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SIR H. PARNELL'S
OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
CORN LAWS.

0559

THE
SUBSTANCE
OF THE
S P E E C H E S
OF
SIR H. PARNELL, BART.
IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS,
WITH
ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS,
ON THE
CORN LAWS.

LONDON:
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1814.

THE
 HOUSE OF COMMONS
 REPORT
 OF THE
 SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
 APPOINTED ON THE 30TH OF MARCH, 1813,
 TO INQUIRE INTO THE CORN TRADE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.
 IN TWO VOLUMES.
 VOL. II.

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 Poppin's Court, Fleet Street.

SUBSTANCE
 OF THE
 SPEECHES,
 &c. &c. &c.

A SELECT committee of the house of commons was appointed on the 30th of March, 1813, to inquire into the corn trade of the united kingdom. Their report was presented on the 11th of May following. On the 15th of June, the house went into a committee of the whole house, to take this report into consideration, and after a long debate, a division of 136 to 32 took place in favour of the alterations that were proposed to be made in the existing Corn Laws.

In the committee a resolution passed unanimously, declaring the expediency of a perfect freedom of exportation of corn. The resolution relating to the regulation of the importation of

foreign corn was postponed, with the view of making such an alteration in it, as might secure the support of many members, who, though they had expressed their disapprobation of it, had declared themselves ready to consent to the price of 80s. the quarter, as a fair price, below which foreign corn ought not to be imported*.

In consequence of the great quantity of public business before the house, it was impossible to make such progress with the proceedings on these resolutions, though they were frequently discussed, as to carry a legislative measure in the last session; and therefore the question was put off, with a notice that it would be resumed in this session.

On the opening of the session in November, a right honourable gentleman communicated to the house, that it would be proceeded on after the Christmas recess; and again, in consequence of the long adjournments of the house, from January to the 21st of March, he informed the house, in answering a question put to him by an honourable member, that it would be brought forward immediately after the Easter recess.

* Many of these members have voted this session against Mr. Huskisson's reduced scale of regulation.

Since that time, eight evenings have been almost wholly occupied in the discussion of the proposed alteration of the Corn Laws; and the bill for regulating importation having arrived at that stage which admitted of its being submitted to the public in a perfect state, the farther consideration of it was postponed for a fortnight, in order that the nature and object of it might be fully understood, and that those who had opposed it, and petitioned against it, on the very false assurances that it was meant to enhance the price of bread, might have an opportunity of learning, that though it gave a very moderate degree of protection to the grower, it at the same time amply provided for the interests of the consumer of corn.

This short history of the origin and progress of the Corn Question, fully shows how unfounded the charge is, which has been so loudly and so often made against the supporters of the bill, of wishing to carry it with unbecoming precipitation. But, perhaps, it might as well have been omitted, because of the general notoriety of the fact, that few questions ever pass through parliament without similar efforts being made by those who form the minority, to defeat the views of their more fortunate opponents: all those various and specious asseverations, which old experienced

members know how so well to enforce with a tolerable decent appearance of a sincere regard for the public interests, have been brought forward on all former occasions, as they now are, for the purpose of effecting, by circuitous means, what cannot be attempted more directly, with any hope of final success.

Another leading charge is, that the advocates of the bill are proceeding without sufficient information having been laid before the house. It is said, the report of the committee is "such a one as the house has never acted upon; that it is full of errors and mistakes; and contains no other evidence than that of two or three gentlemen, whose means of information are confined to the agriculture of Ireland*."

Since this assertion was made, it has been proved to the house to be entirely destitute of any credit, and also that the right honourable author of it, has not only failed in establishing the fact of the committee having made the errors and mistakes attributed to it, but has exposed himself to have the charge retorted against his own work.

The report contains the average prices of corn for the following periods :

* Speech of the right honourable George Rose, page 51.

	s.	d.
20 years to 1646	57	5½
20 years to 1686	46	3
68 years to 1765	33	3
30 years to 1795	44	7
12 years to 1804	68	5
9 years to 1813	88	11*

The report contains the substance of all the laws for regulating the exportation and importation of corn, from the year 1670 to the present time.

1. The 22 C. II, c. 13, (anno 1670.) By which, whenever the price of wheat, in the home market, did not exceed 53s. 4d. the quarter, the importation of it was subjected to a duty of 16s. the quarter, and to a duty of 8s. whenever the price did not exceed 4l., and to a duty of 5s. 4d. the quarter, whenever the price exceeded 4l.

2. The 12 C. II, c. 4. By which the exportation of wheat was permitted whenever the price of it did not exceed 40s. the quarter.

* The prices for the two first periods are the Eton prices, taken from Mr. Claude Scott's edition of the tracts on the corn trade, by Mr. Smith; the prices for the two next periods are for the statute quarter, and are taken from Mr. Chalmer's Estimate, page 322; and the prices for the two last periods are taken from the custom house returns to parliament.

3. The 15th of the same king. By which this liberty was extended till the price exceeded 48s.

4. The 22d of the same king. By which this liberty was extended to all higher prices.

5. The 1 Will. st. 1, c. 12. Which gave a bounty of 5s. the quarter on every quarter of wheat exported, so long as the price was at or below 48s. the quarter.

6. The several laws which passed in each year from 1765 to 1773, allowing a free importation of corn, and prohibiting the exportation of it.

7. The 13 Geo. III, c. 43. By which the high duties imposed on the importation of foreign wheat, by the 22 C. II, c. 13, were taken off so soon as the price of middling wheat rose to 48s. the quarter; and the bounty of 5s. upon the exportation of wheat ceased so soon as the price rose to 44s. the quarter.

8. The 31 G. III, c. 30. By which, 1st, the high duty on importation was to be paid while the price of middling wheat was under 50s.; 2dly, when it was at 50s. but under 54s., there was payable on importation 2s. 6d. the quarter; 3dly, when at or above 54s., 6d. the quarter. By this statute, the bounty of 5s. was given on exportation, when the price of wheat was under 44s.; and exportation was prohibited when it was at or above 46s.

9. The 44 Geo. III, c. 109, which is still in force, and by which the high duty on importation of 24s. 3d. is to be paid, till the price of wheat is 63s. the quarter; when at that price, but under 66s., there is payable a duty of 2s. 6d.; when at or above 66s., a duty of 6d. the quarter.

By this statute the bounty of 5s. the quarter is paid on exportation, if the price of wheat is at or under 48s. the quarter; and exportation is prohibited, when it is at or above 54s. the quarter.

The report contains the state of the imports and exports of corn from 1696 to 1813. The tables, in pages 5 and 6, show an average excess of export from 1696 to 1765; and an average excess of import from 1764 to 1795, being the same as given by Mr. Chalmers, in his Estimate (page 322).

The following statement of the imports of foreign corn, from 1791 to 1813, which is made in the report, is calculated from the custom-house papers in the appendix:

	Quarters.	Cwts.	Value.
From 1791 to 1804 . . .	Corn 12,553,587	Flour 2,693,461	£37,613,435
From 1803 to 1813 . . .	Do. 5,883,844	Do. 1,905,061	21,021,700

These several statements of the average prices, of the alterations of the laws, and of the export and import trade, are in no one in-

stance inaccurate. And as they afford all the information that can be given, as to prices, for 146 years; as to the laws, for 144 years; and as to the corn trade, for 117 years; it is certainly not correct to say, that the house of commons has proceeded to legislate without any information on the subject.

It is perfectly true, that no information is contained in the report upon the prices of corn in foreign markets; or upon the prices which corn ought to bring in our own, in order to afford a profit to the farmer.

But such information was not omitted by the committee through negligence, but purposely withheld, because they considered the question of the expediency of regulating importation and exportation by law to be a question wholly to be decided by the principles of political economy, exemplified and illustrated by experience.

They did not consider the question in the way that many do, who look no farther than merely to protect the farmer; much less did they deem it right to suffer any wish to uphold high rents to influence them. But they conceived the fair and only object of their investigation was to ascertain what course of policy was the best adapted to secure a sufficient supply of corn at a moderate and steady price.

The assertions that many have made, that the committee have proposed to establish high prices of corn, will appear to every one, who reads the report, to be utterly false, there being no one expression contained in it, that can justify so unfair a misrepresentation of its object.

