the Earl of Lauderdale,
with respectful compts
from the Author.

A LETTER

TO

The Rt. Hon. F. ROBINSON,

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, &c. &c.

A LETTER

TO

THE RIGHT HONORABLE

FREDERICK ROBINSON,

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, &c. &c.

ON

THE POLICY AND EXPEDIENCY

OF

FURTHER PROTECTION

TO

THE CORN TRADE

OF GREAT BRITAIN:

AND

ON THE NECESSITY OF REVISING AND AMENDING THE LAST

CORN BILL;

PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS THE MODE OF MAKING THE RETURNS AND OF STRIKING THE AVERAGES, &c. &c.

BY A CORN FACTOR.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY JOSEPH MALLETT, 59, WARDOUR STREET, SOHO;

AND SOLD BY

LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,

PATERNOSTER ROW.

1819.

"YE GENEROUS BRITONS, VENERATE THE PLOUGH."

THOMSON.

A LETTER

ON

THE POLICY AND EXPEDIENCY OF PROTECTION

TO THE

CORN TRADE OF GREAT BRITAIN,

&c. &c.

SIR,

FEW objects of general interest have so much engaged the attention of writers on Political Economy, as the corn laws and the agricultural affairs of Great Britain. If wisdom was, always, the necessary consequence of a multiplicity of opinions, the subject ought now to be thoroughly understood; the legislative enactments connected with it should be the sagest; and the practical results the most beneficial. But, unfortunately, the subject has been rather much handled, than much understood. Like a flight of locusts, which darkens the air and blasts the hopes of the husbandman, this host of authors have only involved the discussion in greater obscurity; the legislative enactments have been framed on a narrow policy and partial views;

the farmer has ploughed up the waste in vain; the land-owner has beheld his interests sacrificed for objects of foreign and political aggrandizement; and the peasantry, driven from the cottages to the wilds of America, or to the workhouses, have lost their characteristics of independent manliness and honesty, and, tainted with all the vices of pauperism, instead of being "the pride," have become the disgrace, and are likely to prove the ruin, of their country.

I do not presume, Sir, to explain why the chief part of the writers on the Corn Laws have been men possessed of little practical experience, and misled by information which has been too often either defective or erroneous; much less why our law-givers have legislated on agricutural affairs from ex parte evidence; or, what is still more extraordinary, why those most concerned have participated in the formation of regulations detrimental to their own interests: my object is to communicate what I know to be the feelings of those who practically understand the subject. To convey such information, requires neither the powers of rhetoric, nor the charms of eloquence. The agriculturists for whom it is chiefly intended, are men of plain minds, who are not to be convinced by subtleties of reasoning, but by facts only; and in whom self-interest is the main spring of action: while to endeavour to persuade you, Sir, or the Members of the Legislature, by any other means than facts and substantial argu-

ments, would be as fruitless as attempting to still the tempest by scattering incense on the air. I venture, therefore, Sir, to address my countrymen, through you, as the President of the Board of Trade; in order to arrest their attention to a subject, from which I perceive other matters, certainly of great political moment to a commercial country, are likely to divert the discussion of Parliament, for this session at least; but which is, nevertheless, one of more vital importance to the welfare of the British Empire, than any other that can be brought under its consideration.

The spirit of commercial enterprize, which has greatly assisted in elevating this country to the high rank it holds among the nations, and has proved the soul of its manufacturing improvements, has, unfortunately, too much directed the fostering care of the Government to our colonial possessions and to foreign objects, in preference to the interests of agriculture; until, at length, Great Britain has been regarded, even by her own subjects, altogether as a manufacturing and trading country, which has little need to be anxious about internal cultivation, while she can command, by her colonial and manufactured exports, a ready and an abundant supply of the grain of other soils. This monstrous and dangerous doctrine has produced much of the apathy which has been displayed with regard to agriculture, and excited

many of the prejudices which exist against those who exercise it. The prosperity of the farmer, when advanced by accidental circumstances a few years since, was beheld with regret; and his elevation in society even regarded as a public evil. And, whilst he has been prevented, by popular clamour and impolitic laws, from taking advantage of events favourable to his interest, and raising the value of his produce, he has beheld the antient patrimony of his landlord passing into the hands of the wealthy manufacturer, or the more fortunate speculator. I do not, Sir, pretend to argue, that the advantages which favourable chances may turn up should not be seized by any branch of the community; but I lament that all have not the liberty of benefiting by such events; and that partial justice is meted to the subjects of a country, justly proud of its constitution, and boasting of the liberties and privileges it has conferred.

