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SUGGESTIONS  
FOR THE  
ESTABLISHMENT  
OF A  
PREVENTIVE POLICE  
IN THE  
*METROPOLIS,*  
CAPABLE OF BEING EXTENDED TO OTHER  
POPULOUS CITIES.



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1812.

SIR, Jan. 1, 1812.

**T**HE mind of man contains an active principle, which is never wholly dormant, but which generally owes the direction of its energies to fortuitous circumstances. The truth of this position, as far as individual instances can exhibit an illustration, is fully proved by recent events in the Metropolis. Year after year have its inhabitants continued flumbering under an equivocal sort of protection, conscious of insecurity, but improvident as to the means of averting danger. The frequent robberies, burglaries, and murders, that have distinguished, with such atrocious pre-eminence, the close of the year 1811, have roused them from this state of torpid indolence, and almost every man that could compose an essay for the column of a daily newspaper, could spring a watchman's rattle, or level a blunderbuss, has, each in the particular mode best suited to his mental, or corporeal, faculties, exerted his talent, from an immediate sense of personal danger. With the two latter descriptions I have no concern, at least in this lucubration; their efforts are the dictates of instinct and nature, and to such admonitions I may safely leave them. With the first-

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mentioned order of combatants I wish for a little amicable discussion, as they have promulgated opinions as opposite as the poles, and as irreconcilable as wisdom with folly, or as freedom with slavery. In this instance, as in most others, truth will, perhaps, be found to lie in some central point, nearly equidistant from the doctrines advanced by the advocates of either extreme. As the most certain method, however, of arriving at the legitimate conclusion of a literary conflict, will be first to ascertain the precise appropriation of the terms applied, the discriminating designations of the combatants, and the ultimate object in the contest, let me proceed to compress into the narrowest intelligible compass the substance of their claims, and the argumentative weapons by which they are respectively supported. The two contending parties I shall take the liberty of describing, under the distinguishing appellations of Alarmists, and Quietists.

The first of these, impressed, perhaps, even to an unreasonable degree, with the magnitude of the danger, and agitated, in an extreme, by the atrocity of the crimes committed, look no further than to provide some effectual remedy for the present evil, and call loudly upon the Government of the Country for the aid of the military. Anticipating the obvious objections to such a proposition from a people jealous of their freedom, and tremblingly alive to every measure that has a tendency to place the

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the safety of the Citizen in the keeping of the Soldier, they justify their demand by suggesting, that "the *military*, may be placed under the control of the *civil* power."

What may be intended by this qualification of a system, the features of which are so indicative of despotism, as, by the very admission of its advocates, to be unadvisable, without such an amelioration of its harshest feature, it may be a task of some difficulty to divine; if in truth, after all, which the Quietist thinks extremely equivocal, it be really made in pure sincerity of view, and "singleness of heart." But widely different indeed are the views which *he* has taken of our situation; of the causes which have led to the late enormities; and of the consequences to be apprehended from any extraordinary exertion of power, and more especially of military power, to suppress, by the interference of such a permanent establishment, a mere temporary evil. He sees, or persuades himself he sees, not the supineness attributed to Government, but their directing influence in every call that is made upon them for the interference of the military. He views, through this flimsy veil, an ill-disguised contrivance for eliciting from the apprehensions of the Publick, an earnest invitation for that sort of interference, which they are panting to concede; and which they will in due time award, with seeming reluctance, but with real alacrity. Impressed with these opinions, he views the Alarmists with the greatest suspi-

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suspicion. He considers them as consisting of two descriptions of persons, dupes and hypocrites; and the latter as much the most numerous class. The evil he views as occasional and temporary; the remedy proposed as permanent and detestable. He finds the primary cause of excessive depredations in the decay of manufactures; in the distresses inevitable from a protracted war; in the general poverty of the *middle* ranks in life, which has curtailed luxury, and thrown many who fill *inferior* ones out of employ. In fine, he considers the present criminal code as sufficiently extensive, and the authority, with which the superior orders are already invested, ample for all the purposes of security, as far as human laws can suppress the calls of hunger, if executed with sufficient energy; and he views all extraneous interference, which does not emanate immediately from the civil body of the community, with suspicion and dismay.

If I do not deceive myself, I have in this statement, fairly brought into contrast, though in a compressed form, the substantial arguments which have been lately exhibited on the two sides of this interesting question. May I be permitted now to offer a few suggestions, which, I trust, will not be altogether unworthy of attention, at this momentous crisis; in the expectation of which I hope not only to steer clear of the consequences to be apprehended from the fears of one set of combatants, and of the extreme jealousy of power

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power attached to the other, but even to concentrate the energies, and give a direction to the efforts, of all real well-wishers to personal security and social subordination, so far as they can be attained consistently with a popular government and civil freedom.