It is impossible that any thing can be more distinctly stated than the end the committee sought to accomplish, being the securing of a sufficient supply at a moderate and steady price. The whole of the facts which are brought forward, and the whole of the reasoning which is built upon these facts, prove this to be the case; and to say, that the committee have urged any thing having an opposite tendency; or that the case they have made out, can arraign them of any other views, is to fabricate language and motives for them, which really do not belong to them.

If the question is candidly and dispassionately examined, it will be admitted, that the true object of legislation, concerning the corn trade, is to do that, with respect to any alteration of the existing law, which shall most contribute to secure a sufficient supply of corn at a moderate and steady price; and it will also be admitted, that the whole question must rest upon the respective merits of one of two theories of political economy. If the decision is in favour of restric-

tions, then it is a matter of no sort of difficulty to acquire such farther information, as may be wanting, concerning the prices of corn in foreign and in our own markets, to fix the proper regulating price.

If this statement is correct, namely, that the question is one of theory; and if it is also correct to say, that it is necessary to be in some measure acquainted with the science of political economy to decide upon it, it is by no means surprising that many very erroneous notions are formed, and much very inapplicable reasoning is urged, concerning the policy and the motive of the proposed new bill. Nor will it be very wonderful, if it should still be very generally approved of, when the public mind is better instructed in regard to those principles of political economy; and that experience on which it is founded.

The theory of those who oppose the bill is this: they say, if you will admit foreign corn to be freely imported, you will always be able to obtain whatever quantity you want from foreign countries, and the price will be as low as it possibly can be, because foreign countries can grow it cheaper than we can grow it. They quote the writings of Dr. Adam Smith, as unquestionable authority, in support of this theory.

They also say, if you thus secure a low price

of corn, the wages of manufacturing labour will be low; and thus your manufacturers will be able to preserve their superiority in foreign markets. And if you import foreign corn in large quantities, you will export your manufactures in large quantities to pay for it.

This reasoning certainly is quite consistent with the best principle of political economy, that all trade ought to be free. But the question, how far it is expedient to adopt it now, depends upon the actual circumstances of the country, and the peculiar nature of the trade in corn.

If no war had existed for the last twenty years; if no new taxes had been imposed; if the commercial intercourse with the continent had been open; if the prices of corn and other commodities in this country were on a level with those of the rest of Europe: it might be difficult, though not impossible, to find a good reason for imposing any restraint on the importation of foreign corn: the transport of so bulky an article would probably afford a sufficient protection to our farmers.

But now that we are in a state directly opposite, in every respect, to that which has just been described — a perfectly artificial state, in regard to prices — there clearly is room to pause, before implicit consent should be given to the advice of

those who recommend an immediate freedom of importation of foreign corn.

The effect of the war, but more particularly of the Berlin and Milan decrees, and of our own orders in council, has been to impose such restrictions on the importation of foreign corn, during the last five years, as had the direct operation of an act of parliament imposing very high duties on that trade, by giving the British farmer the full benefit of nearly the whole demand of the British market. The consequences have been, in the first place, a very high price; in the next place, a very great increased production of corn; and, in the last place, a very great fall in the price of it. A great additional capital has been vested in agriculture, and a greatly increased quantity of agricultural industry has been kept employed under the stimulus of this accidental protection.

Our agriculture has, in fact, been brought almost to a state of perfection, in respect to the two great objects of a sufficient supply and a moderate price. In 1811, the value of corn exported from the united kingdom to foreign countries was 1,379,714*l.*; the value of foreign corn imported was 1,092,804*l.*; leaving a balance of exported corn of 286,910*l.* In 1812, the value of corn exported from the united king-

dom to foreign countries was 1,498,229*l.*; the value of foreign corn imported was 1,213,850*l.**, leaving a balance of exported corn of 284,379*l.*

In consequence of the fire at the custom house, the value of corn exported from Great Britain in 1813 to foreign countries cannot be ascertained. It was probably as considerable as in the preceding years, the same demand for it in the West Indies and in the Peninsula having continued. As the harvests of 1812 and 1813 were most abundant, in every part of the united kingdom, it is fair to suppose that the same excess of export that prevailed in 1811 and 1812 continued through 1813, and will continue through 1814.

In respect to supply, therefore, the agriculture of the united kingdom is quite sufficient to secure it. In regard to price, no one, surely, can complain that it is too high; nor can any one apprehend, correctly, that any legislative measure will advance it, because it is a price altogether established with reference only to the great stock of corn on hand, and the probability of another good harvest.

Under all these circumstances, then, is it expedient suddenly to allow a free importation of corn? Will such a proceeding best ensure to

* See Appendix to the Report — Nos. 1 and 14.

the country the continuance of that prosperous state of agriculture, which to this moment has existed, and that extent of supply, and moderation of price, which we now enjoy? or will it not throw every thing back; and directly lead, first, to a diminished supply of corn? secondly, to a high price? and, lastly, to scarcity and famine?

The present state of our agriculture may be compared to the state of the silk, or any other manufacture, which has been brought to a certain degree of perfection, though naturally better adapted to France than to this country, by the protection of very high duties on the importation of French silks.

If, all at once, these duties were repealed, the French manufacture would be sold so cheap, that our own manufacturer could derive no profit; and the consequence would be either his immediate ruin, and that of all the labourers he employed; or the investment of his capital and their industry in some other occupation. The silk manufacture would certainly cease to exist in this country.

So in respect to corn, if, after the agriculture has been brought to its present state of perfection, by the restrictions which have been accidentally imposed on the importation of corn, now

that those restrictions are removed by the peace, no law should pass, in some degree to supply their place, foreign corn would be imported, and a sudden stop put to the progress of our cultivation.

According to "Oddy's European Commerce," the Poles can afford to bring their corn to Dantzic at 32s. the quarter. The price there is now something higher, in consequence of the late period to which the Prussian rivers were frozen this year, and no corn having yet arrived from Poland at the shipping ports. If this price of 32s. may be taken as the usual price, and if the quality of the Dantzic wheat is better than that of the best Essex wheat by 4s. the quarter, there can be little doubt that, if the importation is left free, as it is virtually under the existing law, great quantities will be imported in the course of the summer; and the price will be lowered so much as to deprive the farmer of all profit on the stock he has on hand, and to compel him to diminish the number of his farming servants and labourers.

The immediate effects, therefore, of this system of a free importation, will be ruinous to that great portion of the community, which consists of those persons whose whole capital and labour are employed in cultivation. The indirect effect of it

will be so general a diminution of agricultural capital, or a removal of it to so great an extent from agriculture into other channels, as to lead to a very diminished supply of corn of our own growth in the course of the next year. We shall, in short, be brought back, in a very short space of time, from a state of things nearly perfect, to that state in which we were before the late great investment of capital in agriculture took place—that is, to a state of deficient supply, and of dependence on foreign countries.

But the advocates for the theory of an immediate free trade, say, though you will cease to supply yourselves, a sufficient supply can be had from abroad. As we have always been able to obtain whatever quantity we have stood in need of, so we shall always in future be able to obtain it.

But then, admitting for the sake of the argument this statement to be correct, the question arises, whether the price of corn supplied in this way, will, on the average, be so low, as it would be if it was all grown at home?

There can be no doubt, that, if to the stock we have now on hand of our own growth, a quantity of foreign growth is added, the market price will be lower than it now is; and also, if to the quantity of corn which we shall derive from the next harvest, a quantity of foreign corn is added,

the price of corn, through the next year, will be lower than it otherwise will be; but if, in the next sowing season, much less corn shall be sown than was sown last year, and the crop in consequence shall fall very far short of that quantity, which is sufficient for our own consumption, then the market price will be governed by quite a different principle, from that which will govern it up to that time.

If the harvest in foreign countries is a good one, we shall be able to obtain the quantity we want, to make up our deficiency. But the price we shall pay for it will be regulated, not by the cheapness of it abroad, but by the dearness of it at home, which will be the inevitable effect of a short supply. That this will be the case, will clearly appear to every one who examines the motives which must govern the conduct of the importing merchants. Their object is to import with the greatest possible profit. To do this, they will leave the deficiency of our own supply to run up prices very high, before they will come into the market. The established traders will take care so to manage as not to let the price, however, get so very high, as to encourage new speculators to come into competition with them; but having got the prices as high as they can, without in-

curing such a hazard of competition, then they will begin to feed the market with foreign corn, but only in such quantities as shall keep down competition against themselves; but not to that extent as will have any great effect in lowering the price of corn. In this way it is, that, while we depend in any degree on a foreign supply of corn, the prices are constantly governed by the principle of scarcity, and not, as they otherwise would be, by the principle of abundance; and that, while the greater part of the people are very contentedly paying a very high price for their bread, they might have it at a much lower price, if they did not adopt the delusion, that the importation of foreign corn made bread cheap.

