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A N
Hutford
IMPARTIAL VIEW
O F
ENGLISH AGRICULTURE,
FROM PERMITTING THE
EXPORTATION of CORN,

In the Year 1663, to the Present TIME.

THE SECONDEDITION CORRECTED.

L O N D O N:

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IMPARTIAL VIEW, &c.

NO fact is more self-evident than that this country is entirely dependant on trade, both for internal felicity and external consequence. The vast sums that have for these seventy years past been borrowed and funded, are incumbrances proportioned to, and dependant on your property; if your supposed staple commodities fail, the nation in a collective view must become Bankrupts, the individuals, Beggars.

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The wise prognosticators in the reign of Queen Anne, fixed this country's ruin, when the national debt became an hundred millions, it now far exceeds that sum, and yet the nation remains in full credit. The people of those times were right in principle, but did not sufficiently extend their ideas; had not our trade greatly encreased, and of course our riches, the present national debt would have been insupportable; but as our trade has encreased with the same hasty strides as the debt, the one pays the other; the national trade being treble, and of course the riches of individuals, the country is no more distressed with a treble debt, than if both had remained at a stand.

In proportion to the increase of trade; the additional supplies extracted from it; the riches gained by the subject; the employ it finds for the industrious poor; it becomes of more importance to the state, and should not be incumbered or restrained, but on the most mature consideration.

The following sheets are not dictated by prejudice or passion, but are the cool reflections of a person wholly disinterested, who only means to set before the public, from history and experience, the advantages they have received from encouraging the exportation of corn, and the imminent danger

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of stopping a trade, to which they have been beholden for plenty, little less than a century.

The export-corn trade, is, I apprehend, the most valuable and beneficial trade we at present possess. It is all neat produce of this country, being different from almost every other unalloyed with any foreign commodity. It is an universal provision for the industrious poor all over the kingdom; whereas, manufactures collect infinite numbers into particular places, impolitically over-filling this, and other great towns, while the country in general is in danger of being uninhabited. The growing such large quantities for foreign markets, secure us in a great measure from a possibility of famine, to which this country was in former times equally liable with her neighbours. It is a very considerable encouragement to the navy. It contributes to relieve the landholder, who by being incumbered with all your general taxes, and a particular addition of four shillings on his rent-roll, is perhaps the most oppressed of any man in the kingdom. It is a certain trade, not like most manufactures dependant on whim and fashion, but affected; only by the seasons, and as they will continue precarious in foreign countries, so we may depend on their continuing to want the same quantity of grain; and of course, the same large sums of money will by this means be brought into the kingdom.

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The great advantages arising to this country from our export-corn trade, cannot be so clearly illustrated as by referring the reader to former times, and setting before him the various statutes, by which the agriculture of this kingdom has been brought to the present perfection. The inexperience of our ancestors made them hope to procure plenty, by prohibiting the exportation of corn, except by special licence from the King: this, by preventing the sale, discouraged the growth of grain, so that it operated diametrically opposite to their intention. No more being grown than for home consumption, an unfavourable season made a scarcity, two, a famine; by which means, wheat has often been five pounds a quarter, and sometimes not to be had for money. The folly of expecting plenty, by confining the sale of your grain among yourselves, does not appear to have been the least understood, 'till about the middle of the reign of Charles the second, in the year 1663, when we find an act past, intitled, "An act for the encouragement of trade." The preamble to which strongly marks, that they had found their mistake, and meant to make plenty at home, by establishing a foreign sale, it is. "*Forasmuch as the encouragement of tillage ought to be in an especial manner re-*