It would not be difficult to demonstrate the reverse of the position, which has just been noticed as being so generally admitted, and to prove that Great Britain is, to the full, as much an agricultural as a trading and manufacturing country. In a succession of the very worst seasons the importation of grain for the home market has never exceeded, in one year, a quantity adequate to six weeks' consumption; and in more favourable times it is considerably under that necessary for one month. Yet, with all this, no part of the community has enjoyed so little of the countenance and protection of Government as the farmers; and I do not hesitate to say, that, had they received one tenth part of the encouragement which the mercantile and manufacturing branches have shared, not only a sufficiency of grain would, in ordinary years, have been supplied for home consumption, but, could foreign markets be found, an ample supply also would have been raised for exportation. Numerous and important as the trading and manufacturing classes of the population of the British Empire are, I am of opinion that they could not exist without the agricultural class, who may be said to take off nearly four sixths of the produce of their whole labour, allowing that five sixths are required for the home market; a calculation which will be found to be pretty nearly correct: whereas it is more than probable that the agriculturists might exist, in a very great degree, independent of trade and manufacture. The greater extent of the capital employed in trade has often been brought forward as an argument by those who have declaimed against any peculiar protection being granted to the farmer: but, admitting the truth of this position, on which however I confess myself to be sceptical, whatever may be the capital of the agriculturists, the comparative importance of agriculture will be more fairly appreciated by reflecting on the following facts.—1. The value of the grain raised

in any ordinary year, in Great Britain alone, may be computed at upwards of one hundred millions of pounds; and that of cattle and other produce of the soil at probably an equal sum.—2. The major part of the burthens of the State are borne chiefly by the land; which, including King's taxes, poor's rates, tithes and other church rates, and those for making and repairing the roads, is taxed to the amount of nearly twenty-seven per cent. on the produce: whereas the proportion of the poor and church rates paid by the manufacturer is comparatively small; and the funded property is altogether exempted*.—3. The agricultural part of the community supply almost all the soldiers to the army; a circumstance which will be acknowledged to be of great importance, even by those who neglect our internal resources. Did the heroes of Talavera, Barrossa, and Waterloo, come chiefly from the workshop of the artizan, or from the plough and the mountain side? Yet this real source of the strength and glory of the Empire, its sinews in war and its pride in peace, has been most unaccountably neglected; and poverty and distress, almost to annihilation, allowed to overtake that portion of the population which, in the

* This may be illustrated by the following example. Suppose A, to die, leaving three children; two of which, B and C, are sons, and one, D, a daughter. Among these the fortune of their father, which is £60,000 in money, is equally divided, giving to each £20,000. B, the eldest son, buys an estate, for which he pays the whole of his fortune; and, by living

energetic language of the poet, "when once destroyed, can never be supplied."

Those who regard the welfare of our country to depend on foreign connexions, colonies, and

on it, and working it to the best advantage, he makes five per cent. per annum for his money, or £1000.

Out of this income he pays 10 per cent. as tithes, or	£100	
Fifteen per cent. as poor rates, or	150	
And as land tax and high-way duty	20	
Say total of taxes, 27 per cent. or		£270
C, the younger son, is a manufacturer, and expends in building a house for his trade	£3000	
And in machinery, &c	7000	
The capital requisite for carrying on his trade demands the remaining sum of	10,000	
Out of the profit which he realises, at whatever that may be, whether one or 100 per cent. he pays 10 per cent. as church rates on his rent, only, which is £150, or	£15 0 0	
Fifteen per cent. as poor rates, computed on his rent only, or	22 10 0	
Highway duties, &c. on his rent	3 0 0	
Say total of taxes, 4 per cent. or		£40 10 0
Hence B, the agriculturist, pays a surplus equal to		£229 10 0

D, the daughter, invests her £20,000 in the stocks, so as to obtain an annual income of £1000; out of which she is required to pay nothing, as she may live in a cottage which is not rateable; or pay taxes upon her rent only, in the same manner as her younger brother.

commerce, and its glory altogether on the brilliant achievements of its arms, cannot complain of the indifference of Government to these objects. On the contrary, while every thing has been lavished upon them, let us examine what protection and encouragement has been given to the native agriculturist.

Perhaps few individuals, unconnected with the corn trade, are aware that no species of grain imported into this country, although brought into our ports in foreign vessels, navigated by foreign seamen, pays any duty; neither is any paid on foreign meal or flour; yet every other article of foreign manufacture, and even several raw ingredients of foreign produce, pay in many instances a very high, and in some almost a prohibitary, importation duty. The foreign cultivator, therefore, although he pays none of our taxes, yet, is rendered capable, even under the restrictions of the present Corn Bill, of bringing his produce to a British market with advantages superior to those enjoyed by the native farmer, who is heavily burthened with taxation, and who, in feeling the partial manner in which the taxes of his country are levied, almost sickens in applying his exertions for the improvement of its soil. But this is not all: the Legislature, as if determined to crush the native farmer altogether, by enabling the Canadian colonists to send grain home, when the average is much under that which opens the British ports

to other countries*, has contrived a method for covering the grain of the United States, by which it finds its way into Great Britain, in the same manner as French and Dutch produce† might be brought in, if covered by Guernsey; and at a time when the price of corn is not

* The ports are opened for foreign wheat only when the average price of that grain is at and above 80*s*. per quarter; but Canadian wheat is allowed to be brought into the home market when the price is 64*s*. per quarter.