But if, after so much capital has been withdrawn from agriculture, our average production should be less than it now is, that is, less than our average consumption, and we should have a bad harvest; and if, at the same time, the harvest abroad should also be a bad one, then we should be in this critical state, that, just in proportion as we stood in need of a greater supply of foreign corn than usual, foreign countries would be the less able to let us have it. We should then not only feel the effects of a system of free importation

by very high prices, but also by the pressure of scarcity and famine.

It is by no means a mere matter of conjecture or theory, that the sudden restoration of a free importation of corn will be productive of these several results of a diminished supply, a higher price, and ultimate scarcity and famine; for this state of things has already more than once occurred in the last thirty years, and is one which has arisen out of exactly the same course of events. The system of the country has for that period been a system of free importation; importation has taken place to a great amount; the price, independent of the value of our currency, has been exceeding high; and scarcity and famine have also happened. It is, then, no idle argument which attempts to explain in what manner these things will again come round, if the same causes which produced them before are again forced into operation, either by the misconceptions of those who mean well; the mischievous misrepresentations of those who act from sinister motives; or the ignorance which manifestly prevails very generally among the mass of those, who have lately been very active in sending petitions to parliament.

The advocates of this theory of an immediate free importation have appealed to the authority

of Dr. Adam Smith, and have adopted his arguments in debating the question.

It has been said, as he has said, that no legislative measure can enhance the real price of corn, though it may the money price; and, therefore, that the farmers and landlords would derive no advantage whatever from any increase of price which might be the result of a restricted importation of corn.

That this argument of Dr. Smith's should have been introduced at this day, after the very able and very conclusive exposure of its total want of validity by Mr. Malthus and other writers, was not to be expected*. Even if they had failed to show that Dr. Smith had fallen into an error, in supposing that the real value of money could be altered in one country by a new law, while it was not effected in any other country, the doctrines of the bullion committee would point out how impossible it was that he could be correct in this instance. For if the nominal value only of corn rose in proportion as the price of it advanced, because the value of money would be lessened, this

* See "Observations on the Effects of the Corn Laws," &c. by the Rev. T. R. Malthus, page 3, showing "this peculiar argument of Dr. Smith to be fundamentally erroneous."

general diminution of its value throughout the country, would be followed by an unfavourable exchange; and this, by the export of money to such an amount as would leave the residue of increased and equal value with that of foreign countries; and then the advance in the price of corn would become an advance, not merely of nominal, but of real value.

It is farther said, on Dr. Smith's authority, that the expense of transporting corn is sufficient to give our own farmers a decided protection. When Dr. Smith wrote his work it might have been sufficient, because the price of corn and other commodities of this country was on a level with that of the rest of Europe. But to say that it is now sufficient, is to betray a want of a due consideration of the peculiar state of those circumstances which belong to this particular period; and which ought to direct us in our application of the general principles of political economy. Every one who has at all attended to the system of price which has been established for many years, and the price of foreign corn, must allow, that the expense of bringing corn now from Dantzic to Leith, Hull, or London, affords no sort of protection to our farmers.

But the greatest stress is placed, by the advocates of a free trade, upon that general principle

of Dr. Smith's, which lays down the expediency of a perfect freedom in all trades whatsoever.

It is well worthy of observation, that, though Dr. Smith has repeatedly urged the policy of free corn trade, he has not supported his doctrine by applying this principle to it. It is, therefore, fair to infer, that he did not think it could be applied; and it is also fair to make this farther inference, that those who now bring it forward, as applicable to the present question, have not well considered it.

A noble lord, who argued upon this maxim, asked why the principle of buying where we could buy the cheapest, was to be considered as a fallacious principle? and urged the policy of buying corn from foreigners, rather than of attempting to grow it home, because they are able to grow it cheaper than we can grow it. But his question proved he had taken a superficial view of Dr. Smith's argument and of the peculiar nature of the corn trade.

When Dr. Smith recommends a free trade, he has in view, not merely to point out how we can buy what we want at the cheapest rate, but the most direct way of adding to the stock of industry, annual produce, and general wealth of the country. His whole object is to show what

course of policy will most contribute to the riches of the community.

Before, then, the principle of a free trade can be urged, as that principle which ought to govern us, when legislating on the corn trade, it ought to be made appear to be a trade, concerning which no other consideration should have weight, besides the limited consideration of what plan of dealing with it will, in the end, give us the greatest amount of national wealth. But this has not been done; and, therefore, if any other great objects of public interest are involved in the question, those who urge the policy of a free corn trade, do so, subject to the charge of inadvertence, and of neglecting to attend to matters of still greater moment than the mere wealth of the state.

But even if it should be correct, to argue the point as one in which our wealth alone should be considered, will the effect of an immediate free importation produce in its operation an addition to our industry, our annual produce, our total amount of general wealth?

It is clear its first effect will be that of ruin to our farmers; its next consequence will be that of taking away, to a great amount, from the demand for agricultural industry; and its farther operation, to diminish agricultural capital. It

will take something considerable away from the revenues of the labourers, the farmers, and the landlords, and thus produce a decrease of that portion of the national wealth, which depends on our general agricultural prosperity.

In the mean time, while this course of loss and ruin is running, will the prosperity of our manufactures be advancing? Whatever may be said of the great importance of foreign demand, the demand for our own consumption is by far the greatest, and infinitely more to be relied upon, as the best support of them. But this demand being, for the most part, for the supply of those who are employed in agriculture, it will, in a great measure, cease to exist, if the system of a free importation of corn is now adopted.

Under, then, the peculiar circumstances of the artificial state of the prices of corn and other commodities, which have been established in this country, and which have been wholly overlooked by those who say we ought now to establish a free trade, such a policy would not be attended with any increase of our wealth, but must be followed by a great diminution of both our agricultural and manufacturing industry and capital. It is, therefore, not a policy at this time applicable to the present circumstances of the country, or at all calculated to advance the public interest,

though, certainly, a policy which ought not to be lost sight of, whenever that period shall arrive, when the price of corn, in this country, shall be on a level with the price of it in the rest of Europe.

The proposed regulations for the importation of corn have been opposed by others, on the grounds, that they will throw capital out of its natural course, and thus do that which is against all sound political principles.

But these regulations are not intended to do any such thing; their whole object is to keep that amount of capital vested in agriculture, which is now vested in it, by contributing to preserve some chance of a profit upon it. They are not proposed with a view of raising prices higher than they now are, but with a view of preventing them from falling much lower. To attempt the one might be fairly said to be to injure the consumer; to effect the other, would be to do that, which the consumer could not, in justice, complain of, because the price, under the existing state of the currency, is as low as it was twenty years ago, while it would afford only a very moderate protection to the grower. There is, therefore, a very great difference between these two objects; and it is no quibble to say, that it is not intended to advance prices,

when it is admitted to be intended to prevent their falling below their present rates.

But those who argue against this supposed attempt to take capital out of manufactures, that it may be employed in agriculture, should recollect what the legislative system of this country has been in respect to manufacturing capital. Is the capital of the country now vested in its natural occupation? Has our system of legislation been so completely free from all meddling with and forcing of capital, that the whole amount of it is now divided in those just proportions, between manufactures and agriculture, as it would have been, if no legislative interference had ever existed? The contrary is the fact. The system of legislation has at all times been actively operative in taking capital from agriculture. The navigation act; the colonial monopoly; the multitude of laws for prohibiting the importation of foreign manufactures, and thus establishing a monopoly in favour of our own, at the expense and loss of the agricultural consumers; the law prohibiting the exportation of wool; the tythe system; the effect of the public loans on agricultural credit: have each and all of them contributed, in a great degree, to diminish agricultural capital. If, therefore, the proposed regula-

tions did in reality give a bounty on the return of capital from manufactures to agriculture, it would be a measure, in no ways at variance with sound political principles.

The opposition which has been so generally made by many in the house of commons, and by all the bodies of manufacturers, who have petitioned against the new regulations, upon the assumption that they will raise the price of corn, and, therefore, the price of manufacturing labour; and that this advance, in the price of manufacturing labour, will deprive us of our manufacturing superiority over foreign merchants in foreign markets, though the most loudly set forth, and most frequently dwelt upon, is, of the whole of the opposition which has been given to them, the most easily to be controverted.

