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FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE.

Freemasons' Tavern, Wednesday, 9th April, 1794.

At an EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING of the SOCIETY of the FRIENDS of the PEOPLE, associated for the Purpose of obtaining a PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, held this Day, the following Address and Resolutions were unanimously agreed to :

“ THE Society of the Friends of the People, associated for the purpose of obtaining a Reform in Parliament, appeal to the Public on behalf of their Principles, their Motives, and their Conduct.

“ Of their principles a solemn avowal was distinctly made at the first institution of the Society, and the preservation of the Constitution declared to be the foundation of all their proceedings.

“ Of their Motives, an equally public declaration was given, namely, That they were anxious by a timely and wholesome Reform to avert from their Country the calamities inseparable from such convulsions as arise, when abuses are suffered to gather and accumulate, till the discontent of the people is converted into despair.

“ Acting upon such principles, and guided by such views, the Society request the public attention to the line of conduct pursued by them.

“ They first drew up a Report upon the State of the Representation, and therein detailed at large the nature and effects of the principal abuses, the sources from which they flowed, and the dangerous system of private patronage in the Elections of Members to serve in Parliament, to which they gave birth.

“ The next act of the Society was to compress the substance of this Report into a Petition to the House of Commons; and in this they not only recapitulated the detail of abuses, but, that the Enemies to Parliamentary Reform might not have even a subterfuge to resort to, they tendered evidence of the truth of every fact they asserted. Had not

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not the fact been recorded on the Journals of Parliament, the Society could scarcely have hoped to obtain credit when they announced, that, after two days deliberation, the House refused to appoint a Committee to take the Petition into consideration.

" If the House of Commons are in truth that Representative Body, which the Constitution designs by " The Commons of Great Britain " in Parliament assembled," the Petitioners have presented and the Society have published the most daring Libel that ever was penned: Why were they not prosecuted?—If the Petitioners only spoke wholesome Truths, and detected scandalous Violations of the acknowledged Privileges of the People, why were they not heard?

" Let what will have been the motives of the House of Commons, for the conduct they pursued, there is, however, unfortunately no reason to presume that they have, as yet, ceased to operate, and consequently the Society have no inducement again to apply to Parliament. To question the consistency and sincerity of the House, would, perhaps, on any occasion be indecorous; but, on the subject of Parliamentary Reform, it would be even absurd. The situation of the Honourable Members being the same, it is not reasonably to be presumed that their sense of the advantages annexed to it will have changed; and their Votes are much too intimately blended with their interests, to admit a doubt that they are sincere.

" Under these circumstances, the Society determine for the present not to renew their Petition; but, tho' they will not address the House of Commons, they earnestly appeal to the good Sense, the Integrity, and the Independent Spirit of the People of England.—To them the Society cheerfully submit their past conduct, and from the construction which any Friend to the Constitution can put upon it, confidently look for their future character. They trust they have in no instance been betrayed into intemperate Warmth; and they are sure no menaces will awe them into dishonourable Submission. Whatever they have seen, or heard, or read, since the first period of their Institution, has more and more convinced them, that a speedy Reform in the Representation is necessary, and strengthened them in their Resolution to persevere and to proceed. They are confident that the time is not far distant, when men will be compelled to feel that Liberty and Property are best secured under the Guardianship of Independence; and that a corrupt System, under whatever disguise it may be concealed, or by whatever abilities it may be supported, will be found to have consulted only the gratification and advancement of interested Individuals at the Expense of the Public good.

" Whether the present time be improper for the discussion of the general Question of Parliamentary Reform, the Society will not here enquire. For the sake of the argument let that be granted. But surely at a moment when the excellence of the Constitution is so vigorously maintained, that to propose Amendment is looked upon as seditious, its advocates will at least be as strenuous in defence of what they
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ledge to be its established principles, as they are active in sounding the alarm against whatever they choose to call an innovation. If that spirit of discontent really prevails, which high authority so very confidently announces, all good men will be anxious to remove every plausible ground of complaint; and, above all, the House of Commons will be cautious how they tolerate a violation of the Constitution, which they have themselves specifically defined and reprobated; and to which, by their votes, they have called the public attention.

" From the year 1701 to the year 1794, the House of Commons have, at the commencement of every Session, uniformly passed the following resolution: " That it is a high infringement upon the liberties and privileges of the Commons of Great Britain, for any Lord of Parliament, or any Lord Lieutenant of any county, to concern themselves in the Elections of Members to serve for the Commons in Parliament."

" In their Petition of last year, the Society complained of the frequent violation of this excellent resolution, and brought the question before the House of Commons in these words: " Your Petitioners inform your Honourable House, and are ready to prove it at your bar, that they have the most reasonable grounds to suspect that no less than ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY of your Honourable Members owe their Elections entirely to the interference of Peers; and your Petitioners are prepared to shew by legal evidence, that forty PEERS, in defiance of your resolutions, have possessed themselves of so many Burgage Tenures, and obtained such an absolute and uncontroled command in very many small Boroughs in the kingdom, as to be enabled by their own positive authority to return EIGHTY-ONE of your Honourable Members."

" The Society again repeat this in the face of the country, and they earnestly entreat every friend to the liberties of England to take into consideration the consequences of so alarming a practice.

" As far as depends on them, the Society without hesitation lead the way to bring the question to issue, and, therefore,

Resolve unanimously:—

1. " That the people have a right to the pure, genuine, and uncorrupted energy of the English Constitution, faithfully administered according to its own acknowledged principles.

2. " That the Commons of Great Britain, in Parliament assembled, have, since the reign of King William III. uniformly, solemnly, and annually determined one of those principles to be violated, whenever a Peer interferes in an Election.

3. " That Peers at this day do interfere in Elections, not only by the exercise of the influence naturally arising from high rank and extensive possessions, but by embarking large portions of their wealth in the purchase of Borough Property, notoriously for the purpose of sending Members into the House of Commons.

4. " That

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4. " That above one fourth of the present House of Commons owe their seats to the known influence and interference of Peers.

5. " That this interference has a tendency to destroy those advantages, which are to be derived from preserving the separate Branches of the Legislature distinct and independent of each other, and to make the House of Commons an engine of the Crown and Nobility, instead of what it ought to be—a check upon the King and the Lords.

6. " That the great number of Gentlemen well known to be concerned in Borough Speculations, who, by the advice of the Minister, have been created Peers demands the most serious consideration of every Friend to the Constitution of Great Britain.

7. " That the people of this country ought not to be taxed but by the consent of Representatives chosen by the free suffrages of the Commons of Great Britain; and that a daring Insult is offered to the Constitution of these Realms whenever a Peer attempts to usurp the Nomination of a Member to serve in Parliament.

In name, and by order of the Society,

(Signed) Wm. BRETON, Chairman.