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SUBSTANCE OF THE SPEECH

OF

J. C. CURWEN, Esq.

&c. &c.

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SUBSTANCE

OF THE

SPEECH

OF

J. C. CURWEN, Esq.

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

On the 4th of May, 1809,

ON MOVING THAT LEAVE BE GIVEN TO BRING IN

A BILL

For better securing the Independence and Purity of Parliament, by preventing the procuring or obtaining Seats in Parliament by corrupt Practices; and likewise more effectually to prevent Bribery.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A COPY OF THE BILL.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. BELL, 148, OXFORD STREET.

By G. E. Miles, 127, *Oxford Street.*

1809.

0075

SUBSTANCE

OF THE

SPEECH OF J. C. CURWEN, ESQ.

MR. SPEAKER,

THE question of which I have given notice, and am now called on to submit to the consideration of the House. is as important as any recently brought under their consideration. It is not without the deepest regret I feel myself compelled to advert to the existence of practices derogatory to the honor and reputation of this branch of the Legislature. I shall not disguise my full conviction that heavy responsibility attaches to the agitating unnecessarily, at such a crisis, measures by which the feelings of the people may be still more irritated: when I consider the dangers and difficulties to which the country is exposed, I am ready likewise to admit

that the present moment, if the choice was open to us, would be the least proper for such an investigation.—In common with other Gentlemen, I feel it to be the bounden duty of us all, whatever may be our political sentiments, to promote union, and give efficacy to every measure calculated for the general safety and defence of the country.

With this declaration of my sentiments, I feel that I am bound to make out such a case as shall show that greater danger may arise from neglecting to discuss the questions proposed to be laid before the House, than can arise from their discussion. Is it policy, or wisdom, nay is it possible for us, to be inattentive or passive spectators of what is passing amongst our fellow subjects? Can that be termed magnanimity which disregards the voice of the people resounding from every quarter of the empire? Are not the interests of the nation deeply involved in the estimation and respect in which this House stands with the people? Could there be a greater misfortune to the country than the loss of confidence in the Commons? To us, then, are attributed the corruption, the prodigality, and waste of public money: we are charged in participating in it: the defects in our representation are pointed at as the source of all these evils; and we are called on to reform these abuses.

If these charges be false and unfounded, ought we not to refute them? If true; ought they not to be corrected? Let us act betimes, whilst we have yet the power of fixing the time and the degree to which regulation ought to extend. If abuses have crept in amongst us; and in truth, they are too notorious and self-evident to be denied; let us proceed gravely and dispassionately to examine their origin and nature, and to apply effectual remedies.—Whatever we now do, will be received by the country as a boon; and may restore unanimity.—Wide as the field is, I promise the House not to occupy more of their time than is necessary to the faithfully discharging of an important duty.

My first object shall be to endeavour to prove the propriety of bringing forward the measure at this moment, as a justification for myself, as well as a ground to call on the House for their sanction. If blame does attach, it is imputable solely to myself: Besides my worthy friend, one of the members for Norfolk, (Mr. Coke,) whose absence I regret, my intention of submitting this question to the House was not communicated to an individual 'till I gave notice of it.

It will not be denied that it is at all times the duty of the Executive Government to pay parti-

cular attention to the temper and feelings of the people; and to note well any material alterations which may take place. To this important duty I am strongly inclined to believe that the Right Hon. Gentleman opposite, has not been sufficiently attentive. Prior to certain recent discussions, there was manifested throughout the country, an unusual apathy and torpid indifference to public men and public measures.—Whilst such a deviation from British character existed, the people could not be considered in a healthy state. A calm so unnatural in the political world, ought to have excited alarm, as foreboding an approaching storm: the causes of it are however not difficult to develope. A general disgust and disbelief of the existence of virtue in all public men had taken root. Corruption had destroyed all public confidence. But at length, the discussions which have recently taken place in this House, have awakened fresh hopes in the people, and tended to revive their confidence. They perceive that there still exist in this House, talents and numbers to contend against abuses.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is not, I trust, among those who ascribe the general feeling which pervades the country to a jacobinical plot to vilify and degrade the House of Brunswick.—If he does, he libels the people of England.—

Much is it to be regretted that the decision pronounced by this House on the important subject alluded to, was so little in unison with that pronounced by ninety-nine out of a hundred of the people. The general opinion is, doubtless, that it was by the public voice the Commander in Chief was driven to resignation: but their exultation does not proceed from any idea of triumph over this House. No, Sir. This burst of feeling proceeds from a sentiment more worthy of the people.—Despondency has now given way to more pleasing emotions: hope is again cherished (and may that hope meet with no disappointment) that a speedy reform of abuses is approaching.—On this House then, it depends to convert this feeling to the wisest and best purposes. Can it be pretended that these feelings, publicly expressed, are the effect of delusion, of artifice, or intrigue? It is well worth our attention to examine how the meetings have been composed; as well as the language in which their resolutions have been worded. It will be found that they have consisted of the respectable part of the community; of men attached to the constitution, firm supporters of the throne; not hostile to the administration of the Right Hon. Gentleman, or friendly to those opposed to him.—In their expressions will be found nothing to justify alarm, except in the

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minds of those who profit by abuses. Invariably they point at these abuses, and at the defects in this House, as their source.—By timely Reform you will turn the tide of popular feeling, and convert it into increased affection and attachment to the constitution. It is true dignity to resist, when right and justice are on our side: but it is obstinacy and madness to identify our existence with abuses which we can neither deny nor defend.