The very first step of the proposition is a begging of the entire question. It is assuming as true and as proved, that which is neither true or proved — that the regulations will raise the price of corn; whereas the whole object of them is to keep it low and steady: and the whole contest is, whether or not they will do so.

But admitting, for the sake of the argument, that it is not erroneous to assume, that the price of corn will be advanced; then, the next step of

the proposition, that such an advance of price will raise the price of labour, is directly at variance with the best established principles of political economy, and the whole range of experience.

Those who maintain that the price of labour falls and rises according as the price of corn falls or rises, have to show, that the value of labour is settled by some rule differing from that which gives a price to every other article of value. But this they neither have done or are they able to do. The truth is, its value and price are governed as the value and price of every thing else are, that is, by the relative proportion of the supply to the demand. This cannot be denied, without violating these great principles, and without advancing a proposition, which betrays a very superficial consideration of the question, and the abandonment of those doctrines of political economy, which, on other occasions, are so strenuously insisted upon.

If we inquire into the expenditure of the labouring classes of society, we shall find, that it by no means consists wholly in food, and still less, of course, in mere bread, or grain. It appears, from minute calculations, that, if the whole expenditure is divided into five parts, two

only consist of meal, or bread*. A rise, therefore, on the price of corn, must be both slow and partial in its effects upon labour. The discovery of the mines of America, during the time that it raised the price of corn between three and four times, did not nearly so much as double the price of labour †. In America, where corn is very cheap, the wages of labour are exceedingly high. In Ireland, where wages of labour are very low, every effort that has been made to establish manufactures there, has been defeated by the cheapness with which English manufactures can be sold, notwithstanding higher wages of labour in England and the expense of transport. The evidence given by several witnesses, who were examined before the house of lords, on the subject of the orders in council, proves that the price of labour is frequently very high when the price of provisions is very low, and, vice versâ, the price of labour very low, when the price of provisions is very high ‡. It is, in fact, the demand for manufactures that regulates the price of manufacturing labour. If this is very brisk,

* "Observations," &c. by the Rev. T. R. Malthus, page 5.

† Ibid. page 13.

‡ See the evidence of Messrs. E. Rhodes, page 186; John Mullins, page 197; and Thomas Denneson, page 205.

and if, at the same time, the price of provisions is low, the workmen can hold out till they raise the price of their labour very high. They will also render their means of supplying it less, in proportion to the cheapness with which they can live, by working a fewer number of hours in each day, or a fewer number of days in each week. If at the time the demand for manufactures is brisk the price of provisions is high, they will be obliged to work more hours in each day, and more days in each week, than they otherwise would do, to obtain a livelihood; and it is in this way the price paid for their labour will be either the same, when provisions are dear, as when they are cheap, or, rather, the price paid for it will be less when they are dear than when cheap.

But if it were true, that the price of labour did advance with the price of corn, it by no means follows, that such an advance in the price of labour would expose our manufactures to be undersold in foreign markets; because it is not the cheapness of labour that has given us the superiority we have so long possessed; on the contrary, the price of labour has always been higher in this country, than in those countries in which we have established markets. The cause of our superiority is to be found in the greater skill, better

machinery, and more extended capital of this country, than is existing in any other country in the world. As we should continue to possess these advantages, notwithstanding the price of labour might still be enhanced, such an enhancement of it could not be productive of that injury to our manufactures, as it has been hastily asserted must flow from it.

The advocates of a free importation of corn have said the proposed plan of restriction is a mere project; that the true system for the country to act upon, is to import foreign corn in great abundance, and thus secure a proportionally abundant export of manufactures. But this project, as it is called, is the offspring of what has been the established practice of the legislature for 144 years, and forms a part of a system to which the term is not perhaps quite so applicable, as it is to the other system of abundant importation, which is proposed, for the first time, to be substituted in its place. But is it correct to say, in order to have our manufactures very flourishing, we must have a great importation of corn? On the contrary, is it not plain, that, as to the immediate benefit to manufactures, it is the same thing whether the demand for them is established by importation from Poland, or by buying corn in the British and Irish markets?

If the corn that is wanted for our food is bought in an English market town, or in Ireland, it enables the farmer who sold it to buy a greater quantity of manufactures than he could have done if the same corn was bought in a foreign country. That this is true, is proved by the custom house returns, which show that Ireland has imported British manufactures in a quantity progressively increasing, in the proportion in which she has exported greater quantities of corn for the supply of the British market. The difference between the two systems is, that in the one instance we form and depend upon a foreign market for the sale of our manufactures, and in the other we secure a home market, besides affording all the benefit of our own demand for corn to our own farmers. The system of importing corn is, in fact, a system which places us at the mercy of foreigners, both for a market for our manufactures and for a supply of food; while the opposite system goes to establish a home market for our manufactures, and a home supply for those who are concerned in making them.

Upon the whole, if what has now been urged in objection to the theory of a free importation of corn, is founded upon substantial data and sound principles, it would appear that it will not

secure to us, if acted upon by the legislature, a sufficient supply of corn, at all times, at a moderate and steady price. It will not be that policy which will produce the greatest amount of national wealth; nor preserve to our manufactures the superiority they now enjoy in foreign countries; nor provide for them the best and most certain market. Nor is it a theory, however consistent with the best principles of political economy, that is applicable to the existing and extraordinary circumstances of the country.

The other, and opposite theory, on which the proposed alterations of the Corn Laws are founded, is, that a sufficient supply of corn can best be secured by encouraging the growth of it home; and that the average price of it will, on the whole, be lower, if such encouragement is given, than shall produce a sufficient supply for our own consumption, and an extra supply for foreign exportation, than it can be, if we depend on a foreign supply, and allow a free importation.

The advocates of this theory, have felt it obligatory upon them, in the first instance, to remove the general impression, that the average production of these countries was not, nor could not ever be adequate to the food of our own population. This impression has been the cause of that prevalent opinion in favour of the importation of foreign corn, which has governed the conduct of

the legislature for the last forty years; and led it to adopt a policy, diametrically opposite to that, which had been the law for upwards of a century preceding the year 1773. This impression also, at this very moment, has a very extensive influence, and is the first that strikes the mind, and leads it to infer, that we must still derive some portion of our corn from abroad; and thence farther to conclude, that the price of corn can not be lower, than the price at which the new law will allow importation to take place. In this way, the very common and very obstinate idea prevails, that those who now propose to raise the price for regulating importation, have no other possible motive than to raise the market price to the same level, and to prevent it from ever falling below it.

From the beginning to the end, the whole chain of this reasoning is utterly erroneous. It is built on an absolute error in point of fact. It bespeaks some negligence in those who urge it, in not sufficiently examining the information contained in the report of the committee; and, where it is had recourse to by those who cannot plead ignorance, it displays a wish to foment opposition to the bill that is now pending, by an appeal, addressed rather to the passions, than to the understanding of the public.

That the united kingdom possesses the means

of growing a sufficient supply of corn for its own consumption, is now fully proved by the custom house returns of the imports and exports of corn, which show, that we exported to a greater amount in the years 1811 and 1812, than we imported, and by the notoriety of the great abundance of the two following harvests. That we can grow much more than we want for our own consumption, will appear to every one, in the least degree acquainted with the actual state of tillage husbandry, it being well known, that, if the improved system of Norfolk, and some few other counties, was to become general throughout the united kingdom, every acre now in tillage, would yield at least one third more corn than it now produces*.

But the circumstance which places the question,

* "The fertility of the ground, in temperate regions, is capable of being improved by cultivation to an extent which is unknown: much, however, beyond the state of improvement in any country in Europe. In our own, which holds almost the first place in the knowledge and encouragement of agriculture, let it only be supposed that every field in England of the same original quality with those in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, and, consequently, capable of the same fertility, were, by a like management, made to yield an equal produce; and it may be asserted, I believe, with truth, that the quantity of human provision raised in the island would be increased fivefold."

Paley's Philosophy, vol. ii, page 359.

whether or not we can supply ourselves, beyond all doubt, is the ability of Ireland to add to her present production of corn.

