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*Braunton Street*

**CONSIDERATIONS**

ON THE

**INTENDED REFORM**

IN THE

**Parliamentary Representation**

OF THE

**P E O P L E.**

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*Sanctus Amor Patriæ, dat animum.*

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L O N D O N:

Printed in the Year MDCCLXXXV.

## E R R A T A.

Page 2, line 24, read *subject*.—P. 9, l. 10, read  
*competition*.—P. 10, l. 12, dele *I believe*.—P. 15,  
l. 6, read *counties*.—P. 15, l. 19, read *procedure*.

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CONSIDERATIONS, &c.

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**T**HE reform in the representation of the people in Parliament, which the Minister is about to bring forward in the House of Commons, is certainly a matter of very great importance in itself, and when the times and circumstances are considered, that importance is much increased, and the question may be found to involve in it the future fate of the English nation. On a matter of such extent, I suppose every Englishman who is able to make up his mind on the subject, will stand acquitted from being urged by any vain motives for declaring his opinion to the world. And as in discussions of subjects which are of great magnitude, the matter, rather than the style, is to be regarded; it follows, that those who seek information from communications made by others, will look for truth and sound reasoning, rather than elegance and the graces of composition.

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tion. If the case were otherwise, I am so sensible of my deficiency in that way, that I should hardly presume to offer my sentiments to the public.

I SHALL state such arguments as I have heard advanced in favour of a reform, and afterwards consider the weight of them.

THE first is the undue influence of the crown, through the means of corruption, which so long as it continues unrestrained, must tend to shake the very foundations of liberty. The second, that the means in their nature best calculated for checking that power, are materially altered from their original institution, I mean the power of the representatives of the people in the House of Commons. Many of the boroughs which are now represented, whatever their state might have been formerly, are become intirely useless, as being without constituents, or fallen so greatly into decay as to have become the property of a few individuals. That in consequence, boroughs coming under this description, instead of assisting to protect the liberty of the subjects, and maintain the equilibrium of the three estates, have administered to the undue influence of the crown, and also created

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ated one species of corruption highly prejudicial to the constitution. I mean bribery at elections, either to independent voters for their suffrages, or to individuals who have an exclusive property in them. These are the principal arguments upon the ground of which a reformation is contended for.

As a remedy to these disorders it has been proposed to disfranchise the rotten boroughs, and abolish the burgage tenures, and add to the number of members serving for counties, who are selected from a description of men least liable to the seduction of corrupt influence; and who can have no temptation to depart from the interest of the people. Another remedy proposed, is the shortening the duration of parliaments, by which the connection between the constituent and the representative is strengthened, and that subserviency to Ministers which gentlemen are accused of, proportionably weakened.

PARLIAMENT heretofore has been found adequate to all the purposes of its institution, when arbitrary power has been attempted to be introduced, for although (under different reigns) many attempts have been made upon the liberty of the country, they have been successfully repelled,

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pelled; the strength of the remedy, always keeping pace with the strength of the injury intended. It is not probable that our constitution has any radical defects which have escaped the wisdom of our forefathers: the great Charter, and the Bill of Rights, are the corner stones of our freedom, and the glorious Revolution brought about in 1688, certainly confirmed to Englishmen all their rights—with a knowledge of these things, can a man say the misfortunes the nation at present labours under have arisen from radical defects in the constitution? I think they cannot. We must look for other causes, before we can prescribe the remedy. It may arise either from maladministration in the affairs of the kingdom by the servants of the crown, for the worst of purposes, or it may arise from the general corruption of the people, which may not allow the executive power to act upon the principles of virtue and honour; or possibly the cause may lie between these extremes.

THE disasters which have fallen upon great nations and brought them to ruin, are seldom found to have had their beginning and conclusion within the remembrance of one short life; but unfortunately for this devoted country, we have seen such a change in the state of this nation,

tion, within the short period of twenty years, as has astonished the good people of England. The consideration of our national disgraces, which have been attended with the additional mortification of having been purchased with the vitals of the country, in men and treasure, has been brought home to the bosom of every individual of the kingdom, from the distresses which have accompanied them, and which will, in all probability, bear down this country for generations to come:

“ That England that was wont to conquer others  
 “ Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.”

SHAKESPEARE.

Seeing the effects which have been produced from causes secret, or not generally seen, it is not, I think, at all wonderful that the multitude should fly to any alternative, which may promise a redress of their grievances; and amongst others to a reform in Parliament. Many members in the House of Commons would support such a measure, as being the wish of their constituents, and others to convince the public that they are free from the imputation of being indifferent to the prosperity of the nation.