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garded and endeavoured; and the surest and effectualest means of promoting and advancing any trade, occupation or mystery, being by RENDERING IT PROFITABLE TO THE USERS thereof; and great quantities of land within this kingdom for the present lying in a manner waste, and yielding little, which might thereby be improved to considerable profit and advantage (if sufficient encouragement were given to the laying out of cost and labour on the same) and thereby much more corn produced, great numbers of people, horses and cattle, employed, and other land rendered more valuable." By this act, wheat at forty-eight Shillings, Barley at twenty-eight the quarter, &c. is permitted to be exported as other merchandize, but incumbered with a rate granted by the 12th of Charles the 2d. C. 4. of tonnage and poundage, which was 20 s. on each quarter of wheat, and ten on barley, &c. With this very heavy addition, it was highly improbable that the trade should succeed, because the price was so great as to render it unsaleable at foreign markets, except in absolute famine. But even the use of this incumbered privilege was so apparent to the people of that time, that in 1670, another act past "*for the improvement of tillage, and the breed of cattle,*" in which the exportation of corn is allowed, although the prices thereof exceed the former rates, and lessens the custom and poundage

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poundage. The use of the former statute in relation to grain, induced them to attempt encouraging the breed of cattle on the same principle, by permitting a foreign trade; and horses, mares, and geldings exported, pay by this act only five shillings each; and an ox, steer, cow, or heifer, only one shilling, though in the year 1660, only ten years before, by the act of tonnage and poundage, a stone-horse paid 66 l. 13s. 4d. a mare, 126 l. 13s. 4d. a gelding, 20 l. and an ox, 6l. 13s. 4d. By these means, agriculture was promoted, grain became more plentiful, and cattle of every kind encreased; and this great advantage so evidently arose from the extending the sale of corn and cattle into other countries, that in the year 1688, the first of Wm. and Mary, C. 12. the act past, that I will venture to call, the MAGNA CHARTA of English agriculture, by which it has been promoted to a degree not to have been conceived; and on this statute being unviolated, depends its future welfare; it is intitled, "*An act for encouraging the exportation of corn.*" The preamble to which is, *Forasmuch as it hath been found by EXPERIENCE that the exportation of corn and grain into foreign parts, when the price thereof is at A LOW RATE in this kingdom, hath been of great advantage not only to the owners of land, but to the trade of this kingdom in general, be it therefore,*

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&c." By this statute, the encouragement of the exportation is completed, by affixing a bounty to the export, when corn is at a LOW RATE, viz, five shillings for wheat, when 48 s. per quarter or under: 3s. 6d. for Rye, when 32 s. or under; and 2s. 6d. for barley, or malt, when 24s. or under.

These statutes, as far as they relate to grain, have succeeded to the utmost that could be wished, or expected; for, although every other necessary of life is become twice, or thrice, the price of that time, yet corn is on the average not half the price. If the wisdom of former parliaments had not promoted the exportation, and by encreasing the consumption reduced the price, it is very reasonable to conclude, that grain would have rose in proportion to all other country commodities, such as beef, mutton, pork, butter, cheese, milk, &c. which have doubled within these twenty-five years, and are treble the price they were in 1688, when wheat at FORTY-EIGHT SHILLINGS is called a LOW PRICE, which at present is reckoned extravagantly dear. If agriculture had not been promoted by establishing the exportation on advantageous terms to the farmer, grain must have rose in the same proportion as other things; and instead of the average price of wheat being

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being thirty shillings, only half the price of that time; it must have been at least six pounds, which is no more than double.

The present clamour for stopping the exportation, is neither founded on reason or justice, and can only proceed from the interested and the uninformed. The two great consumers of grain in this metropolis, are the brewer and the distiller; to a great brewer, the rise of one shilling a quarter on malt, is perhaps a 1000 pounds, a year. That the generality of mankind are more attentive to their own interest than to the public's, I believe, is a fact that cannot be denied; that the trader is particularly so, has been a maxim in all countries, and in all ages, from the first dawn of commerce to this day: It is therefore not extraordinary that a set of men so deeply concerned, should try every art to sink the price of grain; though at the expence of agriculture, the poor farmer, and the general interest of the country. The Borough of Southwark, if I am not misinformed, is represented by a BREWER and a DISTILLER; and the Borough of Southwark are the first set of people that have taken on them to determine for the legislature, how to act in this most important affair.