Many have found fault with the committee, because they examined witnesses only as to the state of the corn trade of Ireland; imputing most perversely to them, that they did so, in order to discover how to regulate the corn trade of Great Britain. But those who have made this charge, have wholly mistaken the object of the committee; or, if they have not mistaken it, they have unfairly misrepresented it. The intention of the committee, in examining these witnesses, was to avoid the same omission which had been made by all former committees, who had the same subject before them; namely, that of forgetting that such a country as Ireland was in existence, and that she was peculiarly capable of assisting to feed the population of Great Britain. When the committee of the privy council, by command of his majesty, devoted several months, in 1791, to the investigation of the corn trade, though they made a very long report, replete with a very laboured account of the old laws, and of many other things that bespoke great information concerning the details of the question, in estimating the means of the British dominions, to supply sufficient food for its population, they never once thought of Ireland. Whereas, if they had hap-

pened to examine a few witnesses, well acquainted with the fertility of its soil and its general fitness to grow corn; and if they had advised a free trade in corn, between Great Britain and Ireland; a free exportation of corn at all times, and such an efficient regulation of the importation of foreign corn, as would have given to the Irish farmer a preference over the foreign farmer; they would have made a report, which would have been followed, if acted upon by the legislature, by the most certain advantage to the public interests; instead of making one, which led to very little, if to any good account. In order to avoid the same error, and with the view of producing incontrovertible proof, that the united kingdom could grow a vast deal more corn, than was sufficient for its own consumption, the committee obtained that Irish evidence, which is given in its report; and not for the purpose of endeavouring to show, as it has been tauntingly imputed to them, what the price should be, for regulating the importation of foreign corn into Great Britain.

This evidence* shows, that in Ireland, there

* Some have gone so far, in reprehending the committee, as to deny the competency of the witnesses to give authentic evidence; but they have evidently done so, from not taking any pains to learn their respective merits.

Mr. Wakefield has been examined before every committee that has inquired into the corn trade during the last fifteen

exists every quality to render her the granary, not only of Great Britain, but of the south of Europe. It also shows, that, if the system of tillage husbandry in Ireland was improved to the extent to which it is capable of being improved, the produce of the land now in tillage might be increased one half; and that, if the occasion required it, an additional quantity of land, in every respect fit to grow corn, to an inconceivable amount, might be brought into tillage. It like-

years. He was particularly well qualified to give evidence on the state of Ireland, having resided there three years, for the purpose of collecting information.

Mr. Killaly has for many years been engaged in making surveys for canals, under the direction of the Grand Canal Company and the Directors General of Inland Navigation, and has very justly acquired a very distinguished reputation, for his great skill and success as a civil engineer, and for the talents he has displayed in reporting upon the resources of the country—He is likewise concerned in extensive flour mills.

Mr. Shaw, a member of the house, from his connexion with the Irish trade, was able to give very useful and authentic evidence. On his recommendation, the committee examined *Mr. Callaghan*, of the house of Messrs. Callaghan and sons, of Cork, who are extensively engaged in every branch of trade connected with the corn.

Mr. Grierson, has been a principal conductor of the Irish board of agriculture, known by the name of the Farming Society of Ireland, and has proved himself to be a very good practical farmer, by his success, in obtaining numerous premiums for improvements in husbandry.

wise explains to us, that the soil, the climate, the number and habits of the people, the abundance of natural manure, and the convenience of seaports, navigable rivers, and inland navigation, which belong to Ireland, give her the means of growing and exporting corn almost without limit.

The committee have thus brought under public observation a state of things, not only not supposed to exist, but about which there was no inclination to bestow the least consideration. Had it not been for the course of inquiry they adopted, parliament might have been again called upon, and no doubt would have been called upon, if some persons had had the direction of the report of a select committee*, to legislate on the corn trade, without any knowledge of this most important part of the subject.

There being no longer, then, any doubt, that the united kingdom is capable of growing a sufficient supply of corn for its own consumption, the next step to be taken is to show how the theory will operate, upon which the new bills have been framed.

* It is very remarkable, that, though Ireland has been united to Great Britain for thirteen years, in all the calculations of the export and import trade of corn, in a recent publication by a right honourable gentleman, who claims great credit for accuracy, the trade of Ireland is omitted.

The advocates of them rest their whole case on the great principles of political economy of supply and demand. They say, if you will act upon these principles, you will do that, which will secure a permanent supply of corn, and at the most moderate rate of price.

To draw forth this supply, it is only necessary, according to the explanation which has been given by Dr. Adam Smith of the best mode of obtaining a sufficient supply of any article, to render the demand for it as great and as steady as possible. In the case of corn, if we allow foreign corn to be imported, we necessarily diminish the demand for corn of our own growth, and thus take away a part of the cause, which would otherwise operate in adding to the supply. In order, therefore, to have the supply of corn of our own growth sufficient for our consumption, we must restrict the importation of corn, and thus render the demand for corn of our own growth greater, in that degree, than it otherwise would be.

But, if we do so, according to the same authority, we shall not only obtain a supply that will be sufficient, but a supply that will be superfluous; for he clearly proves, that the competition to meet the demand will always lead to a greater supply than the actual demand requires.

If, then, these are sound principles, and the reasoning of Dr. Smith upon them is correct, the restriction of the importation of foreign corn must secure to us the first object of the bills, a sufficient and superfluous supply.

In regard to the second object, a moderate price of corn, it is plain, that this plenty which will be obtained will be attended with a low price, and that this superfluity will reduce the price still lower, so as to be as low as it is in the nature of things that it can ever be, consistent with any sort of fair profit to the grower of corn.

To this reasoning, which is grounded on unquestionable data and established principles, it is replied, "the whole is colourable, it cannot be true, because the object of the bills is to raise prices and to sustain high rents, and these low prices will be the seeds of the destruction of the whole project."

But, if those who say so, will only form their opinions from their own means of judging of the grounds upon which these bills are proposed, instead of depending on the false assumptions of some and the unfounded assertions of others, who cry out high prices and exorbitant rents, in order to confound all reasoning, and raise a clamour against the bills, they will learn that there is no sophistry, nor any inaccuracy whatever, to

be discovered, in the argument which is here urged in justification of them.

That the low prices which would follow from a superfluous supply, would contribute to diminish the supply, and bring it back to a level with the demand, is no doubt true. But as, according to the maxim, "it is impossible to have enough without a superfluity," it becomes expedient, in order to secure enough to have a permanently superfluous supply of corn; and it is proposed, accordingly, to effect it by the bill for allowing a free exportation.

It has been so confidently said, that the immediate result of passing the bill for regulating the importation of corn will be a rise in the present price of corn, and that its tendency must be to keep up the price permanently higher than it would be, if we allowed a free importation, that it is necessary, now that the principle of it has been explained, to trace its probable operation on the price of corn.

The price of wheat, for the average of the twelve maritime districts of England and Wales the week ending the 21st of May, was 67s. 11d. If this price is in any degree a price that has been regulated by the importation of foreign wheat, to that degree the bill for restraining importation would advance it. But this price is

a price settled by the quantity of our own wheat in the market, and on hand in the country; and, therefore, the bill cannot advance it. The fact is, the abundance of our own corn alone, has brought down the price to its present level; and this is so great, that there is every reason to suppose that it will fall still lower, even if the bill shall become a law.

In regard to what the price will hereafter be, it must be allowed, that, so far as the bill shall contribute, during this year, to prevent the importation of corn, it will contribute to keep it up to its present rate of 8s. 6d. the bushel, in bank paper, or of 6s. 5d. the bushel, in guineas. But of this price no consumer, surely, can complain. In the next year, as the farmer will have the full benefit of the whole of the demand for our consumption, he will probably grow as much as he has grown of late years; and, therefore, if the crop is a good one, the price will keep as low as it now is. In the following years, the certainty of a steady market will lead to a superfluous supply, and then the price will still be lower. It will thus become gradually lower and lower, till it shall be on a level with the rest of Europe, and then we shall be able to secure permanently a superfluous growth of corn, by being able to export

it, and sell it as cheap as foreign corn can be sold in the foreign markets. This is the state that the country was in, while the law of Charles II was in force; that is, in a state as near perfection as it is in the nature of things that we can be in; not only having sufficient for our own consumption, but an average superfluous supply, at all times ready to meet the deficiency of a bad season, and, with it, at the same time, the lowest rate of price that can exist, consistent with a reasonable profit to the grower.

But the advocates of the new bills can say they are not only right, as to the principles on which they have framed them, but are borne out by the experience of nearly a whole century.