† I am disposed to think the chief object which our farmers and labourers have in view in emigrating to America, is to cultivate the unoccupied lands there, and raise grain for the British market. Every one knows that America has long cultivated more than a sufficiency of corn for her own consumption; and, as she is now cut off from all direct intercourse with the British colonies, she has no other certain market for her surplus produce than that of Great Britain. But our receiving American grain is giving, in fact, a direct bounty to the cultivation of her wilds, and consequently presenting obstacles to the bringing in of our own wastes; which, if brought into tillage, would do more in employing the people, and enabling them not only to live comfortably, but to pay taxes, than any other plan that could be projected. I do not even hesitate to assert, that it would do as much, if not more, as a nursery for seamen, than all the foreign commerce that Great Britain now has or perhaps ever will command. For example—

It is stated that, in Ireland alone, there are upwards of 2,800,000 acres of waste or bog land, nearly all capable of being cultivated; with an idle, illiterate, starving population, that neither consumes foreign produce nor native manufactures, and really enjoying, comparatively, fewer comforts than the brutes. But if 1,000000 of acres only of this waste and bog land were employed in growing corn, the produce, taking

nearly sufficient to enable the British farmer to pay his rent and taxes, independent of the support of himself and his family. I have no desire to claim unnecessary protection for the agriculturist; but why should one part of a community be protected at the expence of another? If the farmer be forced, owing to the prohibitary importation

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the average weight of corn to be as follows, viz.—wheat, 57lb per Winchester bushel; rye, 50lb; barley, 48lb; beans and pease, 58lb; and oats, 38lb; making a general average of 50lb per Winchester bushel; would be 24,000000 of bushels, equal to 1200,000000lbs. weight: a calculation formed on the supposition that the produce of each acre would average three quarters, or twenty-four bushels. Now, 1200,000000lbs, divided by 2240, will produce 535,714 tons, 5 cwt. 2 quarters, 24lbs. of corn (allowing 20 cwt. to the ton); which quantity would require, to carry it to market, 7,657 vessels of 70 tons each, and one vessel of 74 tons, 5 cwt. 2 qrs. 24lbs. (the average tonnage of vessels employed in the Irish and coasting trade being 70 tons); and supposing the corn to be worth, on an average, 40*s.* per quarter, the produce of its sale would be, in money.....£6,000000

The straw, computed at 15*s.* per acre, may be reckoned worth..... .....£750,000

The freight and insurance of the corn, at 5*s.* per qr. 750,000

Making a total of.....£7,500,000

The transfer of the above stated quantity of corn would employ, allowing three men to each vessel, 22,959 seamen.

The cultivation, also, of the above-stated number of acres would require 50,000 labourers, allowing one man to twenty acres; and its produce, which is pretty nearly equal to the average importation of foreign corn for one year, would feed 1,500,000 people, allowing two quarters to each person.

duties on foreign manufactures, to purchase all the manufactured articles he may require from his own countrymen, and be compelled to send his produce to market in British vessels, why should not the manufacturer also be forced to purchase the grain he requires from the British farmer only, by similar restraints? Were society not in an artificial state, I would disclaim every restraint; but if they must exist, let equal justice be meted to all. The farmer cannot even convert many articles of his own produce into the necessaries of domestic consumption. He is not permitted to make soap, candles, starch, nor even malt nor spirits; nor can he export his own wool. In these prohibitions he has to complain of restraints which are imposed upon no other class of British subjects.

But I shall be told that the farmer has no right to complain, as the last Corn Bill secured to him a price for his grain, adequate to the labour and expence bestowed on its cultivation. In answer I would say:—it is true, the last Corn Bill was passed on a conviction that the farmer was unprotected; and under a supposition that the raising the import price of foreign wheat to 80*s.*—of rye, beans, and peas, to 53*s.*—of barley, bear or big, to 40*s.*—and of oats, to 27*s.*—would have secured to him a monopoly of the home market; and thence have enabled him to pay his rent and taxes, and support himself and

his family. Perhaps I might be inclined to admit that these prices, which are however rather too low, particularly with regard to oats, as far at least as Ireland is concerned, if obtained on the spot where the grain is grown, would nearly secure the farmer: but, from circumstances, which I am about to detail, it will appear evident that that Bill does not afford to him a sufficient security; because its privileges do not secure to him a complete monopoly of the home market, the only protection which he can regard as adequate.

In the north of England, in Wales, in Scotland, and in Ireland, the humidity of climate prevents grain from arriving at the same degree of perfection it attains to in the south of England and in many other parts of Europe; where it is in general saved in such admirable condition, as to enable the farmer, if he chuses, to thrash it on the field, and procure for it an immediate market, and a high average price*. But the Irish, Welch, and northern cultivators, cannot enjoy these ad-

* Early and well-saved grain is generally greedily bought up for seed, and for mixing with and sweetening old wheats, for the use of the baker.—Some people pretend that English wheat requires the admixture of foreign, to make good bread; but that position is not tenable; and I do not hesitate to assert, without the fear of contradiction, that better bread cannot be baked, than that which is made of flour manufactured solely from English wheat.

vantages. The grain raised by them is seldom, or never, fit for immediate consumption, and never able to bear a voyage to the London or other great English markets, unless it be kiln-dried; consequently the farmer must either keep it in the stack until it become sufficiently dry and hard for grinding or shipping, or kiln-dry it. If he keep his corn, he must lose by the use and interest of money: he must also lose by weight, insurance against fire, and destruction by vermin, at least 8*s*. per quarter on wheat, and on other grain in proportion; and if he kiln-drys it, although he will be enabled to turn it more rapidly into money, yet he will be a still greater loser. The present Corn Bill, therefore, although it may, in some degree, benefit those cultivators who can dispose of their produce very near the place where it is raised, yet, affords no adequate protection to those who, from locality of circumstances, are forced to send it to a distant market. Both parties, nevertheless, are in other respects equal; both pay the same burthens to the state: and, although the farmer in the south may pay a little more rent, and perhaps higher wages to his labourers (which is not always the case), yet, the comparatively small expence at which he can send his grain to market, is more than an equivalent for any additional expence incurred in its production.