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Clamour once raised by interest, is always zealously pursued by ignorance. The daily papers, being open for the reception of the crude ideas of every man that has pen and ink; on the first hint that grain is dear, you find them filled with declamations against the exportation of corn. Not one enters into, or even knows, either the origin, or use of the export, but all unite to bawl in your ears, that the poor will be starved: "that the poor will be starved," are words that affect the multitude, and people living in peace and plenty, are soon persuaded that famine is near at hand. I love and honour the citizens of London, and think the whole nation much beholden to them for their spirited opposition to the tyranny and oppression of some late Ministers; but cannot compliment them so far, as to say, that I think them in the least degree judges of this general question, of stopping or suffering the exportation; on which, in my opinion, in a great measure depends, the prosperity, or ruin of English agriculture. Though politics flourish in Cheapside, no judgment can be there formed of husbandry; so that their ideas of procuring plenty by a temporary confinement of the present stock of grain, are founded on the credit of the interested essays in the Gazetteer, and other newspapers; which have too often induced them to interfere in this very important affair; without being informed

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of that unanswerable fact, that grain is cheaper at present by a third, than it was a century ago. I hope they will for the future make some inquiries into the subject, or remain silent.

When a set of people have a cause that they are conscious will not bear examination, and which they wish you to believe implicitly on their representation, they do not apply to your reason, but endeavour to interest your humanity and good nature: So the brewer, when he wants the exportation stopped, tells you, of the sufferings of the poor from a small addition to the price of bread; but this same brewer, not long since, to add to his enormous profits, raised porter a half-penny a quart, and then told you, the labourer got more than he could spend without being idle. Let any rational man impartially consider the exportation as the promoter of agriculture, and he will find, that no set of people are more interested in its success, than the body of poor throughout the whole kingdom. However numerous our manufacturers, yet there are more than ten times the number employed and maintained by husbandry. At the very least, every hundred acres supports two families, besides the infinite number of artizans, whose whole dependance for bread is on the prosperity of our corn trade;

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such as plough-makers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, collar-makers, &c. and every country trader. Such a measure may give bread, at a lower rate, for a small time, to the inhabitants of London, but will probably deprive the country poor of their bread for their whole lives.

The stopping the exportation of corn at this time, when wheat is but thirty-eight, or forty shillings, will not only be a measure contrary to sound policy, but NATIONAL FAITH. Trade has been found by experience to flourish in proportion to liberty: trade never succeeds, but where the trader has the greatest confidence in government, both for having his property protected, and his general and established privileges, on which his commerce is dependant, unvariable. The farmers of this country well know, that they grow much more grain than can possibly be consumed by ourselves, the distillery, starch-making, &c. and yet they every year inclose and break up more ground: why is this done? surely it cannot be supposed, that the farmer means to treat the the brewers, distillers, and London manufacturers with grain, at half the prime cost, and to be the cool spec-

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tator of his own and family's ruin; to serve others; no! he does it on the faith of parliament, by which he is promised, that, till wheat exceeds forty-eight shillings the quarter, and barley and malt twenty-four shillings, he shall not only have the liberty of sending his grain to foreign markets, but shall be enabled so to do, by a bounty of five shillings on the former, and two and six-pence on the latter. Has this statute been repealed? No! Has it been explained, like modern half-formed statutes, and the farmer told, that his present privileges were subject to the controul of the more powerful brewer? No! Is this statute, a superficial, inconsiderate law of yesterday? No! but it is a law of seventy-eight years standing, and in that time, found to be of the greatest benefit to the whole kingdom; and is now only clamoured against, because it is not understood. If this law is violated, can the farmer, for the future, confide even in the laws of his country, or conceive himself the object of their protection, when he sees the export of wheat stopt, tho' the price is only forty shillings, notwithstanding the law promises him a bounty, till it exceeds forty-eight shillings.