The act of the 22 C. II, c. 13, which imposed a duty on the importation of foreign corn, which almost amounted to a prohibition, was the law of the land from 1670 to 1773.

The price, by this act, for regulating the importation of wheat was one third higher than the average price of wheat for the preceding twenty years. It was 53s.; making together, with a duty of 8s., which was payable when the price exceeded 53s., the regulating price 61s. The price that would now be equivalent to 61s. is 105s.; being a price greater than the average of the last twenty years by one third.

Concurrent with this law of Charles the Second, for regulating the importation of corn, there was the law of the same prince, for permitting the free exportation of corn; and the law of king William, giving a bounty of 5s. the quarter, when the price of wheat was below 48s. the quarter.

According to the reasoning of the present day, this law of Charles the Second would have kept the price of wheat up to 61s. the quarter; and the conjoint operation of restricted importation and free exportation, if the doctrines of a right honourable gentleman are correct, would have been to raise the price of bread.

But the price did not keep up to 61s., nor did the price of corn rise. The average price became less than it had been for twenty years, previous to 1670.

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Wheat 20 years to 1665 . . .	51	0
— 30 years to 1705 . . .	41	1
— 30 years to 1735 . . .	38	2
— 30 years to 1765 . . .	34	10*

* These prices are taken from the table in page 22 of the Speech of the right honourable George Rose, though they are not either the Eton prices, or the prices of the statute quarter, but erroneously calculated on the principle of deducting one ninth instead of two ninths from the Eton prices. For the sake of comparison, however, the table is sufficient, as the variation from the true prices is uniform.

The average price of wheat for sixty-eight years, to 1765, according to the tables of Eton prices, was 33s. 3d. the statute quarter*.

But the price was not only lower, while these laws were in force, than it had before been, but the supply of corn, of our own growth, was sufficient for our own consumption, and to allow of a considerable annual exportation. It appears, from the accounts of the imports and exports of corn, that, from the years 1696† to 1765, there was a constant balance of exports, on averages of four and five years taken together.

		<i>Excess of Exports.</i>	
5	years ending 1701	...	139,866 qrs.
6	ditto 1707	...	289,304
4	ditto 1711	...	299,367
4	ditto 1715	...	453,986
4	ditto 1719	...	485,852
5	ditto 1724	...	532,732
5	ditto 1729	...	216,643
5	ditto 1734	...	468,844
5	ditto 1739	...	597,462
5	ditto 1744	...	446,378
5	ditto 1749	...	932,593

* Report, page 5; and Chalmers, page 322.

† No accurate account can be obtained of the trade prior to this date.

		<i>Excess of Exports.</i>	
5	years ending 1754	...	1080,077 qrs.
5	ditto 1759	...	273,805
5	ditto 1764	...	696,117*

These prices, and this state of trade, which prevailed during the whole time that the system of law was in force which restricted importation and permitted free exportation, form a case, quite incontrovertible, of the practical illustration of the policy of the system. The advocates of the new bills, rest *their* case upon this practice, and confidently say, that, if the same policy is now adopted, it will be followed by similar consequences; that is, a sufficient supply of corn, both for our own consumption, and for exportation; and a lower price, than the price which has existed under a policy of the opposite character.

They appeal to what occurred after the year 1765, as a farther practical illustration of these doctrines.

In 1765, and each of the seven following years, laws were made, prohibiting the exportation of corn, and allowing the importation of it, duty free; and in 1773, the act of 13 Geo. III, c. 43, was passed, which prohibited exportation, when the price of wheat exceeded 44s. the quarter, and

* Report, page 5; and Chalmers's Estimate, page 322.

allowed importation, when the price was at or above 48s. the quarter, and thus repealed the regulations of 22 C. II.

An entire change in the system of legislative regulation was thus effected, in the first instance, by the annual laws commencing in 1765, and finally completed by the 13 Geo. III, in 1773*.

The average price of wheat, for sixty-eight years to 1765, of 33s. 3d. the quarter, advanced to an average price of 44s. 7d†. the quarter, for 30 years, to 1795; to 68s. 5d. the quarter, for twelve years, to 1804; and to 88s. 11d. for ten years, to 1813‡.

In place of continuing to carry on an export trade of corn, we became importers.

		<i>Excess of Imports.</i>
5 years ending 1769 . . .		223,184 qrs.
5 ditto 1774 . . .		276,206
5 ditto 1779 . . .		290,595

* It is a mere quibble, to say that there was no change till 1773, because the seven preceding laws were temporary. The change, evidently, should be dated from the time at which exportation was prohibited, and free importation allowed. See the Speech of the right honourable George Rose, page 20.

† See Report, page 6; and Chalmers, page 322.

‡ See Report, pages 6, 7, and Appendix, No. 1. It will appear, on a minute comparison of the statement of the report, and of a contradictory statement in the same Speech, page 21, that the report is quite accurate.

		<i>Excess of Imports.</i>
5 years ending 1784 . . .		185,906 qrs.
5 ditto 1789 . . .		198,716
5 ditto 1794 . . .		1,145,584*

In twelve years to 1804, corn and flour were imported, amounting to the value of 37,613,435*l.*; in nine years to 1813, to the value of 21,021,700*l.*†.

This great change in the state of the corn trade, both as to price and as to export, so precisely corresponds with the change in the system of legislative regulation, as to warrant this practical conclusion, that restricted importation, and a free exportation of corn, is that system which is best calculated to secure a supply of corn, and, with it, a moderate price.

There are several persons who have advanced some very vague arguments, in an attempt to explain, that the change which took place in the corn trade since 1764, was owing to our having become a manufacturing country, and to our greatly increased population. But, in point of fact, it is not true that our manufactures arrived at any very great perfection, at so early a period as that immediately following 1764; nor is there any kind of authentic proof, of our popu-

* Report, page 6; and Chalmers, page 322.

† Appendix to Report, No. 1. These statements relate to corn of all kinds. Their accuracy has been denied on other statements of the trade in wheat only. *Speech, &c.* p. 24.

lation having increased, in any great degree, at that period. But, even if the facts were as they are stated to be, it by no means follows, that they would account for our ceasing to supply ourselves with corn, and for the advance in the price of it. On the contrary, as the demand for it would have been greatly increased, according to the principles of demand and supply, the supply would have gone on regularly and greatly increasing.

That the permitting of the free importation of corn, in 1765 and afterwards, might not have been the cause of the change, may very possibly be true, because the price of corn in England, was at that time probably as low as the price in foreign countries. But when the necessary consequences of a prohibition of exportation, for the seven years succeeding 1764, and of the regulation of the 13 Geo. III, by which exportation was prohibited, if the price of wheat was under 44s., are duly examined, the change in the trade may be safely attributed to that part of the change in the law which related to exportation.

For if exportation is prohibited, and if the maxim be true, "that to have enough we must have a superfluity," we never can have a sufficient supply. The reason is, because the farmer knows, that, if more corn is grown than the home consumption requires, the surplus will lower the

price of the whole stock, and afford no equivalent return whatever, for the expense of growing a surplus. A prohibition of exportation, therefore, not only limits the market to our own consumption, but makes it the interest of the farmer never to grow as much as an average supply of it, because, if he were to do so, in all good seasons, he would not be paid for the quantity exceeding the average. The prohibition of exportation in 1765, and in subsequent years, must, therefore, have driven capital out of agriculture; and in this way, it would have brought about just that change in the trade and the price, which afterwards occurred.

But, besides the experience of what has happened, in regard to the corn trade, from 1670 to the present time, the advocates of the new bills say the occurrences of the last eight years afford another practical illustration of the validity of their theory.

In 1806 and 1807, the Berlin and Milan decrees were issued by the French government; and, in 1807, our own government issued their orders in council. In 1808, both came into active operation, and, conjointly with the influence and exertions of Buonaparte in Holland, Denmark, Prussia, and Russia, a very great restraint was imposed, and continued to exist, up to last

year, on the importation of all foreign goods into this country. Though the average price of wheat for 1809, was 95s. 7d.; for 1810, 106s. 2d.; for 1811, 94s. 6d.; and 1812, 125s. 5d., foreign corn was not imported in any commensurate amount, notwithstanding the price of it abroad was as low as it usually is.

The consequence of the demand for corn being thus, in a great measure, confined to that of our own growth, and of the high price of 1809 continuing steadily through the years 1810, 1811, and 1812, was, in the first place, great profit to the farmer; in the next place, an increased supply; and, finally, an abundance, which has enabled us to feed ourselves, and has also been productive of the present low prices.