It has been well observed, that "the extreme of punishment, ordained for particular crimes, acts very feebly on the minds of hardened thieves; and the chances of acquittal upon trial, arising from various circumstances, render the severity of consequent punishment of little avail." If this position stood in need of any illustration, the frequent robberies that were wont to be committed under the very gibbets upon Hounslow Heath would afford one of singular application. But Sir, the present woeful experience of each successive *day*, perhaps I ought rather to say of each *night*, brings the correctness of this observation home to every man's recollection and feelings at this particular period.

That the evil requires *some* speedy, and *some* potent remedy, we are well assured by the authority I have lately cited, by which we are informed, that even "in mid-day we continually meet gangs of thieves in the streets, who insultingly stare us in the face, while the populace, to whom they are well known, gaze at them with fear and wonder; so that a stranger to these matters would suppose that they were licenced thieves." A mind, even less acute than that which suggested these observations,

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servations, could not but arrive at the conclusion, in which every man must concur, that, since precarious punishment operates so imperfectly to deter from crime, "PREVENTION BECOMES THE GREAT DESIDERATUM."

How this is to be accomplished presents, perhaps, a consideration of some delicacy; but, in my apprehension, not one of insuperable difficulty. From any improvement in the moral character of a great city, which, if practicable, would present the best resource, we can have no immediate expectations, whatever prospects may open to future generations, from the improvements that are universally adopted in the education of the inferior orders. The only method, therefore, of accomplishing the projected purpose, seems to be by the efficient application of the strong arm of authority, so modified as to exclude all necessity for a military despotism, and to do away all apprehensions for personal security,

That the present system is defective and inefficient, recent circumstances supersede the necessity of proving by argument. But I conceive the inadequacy of it, to be rather adventitious, than radical; to be more in its adaptation, than in its basis. The foundation may be solid, though the superstructure be nodding to its fall.

The numerous experiments that have been unsuccessfully made, of late, to annihilate the system of our poor laws, inadequate as they are to the present circumstances and situation

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of the nation, sufficiently prove the innumerable difficulties which occur in every attempt to abrogate laws and customs, that derive their origin from Tudor or Plantagenet antiquity. It is well known that the modern practice of night watching derives its descent from a stock no less venerable for its remoteness, as the statute book fully proves; but that exercise of authority, which was amply sufficient to restrain the licentious in the days of our Edwards and our Henries, is completely unequal to prevent, or detect, the atrocities of the time of George the Third; unequal, not in its nature and intrinsic structure, but in its extrinsic imperfections, and its inadequate application to modern refinements in villany.

"Experience may convince us that a few watchmen placed here and there, coming out of their boxes once or twice in an hour, going the little circuit allotted to them, and then returning to their watch-boxes, are little or no security. Houses are not broken into by chance. The work is premeditated, the watchman's time is calculated, the ground he will go over is ascertained, his return is known; and in the intervals the thief effects his purpose;" —to which description we may now add, the murderer steeped himself up to the chin in blood.

Such, in substance, at least, were the strictures of the Chairman, at the late Quarter Sessions of the peace, for the County of Middlesex, on the present defective police of the

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Metropolis. Though the observations may not come recommended by any novelty, they are luminous and correct, and my present purpose shall be to supply the deficiencies which are discoverable in them, by investigating the specific errors of the present defective system, and by suggesting an establishment, the principal features of which shall be simplicity and vigour, in order to erect, on the old foundation, a new and PREVENTIVE POLICE.

This authority, which I have more than once cited, appears to consider the inefficiency of the present police as inherent in the system itself, rather than arising out of any delinquency in the instruments of its operation. This I conceive to be a material mistake; experience has convinced me that, to the connivance, if not to the co-operation of our (miserably mis-named) *watchmen*, fully as frequently as to their ignorance, their imbecillity, or their absence, we owe nine parts out of ten of our continually recurring depredations. With this conviction on my mind, in enumerating the defects of our present establishment, I must place at the head of it,

- 1st. The absence of integrity in its officers.
- 2dly. The insufficiency of their numbers.
- 3rdly. Their impotence from age, infirmity, inadequacy of weapons, either for offence, or defence, and weariness.
- 4thly. The want of incentives to activity from the scantiness of their recompence.
- 5thly. The impediments to punishments for malversation in office.

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6th and lastly. A radical imperfection in the mode of their appointments.

The *first* in order of the accusations needs scarcely any illustration. Even if the system itself approached much nearer to perfection than it actually does, its beneficial operations must be entirely defeated, while to vagabonds and accomplices is entrusted the detection of thieves and murderers.