The measures, Mr. Speaker, which I have to submit to the House are calculated to renovate, not to alter any thing in the existing establishment. I do not propose to dislodge one stone in the building; but to examine whether through the lapse of time its foundation may not have need of reparation; and to submit to your consideration, a mode of effecting that reparation, which if much longer neglected will bring into danger the whole fabric.

Before I explain my proposition, I would beg the indulgence of the House for a moment, whilst taking a rapid view of the circumstances under which former Reforms have been attempted. Nearly about the conclusion of the American war, Mr. Pitt made his first proposition.—The agriculture of the country was then depressed; our commerce stagnant; taxes augmented; and all

rational hope of success in the contest, vanished. An Opposition the most respectable in character, talents, and weight of property, failing in every attempt to convince this House, appealed to the people: they succeeded in raising a general cry for Peace and Reform. By driving the Minister from the helm, they obtained the former.—Reform they would have obtained, had Mr. Pitt maintained his consistency.—This House received his proposition with considerable favor.—In the progress of time however, the political horizon brightened; our difficulties were removed; and the Minister finding the facility with which he could govern on the old system, fled from his promises, and abandoned his former supporters. Unfortunate was it for his country, that he thus sacrificed his reputation; and preferred place with corruption, to measures to which he was pledged, and which would have secured us from the present, and from future dangers!

I pass over minor attempts which excited little sensation: the next serious effort was made by "the Friends of the People." They sought to inspire the country with their own sentiments:—but the moment was unpropitious: Reform was neither called for nor wished. The events in France had astounded, and created general alarm amongst all ranks of people. Mr. Pitt finding

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that he could not avoid discussing the question, or defend his apostacy, seized the moment to excite alarm, and adopted measures to avert supposed dangers, which a short time previous to this association, he had treated with contempt.—Great was the error of those Gentlemen, and not less that of the Opposition of the day, in not paying sufficient deference to the feelings of the people.—Speaking for myself at least, on a review of that period, I lament the warmth into which I was occasionally betrayed.—The indiscretion of our zeal afforded opportunities to designing men to misrepresent our intentions.—Here, Sir, may be found a strong example of the defect of political wisdom; in not attending to the temper and feelings of the people.

Contrasting former periods with the present, I think, Sir, I am borne out by the fact, in stating, that now for the first time, the people call out for reform, without instigation, and purely on their own persuasion of its necessity.—Such a call ought not to be represented as delusion; cannot be expected to subside; or be safely disregarded.

Now, Sir, allow me to remark on the difference that lapse of time has occasioned between our present state, and that in which we were at either of the periods to which I have before particularly

alluded. The power and influence of the crown have received considerable increase: our army, navy, system of taxation, and expenditure, are at present on such a scale, and under such management, as materially to augment that influence:—and next, observe the effects which Mr. Pitt's profuse creation of Peers has produced. Without much enriching that noble body, it has tended to impoverish us. This weight of landed property and influence has been substracted from this House and added to another, which may fairly be supposed to direct its views more towards the crown than the people. The arguments then for restoring the purity of this House, for adding to its respectability whilst we restore its integrity, are infinitely stronger at the present, than at any former period.

Distant, however, as it is from my wish or intention, Sir, to say a word unnecessarily, that may be construed into disrespect to this House, I shall touch as slightly as may be, on the abuses proposed to be remedied. To our own Journals I may indeed refer, by which it appears, a bold petitioner has told us, "that the seats are bought and sold in this House like the stalls in Smithfield;" and I may remark, that to this insult the House thought fit to submit in silence. For my purpose it is quite sufficient to recall to

memory the statement made by an Hon. Member, of the infamous traffic which on the dissolution of every Parliament takes place at the Treasury, and the memorable reply made to that statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. What was that reply? Denial? No, no;—Recrimination. As if the example of others, or as if any pretext could justify a crime so atrocious and flagrant.

In some former Parliament, a mercantile house in the city, forsooth, also speculated in this commodity. They bought four seats: whether to vend again, in retail; or to dispose of to some special customer, I am not informed.