In point of fact, the theory which is proposed to be adopted has been already in the fullest operation during the last five years; and, instead of the advocates of it being in a state to recommend it, as one to be tried *de novo*, all they have to request is, to take advantage of the good that has been derived from it, by continuing to give it effect; that we may thus complete the progress now making towards bringing the corn trade to something like a state of perfection.

All they ask is, to secure the advantages which the accidental restriction of the importation of

corn has bestowed upon us; and, instead of suffering the peace to take away all protection from our farmers, to interpose with a law to continue it in another way. By so doing, you will induce them to go on with that extent of cultivation, which is now equal to supply us; and which soon will be equal to enable us to export corn. By taking a contrary course, that is, by allowing the peace to remove at once all restraint on importation, you will check the inclinations and abilities of the farmer just at the moment, when a few years more of protection would enable him to come into competition with the foreign farmer; you will thus throw every thing back, and reduce us to that state of dependence and of high price, that the country has repeatedly been in ever since the similar system of policy was introduced, in 1765.

But the advocates of the bill for regulating importation need not rest their case solely on the experience, which is so favourable to them; they can refer, after the example of their opponents, to the writings of Dr. Smith, and show that the proposed regulations fall under those rules, which he lays down for making exceptions to the general rule of a complete freedom of trade.

He says, if a particular object of our own in-

dustury is essential for the defence of the country, protecting duties may be imposed*; and he illustrates his reasoning by the navigation act, which he calls the wisest law on the statute book, though he proves it to be detrimental to the general wealth of the country.

In respect to corn, an independent supply of it is quite essential to its perfect security. Though we have not yet, at any time, been altogether at the mercy of our enemies for food to eat, we have more than once been very nearly so. In 1810, we were obliged to get corn even from France. In that year, we imported from thence 337,498 quarters of corn and 202,922 cwts. of flour. Had Buonaparte completely succeeded in his attempt to conquer Russia, he could, in concert with the Americans, if a bad harvest had occurred, have reduced us to complete submission.

If another confederacy of the northern powers should ever be formed, to resist our claims to maritime rights, and if America should become a party, as she most probably would do, they would only have to follow our own example in regard to Norway, if we should be pressed by scarcity, to secure the means of humbling and disgracing us.

* Vol. ii, page 192.

Another instance in which Dr. Smith says protecting duties may be imposed is, in the case of our having taxed some article of our own production. In such a case, he allows, that it would be just to impose a tax, to an equal amount, on the importation of the same kind of article from abroad*.

In whatever degree the price of corn is enhanced by taxation, to that degree, therefore, he would admit a duty to be imposed on the importation of it.

But there is still another case, in which he says importation should be restricted, which is peculiarly applicable to the present state of the corn trade; that is, where any commodity of our own production has been encouraged for some time by high duties and protections. He says, to restore a free importation of the same kind of article *suddenly* must be attended with the most injurious consequences; and that "Humanity, in this case, requires, that the freedom of trade should be restored only by slow gradations, and with caution and circumspection. Were these high duties and protections taken away all at once, cheaper foreign goods, of the same kind, might be poured so fast into the home market,

* Vol. ii, page 195.

as to deprive, all at once, many thousands of our people of their ordinary employment and means of subsistence*."

Though no high duties and protections have existed by law in favour of the farmers, restrictions on the importation of corn, of equivalent effect, have been established, during the last five years, by those measures, which have distinguished the particular character of the late war. To allow, therefore, peace to take place, and do away, at once, these restrictions, would be to restore the freedom of trade in that sudden manner, which Dr. Smith says would be attended with great mischief and calamity. Foreign corn would be poured so fast into the home market, as to deprive, all at once, many thousands of our farmers, and our farming labourers, of their ordinary employment and means of subsistence.

If, then, even it should be advisable to adopt a complete freedom of trade, the proposed bill for regulating importation ought to be passed, in order that it may be restored by slow gradations, and with due caution and circumspection; and the advocates of a free trade, instead of opposing it, should only require a clause to be

* Vol. ii, page 202.

inserted, that, at a given period, the importation of corn should be wholly free.

If they would admit the authority of Dr. Smith to govern them on this point, then the dispute between them and the advocates of the proposed alterations of the Corn Laws would be narrowed into a very small compass. For, if the bills should produce the effects, which it is said they will produce, that is, a superfluous supply, a gradual fall in price to the level with the rest of Europe, and an established export, then the restraint of importation will not be requisite to protect our farmers. If it existed by law, it would be inoperative in such a state of things. But still it might be a question, whether it would not be good policy to retain it, in order to give confidence to the farmer; and thus preserve all the inducement in our power to make sure of a sufficiency of a commodity, which is so indispensibly necessary to the comfort and happiness, and to the wealth and strength of the community.

Enough has now been said to show, that the object of the bills now before parliament is not to enhance the price of corn or of bread, nor to sustain exorbitant rents; but, on the contrary, to prove that the object of them is to prevent, in the first instance, the injury that would follow

from allowing a free trade all at once; and also to prevent the great discouragement of tillage, that it would give rise to. In the next place, the object of them is to secure the continuance of the same extent of cultivation, that at present exists; and such a gradual fall in price as shall allow all parties time to provide against any possible injury, that it may lead to. And, lastly, the object of them is to give a fair opportunity to the capital of these countries to produce in agriculture the same effects it has already produced in manufactures; that is, a greatly increased production, attended with diminished prices; but at the same time accompanied with a sufficient profit, though at a much more moderate per centage rate than the heretofore common rate of agricultural profit.

Some gentlemen who have opposed the bill for regulating importation are willing to allow, "THAT THE GROWER OF CORN SHOULD BE EFFECTUALLY PROTECTED, TO THE EXTENT OF THE PRICE BEING HIGH ENOUGH TO ENSURE HIS BEING ABLE TO PAY A FAIR RENT, AND TO HAVE A REASONABLE PROFIT TO HIMSELF*." They even go farther, and quote the report of the committee of the privy council of 1790, who say—"For

* Speech of the right honourable George Rose, page 31.

the sake of the consumer, the most liberal encouragement and protection should be given to those employed in the production of corn; *for, without offering proper incitements to their industry, plenty can never be procured.* For these reasons it will be found, perhaps, on due consideration, that the interests of the grower and consumer, well understood, are less at variance, than at first they may appear*." But this class of opposers pretend to say, that there is not sufficient information before the house of commons to enable it to determine what this protecting price should be.

If they are correct in their assertion, the fault is theirs alone; for it was their duty to have moved for a select committee, to obtain the information they allege to be wanting, at the opening of the session, when notice was given that the question would be again brought forward.

But the assertion is not correct. The committee of last year did not overlook this point of what ought to be the regulating price. Having traced the operation of the law of Charles the Second, and that of the laws of 1773, 1791, and 1804, they recommended the house of commons

* Speech of the right honourable George Rose, page 32.

to adopt the principles of the law of Charles the Second, in taking a new price of regulation; and they proposed 105s. as equivalent to 61s. in his reign; that is, a price one third higher than the average price of the twenty preceding years, on the principle, that 61s. was one third higher than the average of the preceding twenty years, to 1670, the date of the law of Charles the Second. It was not at all necessary, therefore, for them to make any inquiry into the price that would exactly afford a reasonable profit to the farmer, or secure a fair rent. They did not consider the question in the confined view of upholding profits and rents, but with the sole object of securing an independent supply, at a moderate price; and, finding that the country had enjoyed both under the law of Charles the Second, they felt themselves safe in advising a recurrence to the successful practice of nearly a whole century.

But, if they had not thus acted on principle and experience, and had undertaken to recommend a price that would be sufficient to remunerate the grower, without being too high in respect to the consumer, they would not have taken the course that these gentlemen propose, of examining farmers and corn factors about it; because such an attempt would only produce some sort of explanation of what the price should be to

pay the recently contracted high rate of rent; for each witness would of course have formed his opinion on the rents and prices which were of late years current. Such an inquiry could not have led to the ascertaining of what the fair price ought to be, and it would most justly have exposed the committee to the charge of wishing to sustain high prices and high rents.

Besides, it is quite absurd to suppose that any thing like a concurrence of opinion could have prevailed between any two witnesses who might have been examined.