I have already mentioned that the protecting price, in the present Corn Bill, is too low as far

as it concerns oats; and that Ireland in particular, which is an export country for oats, and cultivates chiefly this species of grain, is very seriously affected by it. To be satisfied of the accuracy of this assertion, it is only requisite to look at the condition of the Irish farmer, and the disadvantages under which his produce is sent to the English market. The political state of his country, an indelible stain on British legislation, renders him discontented as a subject. The uncertain tenure by which he holds his farm, produces an indifference to its improvement; and his consequent poverty, which is kept up by the necessity of his produce being sold for a distant market, in which it has to compete with foreign oats, if the price exceed 27*s.* per quarter, too often destroys every principle of honesty and fair dealing, and leads him to endeavour, by the adulteration of his grain, to obtain by an additional weight what he is certain of losing in price. Instead, therefore, of being protected by the last Corn Bill, he is scarcely able to pay his rent and taxes, independently of maintaining himself and his family, in a state approaching to starvation; and hence is driven to supply his deficiencies by stratagem and fraud*.

* In Ireland the farms are very small, which, with the necessities of the farmers, causes the corn to be brought to the Irish markets in small quantities, and sold by weight.

The object, therefore, anticipated from the last Corn Bill has been, in almost every instance, defeated: and, while it has attached the odium of monopoly on the farmers and landowners, it has not secured to them any substantial consolation for the unpopularity they have incurred. But even allowing that the principle upon which it was framed be good, yet, if this be confined in operation, and the mode by which the actual state of the markets should be ascertained be defective (as I hope I shall be able to prove), the Bill, in fact, becomes a dead letter. It was passed on a conviction, as has been already noticed, that foreign corn should not be permitted to be imported for home consumption, as long as grain of British growth remained under a certain price

Owing to the stones and dirt with which it is purposely mixed, in order to increase its weight, the Irish merchant, who purchases this grain for the English market, is at a considerable expence in cleaning it, which, in addition to the other expences that must be incurred in transporting it, renders it impossible that the farmer can obtain more than 17*s.* 2½*d.* per quarter, even allowing that Irish oats could be sold at 27*s.* the protecting price in the London market: and, if it be further considered, that, from the deteriorated character of the article, this price is *almost never* procured for it, the reader will readily judge how far the Irish farmer, after paying his rent and taxes, is capable of supporting himself and a family, even supposing he has neither servant nor cattle, nor any other implements of trade than a spade, a sickle, and a flail. To illustrate this

per quarter; for example, 80*s.* for wheat. But the enactment on this point is partial, inasmuch

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point, let us suppose that a quarter of Irish oats is sold in London for..... £1. 7*s.*

The charges to be deducted are:

Cartage from the farm to market...	£0	0	8
Merchants' Commission for purchasing, expence of kiln-drying, warehouse rent, chartering vessels, and shipping—5 per cent. or about.....	0	1	4
Interest of money from the day of purchase (the corn being bought for cash), until the corn is sold, and the credit expired—say, 8 months, is about	0	0	10½
Coals, and loss of weight in kiln-drying, and for labour—10 per cent. or about.....	0	2	8
Freight, calculated at an average of 18*s.* per ton of 20 cwts. and the quarter of oats, averaging 296 lbs.	0	2	4½
Marine Insurance—1½ per cent. or about..... ...	0	0	4¾
Average loss of measure, and damage at the bottom of the cargoes—1 per cent.....	0	0	3¼
Dock and port dues, with insurance against fire—½ per cent.	0	0	1½
Commission for affecting insurance, advancing money, selling, and guaranteeing debts, 4 per cent.	0	1	1
Total charges	0	9	9½
Nett price to the grower.....	0	17	2½

as the average* is ordered to be taken from the twelve maritime districts of England and Wales only, leaving the whole of Scotland and of Ireland unnoticed; although it must be evident, that whatever may be considered as a protecting price, should apply to the Empire generally, the taxes and public burthens being borne equally by all, in proportion to their circumstances and ability†. As foreign corn, also, when admitted

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* The first Act, for preventing the too great importation of grain into Great Britain, by securing correct returns of the prices, or, in other words, fixing an average, was passed in 1685.

† The following extract from tables of the comparative prices of corn in England and Wales, and in Scotland, in 1817, signed by Mr. Dowding, the Receiver of Corn Returns, will shew the importance of striking the average not from the returns of England and Wales only, but from those of the whole kingdom.