To the *second*, the observations of the Middlesex Chairman quoted, apply with so much propriety, that little, if any thing, can be added to its acuteness or its accuracy.

On the *third*, almost every man's own experience will have anticipated the prominent observations. It is a well known and acknowledged fact, that the election of watchmen generally falls on one or two descriptions of persons; either, when it proceeds from motives of humanity, on old inhabitants who are rendered by age and infirmity incompetent to any active or laborious employ; or, when it proceeds from false economy, on paupers who have no other resource but the workhouse, and on vagabonds who will undertake the office for the smallest remuneration. In the few instances where the appointment is not influenced by these unworthy motives, and when the person appointed is sufficient for the duties of his office, he is not supplied with such weapons as will even secure his own person, much less operate as an encouragement to attack others. And even were this defect

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supplied,

supplied, exhausted nature, after such protracted vigils, will be nearly identified with indolence, if not with cowardice.

The *fourth* objection has its origin in sordid avarice, and receives its merited return in the inefficacy of the means employed for its protection. It is a vice and a folly on which even experience will not effect a cure, and which nothing less than authority can suppress.

The *fifth*, is in some degree a radical defect in the system itself, and calls loudly for correction. To effect this is part of what I purpose to suggest.

The *sixth*, and last, objection I take upon report, but I believe the representation to be correct. It is said that the watchmen of this metropolis are appointed by an hundred different trusts, under almost as many different descriptions and designations; and that those bodies of trustees are regulated and governed by Statutes still more numerous, varying in their objects, powers, and properties, from each other. If this be the fact, and I believe it is, I can have little hesitation in attributing to such a fertile source of inconsistency, no inconsiderable proportion of the evils at which we repine, and which it is the purpose of this little essay to obviate.

Proceed we now to particularize the remedies though according to a somewhat different arrangement from that, in which we have enumerated the grievances; in doing so simplicity shall be the basis, security the  
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object, and responsibility the medium through which it shall be attained.

In the first place let the number of watchmen be quadrupled, of which aggregate let one half, or double the present number, be on duty, from six in the evening till twelve at night; and the other half, relieving the former at that hour, take the duty till six in the morning. By this regulation young pick pockets, and novices in shop lifting, will be deprived of the means of learning their trade; and the evening school in which adepts teach and practice, while scholars learn and imitate, mischievous acts, that bring both ultimately to the commission of more heinous offences, will stand a chance of being more effectually prevented. It is almost unnecessary, to observe that this is intended only for the winter regulation, or from Michaelmas to Lady Day: During the summer half year a considerable reduction in the number of hours, watching might be admissible. By this arrangement lassitude could not take place, and idleness or inattention would be left without apology.

Let the appointments of these guardians of our security be annual, and by the inhabitants of each parish in vestry assembled. Under this regulation, the prospect of a re-appointment would operate as an incentive to vigilance, no less than the apprehension and disgrace of a rejection would deter them from delinquency. Youth, vigour of mind, as well as body, habits of sobriety, and intelligence of understanding, should

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should be sedulously enquired for; while age, imbecility and intemperance, should operate as an absolute exclusion from becoming a candidate. When the presentation of the qualifications here enumerated have been succeeded by an appointment, let the most complete equipment in respect of arms inspire confidence; and a liberal pecuniary recompence stimulate exertion. That nothing may be left uneffayed to encourage activity, let the incitement of hope, next to fear, the strongest impulse of the human heart, be called in as an auxiliary, by forming an eleemosynary retreat for age and superannuation.

Thus far, courteous Reader, we have been travelling together in the beaten track of precedent and experience, from which the deviations have been few and occasional, and the excursions limited. We have now to explore a new and untrodden way, through the intricacies of a strange land. Metaphor apart! we have hitherto been calculating merely the effects of physical and numerical strength; estimating the consequences of moral feeling; and ascertaining, as far as they can be ascertained by analogical reasoning, the natural consequences to be predicted from the proper application of rewards and punishments. The institution of a controuling authority, which may give a direction to the first, and the last, mentioned of these objects of consideration, and which may supply the occasional deficiencies which human infirmity gives us but too  
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much reason to expect in the other, remains still to be suggested and considered.