There are such an endless number of circumstances belonging to such a variety of considerations of soil, climate, means of transport, system of leasing, moral and agricultural habits, extent of capital, &c. &c. that bear on the question of the fitness of any given price as a standard for regulating the trade of the united kingdom, that a committee might become exceedingly puzzled by the evidence that might have been given to them, but could not by any chances have advanced one step nearer the end of judging correctly on the question, after a laborious investigation, than they would have been at the commencement of it, if they were only acquainted with what the average price of corn had been for a certain long period of years immediately preceding!

As it is this general average of price, that regulates and governs the profits of farming and the rents of land, no safe conclusion can be made upon what price will be a fit and proper price for protecting the farmer, except it is founded wholly upon this average. If taken for a period of twenty years, it will probably be the most correct datum of calculation that can be taken; and for this reason it is, that the price of 80s., which is about the average price of the quarter for the last twenty years, is so universally allowed to be that price which ought to be now adopted.

In regard to the price of foreign corn, all that is necessary to be known is, that it is generally much lower than the price of our own corn; and if we provide that it shall not interfere till our own reaches a given price, which may and ought to be settled without any consideration of what the exact price is of foreign corn, we shall do all that is fit to be done.

It is proposed by those, who thus erroneously imagine that the price for regulating importation can only be ascertained by the inquiry of a new select committee, to postpone the measure to the next session. But to advise such a proceeding is nothing more or less, than to advise what will render it impossible that any measure will ever do any good; to expose the farmers to all the injury that is impending over them; and

to put a sudden stop to cultivation. The only use of any measure is to produce confidence among the farmers at this very moment, and to induce them to sow as much land with corn during the ensuing sowing season as they have sown during the last four sowing seasons. If they see the market secured to them, they will not be deterred from doing so by the low prices. But if the present low prices shall be subject to be reduced still lower by foreign importation, it would be insanity to sow under any expectation of ever reaping a profit from the crop. The facility of converting a great portion of the land now in tillage for corn into pasture and meadow is so great, that the loss of this session in passing a bill might place us under the necessity, in the space of one year, of importing very largely from foreign countries; and advance prices very considerably.

So many persons have called the whole proceeding, both in parliament and out of it, an "Irish job," that it is necessary to make a few observations, to show how far such a character can be justly given to it. Some of those, who have been the most forward in casting this reflection upon it, are so much in the habit of governing their own public conduct by motives of personal interest, that they very naturally fall

into a habit of supposing, that the best way of finding out what the object of any new measure is, is by examining in what way the person proposing it is personally interested in it. But such a course of inquiry will, in the present case, lead only to an erroneous conclusion; for the person with whom the present discussion originated, has lived too much among the liberal and enlightened part of British society, to adopt so mean and selfish a notion as that of ever thinking of urging any public measure, merely because it might be beneficial to Ireland.

So far from the bills now before parliament having any tendency to advance the interests only of Ireland; the operation of both of them must be of the greatest benefit to Great Britain.

If the regulations for the importation of corn have any operation in keeping the price from becoming lower, as the first effect of them will be felt in the English markets, the English farmers will be the first, from their proximity to them, to reap advantage from them. If the market of London and of the eastern coasts of England require a supply of grain beyond what can be provided by the English farmers, and these regulations exclude foreign grain, the Scotch farmers will have a decided superiority over the Irish in securing this market, in consequence of

the voyage from Scotland being shorter than the voyage from Ireland. The benefit Ireland will derive will be that of supplying the western coasts of England and Scotland. But if Ireland will there have a good market for the sale of her corn, will not the manufacturing population of the north of England, and of Paisly and Glasgow, be also benefited, by having plenty of corn to eat? Thus, then, it appears the interest the Irishman has in the measure is the market it secures to him. The interest the Englishman has, is the daily bread it supplies him with. That is, this great Irish job will do nothing more or less, than afford that abundance of bread to the English manufacturers, which England cannot herself grow for them.

The bill for allowing a free exportation of corn will not, perhaps, have so direct an operation in assisting to feed the people of this country. But, the moment it becomes a law, it will be the means of relieving the great distress that is now felt in the British colonies, for want of flour and corn. It, however, will indirectly contribute to the plentiful supply of the English market, because it will encourage tillage in Ireland; and if it shall lead to a large established export trade, such an average surplus will be grown beyond what is necessary for an average supply, that it

will afford a great resource in bad harvests, to prevent the pressure of scarcity.

The free exportation of corn from Ireland will operate beneficially to the landed interest of this country in this way—As the trade in corn between Great Britain and Ireland is quite free, and never can be otherwise, if Ireland was prohibited from exporting corn, as she can grow it much cheaper than it can be grown in England, she would soon send it into the English markets in such quantities, as would reduce prices and rents to a level with the prices and rents of Ireland*. The exportation from thence to England has not yet produced any such effect, because there has not been sufficient time, since the free trade was established, to grow as much corn as must be grown in Ireland to have this operation. If, however, all she can and will grow, beyond her own consumption, is to find a market only in England, in consequence of a free exportation not being allowed to foreign countries, the farmers and landlords of England will soon have to regret the mistaken policy that shall have rejected so beneficial a measure.

Those who say the interests of Ireland are

* It is commonly supposed, that rents in Ireland are as high as they are in England. They average at least one third lower.

alone considered, should remember that the people of that country are prevented, by all sorts of protecting and prohibiting duties, from buying foreign manufactures, and thereby of getting them as cheap as they otherwise could do. That is, the law has given the manufactures of England a monopoly, directly at the cost of the Irish farmers. If this is to be the rule on one side, common justice requires that a preference should be given to the Irish farmer over the foreigner, in supplying the English manufacturing population with corn. But to judge from the language of many late petitions, only one principle seems to prevail among a great number who have given an opinion upon this question, and that is, *to sell dear and buy cheap.*

It should likewise be remembered, that in whatever degree the alterations in the Corn Laws shall be of advantage to Ireland, they will conciliate the people, and consolidate the connexion between the two countries. The population of Ireland is now known to be between six and seven millions*, and surely it must be a measure of British, as well as of Irish interest, which shall so intimately affect their general comforts, happiness, and wealth.

* This appears from the population returns under the act of last session.

In whatever degree also these alterations shall increase the wealth of Ireland, to that degree it is a great British object, because it will afford a new source of taxation, directly applicable, under the expected new arrangement of the finances of Ireland, to British expenditure.

To the argument that some persons have urged, that we ought to wait till the state of the currency is improved; before we alter the Corn Laws; it is to be said, in the first place, that there is as yet no appearance of any effort being made to restore it to its proper value; and therefore, there can be no certainty of this period ever arriving; and, in the next place, it may be denied that the probability of an emended currency, is a circumstance in any way applicable to justify delay, if the future supply of corn is thereby put to hazard. If the theory of a depreciation, by an over issue of paper, is a sound one, as it certainly is, then the foreign exchange will alter in our favour, as fast as our currency recovers its value. But this alteration in the exchange will be in favour of the importer of foreign corn, so far as an unfavourable exchange adds to the selling price of it. This advantage, however, will be counteracted by a proportionate fall in the price of our own corn, and a higher duty, Till,

* According to the graduated scale of duty.

then, the exchange shall come to par, and in our favour, the change in currency would in no degree alter the efficacy of any regulating price now fixed for importation. As no one can expect that such an event as a complete system of cash payments by the bank, similar to that which existed prior to 1797, can be brought about in a very short space of time; whenever it does occur, it will then, and not till then, be a fit occasion to consider what is right to be done on this question of regulating the importation of corn, so far as the value of the currency bears upon it.

Having thus gone through all the several objections that have been urged against the Corn Bills, as to the time of pressing them forward, their principles, and their objects, it is only necessary again to declare, that the authors of them, so far from intending to sustain high rents, rather look forward to a reduction of all those which have been calculated on the prices of the last few years; so far from intending to raise the price of corn or bread, they are altogether influenced by a desire to secure plenty and low prices, by averting that sudden stop to cultivation, which will certainly take place, if no protection is given to the farmer, and which must be followed by high prices and scarcity. And, finally, so far from

wishing to benefit only the grower of corn, they seek to protect and promote the interests of the consumers, which, when well understood, differ in no kind of degree from those of the growers. These are the real motives, which have influenced their conduct. To attribute any other to them is to do that, which is an unwarrantable misrepresentation, and that which no argument or fact that they have ever advanced will at all justify.

THE END.

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