	Wheat, per qr.			Rye.			Barley.		
Eng. and Wales...	£4	14	9	£2	16	6	£2	8	3
Scotland.....	3	8	3	1	18	4	1	9	8
Difference.....	1	6	6	0	18	2	0	18	7

	Oats, per qr.			Beans.			Peas.		
Eng. and Wales...	£1	12	1	£2	12	0	£2	11	5
Scotland.....	1	3	8	1	15	5	1	15	8
Difference.....	0	8	5	0	16	7	0	15	9

The injustice done to the Scotch farmer by opening the ports, under such circumstances, does not require to be pointed out.

for home consumption, pays no duty, and becomes British property, it is not unreasonable, Sir, to contend that it should be placed under the same regulations as British produce, and its sale be noticed in determining the averages. This, however, is not the case; no returns of foreign or even of Irish grain made by the dealers in London are noticed in striking the averages; and in the country the returns are made on the best English only, which is often 8*s*. per quarter dearer than the middling; and the ports, thereby, opened for foreign corn, which is on an average above 8*s*. per quarter inferior to English, and sells at that sum less in the twelve maritime districts. In London, the factors make weekly returns of the quantities of corn they sell, with the prices it fetches; but the receiver of the returns pays no attention to either the quantity or the price of the foreign or the Irish corn, in making up his averages: and no notice whatever is taken of foreign flour of any description; which, from being a perishable commodity, must be sold as soon as possible after it arrives, and consequently averages, in general, 8*s*. per quarter lower in proportion than wheat. This remark applies most forcibly to American flour, the importation of which, in 1817, exceeded 1,000000 of barrels, equal to 500,000 quarters of wheat; more than nine-tenths of which were imported in American bottoms, navigated by American seamen. Another objection to the

ready introduction of this flour, is, that it affects one at least of our manufactures; the whole being ground by American millers, to the prejudice of our own millers, who may be truly declared to be the only manufacturers in Great Britain who are unprotected*:—for, although the mill property in this country may be estimated at about £8,000,000, and the number of people employed in it at nearly 300,000, yet, for want of a protecting duty, the British miller was actually robbed, in 1817, of at least £100,000, the price of grinding the 1,000000 of barrels of American flour, imported in that year; whilst, at the same time, he was imperiously called upon to pay taxes for the support of that government, who could thus so shamefully neglect his interest.

Let us now, sir, examine in what manner the returns are really made out. As the law stands, candour obliges me to admit, that the parties making the returns are bound, on oath, to deliver a true and honest return; but, as it is their interest to make false returns, the oath, as too frequently happens in matters of pecuniary regulation, is little regarded; and, in the majority of the districts, the returns are made by the bakers only, who state the average at fully 8*s*. per quar-

* This observation does not apply to the Irish millers, who are fully protected by the total prohibition of the importation of foreign meal or flour into Ireland.

ter above the actual market-price, and return on the best wheat only, which is always four shillings, and often eight shillings, higher than the middling quality*. This fraudulent mode of making up the returns by the bakers, is intended to regulate the assize of bread to suit their particular interests†. Thus, when the average of wheat is stated to be eighty shillings per quarter in the Gazette, it is actually little more than sixty shillings‡; and of other kinds of grain in proportion.

The effect of such incorrect returns on opening the ports of Great Britain, is much more considerable than those unacquainted with the corn trade would readily credit: and occasionally the most trivial transactions, even in the smaller maritime districts, will effect that result. As a convincing proof of this, I need merely mention that the sale of six quarters of oats, in the spring of 1818, in the Swansea market, opened all the British ports for the importation of that species of grain, although the real average of oats, at the time, was below twenty-seven shillings per quarter, the import price*. It is also a fact that, in the majority of both the Welch and the English districts, whilst the averages returned by them appear highest in the Gazette, the factors in these districts are actually sending supplies to the London, Liverpool, Bristol, and other markets, the returns from which are the lowest in the same Gazette. It must be evident, therefore, that whatever may be the advantages of the last Corn Bill, even admitting them to the full extent, they must be almost entirely nugatory, as long as false returns

* In the provincial papers, wheat is sometimes quoted at 10*s.* per quarter below the London quotation, while the quartern loaf, in the same places, is 2*d.* dearer than in London.

† I am credibly informed, that, when the assize of bread existed in London, the bakers entered into an agreement with the millers to purchase flour at the nominal price of 90*s.* per sack, when the real price was 80*s.* only; the additional 10*s.* being returned to them as discount on the payment of their purchases: by which understanding they were enabled to defraud the public, by obtaining the assize to be set at 10*s.* higher than it ought to have reached. So much for an assize of bread!

‡ The corn factors have, of late, been much surprized to find the price of corn stated as being higher in the Gazette, at the very time when they knew it had fallen considerably, and sales were extremely dull.—(See *Gazette*, particularly as referring to the Welch districts.)

* This transaction was particularly inquired into by the merchants of Cork, who discovered that it had originated in an unfair return. They remonstrated with the Irish government (see *Cork Journal*); and the fraudulent nature of the return has been since acknowledged by a Welch Member, in the present session of Parliament, who endeavoured to explain it by stating that the return was made in Welch instead of English measure. The remonstrance of the Cork merchants against this Welch average, is well known to Mr. Peel, who was at that time the Irish Secretary of State.

can be made, and the averages struck upon these returns. The malady is not irremediable; but, as it has fixed upon the vitals, it can only be removed by a radical alteration of the whole system.

Having thus endeavoured to shew that the British agriculturist is still unprotected, notwithstanding the apparent guarantee of the last Corn Bill, I will venture to suggest some means for removing the evil. In doing so, Sir, far be it from me to advance my hints with an air of dogmatism. Such as they are, they may prove the basis of some practically beneficial measures; and if such be the result, my object will be attained.

