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 G L A S G O W.

BEFORE the union of the two kingdoms, the privy council of Scotland was vested with the power of suspending the laws prohibiting the importation of victual into Scotland in time of dearth and scarcity; particularly of oatmeal, when it exceeded eight pounds Scots, or thirteen shillings and four pence Sterling per boll.

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But the powers of the privy council of Scotland being taken away by an act in the sixth year of the reign of her late Majesty Queen Anne, the prohibitory laws could not be suspended:—therefore an act was passed in the fourteenth year of the reign of his late Majesty, King George the Second, intituled, “ An act for licensing the importation of victual from Ireland, and other parts beyond the Seas, “ into Scotland, in time of dearth and scarcity;” by which the judges of the court of session, justiciary, and exchequer in Scotland, were vested with the powers of suspending the said prohibitory laws, at any time, when the current prices of victual in the *county and city of Edinburgh* did exceed the rates and prices therein mentioned; particularly, when oatmeal exceeded thirteen shillings and four pence Sterling per boll, weighing eight stons Troys.

Before passing this act, the price of oatmeal, which, from the union to that time, had generally run from ten shillings and eight

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pence, to twelve shillings Sterling per boll, did, in the year seventeen hundred and forty, rise to the enormous price of twenty-five shillings and four pence Sterling per boll. And though it is confessed, that the powers given by that act, of suspending the former prohibitory laws, were of great advantage to Scotland; yet, in many respects, the law was always considered as grievous: First, Because the obtaining a licence to import was attended with considerable expence and delay. Secondly, That the importation was regulated by the prices of corn in the county and city of Edinburgh, where the prices of corn were generally about a fifth part lower than in Glasgow, and other trading and manufacturing towns in the west of Scotland. Thirdly, It was required, as a necessary qualification, that the persons who were to give evidence as to the prices of corn should be in possession of a landed estate of four hundred pounds Scots *per annum* of valued rent. Fourthly, The judges were impowered, once in every thirty days, from the time that such suspension had taken effect, to take off such suspension, in case the prices did not then exceed the prices mentioned in the act; which, from the shortness of the time, was in some degree equal to a prohibition to import corn from a foreign country, and even from Ireland.

The grievances, however, under which Scotland has so long laboured, were in some degree alleviated by many temporary statutes, passed during these last twenty years, permitting the importation of corn duty-free. But these laws not having fully answered the wise intentions of the legislature, his Majesty was graciously pleased to recommend to both houses of parliament, to take into consideration the high price of provisions, and, as far as human wisdom could go, to apply such remedies as might alleviate the distresses of the poor.

In consequence of this recommendation, an act was made in the

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thirteenth year of his present Majesty, intituled, "An act to regulate the importation and exportation of corn;" by which it is enacted, that, from and after the 1st of January, 1774, all customs and duties formerly paid respectively on wheat, flour, rye, pease, beans, barley, beer, bigg, and oats, imported into Great Britain, are repealed; and, in lieu of the former duties, very small duties are imposed during the continuance of the respective prices therein mentioned; particularly, whenever the price of middling British wheat, at the ports and places where wheat shall be imported into Britain, shall appear according to the methods directed by law for ascertaining the rates and prices of corn and grain imported, *to be at, or above,* forty-eight shillings per quarter, that then only a duty of six pence per quarter shall be laid upon all wheat; or whenever the price of middling British oats shall, in like manner, appear *to be at, or above,* sixteen shillings per quarter, that then a duty of two pence per quarter shall be laid upon all oats.

By this act it is also declared lawful to import oatmeal into any port or place in Scotland, where the price of oatmeal *does exceed* the price of sixteen shillings per boll, weighing eight stons Troys.

By this act, the powers formerly vested in the judges of the courts of session, justiciary, and exchequer, are declared to cease and determine; and that thereafter the sheriff, or steward-deputes, of the several shires or stewartries in Scotland, within which there are ports and places for the importation and exportation of goods and merchandises, or their substitutes, should, and they are thereby authorized and required, four times every year; that is to say, upon the first day of November, first day of February, first day of May, and first day of August, or as soon after as may be, to summon and convene before them, two or more honest and substantial persons, and upon their oaths, and by such other ways and means as shall seem to

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them proper and necessary, to examine, inquire into, and determine the common market prices of middling British corn and grain, and oatmeal, as the same may be bought in their respective counties or stewardries, and to fix and ascertain the same by proper acts and determinations.

The Memorialists, and all Scotland, were happy to find themselves in all respects, except those to be afterwards noticed, treated on an equal footing with his Majesty's happy subjects in England. They were relieved from the former tedious and expensive mode of application, for obtaining a licence to import; the importation is regulated according to the rates and prices of corn in each county, without regard to the county or city of Edinburgh; the ports must remain open for three months; and any honest or substantial person is declared to be a legal evidence, though he is not possessed of a landed estate of four hundred pounds Scots *per annum* of valued rent.