In the quarter of England in which I reside, an occurrence, also in a former Parliament, may be stated.—A lady whose influence in a certain borough was supposed to be considerable, was surprized by a visit from a person, naming himself Reding, or some such name.—He proceeded at once to business, and offered her 10,000 guineas for the two seats. The respectable lady dismissed him with indignation. But the borough-monger, judging of others by himself, conceived that the rejection of his offer could not proceed from any other motive, than its inadequacy. He returns to the charge: bids 12,000 guineas! This drew from the lady a reply which does honor to her memory;—"Never have I disgraced myself with

such practices:—it is now too late in life for me to begin them."—

But, Sir, if I needed any proof of the existence of these abuses besides their notoriety, I might refer to the conduct of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, witnessed by the whole House. In a Bill he has introduced to stop the sale of places, &c. he consented to accept a clause inflicting penalties on the traffic in seats in this House. Here, Sir, is an avowal of the existence of the abuse. It is no answer to say that he finds difficulty in framing a clause to correct it. May not another man attempt it? If the Right Hon. Gentleman maintain that no such abuses exist, than let us adopt the suggestion of an Hon. Gentleman behind me, and examine into the fact in a committee.

The anxious care with which the Legislature has guarded the purity of election is evinced by a mere reference to the Statute-book. From the 13th Elizabeth to the 10th of the King, various laws have been passed for this very purpose: my design is merely to further their operation, and extend their principle. The sale or purchase of seats has not indeed been directly forbidden, or even pronounced illegal; but I am persuaded, Sir, that this is because the question has never yet happened to be directly brought, either under parliamentary, or judicial cognizance.

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Notwithstanding the precedents which seem to apply so strongly to my plans; still, Sir, I might have hesitated in proposing them, had not I found myself fortified by an authority to which every Englishman looks with veneration. During the present reign, the selection of persons clad in the ermine of justice, has certainly done honor to His Majesty's government.—Both in point of talents and unimpeached integrity, our judges have been most eminent: and in no country, and at no time, has the administration of justice been more unblemished. From this body I draw my authority: I have, Sir, the direct sanction of Sir W. Blackstone himself,* for the extension to the elected of the oath against bribery. Under such authority as his, I feel confidence in adopting this as a leading feature in the proposed measures of reformation.

Another measure, Sir, I shall beg leave to propose, will be to impose penalties on the sale, or contracting to sell a seat in this House: and next, to extend the bribery laws to agents or other persons attempting to corrupt electors

* It might not be amiss if the members elected were bound to take the latter oath (viz. *against Bribery and Corruption,*) as well as the former; i. e. the Oath of Abjuration.

1st. Bl. Com. p. 180.

during the whole period of parliament; to preclude their receiving a corrupt consideration for their votes, at any period, as well subsequent, as preceding the election.

To revert, Sir, to the first in order of the measures about to be submitted to the House, if the Legislature has seen the necessity of guarding the purity of election by an oath administered to the elector, how much more strongly will every argument apply to the representative. To him, are entrusted the lives and properties of the people: on his faithful execution of that trust depends the preservation of all that man holds dear. The moral sanction of an oath by him, being better understood, would be better observed, and in fact, considering the class of men from which this House is usually composed, I do not harbour the least suspicion, but that this measure will attain completely its object.

When the question, Mr. Speaker, is brought directly before the House, whether or not they will require from their own members, an oath similar to that already imposed on their constituents, if that question be decided in the negative, in common fair dealing let them also exempt the great body of electors.—Such a proposal would, I fancy, find few supporters.

But, Sir, the House has already agreed to the

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expedience of requiring from its members certain oaths. The principle is neither new, nor can be construed to imply any disrespect towards any of our number. To the immortal honor of the wise and virtuous statesman to whom this House and this country owes the obligation, and by whose respectable name the Act will ever be distinguished *, the tribunals for the adjudication of contested elections, acting under the solemnity of an oath, have been found to execute their important trust with unsullied integrity. From tradition and from history we know what the evils were, which required this very remedy.—It has been tried: it has been found effectual. No voice is heard; no sentiment is felt, but that of applause to the measure itself, and gratitude to its author.

On the subject, Sir, of the proposed restraint on the sale of seats, I shall content myself with remarking, that if the Legislature in its wisdom has thought fit to forbid the corrupt disposal of a single vote, *a fortiori*, should they restrain the transfer of the seat itself on considerations equally immoral. The crime is of deeper dye: it brings on us ignominy at home and abroad.—It is indeed high time that a practice so flagitious

* Mr. Grenville.

should be marked with our reprobation, and subjected to punishment.

The sale of the elective franchise by the voters themselves, has, I fear, Sir, become too frequent. As it affects the state, and as it is accompanied among the lower orders with an increasing relaxation of morals, it demands imperiously a remedy speedy and effectual. These scandalous bargains are, it seems, often not completed 'till after the period is elapsed for petitioning.—The Bribery Act, in these cases, becomes a dead letter.