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It cannot be denied, that the preference (in the first instance) is due to that part of the representation of the people which is composed of the country gentlemen. They are, if I may be allowed the expression, attached to the soil itself. But on the other hand, the various articles of commerce with which Providence has so highly gifted this fair island, have been drawn forth, so as to produce that transcendent power which we had long enjoyed unrivalled, by the exertions of other classes of men, the merchant adventurers, and those enterprising and bold spirits which the principles of our happy constitution naturally give birth to. From their exertions has grown our extensive commerce, and the creation of our fleets to defend it, and those manifold blessings which have followed our having the command of the sea. This part of the empire is represented in Parliament (generally) by means of those boroughs which are come-at-able for money, and therefore termed *rotten boroughs*; and I believe each of these constituent parts is as necessary for the welfare of the whole, as the workings of the mind is to conduct the operations of the body.

THE borough representation is composed of gentlemen of all descriptions, merchants, lawyers,

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yers, seamen, and soldiers. It is by the boroughs, in a great degree, that the commerce of the kingdom is protected, and the balance between the landed and monied interest preserved. Certainly the borough representation leaves an opening for the admission of strangers into Parliament, and with it the possibility of as much merit as the nation can give. I say the possibility only, which I oppose to the objection made to the admission of strangers, namely, that they are more liable to be corrupted. But independant of this objection which I shall consider by and by, I am not clearly of opinion that gentlemen of the vicinity are always the most eligible persons to serve in Parliament. They may owe their election rather to local influence, than a preference due to goodness of character, either in point of ability or integrity.

THERE is likewise another consideration which deserves some attention. It is well known that it is the doctrine of Parliament, that a representative is not to consider himself as simply representing his constituents, but when in debate, to consider himself as a representative of the nation at large. Were it otherwise, to procure some advantage to his borough, he might vote against the general good of the whole. Strangers

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gers might perhaps, on this ground be more free to make a decision, than a member more intimately connected with his borough.

THAT the influence of the crown is increased far beyond its due bounds, was the sense of a former Parliament, and is, I believe, the sense of every independent man in the kingdom; however, I am not of opinion that a reform in Parliament will tend in any degree to remove, or even shake the undue influence of the crown, or which amounts to much the same thing, that there is any radical defect in the constitution of the Parliament, to which a remedy can be applied, which will operate to lessen that influence.

I BELIEVE it is generally understood, that those Members by whom the business of the nation is conducted in the House, are not the county Members. They, from being much at their ease, and (generally speaking) not having been under the necessity of exercising their talents by any extraordinary industry, in order to their advancement in life, leave the field open to those who will acquire the necessary knowledge in every branch, and do the drudgery of the House; but those who have the labour, will have the

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the power also, and a share in those good things, which administration have to give; much of the business of the nation, therefore, comes into the hands of the borough-members unavoidably. It follows in consequence, that with the advantages annexed to place, those members will be open to censure, not only upon just grounds, for their errors; but from being in situations which may excite, from motives of envy and competition, constructions which their conduct may not merit: and this may perhaps have been the origin of an opinion, that borough-members are more liable to the operation of the influence of the crown than the county members.

I SHALL not make any distinction between county and borough-members, on the score of bribery in compassing their elections; because I do believe that virtue and vice are disseminated pretty equally throughout the House of Commons. And I believe, candidates for counties have felt the necessity of being liberal to their constituents, to as great a degree as candidates of any other description: and if more members are added to the counties, the field will be extended for bribery to thrive in. Indeed, I do not think bribery can ever be abolished: it fol-

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lows great opulence, as naturally as the shadow follows the body. What is the application of many of the gifts which are in the power of the crown, other than so many irresistible arguments to draw a veil before the judgments of men, and make them (sometimes) even deceive themselves?

ON the score of abilities it might be invidious to draw a comparison between county and borough members. That the mind is enlarged, and the faculty of judging better established by travel, there can be no doubt; and I believe that style of travelling which is undertaken solely for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, is, perhaps, more within the reach of county than borough members. But whether or not gentlemen who travel for improvement, have their talents so improved as to make them warmer advocates for liberty, and more strenuous supporters of this excellent constitution than they would otherwise have been, I think may be doubted. My opinion is, that the powerful are *not* those who see and feel the excellency of our government in the strongest point of view. I speak in general, for no doubt there are shining examples where this opinion is contradicted in particular instances.