Was not Europe, or rather the world, in a completely artificial state, as far as commerce is concerned, nothing would so effectually relieve the farmer and benefit the landowner, as the abolition of all restrictions whatsoever on the sale of grain, either for home or for foreign consumption; or, in other words, the entire freedom of trade in corn; but, as this is not the case, other measures must necessarily be resorted to, consonant to the real state of general commerce. Were the averages correctly obtained, the remedy might be found in a modification of the last Bill: but, in my opinion, the imposition of an import duty on grain of all kinds would be a more equitable and much more effectual measure. Let us now take an impartial view of both of these plans; and, in doing

so, I must beg leave to repeat, that, as my object is rather to direct the attention of the Members of the Legislature and the country to the consideration of the subject, than dogmatically to insist on the adequacy of my own proposals, I wish the ideas I am now about to offer to be regarded rather in the light of hints, than in that of a well-digested and complete plan.

As a preliminary, I must observe, that, whatever remedy may be adopted, the assize of bread throughout the kingdom ought to be abolished; and that article of life sold, as every thing should be, by weight, for the utmost it can fetch. Little argument is necessary to prove, that whatever is sold for what it will fetch, particularly if sold by weight, and the article be one of general consumption, can never acquire a higher price than it ought to bear, commensurate with the demand. And it should be generally known, that, with regard to bread, this has very long, I may perhaps say always, been the custom in Manchester, where the people are better and more cheaply supplied with that necessary of life, than in any other part of the kingdom. On the same principle, whatever the remedy may be, the averages should be correctly taken. By what method is this to be accomplished? It might be supposed that the country gentlemen, who are the landowners, would be careful to see that proper returns are made in their particular districts; but as this des-

cription of individuals are generally either extremely indolent or averse from business of every description, I would propose that the returns be collected by the Excise in the following manner. In each district, for example, the quantity as well as the price of all grain, foreign as well as British and Irish, good, bad, and indifferent*, which has been sold within a specified time, should be returned, and the average struck upon the quarter of each variety†. These averages should then be transmitted to the Board of Commissioners in London; who, in conjunction with a Committee of the Board of Agriculture, appointed for the purpose of watching over the interests of the landed proprietors, would be readily enabled, from a comparative examination, to strike the general average; which should be, as at present, regu-

* Scotch, Irish, and more particularly foreign corn, is, on an average, always less valuable than English, by 8*s.* or 10*s.* per quarter.

† As, in almost every county, the weights and measures are different, and in some instances they differ materially, even in the same county, a difficulty might thence be supposed to arise in obtaining correct returns. To obviate this objection, I would suggest that the returns be made, in the first instance, agreeably to the sales and purchases; but that the receiver should afterwards state the comparative difference between these and the Winchester measure and standard weight, in the reports transmitted to the Board of Commissioners in London. An additional advantage might, also, result from obliging returns to be made by the purchaser as well as the seller.

larly published in the Gazette. My reason for naming the Excise to this duty, is, that my experience has convinced me it is a most active, indefatigable, and impartial department; and one into which fewer abuses are likely to enter than any other under Government. The medium, however, through which the returns are made, is of secondary importance, the great object being correctness.

Now, supposing that the averages are fairly obtained, it may be asked, what modification of the present Bill would relieve the farmer and landowner, without injuring the public? The answer to this question may be given in a very few words. In my opinion, the present prices, except in the case of oats, would be a protection to the farmer, were the averages fairly taken*. For this purpose, the method I have hinted at, or some other, ought to be enforced by law; and so important do I regard such an enforcement to be, that I have no hesitation in asserting, that an equitable return of averages would be nearly as beneficial to the farmer, and consequently to the landowner, as an additional protecting advance of 20*s.* per quarter, under the present system of returns;

* In Liverpool, and many other country markets, the returns on wheat only are made; and no notice taken of any other description of corn.

whilst it would also have the advantage of not being felt by the consumer; who might naturally complain of the rise, which any additional advance in corn must necessarily produce on the price of bread. With reference to oats, I have already explained my reasons for thinking the present protecting price too low, particularly as far as concerns the Irish farmer; nor is the Scotch farmer, nor any grower of oats who is obliged to send his grain to market by sea, or coastways, less interested; for the freight and charges on a low-priced article are much higher in proportion than on one of greater value, the bulk in both instances being equal. I think I am therefore justified in asserting, that the distant grower of oats, who is forced to seek a market for his commodity at London, Liverpool, or other great markets, cannot be fully protected under 32*s.* per quarter: and even this will barely afford him a living profit, the land upon which oats are generally raised being in many instances incapable of bearing wheat or any other more advantageous crop, which would make up the loss on the cultivation of oats and other sorts of inferior grain. As another reason for so high a protecting price as 32*s.* I may mention the enducement which Canadian, Guernsey, Jersey, and foreign growers of oats, have to send them to a British market, and the ample profits they obtain when the ports are opened under the present system, for the reasons which

have been already stated*. The additional charges of freight, &c. which, on account of the distance, might be regarded as an obstacle to the Canadian oats being sent to the mother country, operate in a much less degree on the colonial

* The necessity for a protecting importation duty on flour is not less obvious than on oats. I have already noticed the injustice done to the British millers by the great importation of American flour in 1817; and it is remarkable that, although before the last Corn Bill was passed there was a protecting impost of 2*s.* 6*d.* per cwt. on all foreign flour, yet, this circumstance was altogether overlooked in framing that Bill. I am of opinion that an extra importation duty of 10*s.* per barrel on American flour would not check its importation: and it is a fact, that the injury sustained by this country from the free importation of flour is greater than from double the quantity of wheat; owing to its being a perishable article, and requiring, to use a technical phrase, to be instantly forced off.