One objection to my plan, Mr. Speaker, which I have heard taken, is, that it would tend to exclude talent; that those who possess no other recommendation or means of courting public favor, would find increased difficulties in procuring seats.—In my own opinion, a great recommendation of this measure is, that the effect would be found precisely opposite.—As things stand, place in one scale, Mr. Goodluck's five thousand guineas; in the other, modest merit; and which may be expected to preponderate?—That some men have found their way hither, solely from the reputation of their abilities, we may instance Mr. Pitt himself.—To the credit of a man whose political opponent I was through life, I mean the late Lord Lonsdale, he more than once returned Mr. Pitt to this House, gratuitously.

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Let this measure pass; and there is no ground for apprehension, but that Patrons of Seats would feel their honor as much concerned in the due exercise of that patronage, as they now do with regard to ecclesiastical preferments.—How seldom do we hear of the possessors of the latter species of patronage being swayed by sordid motives?

Other objections which I have heard taken, seem all to resolve themselves into this, that every means of corruption would be cut up by the roots, and every subterfuge defeated.—I am told that a Reform in the Representation should precede such a measure; that when this is effected, we may place our guards for its preservation.—Sir, I question the sincerity of this advice. It recommends the undertaking any thing but that which is likely to succeed.—By many, I well know I shall be deemed to attain little, if my object succeeds: by others, I shall be deemed guilty of presumption in attempting too much.—My own sentiments I never disguise:—the measures I have this night submitted to the House, do indeed fall short of what I might wish, or even think necessary; but I have undertaken no more than what I trust may be found practicable, and if carried into effect, productive of real, permanent benefit to my country.—For popular applause I care not, and look not; but earnestly wish, by

the conscientious discharge of my duty, to deserve it.

I shall now proceed, Sir, to shew what would be the practical benefits resulting from the correction of existing abuses.—The first and the most important would be the re-establishment of this House in the good opinion of the people; an advantage that cannot be too highly estimated. I should be unworthy of a seat in Parliament if I were disposed to give way to popular clamour and delusion.—But the just and legitimate complaints of the people I would redress; their reasonable petitions, I would comply with. The arguments urged against Reform in general, do not apply to measures of wise regulation; and least of all, where the circumstances are found essentially different.

In adverting to the next topic, Mr. Speaker, I would in the first place, wish to guard against misapprehension. In the paths of commerce I am well persuaded there are to be found men of as high honor, as independent minds, of as much general information, and in every point of view as respectable, as in any other. But there are attached to every class in society a peculiar character, and distinguishing habits. In former days, the mercantile character was marked by frugality and industry. Amidst all our changes,

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has there not taken place some change in these characteristics? Trade is commuted for speculation: a lucky hit produces the objects of a whole life.—If unsuccessful, hundreds are reduced to poverty, and the principal consigned to a prison, and oblivion.

How few are there among us who can decide impartially and correctly when our own immediate interests are at stake? War produces loans, contracts, and not unfrequently an extension of commerce to those engaged in certain branches of it. Is it uncandid to suppose that those who contemplate war under this aspect, will not be as averse to it as the landed proprietor who knows and feels its miseries. He who spends a considerable portion of his time in the country, necessarily witnesses the hardships that war produces to the lower classes. The power of interest over judgment and every patriotic feeling, was strongly exemplified by an occurrence which, I wish to God, could be erased from the memory of man, and the page of history.—On the Royal Exchange, when the Lord Mayor communicated in 1806, the miscarriage of our negociations for peace, his auditors expressed their indecent, unfeeling exultation, by three cheers!

By the alterations I propose, a larger proportion of the landed interest would appear amongst

us. The mercantile portion of the community would continue indeed to represent the metropolis and those boroughs where they have a natural interest. The very excellence of Parliament consists in having a due proportion of all ranks in society: considering the importance of our commerce, I should be sorry if we had not of those who pursue it, that due proportion, as well as of the army, and learned professions. But the peculiar advantage of having the landed proprietor in this House, is that each individual brings with him the affections and the confidence of a portion of the people.—Thus the united affections of each portion of the empire, concentre in Parliament; and hence springs the moral power which it possesses.

The infallible consequence, Sir, of increasing the numbers of our country-gentlemen within these walls, would be to make us more pacifically disposed. It would give a different tone to our councils. It would check the rage for foreign commerce, and the acquisition of fresh colonies. It would turn our efforts and our attention to domestic improvement; to the melioration of our internal resources and the happiness of our country. It would inspire greater moderation of conduct towards other nations, and dispose us not to imitate on the ocean those strides of power

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which we deprecate on the continent. We should then no longer be the objects of hatred and jealousy to every power in Europe.