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It has been asserted that county members can have no temptation to depart from the interest of the people by design. I have seen no arguments to prove (even in the smallest degree) that county members are not to be seduced from their duty to the people, and become the humble servants of the crown, to as great an extent as borough members. All men are not to be tempted with the same thing. Some are satisfied with contracts in their various kinds, others with a situation which enables them to create a comfortable subsistence no-body knows how. Some men, who have all the solid enjoyments of life, are to have their imaginations tickled with empty titles, because a superabundant plenty has made them wanton and capricious. I do not mean to be severe upon any particular class of men; but simply to shew, that it is from the weakness of human nature, and not the weakness of the constitution of the House of Commons, that our national misfortunes are to be imputed. County and borough members are alike obnoxious to the snares of temptation.

THE great objection to a reform in Parliament, and which is founded in reason, is the danger lest any material alteration should arise to affect the balance which ought ever to be

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preserved



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preserved between the commercial and the landed interest of the kingdom. Commerce is the soul of the nation, therefore the utmost attention is necessary to prevent its being oppressed, even in the smallest degree by the landed interest. This is not to be so effectually prevented by speculative opinions, as by the intervention of those members of the House, who are merchants, and have an interest in its preservation, and who see in its first symptoms every thing that has a tendency to injure it. In this commercial empire, the landed interest should not preponderate, because if commerce is shackled and kept down, the event in the end must be, that our importance as a maritime power will sink, and the value of land sink in proportion; but no such effect can arise from the resolutions of a House of Commons favourable to the commercial interest of the kingdom.

It has been asserted also, that the present deplorable state of the nation is owing to the inadequate representation of the people; but it has been asserted without proof. I conceive the American war, and its consequences, to have been one of the great causes of our present condition. I believe it is generally understood,

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stood, that the Minister under whom that war was begun, and conducted throughout, was supported in it by the country gentlemen, and they were, I believe, amongst the last, who (upon principle) abandoned that destructive project.

THE noble Lord gulled them with the prospect, that a revenue might, and ought to be obtained from America, which would in some degree lessen the heavy burthens upon this country. That war brought on other wars, and the exertions made by England astonished Europe. What heart does not bleed when they think of such exertions so greatly misapplied? this war, I understand, increased our national debt one hundred millions sterling. The expenditure of this enormous sum certainly afforded the minister the means of corruption, and I do in my conscience believe, that war was continued latterly against the wishes of both the landed and commercial interest of the nation (and particularly of the latter) by such means as no minister can openly avow. It is, I apprehend, from considering on the consequences of the American war, rather than the war itself, that the people have conceived the prosperity of the nation has been sacrificed, and from an inadequate representation of the people.

Whereas

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Whereas the idea of drawing a revenue from America began it, and the increased influence of the crown continued it.

I HAVE not any doubt, but that the undue influence of the crown has been one great cause of the calamities we are now suffering. I know not whether I am singular in my opinion, but I think the King's Ministers have uniformly pursued a conduct, hostile to the rights of the people, and the honour of the crown: under such circumstances, what should the operation of the American war be, other than we have seen it?

LORD NORTH as a Minister certainly merits no praise: for whether in his ministry he acted as the deputy to a secret influence; or whether he suffered those under him to use his influence to produce unworthy purposes, he alone stands responsible. But whatever the noble Lord's conduct might have been as a Minister, his abilities are respectable; and the nation has only to lament, that those useful talents should have been so greatly misapplied. Lord North contended in a very able speech in the House, against any reform in the representation. I dare say, he very well knows, that our dif-  
graces

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graces have not arisen from defects in our government; and therefore was against an innovation, which (to use his own words) was to shake and unhinge the constitution.

ADMITTING there were added fifty Members to the countries, and that they were the most competent to the service of the country; is it a decided fact, that they are the best guardians of the public liberty and public credit? I think it may very well admit of a doubt, because they are open to the snares of temptation, and are as liable to fail in the trust reposed in them, as other men. Let it be considered, how greatly the peerage is increased very recently, and, I believe, it will be readily granted to be a possible case, that it may hereafter be considered as a matter of course, that an election for a county is to be followed by a peerage; such a procedure may be continued to the extent I mention, and naturally enough follow what has been already done.

By such a conduct, it is true, the crown might establish a power in the House of Commons, adequate to the effecting any purpose, but it would be for a time only; for in proportion as the power of the House of Commons became  
weak

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weak and languid, the House of Peers would become formidable to the executive power, by which the balance of the three estates would be destroyed. What the consequences in such a case would be, no man can foresee; but probably it would produce a struggle between the executive power and the Lords, which might in the event destroy the liberty of the nation for ever.

Now will any man pretend to say from what has passed in this kingdom, within the last twenty years, that the people have any foundation to hope material benefit from any innovation in the constitution. Ought we not rather endeavour to avoid so dangerous an experiment, and look upon it with a suspicious eye. It would certainly be much wiser to overset the doctrine which has lately been broached on the subject of the Westminster scrutiny in the House of Commons, and endeavour to preserve the rights of the electors of Westminster, which have been grossly violated.

