pool*.

And these are of two Sorts.

1. By overcharging them in the Price.
2. By making short Measures: Which last Fraud they practise in a Manner so different from those which are pursued on shore, that I cannot excuse myself from giving a Hint or two, by way of Explanation. As thus: If a Bargemen has an Order to load a Score, which, as before specify'd, ought to be Twenty-one Chalders, it is usual for them to load no more than Seventeen and a Half, and oftener but Seventeen and a Vat; which is a Quarter.

It ought, however, to be observed, to the Honour of the Lightermen of great Credit and Business, that they will not suffer them to be guilty of any such Baseness when employed

ployed for them; and in particular there is one Mr. *A. B.* who has several times refused to shew them the least Countenance on these iniquitous Occasions.

But to get over this Difficulty, when they have Orders for a Score, they send down their Craft with about two Chalder of Coals on board, to which they add fifteen Chalders and three Vat, which they sell for a Score; and so the Lighterman, on whose Account they load, is deceived, and the Customer cheated of three Chalders and a Vat.

And, finally, when those Bargemen, who live higher up the Country, receive Orders from a Lighterman, or Woodmonger, to load a Score, they pretend to buy a Chalder and a Half for their own Use; but before they arrive at the Place where the Coals are to be delivered, they contrive to make a Sale of five Chalders on their own Accounts, and the Customers must be content with the Remainder.

It is now necessary to shew what Care the Legislature has taken to secure the Subject against these Impositions; and thro' what express Limitations these Men have the Presumption to make their Way, as likewise

likewise to what severe Penalties they are liable for so doing.

By the 16 and 17 *Car. II. cap. 2.* It is enacted, That all Sorts of Sea-Coals brought into the River of *Thames* and sold, shall be sold by the Chalder, containing thirty-six Bushels heaped, and according to the Bushel sealed for that Purpose at *Guildhall, London*; and so proportionably. And, 2^{dly}, That all other Coals, commonly sold by Weight, after 112 Pounds to the Hundred, upon Pain of Forfeiture of all the Coals, otherwise sold, or exposed to Sale, by any Woodmonger, or Retailer of Coals, and the double Value thereof; to be recovered in any Court of Record, or by Complaint to the Lord-Mayor of *London*, and Justices of the Peace within the City and Liberties, or any Justices of the Peace of the several Counties, where such Coals shall be exposed to Sale; who, upon due Proof, upon Oath, may convict the Offenders, and give Warrant under their Hands and Seals, for levying the Forfeitures, one Half to the Person complaining, the other Half for the Poor, &c.

This Statute was originally made only for three Years: But in the Reign of *Will.* and *Mar.*

Mar. it was revived, and rendered PERPETUAL.

By another Statute, which was passed in the second Year of his present Majesty, it is farther enacted, " That whoever, from and
 " after the 1st Day of *August*, 1730, shall
 " not constantly keep and use such a Bushel,
 " and such Sacks as herein before described,
 " and no other, or shall not so fill their
 " Coal-Sacks from such Bushels, or shall
 " otherwise offend against the true Interest
 " and Meaning of this Act, shall for every
 " such Offence forfeit and pay the Sum of
 " fifty Pounds; and if any Servant or Ser-
 " vants of such Dealer or Dealers in Coals
 " shall, from and after the 1st Day of *Au-*
 " *gust*, 1730, fill such Coals into Sacks,
 " without first duly measuring the same by
 " such Bushel, such Servant or Servants
 " shall for every such Offence be commit-
 " ted to the House of Correction, there to
 " be kept to hard Labour, for any Time
 " not exceeding thirty Days, nor less than
 " fourteen Days."

Thus, Sir, agreeable to my first Design, I have laid before you a Sketch of those private Abuses, which, by their frequent Practice, are become a public and general Grievance:

vance: And how deeply they affect the fair Trader; how heavily, tho' insensibly, they fall upon the Consumer; and how loudly they call for Punishment and Prevention, the common Sense of every Man will very sufficiently conceive.

The same Frauds which are practiced upon the Chalder descend to the Peck, and both Poor and Rich are excised alike.

In Justice then to the Rich, in Mercy to the Poor, and for the Credit of Government, which is understood to extend its Care and Protection to all, the Laws should be put in Force, and every honest Expedient should be used to preserve the Subject in general from Oppression, and to provide that the poor and honest Tradesman might have the same Chance to thrive by his Industry, as the rich and abandoned Knave.

Sure I am, Sir, that if any honest and effectual Expedient, to answer these wholesome and seasonable Ends, can be proposed by way of Supplement to the Laws, it will naturally and necessarily meet with Countenance and Encouragement from you.

And, as for my own Part, however I may have provoked and offended the rotten

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Part of the Coal-Dealers, by detecting and exposing their Enormities; however I may be malign'd and aspersed on that Account, I shall always reflect with Pleasure upon this humble, tho' honest Endeavour, to be serviceable to my Fellow-Subjects.

I am, with all imaginable Respect,

S I R,

Your most Obedient,

Humble Servant,

F I N I S.

