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FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE.

Free Masons' Tavern, Dec. 5, 1795.

AT A GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF THE FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE, ASSOCIATED FOR THE PURPOSE OF OBTAINING A PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, HELD THIS DAY,

NICOLLS RAYNSFORD, Esq. in the Chair.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

THAT the following ADDRESS from this SOCIETY to the PEOPLE be printed and published:

WE are folicitous once more to address our Fellow-Countrymen, while we can deliberate exempt from the insolent controul of a Magistrate, and, in the discussion of our common interests, are yet permitted to hold up the Bill of Rights as our buckler and defence.

We associated to propose to Parliament, and to the Nation, a Reform in the construction of the House of Commons: in pursuit of this object we have shewn that eighty-four individuals, by their own immediate authority, send one hundred and fifty-seven Members to Parliament!—that seventy more powerful individuals, by their

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their influence, return one hundred and fifty other Members! making together a Majority of the House!—that a large portion of these Members are nominated by Peers, in direct violation of the acknowledged Constitution of our Country! an evil continually increasing with every new Creation;—in short, that a large Majority of the House of Commons are returned by Electors so few in number, that the great body of the People, of every rank and description, are excluded from the semblance of a choice; and even where Elections appear to be popular, the mode of conducting them, and the complex nature of the Rights of Election, have rendered the expense of a contest so ruinous, as to transfer to the overgrown wealth of a few the whole Rights of the British Nation. These facts, and these consequences, we have detailed in our Petition to the House of Commons, and offered to establish by Evidence at their Bar. The House of Commons have admitted our Petition on their Journals, declined the proof, and thereby confessed that our allegations are true.

We are answered, that the practical effect of this dominion of the few is really beneficial to the people! This we deny. We appeal to the frequent wars by which the people are exhausted, undertaken by the caprice of ministers, whose dictates are implicitly obeyed. We appeal more particularly to the wasteful profusion of the present odious war, in which the demands of ministers are made without feeling, and granted without investigation or delay. We appeal to the growing establishments, both in Peace and War! to the enormous debt of three hundred millions, already accumulated! to twenty-one millions of pounds sterling annually exacted from less than ten millions of People! to burdens progressively in-

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creasing beyond the example of any former Age or Country, which have already placed the comforts and many of the necessaries of life beyond the reach of a large portion of the Community. To arrest the progress of these evils we see no rational means, but by restoring to the People an effective representation in Parliament—by establishing a common interest between those who hold the Public Purse and the great Body of the Nation—by creating a Representative Assembly, who will calmly examine the complaints and redress the grievances of the People; who, possessing their confidence, may give order and oeconomy to the Government, and stability to the Laws.

We feel extreme alarm in beholding an opposite system of constraint adopted; new Treasons created, vague and undefined—a measure ever regarded as the harbinger of civil contention; the mild spirit of our Laws subverted, and the punishment of Felony inflicted on Misdemeanors; above all, that most important right of Public Discussion, established by the Bill of Rights, that principal distinction of Freemen, that source of the open, liberal, and manly character which distinguishes the British Nation, completely, as we think, destroyed by Provisions which make the free exercise of it altogether impossible.

These measures lead evidently to Despotism, perhaps to Anarchy. Possibly the British Nation may experience the horrors of both conditions before the People can recover their Rights. The present measures sufficiently develop the system of our Rulers: an immense Military Force is established; and the Soldiers are collected into Barracks, that they may not imbibe the sentiments of the People; while our Ministers profess them-

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themselves prepared to act even beyond the Law. But what can avail even the strictest adherence to the letter of the Law, while the few possess the whole power of Legislation? The Trial by Jury may indeed subsist; but Juries, by their oaths, must conform to the Laws prescribed, and under the forms of Freedom the Nation may be slaves.

The time is now arrived when the British Nation must make their Election: either patiently to submit to this system of constraint, which, from its irritating nature, will ever furnish pretexts for making new advances, or they must, in a temperate but determined tone, demand the Restoration of their Rights, as established at the Revolution, claim an effective voice in the Choice of Representatives, and by their orderly, dignified, and united Petitions, induce their Governors to return into the Paths of Peace.

In Name and by Order of the Society,

(Signed) N. RAYNSFORD, Chairman.