The large proportion of flour, compared with that of wheat, which is imported into our ports from America, has been often matter of surprise. It arises partly from the saving of freight on the diminished bulk of the article; but, more particularly, on the fact that the American millers have a monopoly of the corn market of the United States, owing to their contracting with the cultivators for the corn they raise, long before it is reaped, to be paid for at the market price of the date of its delivery: a system which prevents the merchants, generally speaking, from obtaining supplies of wheat, and, consequently, executing orders for exportation. As the American millers also, who have the finest corn mills in the world kept up, as has been already stated, at the expence of the British millers, and are, besides, very wealthy, purchase the wheat they grind for cash, and sell their flour on credit, much encouragement is given to speculators to export flour.

farmer, than the taxes and rates with which the British grower is burthened; and, if to these be added the freight coastways, and the other charges which must necessarily accrue on a commission sale, the disadvantages under which the latter comes into the market must be very obvious. The only remedy, therefore, under the existing Bill, is to raise the protecting price to such a sum as will encourage the cultivation of British oats, and consequently prove nearly a complete prohibition of the importation of that species of grain. Any chance of a deficiency of oats, in the event of a short crop, need not be dreaded; for the price being so high, the foreign grower will, under every circumstance, bring his grain to this country, provided he is certain of a market, whatever may be the wants of his own. Oats, like every other article of commerce, will always find a way to that purchaser who is capable and ready to give the best price. With the above-stated modification of the last Bill, therefore, the agriculturist would undoubtedly have much less cause for complaint than he now has: but under no alteration of it would he be so materially benefited as by the imposition of an importation duty on foreign corn, graduated according to Mr. Huskison's suggestions. Regarding it in a practical point of view, I cannot perceive one solid objection to such a measure; and assuredly no method of protecting the farmer, and consequently the landed proprie-

tor, would be so little felt by the public, whose interest as consumers has always been considered paramount to that of the growers, and I will admit the propriety of the preference, in every legislative enactment respecting grain.

The idea of an import duty on grain is by no means novel. Before the passing of the last Corn Bill, foreign grain could, at all times, be imported into Great Britain for home consumption, on paying a small duty which varied according to the price of the article at the period; and the revival of this plan, properly modified, is exactly what is now required. It would not very materially lessen the importation of foreign grain in a season of scarcity, whilst it would tend to reduce the burthens of the British farmer, by virtually raising a revenue on foreign cultivation. That it would, however, lessen the general importation to a certain extent, must be admitted: for at present the inducement to send foreign grain to a British market the moment the ports open, or to await the opening of the ports, is so great, that foreign merchants are actually, always, pouring it into this country*, partly on their own risks: and often at times, when no British merchants

* See the Import Lists, for the enormous importations which have lately taken place, and still continue, and are likely to occur as long as British merchants will make advances upon the consignments.

could venture to give an order on his own account. I can confidently assert, Sir, that, on an average, two thirds at least of the foreign corn and flour brought into Great Britain, are on consignment from foreign mercantile houses. The only disadvantage, therefore, that can be supposed to attend an importation duty, is, that, from its discouraging the foreign cultivator, by throwing greater difficulties in the way of a market for his surplus produce, this country might, in some years, be in danger of famine. To this I would answer, that, as the supply of every thing is always regulated by the demand, the additional encouragement bestowed on the exertions of the British farmer by a properly graduated importation duty, would bring so much land into tillage, and improve so highly that on which corn is already raised, that it is probable the supply would be generally such as to maintain the duty on foreign corn at the highest ratio; and, even in the most unfavourable years, it would scarcely fall to the lowest. Under existing circumstances, also, it should be known, that, were the ports not otherwise shut, no low prices which have ever come under my knowledge, have been able to prevent the importation of foreign grain, even when the exchanges are against this country, if British merchants can be found to consent to make advances on such consignments. On this account, when the ports are opened, the British merchant professes to come under advances to the

foreign shipper, to the extent of two thirds of the probable net proceeds of his consignment: but in many instances, even three fourths and sometimes more than the whole are found to have been advanced, owing to occasional rapid and unforeseen reduction of prices*. This is still encreasing the profits of foreign cultivators, encouraging foreign shipping, and giving foreigners a bounty indirectly on the corn they send to us.

The disadvantage under which this country has laboured with respect to exchanges, has been long felt and lamented; but it is difficult to conceive how it can be otherwise, under the present system of our commercial intercourse with foreign nations, which is not founded on reciprocity. Thus, if we annually receive foreign corn, equal to one month's consumption, and in value to about £8,000000, without imposing any duty upon its importation; and, also, the articles of cotton and wool for our staple manufactures, at a comparatively insignificant duty, whilst other countries will not receive our commodities on the same terms; and France, in particular, will not admit our manufactures on any terms whatsoever—how can the exchange by possibility be

* This has the effect of locking up the capital of the British merchant, which should be employed in making advances on British produce; and consequently tends to keep down prices.

otherwise than against us? It is to this state of the exchanges, that the disappearance of our bullion is to be attributed; and as long as it continues so, it would be preposterous to hope for the return of a metallic currency in this country. Looking at the question, therefore, in all its bearings, it may reasonably be demanded: For what purpose do we exhaust our strength and weaken our resources, by forcing manufactures and foreign commerce, while more solid and permanent advantages would be the result of confining our attention chiefly to agriculture and internal objects? To say that Great Britain could exist independent of commerce altogether, is a remark which admits of much discussion and diversity of opinion; but, that her welfare would be much increased by looking more at home, and, to use a homely phrase, *minding her own affairs*, is a truth on which there can be but one opinion.