But, Sir, another and most important object would be attained, if this measure fortunately receives the approbation of the legislature. The times require a strong administration: measures of great energy must be resorted to. But how can an administration, not possessing the public affection and confidence, venture on such measures? No combination of talents can form a strong government unless this *sine quâ non* be effected.—Some of the measures adopted by the Right Hon. Gentleman have unfortunately had the effect of increasing the distrust, and lessening the respect of the people for this House. How shall we, for instance, reconcile to the country, the vote given recently in the case of a Noble Secretary? The loss which might have been sustained by the retiring from office of a person possessing the noble Lord's acknowledged talents and assiduity would have been ten-fold compensated by the effect that sacrifice would have had on the outraged feelings of the country. I am ready to allow that under the present system, Ministers can hardly be deemed free agents. Those who support them think themselves entitled to the patronage most commodious to them: and the

demands are so great, that I do believe many jobs are consented to by Ministers sorely against their will. An opportunity now offers itself to the Minister, of compliance with a measure which I sincerely believe will be grateful to the country. It comes from no concert: It is offered with no view of hostility to him, or favor to his adversaries. —Anxious I admit myself to be, to learn the Right Hon. Gentleman's sentiments.—If hostile; to him, not to me, be the consequences. To Opposition I would say, be cautious how you sanction this measure with your approbation, earnestly as I wish it. If it receives your support, you are pledged to act in conformity to it in the event of your return to power. The nefarious traffic in seats must then have an end. I beseech you therefore, not to delude the nation; and not to support me with your votes, unless the measure fortunately receives your sincere approbation.

No long time has elapsed, Mr. Speaker, since we had an opportunity of witnessing the benefits which result to a minister from his sedulous observation of the temper and wishes of the people; and his compliance with these wishes, when reasonable. The waste and profusion, the harsh and obnoxious acts of power, by which the predecessors in office of Lord Sidmouth had disgraced their career, appear to have been little to the taste

of his Lordship when Minister.—He adopted another line of conduct.—Temper, mildness, and economy marked his sway. The object before his eyes appears evidently and uniformly to have been, to rule in the hearts of the people: and he succeeded. Though the country was again plunged in war, though extraordinary sacrifices and privations became necessary, yet we might then observe a general coalescence of opinion: when our voluntary services in our country's cause were called for, hundreds of thousands started to arms; our "ploughshares" were converted into "swords". Instead of finding difficulty in completing our volunteer corps, the difficulty consisted in selecting among the too numerous offers. Could all this have been effected under an unpopular Minister?

Still, I admit, Sir, that the present discontents may in some degree be ascribed to our taxation: but not so much to its direct pressure, as to the imprudent aggravation it receives from the mode in which our fiscal laws are administered. In the infancy of taxation, as in the infancy of life, to reconcile us to the pill, it may be prudent to gild it. But that system which might be suitable when five or ten millions were to be raised in the year, must be departed from, when your wants demand forty millions. The necessities of the times have taught

us, that it is our interest to pay direct taxes. Simplify the system: levy a few efficient taxes: do not by means of multifarious unintelligible laws, inflict on the people constant vexation. Do not summons a whole country to know who keeps a dog; or whether the petty farmer who curries his own horse, and plants his own cabbage, is to be surcharged with a groom, and a gardener. Take what is wanted directly from us. A less sum will then be requisite, and you may dismiss from the service a legion of tax gatherers, inspectors, assessors, and excisemen. You may then repeal also such revenue laws as are pernicious and oppressive: for instance, that affecting salt. Providence in its bounty bestows on us this boon inexhaustibly: Foreigners find it their interest to export it for agricultural purposes from our ports. But as to our own use of it, for that purpose, and for the use of the manufacturer, the high duties altogether preclude its application.

Another, perhaps a greater source of public dissatisfaction, which the plans I have submitted to the House, may I trust, Sir, help in future to eradicate, arises from the present wasteful profusion of the public money in pensions, reversions, jointures, and other such jobs of infamy. When public services merit rewards out of the public purse, the people ought to have the reasonable

gratification of bestowing them by the hands of their Representatives. From them the public would not require a niggardly policy. The gift itself would be doubled in value by it publicity, and by its being the fair meed of brilliant and meritorious services. Different indeed must be a person's feelings on hearing, as at present, that his name is thrust in at the bottom of a pension list, to enter which merit usually forms no part of the recommendation; and on receiving openly, for causes assigned, and with the applause of his country, the reward of merit. I wonder not that the relatives of a truly meritorious officer* who lately gloriously fell in his country's cause, declined being confounded on a pension list, with the retainers of a court; though they might gladly and gratefully have accepted any mark of national munificence. A Minister who paid due attention to the feelings of the people would never sanction, and I trust, Sir, no Minister of any description, will ever again sanction the dealing out pensions of a few hundreds among the relations of the most elevated and opulent of our nobles.

To aid the brilliant illuminations of their mansions, the farthing candle of the industrious indigent cottager must be sooner extinguished.

* Sir John Moore.