In those respects they felt the blessings of English liberty; but with respect to the article of oatmeal, the bread of by far the greatest part of the inhabitants of Scotland, they were struck with astonishment to find the import price raised one fifth higher than formerly; that is, from thirteen shillings and four pence to sixteen shillings per boll, contrary to the humane recommendation of his Majesty; whereby the distresses of the poor, in place of being alleviated, were greatly increased; whilst, at the same time, the import rate of wheat and wheat-flour, the bread of England, was reduced two-fifth parts; that is to say, from four pounds per quarter, to forty eight shillings per quarter.

They felt, with indignation, that more regard was shown to the *horses* of England than to the *men* of Scotland—thirteen shillings and four pence per boll of oatmeal, not sixteen shillings, being the

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nearest corresponding price to sixteen shillings per quarter for oats; and, as if the face of the poor of Scotland had not been effectually grinded, the import price of oatmeal must *exceed*, whilst it is sufficient that the import price of oats is *at, or above* the rate prescribed.

In another respect, Scotland, in this law, was not treated on an equal footing with England; for though wheat and all other grain may be imported, when the duties, not repealed by this act, shall be due, and may be landed without payment of duties, and warehoused under the joint locks of the King and the importer, and again re-exported; yet the benefit of those salutary provisions are not extended to oatmeal.

This law having passed through both houses of parliament before the Memorialists had received sufficient information concerning it, they, and almost all the boroughs in Scotland, did, in the then next session of parliament, present a humble petition to the house of commons, praying, that the import rate of oatmeal might be reduced to thirteen shillings and four pence per boll, as formerly; and to be allowed the liberty of warehousing oatmeal in the same manner as other grain; but the honourable house, not having a sufficient trial of a new law so lately passed, were pleased to refuse the desire of their petition.

At a time when the Memorialists were intending again humbly to remonstrate to parliament for redress of the grievances already noticed, they have seen, with equal concern and astonishment, leave given to bring in a bill to amend and render more effectual two acts made in the thirteenth and fourteenth year of the reign of his present Majesty, in so far as relates to the regulating the importation and exportation of corn in that part of Great Britain called Scotland.

By this bill it is proposed, that the power of regulating the im-

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portation and exportation of corn shall again be vested in the judges of the court of session and exchequer, in the same manner as they were authorized by the act in the fourteenth year of his late Majesty King George the second: the same tedious and expensive mode of application for a licence to import is to be again introduced; the import rate is to be determined according to the market prices in the county and city of Edinburgh; the evidence of persons of landed estate alone are to be held as good evidence; and it seems to be intended that the ports may be shut in thirty days after a license is granted for importation; and, to these hardships and inconveniences, already long felt and complained of, is superadded a new one, by which the importation of oats is regulated by the price of oatmeal.

It is with great grief that the Memorialists observe an attempt made to separate Scotland from England in a law of all others the most important. Subjects of the same King, and under the same legislature, they consider it as their glory, and as the best security for their liberties, to enjoy the benefit of the same laws which have rendered England the happiest and the most flourishing country in the world.—Trusting to be sheltered under the wings of English liberty, they demand it as their right and privilege to be treated on an equal footing with the King's English subjects.

There is no reason in justice or expediency for making the prices at Edinburgh the rule for regulating the importation for *all* Scotland.—Edinburgh is situated in the heart of the richest corn country in Scotland — Glasgow in the poorest; and whilst the one city may be blessed with plenty, the other may be almost reduced to a starving condition.—Famine may be the fate of Argyleshire. And as every county in England has the valuable privilege of being regulated in the importation of corn by the prices in each county,

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they humbly hope the same liberty will not be denied to the counties of Scotland.

It was not to be expected that the old mode of ascertaining the prices would have been revived, after the legislature had declared, that it had been found to be attended with great inconvenience, and was inconsistent with the principle of the late act. And now this bill sets out with declaring, that the late act had been found liable to many inconveniences, and that it hath been found, by experience, that taking a proof of the prices of grain at Edinburgh, in order to regulate the importation and exportation at all the ports in Scotland, is preferable to the mode established by the last act.

The Memorialists are at a loss to reconcile declarations so opposite to one another: they have not seen, nor have they heard of any inconveniences arising from the late act, other than that the import price of oatmeal was raised a fifth higher than formerly, and that they were denied the liberty of ware-housing it.

It cannot be considered as a just ground of complaint against the late act, that it has pleased God to bless Great Britain and Ireland with greater plenty for these two last than in the preceeding eighteen years; and that the prices of corn, in consequence of that plenty, have been reduced.—Though this may appear a misfortune to men of narrow notions, and illiberal views, yet to every person who has a wish for the interest and prosperity of his country, it must be obvious, that the riches of a country consist in the quantity of its produce; not in the price at which it is sold.—The same number of bolls of oatmeal, or other grain, will maintain the same number of persons, whether the price it is sold for is ten shillings or sixteen shillings per boll, and the same quantity will be produced.—The evident intention of this bill is to raise the prices of corn every year in which an importation becomes necessary; which is, in effect, laying a grievous

tax on the consumers, to be put in the pockets of a few landed men to the extent of the whole produce, and into those of foreigners to the extent of the quantity imported.