It has been argued, that a duty on the importation of foreign corn, would have the effect of hampering our export trade in other commodities. But it must be recollected, that, as things now exist, foreign corn is brought duty free into this country, whilst every article which is sent out of it, in return for corn, pays a heavy duty to the country receiving it. It is by no means evident that any importation duty less than cent. per cent. would prove a complete barrier to the import of foreign

corn into this country, whenever the supply might demand it, or, in other words, whenever it can find a market; for if, under the existing laws, two thirds are sent in at the risk of the foreign merchant, in the other case orders would be given, and the advantage accrue to the importer. The general traffic of the world is conducted, at the present moment, altogether under restrictions and artificial regulations; consequently no reasoning, founded on the idea of a free trade, can be correct or tenable. The reasoning, also, that supposes mercantile transactions would be cramped by a merely temporary liberty to import grain, because distant orders could not be executed from the period of opening the ports, before they might be again shut, is equally fallacious. The fact is, that corn is always imported, whether the ports be open or shut, as long as our merchants will agree to make advances on the consignments: and, although the foreign produce thus imported cannot be brought into the market until the ports are open, yet, it is in the country, ready and in waiting for that event; or, in lieu of it, for an export demand:—A proof that mercantile enterprize is at all events sufficiently active, even under the existing restrictions. The idea that grain is a perishable commodity, as has been often advanced in argument, is incorrect; on the contrary, wheat may be kept for thirty years, provided it be regularly turned, in a dry, airy room: and this

is a process never neglected when corn is warehoused. The annual expence of this system of warehousing, including interest on the purchase-money, waste, rent, and other charges, does not exceed from six shillings to eight shillings per quarter, even in London. Flour, also, although it be a perishable article, is imported in great quantities from America to await the opening of our ports*.

It is an axiom, Sir, in political economy, that the price of every commodity, whether it be the raw material or a manufactured article, should be equivalent to the labour bestowed on its production, and to the necessary wants of the labourer. This, however, notwithstanding the popular

* It is not a little remarkable, that, in framing the last Corn Bill, such as it is, the possibility of bread being imported into this country in sufficient quantity to injure our agricultural interests has been altogether overlooked; and, under the existing laws, wheat, in the form of bread, may be sent into any British port, duty free, whatever may be its price in the home market at the time of the importation. Nor is this an oversight which has not been taken advantage of by those interested: for it is a well-known fact, that American biscuits have been imported in large quantities, and re-shipped for Newfoundland, to the great disadvantage of our own biscuit bakers. They might even have been consumed in Great Britain; and what law, I would ask, is there to prevent a contractor of bread for the supply of the Navy, from furnishing the whole of the quantity required, from wheat grown, ground into flour, and baked into Bread, in France or any other country?

clamour against what has been denominated the high protecting prices of the last Corn Bill, has been denied to the British agriculturist. Whether an importation duty, according to a graduated scale, would place him in a preferable position, is yet to be proved; but, as far as we may venture to form a judgment from the consideration of all the circumstances of the case, such, we may confidently presume, would be its natural result. It would, besides, have the additional advantage of rendering the trade as free as it can be, in the present artificial state of the commercial world. What the duties ought to be, I have no data for determining; and I must rest satisfied with having attempted to point out the necessity and the advantages of the measure.

The facts and reasoning advanced in the foregoing pages, authorize us to draw the following conclusions:—

1. That the interests of the agricultural part of the British community are not sufficiently protected by law; inasmuch as the existing Corn Bill, which was framed for their protection, is rendered inefficient from the present method of returning the averages.

2. That they cannot be fully protected by any extension of the present system.

3. That they may be sufficiently protected, however, either by a modification of the last

Corn Bill, so as to obtain fair returns, and by an advance on the importation price of oats:—or, which would be much more advantageous, both to the cultivator and the consumer, by the imposition of an import duty on foreign grain, agreeably to the plan of a graduated scale, as suggested by Mr. Huskison.

Such, Sir, are the opinions and facts I have to lay before you, and in your hand I leave them. Without presuming to step too far out of my course, I may be permitted to observe, that the state of the British Empire at the present juncture loudly demands that something should be effected to render our internal resources adequate to our wants in a moment of emergency. The example of Empires that now exist but in History, is sufficient to teach us that foreign objects and foreign connections, too long persisted in, lead but to downfall and ruin; while the internal resources of a nation well nurtured and properly husbanded, enable it to defy the inroads of misfortune from without, and, within, to ward off even the destructive hand of Time. Great Britain is not destitute of these sources of stability; and were her agriculture, as one of the most important of these, properly protected, she might not only become the granary, but the emporium of Europe.

I have the honor to remain, Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

A CORN FACTOR.