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The better to illustrate the subject, let us suppose that these artifices succeed, and that exportation of corn is stopt for three years; which is the time, I am told, the parties mean, or at least, did design to ask. I should be glad to know, why they take it for granted, that, in consequence of this law, corn will sink in price, because if we may, from former events, form a judgment of future, we might suppose the contrary. In the middle of February, 1757, the parliament in obedience to popular clamour, stopped the exportation of corn, and the distillery: at that time, wheat was about forty-six shillings; before the end of the month, it rose to fifty shillings; in March, it was fifty-six shillings; in April, sixty shillings; in May and June, sixty-three shillings; and so continued, till a plentiful harvest reduced it to about fifty; at which price it remained the whole year. It afterwards appeared, by the great quantities of old grain brought to market, that, so far from a real scarcity, there had been, during the whole year, more grain in the country, than was necessary both for the exportation, and the distillery; and that this act had operated quite different to the intention, and expectation of the shallow politicians that procured it. The farmer

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naturally concluded, that a measure so destructive to this most valuable trade, would not have been taken, but in case of absolute necessity: from stopping the exportation, he inferred, there must be a great scarcity; he saw grain advance daily; he, like every other trader, is disposed to make the most of his goods, and therefore he kept his grain from market. The common people, who had been taught to believe, as they are at present, that grain would become a drug, and the price fall as soon as the export was stopped, finding the exact contrary effect, and that wheat, which before the act they could have bought for five-shillings and six-pence the bushel, was rose to eight shillings, became exceeding riotous, going into several markets, and destroying, or seizing the corn. This so intimidated many well-meaning farmers, who were otherwise disposed to sell, that they would not venture their grain out of their own yards. Another very discouraging circumstance, that then happened, and always will happen, when the export and the distilling are stopped, is, that the markets are not a certain sale, and that grain of an inferior kind, may lie a long time without being disposed of. At most great markets, there is as much corn each day offered, as would serve the neigh-

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bourhood for months. There are also great quantities, that from being smutty, or damaged, are not saleable, except to the distiller, exporter, &c. because we are come to that degree of luxury, that a London chimney-sweeper will not eat any but the finest bread; so that the exported grain, is either the refuse, or the superfluity of an over-stocked market, which a distressed farmer disposes of at a lower rate, to pay land-tax, or exigencies; but when he is not almost certain of disposing of his grain, it cannot be conceived, he will be at the hazard and expence of drawing it to market. By these means, the stopping the export has, and may again contribute to the rise of grain.

I will now suppose the contrary, and that stopping the export and the distillery, will make such a glut of grain, as to reduce the price considerably: let me ask these zealots, upon what principle it is done; do they impeach the farmer of getting exorbitant profit? if they do, I would have them enter into the merits, and examine last year's harvest. I allow, that there was as great plenty of wheat as has been for many years; but there was a great deficiency of barley, oats,

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employed in fattening of cattle; but the state of pasture in most counties is quite different: for it affords no food for cattle in dry summers, and very little in winter; by which means, tillage is absolutely necessary for their support; the straw and chaff of the exported grain is left in the farmer's yard, and enables him to encrease his stock of cows, sheep, &c. If tillage is discouraged, sheep will not be kept in several places, where at present there are great quantities, because, in many countries, these are of no advantage to the farmer, except for folding his ground; and as on poor swade they do not grow better, he often at the end of a season, sells his stock at less than prime cost. The great encrease of sheep in some counties, is owing to the culture of turnips; and in proportion as you diminish your ploughed land, so the growth of turnips must decrease, and of course, fewer sheep can be bred or kept.

From these particulars, and historical deductions, I may venture to conclude, that neither the interest of the farmer, or the country in general, is the least attended to by the opponents of the exportation; nor is it at all to be wondered at, when we find, that the opposition comes from the shopkeepers in London and Southwark. The farmer, like every other trader, must have a sufficient profit, or

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he cannot go on long; the working his ground is equally expensive in scarce and plentiful years; in both he pays the same rent, keeps the same number of horses, has as many servants and labourers, is burthened with the same heavy taxes, and must provide himself and family with the necessaries of life; by the difference of seasons, his grounds at one time produces twice the quantity they do at another; in a favourable year, an acre of wheat may contain four quarters, in a bad one, not two; what is the poor farmer to do? is he to sell at the same price whether he has much or little? The expecting any thing so strange, is more like Quixots than London tradesmen: however, I believe, the farmer may agree, that if the corporation of London, or the inhabitants of Southwark, can produce a single member of theirs that act on this principle, and prefers ruin to advancing his goods in dear times, for fear of distressing the poor, he may venture to let this noble spirited tradesman, when found, fix the price of his grain; but till they act on these principles, they should let the farmer have some return for his toil and expence.