Not, Sir, that I would insinuate, that by this sort of saving; by the cessation of abuses of this description, any considerable alleviation of the public burdens would be felt. But they indispose the public mind; they tend to impeach all public character.—Too many are already inclined to view all men who hold public offices, as equally corrupt. That opinion, I fear, is becoming too general; though none can be more fatal, or more ill-founded. Public character is the strength of a country: and truly poor is that country which possesses little of it.

Should it be, for instance, our misfortune at any future time, to have a monarch incapable of distinguishing between firmness and obstinacy; who conceived it magnanimity never to yield to circumstances, would there not be an essential difference between one set of men willing to accept and to retain office, without possessing the power to judge, but bound to act as the tools of others; and another, who would only hold office so long as their judgment was permitted to direct their actions?

In a neighbouring country, Sir, if a strict examination were to take place of all the causes which have led to the total extinction of that liberty which at one moment there was a fair prospect of their obtaining; if the convulsions, which have accom-

panied the loss of this, the greatest blessing that man can possess, have been so dreadful as to lead many to abhor its very name; perhaps, the most prominent and the most active of these causes has been the want of character, and consequent want of confidence in their successive leaders.

How different, happily for us, is our prospect at home! Amidst all our divisions we can do justice to one another's motives:—However estranged by casual circumstances, and the inevitable discordance of opinion where thought and action are free, yet I trust such will ever be the conduct of our public men of all parties, as not to give real ground for the diffusion of that opinion to which I have just alluded. Though we may look askance at each other for the moment, yet we know not how soon, or with whom, we may again cordially unite. On the important question which lately rivetted the attention of the House, I for one considered myself as exercising a painful duty, and in the capacity of a juryman. Though the conclusion formed by others was in opposition to my own, yet I shall not doubt that it was on their part equally conscientious; that as the one deserves no praise, the other as little merits reprobation.

In the sincerity of our wish to uphold the just prerogatives of the Crown, we are, I trust, all

united. In distinguishing these, from the exercise of influence unknown to the constitution, though alas! too well known in practice, and attended with dangers not only to the subject, but to the prerogative itself, I foresee many struggles. But as to the just and fair prerogative, let it never be forgotten, that though this be the inheritance of the Crown, it is a trust for the benefit of the subject, for purposes the most useful.

I shall no longer detain the House; but must conjure them, I must conjure the Right Hon. Gentleman to reflect coolly; not to mistake the feelings and the expressions of the people. They arraign us of corruption; they point at the disreputable manner, in which it is alleged that some persons find their way hither. To this accusation we must plead. No evasion, or special-pleading sophistry will stand us in stead. If we evince a disposition to reform, we shall heal our divisions and re-establish ourselves in the good opinion of the people. Then may the Right Hon. Gentleman proclaim to all Europe; it is not on the bravery of her troops, or on the unparellelled prowess of her navy alone, that our country builds her strength: it is on the hearts and the affections of her children. Possessing these, she can securely bid defiance to a world in arms. With increasing difficulties she can call forth increased

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exertions.—Her soldiers, are every man who can wield a musket.—Her resources, every guinea we possess. In her defence every arm will be uplifted; every danger despised: and no other object of emulation can then exist among us, but how each in his station can yield the best service to his Sovereign and his country.

I move, Sir, that leave be given to bring in a Bill, &c. &c.

A

BILL

For better securing the Independence and Purity of Parliament, by preventing the procuring or obtaining Seat in Parliament by corrupt Practices; and likewise more effectually to prevent Bribery.

WHEREAS it is highly expedient and necessary to prevent corrupt Practices in the procuring of Members to be returned to serve in Parliament, or the Sale or Purchase of any Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence, for procuring any such Returns;

Be it therefore enacted by the KING's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That if any Person or Persons shall from and after the day of either by himself, herself

or themselves, or by any other Person or Persons for or on his, her or their behalf, or in trust or for the use or benefit of him, her or them, or for or on the behalf or for the use or benefit of any other Person or Persons, sell or bargain for the Sale of any Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence, or pretended Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence, for or in order to the Election or Return, or causing or procuring or endeavouring to cause or procure the Election or Return of any Person or Persons to serve in Parliament; or for or in order to the causing or procuring or endeavouring to cause or procure any Persons having right of voting or claiming to have right of voting to vote for the Election or Return of any Person or Persons to serve in Parliament; or shall receive, have, or take any Money, Fee, Gratuity, Loan of Money, Annuity, Reward or Profit, directly or indirectly, or any Office, Commission, Place, Appointment or Employment, or Reversion of any Office, Commission, Place, Appointment or Employment whatever; or any Promise, Agreement, Engagement, Covenant, Contract, Obligation, Bond or Assurance; or shall by any way, device or means, contract or agree to receive or have any Money, Fee, Gratuity, Loan of Money, Annuity, Reward or Profit, directly or indirectly; or any Office,