The legislature have wisely allowed the perpetual importation of beef, pork, butter and cheese from Ireland into Britain; and if that regulation is a salutary one to both countries, the Memorialists are at a loss to discover the principle upon which it is not extended to corn.—If it shall be said that the Irish do not pay the same high taxes as the British do, and that therefore they ought not to be allowed the benefit of the British market, in competition with the British landed interest; it is asked, upon what principle the importation of Irish linens is allowed, in competition with British manufactures: but the Memorialists would not here wish to be understood to express their disapprobation of the liberty of importing Irish linens.

The Memorialists beg leave to call the attention of all ranks of men to this important observation, That whenever provisions are plenty and cheap, manufactures flourish.—Whenever they are scarce and dear, manufactures decay. And the true cause of the present flourishing state of manufactures, in every part of Britain, is the plenty and cheaper price of provisions, with which the kingdom has been blessed for these two last years, notwithstanding of one great source of its consumption being dried up, by the unhappy war with its colonies.—That man must be dead to the feelings of humanity who would wish to add to the calamities of war, dear provisions, and the consequent decay of manufactures.

It is indeed of little importance to the commercial and manufacturing interest of Britain, what is the price of provisions, so be it, Britain can be supplied with provisions on the same, or nearly the same terms with the other nations in Europe who are her competitors in trade.—Her natural advantages—Her happy constitution—

Her superior skill and industry will ever enable her to carry on her trade and manufactures, in competition with her rivals, when she is supplied with provisions on a level with other countries, with the carriage and risque of transportation from the foreign country added to it; and this end may, at all times, be attained, by a law allowing the free importation of provisions, or at a low limited price.—This is the true and the natural price which the landed man is intitled to receive, and the manufacturer is able to pay.

After having thus stated the two great objections to this bill, viz. The import rate of oatmeal being raised above thirteen shillings and four pence per boll, and the market price of Edinburgh being the rate for all Scotland; the other objections to the present bill, which have been already mentioned, shall be again just brought under view.

First, That the mode of application to the courts of session and exchequer is tedious and expensive, and is not equal to the mode prescribed by the present law, by which the sheriffs of the respective counties are authorized and required to ascertain the prices of corn, at four stated times in the year, without the necessity of any application being made to them for that purpose.

Secondly, The qualification of a witness to be possessed of a landed estate of four hundred pounds Scots *per annum* of valued rent, is as absurd as it is unjust, for any honest or substantial person is as credible and as good an evidence as a landed man.

Thirdly, The time limited for opening the ports to thirty days, is evidently too short for importing corn from Ireland, and more so from other foreign countries.—Nay the time limited to three months, as the law stands at present, is by much too short: but the Memorialists will not complain when they are treated on an equality with Englishmen.

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Lastly, The proposal to regulate the importation of oats by oatmeal is cruel and oppressive, and is creating an invidious distinction betwixt England and Scotland; for the price of oatmeal in Scotland may be under sixteen shillings per boll, when the price of a quarter of oats may be eighteen or nineteen shillings; so that oats, which may be imported into England when the price is sixteen shillings per quarter, cannot be imported into Scotland until the price is two or three shillings higher than in England. When the late act was depending in parliament, a Scotch member proposed that the import price of a quarter of oats should be rated at eighteen shillings. It was shrewdly said by an English member of parliament;—"No, Sir, we will not starve our manufacturers, but you may do with yours as you please."—It would have been noble, if he had said, we will neither starve our manufacturers, nor will a British House of Commons permit you to starve yours.

The Memorialists shall only further observe, that if any nominal distinction was justifiable in the law betwixt England and Scotland, it ought to have been allowed in favour of the latter in the article of wheat; for it is a well known fact, that a quarter of wheat in Scotland is of inferior quality to the wheat of the southern parts of England by five shillings per quarter; so that, in strict justice, the import price of wheat ought to have been rated at five shillings per quarter lower in Scotland than in England. But the Memorialists will not complain, where there is even an appearance of their being treated on an equal footing with his Majesty's subjects in England.

Upon the whole, the Memorialists are perfectly satisfied with the law as it stands at present, provided amendments be made to reduce the import rate of oatmeal to thirteen shillings and four pence per boll, as formerly, and that liberty be given to ware-house and re-ex-

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port oatmeal, under the same restrictions and regulations as other grain; nor have they any objection to the powers now vested in the sheriffs of Scotland being transferred to the quarter sessions, by which the law of Scotland will be more nearly assimilated to that of England.

COUNCIL-CHAMBER, }
GLASGOW, 2d May, 1777. }

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