WHEN it is considered that the Minister who is to bring forward the motion for a reform in Parliament, is the man who opposed the people of Westminster from being heard by  
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council at the bar of the House, in defence of their rights on this very subject, it must be concluded, either that the Minister means to stir a business in which he is not serious, or which he means to pervert to ends widely different from the wishes of the people.

THAT there are defects in the representation is true, but they are defects which are best explained by asking what is there in the world quite perfect? Time has certainly wrought some change in the constitution, but though in the change it may have lost in some points, it has as certainly gained in others. And it should, I think, be remembered, that time has also established those sacred rights, upon which our liberty rests; and then a consideration will arise, whether the benefits intended by what is called a reformation, may not be more than counterbalanced by the evil consequences it may lead to.

THE defects in the representation are those boroughs, either where there are no constituents, or where the right of election is confined to the property of an individual, and where consequently the original intention of the legislature is defeated. But palpable as these defects  
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are, I know not upon what grounds boroughs coming under this description can be deprived of their prescriptive right of returning members to Parliament, to abolish it *would be little less than suicide in a Parliament.\**

BUT if those who hold boroughs in property, would follow the example of the proprietor of Old Sarum (who expressed his willingness that the right of returning members for that place might be vested in the proprietors of the Bank of England) and suffer their boroughs to be administered by such corporate bodies in the kingdom as Parliament should judge most eligible, it might be productive of good, whether or not gentlemen will be so public spirited I know not. But I think the offer of Old Sarum may nevertheless be accepted.

I AM clearly of opinion, that the number of representatives should be neither increased nor diminished; but if any mode could be fallen upon (with the consent of the proprietors) to make the representation of the boroughs above alluded to, more effectually beneficial to

\* *Vide* Dialogues concerning the Law and Constitution of England.

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the nation, by renewing what must have been the original intention of the legislature, it might help to restore vigour to the constitution, without in any respect endangering it.

HAVING explained upon what grounds I am averse to any alteration which must affect the frame of the House of Commons, either in form or substance; and thinking as I do, that the undue influence of the crown is one great cause of our misfortunes, the adoption of any measure, that might in its operation have the effect of lessening it, would relieve the constitution of the kingdom of many of its obstructions, and tend to purify it. I cannot conceive any single remedy which promises so much efficacy towards that end, as the shortening the duration of Parliament.

By giving the people a more frequent opportunity of marking, by their approbation, or disapprobation, the conduct of their representatives, that subserviency in members of Parliament to the will of the crown, which is alledged against them, would certainly be checked, if not entirely broken. It is evident that the oftener the people are called upon to make their election, the stronger and more intimate the

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connection will be between them and their representatives. And unless it is supposed that the body of the people is corrupt, (which I am very unwilling to believe) there must result from it more attention from members to the interest of the public; who, if they betray their trust, will soon be taught by their constituents, in what light they consider them.

I WILL not take upon myself to say, (taking all circumstances into consideration) whether three or five years, instead of seven, would be preferable, but certainly the shorter term would operate most effectually to the relief of the evils complained of.

THE principal argument in objection to this has been, that the frequency of general elections would greatly increase bribery amongst the people, and destroy their morals and the spirit of industry, by drawing them from the occupations, by which alone, for the prosperity of the state, they ought to maintain themselves and families.

SOME regard is certainly due to this objection; but I think it is by no means such an one as ought to be put in the balance, when opposed

fed to the probable advantages which would arise from having shorter parliaments; would it not be wise to risque this inconvenience, when it is to produce benefits so substantial? The frequency complained of, would certainly reduce the great expence and rioting that now attend elections. The reasons I need not mention, they are obvious enough.

IN treating on the subject of a reform in the parliamentary representation, volumes might be written; but after saying every thing that could be said upon it, and adopting the wisest measures that circumstances would allow, the good operation of them would depend in a very high degree upon the support to be given them by the Sovereign, seconded by the integrity and ability of those whom he may delegate to manage the affairs of his government; and indeed without making any change at all in the representation of the people, these are means sufficient for producing the ends intended by such a change.

F I N I S.

The first part of the document  
 discusses the general principles  
 of the system and the  
 various components involved.  
 It is divided into several  
 sections, each dealing with  
 a specific aspect of the  
 overall design. The first  
 section covers the basic  
 concepts and the second  
 section describes the  
 hardware requirements.  
 The third section details  
 the software architecture  
 and the fourth section  
 discusses the implementation  
 and testing procedures.  
 The final section provides  
 a summary of the work  
 and the conclusions drawn  
 from the study.