Commission, Place, Appointment or Employment, or Reversion of any Office, Commission, Place, Appointment or Employment whatever, for any such Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence, or pretended Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence as aforesaid; and also if any Person or Persons shall by himself or themselves, or by any other Person for and on his and their behalf, purchase or bargain for the Purchase of the Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence, or pretended Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence of any Person or Persons, for or in order to the Election or Return, or causing or procuring the Election or Return of such Person or Persons to serve in Parliament; or for or in order to the causing or procuring or endeavouring to cause or procure any Person or Persons having right of voting or claiming to have right of voting, to vote for the Election or Return of any such Person or Persons: or shall give or pay any Money, Fee, Gratuity, Loan of Money, Annuity, Reward, or Profit, directly or indirectly; or shall make or enter into any Promise, Agreement, Engagement, Covenant, Contract, Obligation, Bond or Assurance, to give or pay any Money, Fee, Gratuity, Loan, Annuity, Reward or Profit; or to give or procure any Office, Commission, Place, Appoint-

ment or Employment, or Reversion of any Office, Commission, Place, Appointment or Employment whatever; or shall by any way, means or device, contract or agree to give or pay any Money, Fee, Gratuity, Loan of Money, Annuity, Reward or Profit, directly or indirectly; or to give or procure any Office, Commission, Place, Appointment or Employment, or Reversion of any Office, Commission, Place, Appointment or Employment whatever, for any such Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence, or pretended Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or Influence as aforesaid, either before or at or after any Election for any County, Stewartry, City, Town, Borough, Cinque Port or Place, whether the same shall be then vacant or full; then and in such Case all and every Persons or Person shall for every such Offence forfeit the sum of to any Person who shall sue for the same, to be recovered with full Costs of Suit by Action of Debt, Bill, Plaint, or Information in any of His Majesty's Courts of Record at Westminster, if the Offence be committed in that part of the United Kingdom called *England* and *Wales*, and in any of His Majesty's Courts of Record at *Dublin*, if the Offence be committed in *Ireland*, wherein respectively no Essoign or Wager of Law, or more than one Imparlance

shall be allowed; and if the Offence be committed in *Scotland*, then to be recovered with full Costs of Suit by summary Action or Complaint before the Court of Session or by Prosecution before the Court of Justiciary there; and that all and every Persons or Person who shall be guilty of any such Offence, shall, from and after Judgment obtained against them or him in any such Action of Debt, Bill, Plaint or Information, or summary Action or Prosecution, or being any otherwise lawfully convicted thereof, be and are and is hereby declared and enacted disabled and incapacitated for ever thereafter to serve in Parliament for any County, Stewartry, City, Town, Borough, Cinque Port or Place in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and that such Person or Persons shall be deemed to be no Member or Members in Parliament, and shall not act, sit, or have any Vote or Votes, Place or Places in Parliament, but shall be and are hereby declared and enacted to be to all intents and purposes as if they or he had never been returned or elected Members or a Member in Parliament.

And be it further enacted, That if any Agent or Agents or Person or Persons whatever, shall at any time before, at, or after any Election or Elections of a Member or Members to serve in Parliament for any County, Stewartry, City, Town,

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Borough, Cinque Port or Place within the said United Kingdom, give, distribute, pay or dispose of any Money or Reward by way of gift, loan or other device, or promise, agree or contract to give, distribute, pay or dispose of any Money, Gift, Loan, or Reward, to any Person or Persons having or claiming to have a Vote or Votes at any Election or Elections of a Member or Members to serve in Parliament, or to any other Person or Persons for or on his or their behalf, or for his or their use or benefit, or in trust for him or them, in order to prevail upon, induce, cause or procure such Person or Persons to give his or their Vote or Votes, or to forbear to give his or their Vote or Votes at any such Election or Elections, or in order to repay and satisfy such Person or Persons for having given his or their Vote or Votes, or for having forborn to give his or their Vote or Votes at any such Election or Elections; such Agent or Agents, or Person or Persons so offending in any of the cases last aforesaid, for every such Offence shall forfeit the sum of to any Person who shall sue for the same, to be recovered with full Costs of Suit in manner hereinbefore directed.

And be it further enacted and declared, That all and every such Sales, Bargains, Promises, Agreements, Engagements, Covenants, Contracts,

Obligations or Assurances as aforesaid, are and shall be null and void, and of no effect.