From supercilious ignorance, in the persons of Beadles, Constables, and Headboroughs, or by whatever other denomination the more dignified guardians of our nocturnal security may be distinguished, experience has fully taught us we have nothing to expect. "A little brief authority" may perhaps tempt them to exercise a petty tyranny and an useless oppression, but never yet has taught them, and never, in the common course of human events, can it teach them, the only legitimate use of power, the protection of innocence, and the impartial administration of justice. A watch-house, where the throne of their little empire is erected, is proverbially the hot bed of venality, where accusation and guilt are usually considered as synonymous, where oaths are merchandize, and evidence a marketable commodity. When did we ever hear of the burglar or the murderer being conducted thither? But it generally presents the concluding scene of a drunken frolic, *because* one or other of the parties implicated can *pay* for their discharge. Thus the person, in whose hands is placed the controul, becomes in fact the master of the revels; and the watchman, by the very tenure of his office, claims a prescriptive right to be a rogue. The trouble that attends any appeal from these nefarious proceedings, these iniquitous detentions; any attempt to procure a censure upon this prostitution



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titution of power; or to obtain the removal of the delinquents from office; almost infallibly operates to throw the mantle of impunity over their offences.

This train of observation brings me to the material and concluding article of my propositions, on which the efficacy of the whole must depend. I would recommend the institution of a Board of Commissioners, somewhat similar to that for the regulation of hackney coaches, who shall have the *general controul* over all the watchmen throughout the metropolis, comprehending the power of reward, punishment, and dismissal; but without any interference with the parochial right of appointment, which should originate and always remain, in the vestries of the respective districts. Let this Board issue numbered badges, somewhat upon the same plan as the plates on hackney coaches, to be attached to the habiliments of the watchmen, like those belonging to the servants of the fire-insurance offices. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that the Commissioners must have an unlimited power to receive accusations, hear evidence upon oath, and give a summary judgement; and that they must be armed with various powers of punishment, in proportion to the nature and magnitude of the offences, either of omission, or commission. Among these pecuniary mulcts or penalties, will, of course, constitute a prominent feature; and these, I would recommend, should  
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be suffered to accumulate, for the purpose of rewarding, at the expiration of every year, instances of activity in any of the fraternity, superadded to their usual salaries.

Whether, for the better establishment of such a system as that recommended, any intermediate authority, between that of the Commissioners and the watchmen, be necessary, is more properly a subject for minute regulation, than of general recommendation; and therefore rather beside the professed purpose of this little essay; the design of which is to suggest merely an outline, not to provide for every probable or possible contingency connected with the execution of its interior arrangements. Various, I am well aware, are the opinions upon this part of the subject; some thinking it a measure of absolute necessity, while others suppose it would be the means of removing from the immediately operative instruments of the machine, the watchmen, the principal portion of their responsibility, leaving them only the odium of office, and stripping them of the principal motive to emulation in the exercise of it. Be the weight of argument on whichever side it may, of this question, as merely a collateral one, I may fairly dismiss it without decision, and proceed to the further consideration of the general subject.

To effect the objects under discussion, an act of Parliament must, of course, be passed,  
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which shall supersede all the little local authorities and parochial privileges, by which, at present, the different districts in, and about, the metropolis, are governed. Such an act will have to embrace an extraordinary diversity of objects and considerations, and will involve in its provisions one of the most important interests of legislative interference; no less an one than the personal security of every inhabitant within the limits of its jurisdiction. It is almost superfluous to observe that such a statute should be discussed with more than usual deliberation, and information should, in the interim, be elicited from every quarter. Vestry meetings should be summoned, magistrates should be consulted, and almost every channel of communication should be opened.

By this comprehensive expression, however, let me not be understood to recommend, as some writers have hastily done, any reference to the police establishments of other countries on the continent of Europe; none of them will be found congenial with the latitude of the British metropolis; none of them applicable to its peculiar constitution and the feelings of its inhabitants.

Under the more powerful monarchies, they, for the most part, favour of inquisitorial research, or of military despotism. Indeed there would be great difficulty in pointing out an instance where these objections do

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not occur, in a greater or a less degree, except in a few insignificant states, the territories of which are confined within narrow limits; where wealth is less diffused; where morals are less debauched; and where, from the simplicity of general manners, or a happy ignorance of artificial wants, the temptations are fewer in number, and less powerful in effects. In these, an ordinary degree of vigilance is all that can be necessary, and the extreme energies of authority would be useless, at least, if not wholly misapplied.

In this Country, where a laudable jealousy of power prevails, yet where the occasions for its exertion must be numerous, from the almost irresistible temptations to transgress those laws which protect property, no examples drawn from the polluted sources of Military or Ecclesiastical tyranny, can be applicable or admissible; and those who recommend them would do well to recollect, that, to the occasional extension of the supreme power, whether civil or spiritual, originally permitted for the cure or prevention of some temporary evil, do nearly all the Countries of the Globe now owe the perpetual exercise of that despotic rule, under which they respectively grow.