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I shall only mention one more particular, that I think evidently marks, that this clamour is raised to serve the private ends of a few, and not from a zeal for the benefit of the nation in general, or the welfare of the poor in particular; which is, that the people who endeavour to frighten you with the apprehension, that the poor will be starved by a quartern loaf being seven-pence, neither take notice of, or propose a remedy, for the present extravagant price of other provisions. A Frenchman, and most other foreigners, are principally beholden to bread for their subsistence; but the English eat great quantities of meat, and therefore, a farthing a pound advance on beef, and mutton, is of as much importance to a family, as two-pence on a quartern loaf, allowing a quartern loaf a day to a family of eight, and a pound of meat each; yet meat has rose within every man's memory a penny, or three half-pence, without any clamour, little complaint, and no desperate remedies tried, or indeed any applied, but the liberty of importing cattle from Ireland. Meat, butter, &c. are doubled in price within these twenty-five years; Grain not half the average price it was one hundred years ago. If we look back to ancient chronicles, we shall find a still greater disproportion. In the year, 1315, in the 8th of Edward the 2d, wheat sold at 40 s. a quarter,

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a quarter, and the year before, by the price of provisions settled by parliament, a grass-fed ox sold for 16 s.; so that wheat was at the price it now is, and an ox at least twenty times cheaper. In 1317, early in the year, wheat was four pounds a quarter. In 1586, 29th of Eliz. wheat in meal, was at London 3l. 4s. a quarter. In 1594, the same. In 1596, wheat meal, at London, 4l. a quarter†. In 1597, 5l. 4s. a quarter*. In 1648, wheat was 4l. 5s. a quarter, and the next year, 4l. †.

Let all these stated facts be well considered, and the grateful man will rather be disposed to fall down on his knees, and thank God for the great plenty we have been blessed with, in comparison to our ancestors, than to try hazardous experiments, in hopes of reducing the price still lower, which may ruin our export trade, and of course, English agriculture; for they have risen together, and neither can flourish without the other's aid. The impartial man must see that the exportation has been for many years the support of the Farmer; that the poor labourer depends

† By comparing the different value of money in those times, and these, the reduction of the price of grain is almost inconceivable.

* For particulars, see English chronicle, by Edm. How, Gent. and history of wheat, &c. by John Penkethman.

† See Bp. of Ely's account of the price of Grain; by which it appears, that grain, before the exportation was encouraged, was seldom less than forty-shillings, and that even since, it has oftener been above than under.

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on it for bread ; that, so far from being subject to famine, we have since been always blessed with plenty ; that the exportation is so interwoven with the general system of husbandry, that an infringement of this privilege may endanger the whole ; and therefore no impartial man will say, that it should be stopped with wheat at only FORTY-SHILLINGS, when the law PROMISES EVEN *the* BOUNTY till FORTY-EIGHT-SHILLINGS. The utmost advantage to be expected is a reduction of a few shillings, and that probably obtained by the loss of the most valuable, and generally useful trade, we at present possess ; perhaps the only trade we are not already in the most imminent danger of losing. A trade that draws from foreigners, little less than a million a year ; which is diffused all over the country among a set of industrious, valuable people, who are excluded from almost every other species of commerce, tho' contributing in a much larger degree to the exigencies of government, than traders, or manufacturers. Great sufferers by war, and by the late cruel, unfeeling, Scottish Ministry, unrelieved, even in their MIGHTY peace.

F I N I S.