And be it further enacted, That no Person who shall from and after the day of be elected a Member to serve in Parliament for any County, Stewartry, City, Town, Borough, Cinque Port or Place in the United Kingdom, shall sit or act as such Member in Parliament during any debate after the Speaker is chosen, or vote, until such Member shall first take the following Oath, and make and subscribe and audibly repeat the same as follows:

"I *A. B.* do swear, That I have not by myself "or by any other Person or Persons for or on my "behalf, nor hath or have any other Person or "Persons to my knowledge or belief for or on my "behalf, or at my charge, or in trust for me or "for my use or benefit, either before or at or after "my Election, directly or indirectly purchased "or bargained for the Purchase of the Nomina-"tion, Recommendation, Interest or Influence, or "pretended Nomination, Recommendation, Inte-"rest or Influence of any Person or Persons, for "or in order to my Election or Return, or "causing or procuring my Election or Return to "serve in Parliament, or for or in order to the "causing or procuring or endeavouring to cause "or procure any Person or Persons having right

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" of voting or claiming to have right of voting, to
" vote for my Election or Return; nor have I
" given or paid any Money, Fee, Gratuity, Loan,
" of Money, Annuity, Reward or Profit, directly
" or indirectly; and that I have not made or
" entered into nor will I make or enter into any
" Promise, Agreement, Engagement, Covenant,
" Contract, Obligation, Bond or Assurance, to
" give or pay any Money, Fee, Gratuity, Loan
" of Money, Annuity, Reward or Profit, or to
" give or procure any Office, Commission, Place,
" Appointment or Employment, or Reversion of
" any Office, Commission, Place, Appointment
" or Employment whatever; and that I have not
" by any way, means or device, contracted or
" agreed, nor will I by any way, means, or device,
" contract or agree to give or pay any Money, Fee,
" Gratuity, Loan of Money, Annuity, Reward
" or Profit directly or indirectly, or to give
" or procure any Office, Commission, Place,
" Appointment or Employment, or Reversion of
" any Office, Place, Appointment or Employment,
" whatever, for any such Nomination, Recom-
" mendation, Interest or Influence, or pretended
" Nomination, Recommendation, Interest or
" Influence as aforesaid, either before, or at, or
" after my Election.

" So help me GOD."

Which said Oath shall be from and after the solemnly and publicly taken made and subscribed betwixt the hours of in the morning and in the afternoon by every Member of the House of Commons at the Table in the middle of the said House, and whilst a full House of Commons is there sitting, with their Speaker in the Chair; and the same shall be taken and made at the same time and in the same manner as the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy.

And be it further enacted, That if any Person or Persons taking the said Oath hereinbefore set forth and prescribed to be taken, shall have done any thing contrary to such his or their Oath or Oaths so to be taken, made, and subscribed as aforesaid, and be thereof convicted by due course of Law, he or they shall incur and suffer the pains and penalties which by the Laws and Statutes of this Realm are enacted or inflicted in cases of wilful and corrupt Perjury.

And be it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That if any Person offending against this Act, shall within the space of months next after any Offence against this Act shall be committed, discover any other Person or Persons offending against this Act, so that such Person or Persons so discovered be thereupon convicted or recovered against, such Person so discovering and not having been before that time convicted of any

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Offence against this Act, shall be indemnified from and against all Penalties and Forfeitures, and also from and against any Prosecution for Perjury which he or they shall have then incurred by any Offence against this Act.

Provided always, and be it further enacted, That it shall not be lawful for any such Person to plead any former Discovery in abatement or bar of any Action, Information or Prosecution or before any Judgment or Conviction against him; but such Discovery shall and may be pleaded only after Judgment or Conviction and in stay of execution of the Judgment; and shall, if the Party shall have made such Discovery and Judgment or Conviction shall have taken place thereon within the Provisions of this Act, be admitted by the Court in which the same is pleaded as a perpetual stay of execution of any such Judgment or Conviction as aforesaid.

Provided also, and be it further enacted, That no Person who shall by any Offence committed against the Provisions of this Act be disabled or rendered incapable of sitting or voting as a Member in Parliament, shall by reason of any such Discovery, as aforesaid, or any such Judgment or Conviction upon any such Discovery, be relieved or discharged from any such Disability or Incapacity, or rendered capable of sitting or voting as a

Member in Parliament on any Election or Return whatever.

And be it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That no Person shall be made liable to any Incapacity, Disability, Forfeiture or Penalty by this Act created or imposed, unless some Prosecution, Action or Suit for the Offence committed shall be actually and legally commenced against such Person within the space of

Years next after such Offence against this Act shall be committed, and unless such Person shall be actually and legally arrested, summoned or otherwise served with any original or other Writ or Process within the same space of time, so as such Arrest, Summons or Service of any original or other Writ or Process shall not be prevented by such Person absconding or withdrawing out of the Jurisdiction of the Court out of which such original or other Writ or Process shall have issued; and in case of any such Prosecution, Suit or Process as aforesaid, the same shall be proceeded in and carried on without any wilful delay, and that all Statutes of Jeofails and Amendments of the Law whatever shall and may be construed to extend to all Proceedings in any such Prosecution, Action or Suit.

FINIS.

G. E. Miles, Printer, 127, *Oxford Street.*

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