Should a statute to the effect I have been recommending, pass the legislature of Great Britain, ancillary to the principal and immediate objects of its provisions, it must necessarily embrace a great variety of collateral and

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remote

remote ones. To enumerate any considerable portion of these would be beside the present purpose; but to glance at a few of them may be admissible *en passant*, without infringing the general rule of restriction the author has imposed upon himself.

In the first place, then, let me mention a circumstance, which is of general notoriety, but which has been little animadverted upon. Scarcely a burglary, of any magnitude or extent, takes place in London or its environs, but a hackney coach is in waiting, at a convenient distance, not only to convey away the spoil, but to enable the perpetrators to elude pursuit.

The attendance therefore of these vehicles, under suspicious circumstances, at unusual hours, should be made the objects of the Watchman's most jealous observation. What special provision should be introduced for their detection, or what peculiar punishment should be annexed to their participation in the offence, as well as the authority before which it should be made cognizable, are matters beyond my province to decide. It is sufficient that the attention of the public has been called to the notice of the fact.

These repositories of liquid fire, commonly called gin shops, where copious libations usually supply the adventitious valour necessary for the perpetration of these midnight deeds of desperation; as well as those corrupt receptacles

tacles of plunder, which hold out almost irresistible invitations to the pickpocket and the burglar in the shape of three blue, or golden balls, should be pointed out in an especial manner as places requiring the watchman's peculiar and incessant attention.

With one, and one only, additional remark on this digression from my general subject will I now trouble my reader. It would, be well if our penal statutes, which, in the present state of society are so continually called for, by the increasing frequency of offences, were not so constructed as to depend, in a great measure, for their efficiency, on the precarious activity of common informers *alone*. To say the least of it, the odium attached to the office is such as commonly to defeat the intention of the law. In the case under consideration especially, hope and fear, and all the predominating passions of human nature, should be brought into full play. To lodge information against watchmen for neglect of duty, should be made a matter of the greatest facility to all who should be even accidental observers of delinquency, and to those particularly employed it should, by all possible methods, be made a matter of duty and of interest. Above all things, an impenetrable veil of secrecy should be thrown over the persons of informers, never to drawn aside but in cases of indispensable necessity. What ought universally to be considered in that light, it may not

not be even eligible to particularize to any great extent. A case where exposure may be *essential* to convict guilt, perhaps is one of the instances which may fairly enough be left to the direction of the Commissioners; where it may become *necessary* for the purpose of defeating malice, or protecting innocence, this veil must be "rent in twain," rather than not expose the Author to public indignation. After all however, much must be left, much more than one might wish, *ex necessitate rei*, to the discretion of those, who are to preside over the execution of such a trust. One would hope that powers so extensive, as those persons must necessarily be clothed with, will be placed in hands where we cannot presume ignorance of the laws of the land, and from which we may reasonably expect integrity of conduct. There is no human institution, and in the nature of things there never can be, but what must be liable to abuse; but if every reasonable precaution, consistent with necessary vigour, be made use of in the construction of the law itself, and in the formation of the Court which is to interpret, and to execute it, all is done for Society, of which Society is susceptible; and the occasional errors or improprieties, which may from time to time occur, are the inevitable lot of sublunary establishments, and the frailties of man; which the quickest foresight cannot distinguish through the cloud of futurity,

turity, and against which the caution of the wisest cannot absolutely provide. It is no small advantage gained, if, in instituting a police, so vigorous as shall be commensurate with the evil to be suppressed, no extraordinary power is given to any particular body of men, who fill an insulated situation in Society, who can form no *imperium in imperio*, who are not segregated from the general mass of the community by a separate code of laws. It is no trifling security to our liberties, if, in delegating to individuals so tremendous a power, as that which will be sufficient, in these days of blood and rapine, to protect the persons and properties of almost all that have any thing to lose, we can suggest any plan, that will keep it out of the hands of those authorities in the State, which are already elevated perhaps too much above controul. This object has never been out of sight in the few preceeding pages, and the Author trusts he did not much deceive himself in his prediction, when he professed that this little essay would suggest a scheme for a preventive police, of which simplicity should be the sole foundation, and in the superstructure of which he would take experience for his principal guide. These promises have been amply fulfilled. No experiment entirely new has been hazarded in the operative part of his system, and even in the authoritative or directorial department, he has merely applied an example, presented by an old establishment



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establishment to a new purpose. If at this awful crisis his little treatise shall suggest one useful hint to those, whose peculiar province it is to provide for the safety of the metropolis, he will consider it an ample remuneration for the trouble he has taken.

AN OLD MAGISTRATE.

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