

35-5

11 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 2

0081

A

COLLECTION
OF THE
LETTERS
Which have been addressed to the
VOLUNTEERS OF IRELAND,
ON THE SUBJECT OF A
PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,
BY THE
EARL OF EFFINGHAM, DOCTOR JEBB,
DOCTOR PRICE, AND
MAJOR CARTWRIGHT, THE REV. MR. WYVILL.
TO WHICH ARE ANNEXED,
A Letter of the Rev. Mr. NORTHCOTE, on the same
Subject ;
A Letter of LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SHARMAN
to Dr. JEBB, with his Answer ;
And all the Letters of the Reverend Mr. WYVILL, ad-
dressed to the Yorkshire Committee of Association ; to
JOHN CAMPBELL, Esq. Chairman of the Committee
of Stirling Merchants ; BRASS CROSBY, Esq. and
Others.

L O N D O N :
Printed for J. STOCKDALE, opposite BURLINGTON-
HOUSE, Piccadilly. 1783.
[Price Two Shillings and Sixpence.]

T O T H E P U B L I C .

THE avidity with which every piece treating of a Parliamentary Reform is received by the Public, has induced the Editor to form a Collection of the most distinguished Papers on that Subject.

All the following Letters appeared in a detached state, most of them in the Irish News-Papers; and as the demand for them has been considerable, it was judged an acceptable piece of service to re-print them in a manner which should render Justice to their Merit, and give Permanency to their Existence.

Piccadilly, 27th Oct.

1783.

A
C O P Y
OF THE
CIRCULAR LETTER,

Which, at the last Meeting of the Committee of Association for this County, was ordered to be sent by their Chairman, the Rev. Mr. WYVILL, to the Chairman of the several other Petitioning and Associated Bodies, and such other Friends to the Reformation of Parliament as he should think fit.

BURTON-HALL, near BEDAL,
Nov. 1, 1782.

S I R,

I AM directed by the Committee of Association for the County of York, to transmit to you the inclosed Account of their Proceedings on this day, and the 31st of October, which they request you will have
B the

[2]

the goodness to lay before the Committee of —, at its next Meeting.

I am also instructed to mention how much the Yorkshire Committee wish to obtain a free Communication of Sentiments with the Committee of —, on the subject of Parliamentary Abuses, hoping, by their opinion and advice, to be enabled to judge what Propositions, for the Reformation of Parliament, it may be expedient to recommend to the intended General Meeting of the County of York on the 19th day of December next.

The Yorkshire Committee have seen, with much satisfaction, Petitions adopted by several Public Meetings of great Respectability, requesting, in *general Terms*, a Redress of Parliamentary Grievances, they approve this respect and deference to Parliament, and with a similar delicacy may be observed in the measures of the County of York: But it seems to be adviseable that this *General Petition* of the people should be supported by some *particular Declaration* of their wishes, in a mode as little offensive as possible to the dignity of Parliament; for
if

[3]

if it shall not be known on what grounds, and to what extent the people desire that the Reformation of Parliament may proceed, it may be foreseen that hence insuperable Objections will be urged against every Plan of Reformation which their friends in Parliament may propose. INSTRUCTIONS from each Constituent Body to their respective Representatives seem to be the most obvious and unexceptionable mode, by which Parliament may be apprised what Correction of Abuses is expected by the People, and yet every appearance of Disrespect to that Assembly may be entirely avoided.

If this Method of conveying the Sense of the Nation to Parliament, and ascertaining *what Reformation there* would give general satisfaction, should be approved, the next important Consideration would be, what particular Propositions of Reform, in the present State of this Country, are most eligible; and, if proposed in the INSTRUCTIONS of any Constituent Body, are most likely to receive the general concurrence of the public: For, if too extensive a System of Reformation should be rashly ob-
B 2. truded

[4]

truded on Parliament, the whole attempt might miscarry, and the Opportunity to secure the Liberties of England for Generations to come, might be irretrievably lost. But on the other hand, every Friend to the Constitution would lament the Loss of superior Improvement, if, from too rigid a scruple to extend the terms of the Association, the additional Representation of the Counties and the Metropolis should be alone procured, when the Abolition of the MOST OBJECTIONABLE BOROUGHES, in a limited degree, might have been obtained. In the Opinion of the Yorkshire Committee, the little decayed Boroughs, dependent on, or unduly influenced by, the Boards of Ordnance, Treasury, Admiralty, &c. may be justly placed in that class. For what more dangerous Perversion of the Constitution can be imagined, than THE NOMINATION OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT BY THE CROWN; or what Fidelity to the Public Trust can be expected from Senators who are thus created by that Government, whose Conduct they ought to watch and controul?

On

[5]

On this occasion, the Yorkshire Gentlemen are free to own their inclination, if the Proposal should fortunately meet the Approbation of the Committee of —, and other respectable Bodies, to recommend to the General Meeting of the County of York, on the 19th of December:

1. To instruct their Representatives to introduce, or to support a Bill in Parliament, for abolishing at least Fifty of the MOST OBNOXIOUS BOROUGHES; providing for the Electors in the several Boroughs abolished a proper gratuitous Compensation for their extinguished Franchises; and enabling them to vote, together with the Freeholders, in Elections for Knights of the respective Shires to which they belong; and also adding an adequate number of Members, not less than an Hundred, in a due proportion to the several Counties and the Metropolis:

2. And farther to instruct their Representatives to move, or to support a Motion for the Repeal of the Septennial Bill.

3. Also

[6]

3. Also for admitting Proprietors of Copyhold Lands of Inheritance, with Fine certain, of the clear yearly value of Forty Shillings, to vote at County Elections of Members of Parliament throughout the kingdom:

4. And lastly, to support the Application of any County in Scotland, for setting aside nominal and fictitious Votes, and for regulating Elections to Parliament in that part of the kingdom, in a manner agreeable to the true intent and spirit of the Constitution.

On the subject of the two last Articles of Reform, the Yorkshire Committee are little apprehensive that any considerable Variation of Sentiment will be found among the True Friends of the Constitution—still less can they suppose that, to the Proposition for the Repeal of the Septennial Bill, any material Objection will be urged: But if the Proposal for a limited Disfranchisement of the most obnoxious Boroughs should not receive the Approbation and Concurrence of a decided Majority of the Counties and Principal

[7]

pal Towns, which support the Claim of Parliamentary Reformation, the Yorkshire Committee will not hesitate a moment to sacrifice their wishes to the preservation of that harmony and union among the several Associated and Petitioning Bodies, without which there cannot be a Probability of Success. In that case they will readily strike out the Article for the Abolition of certain Boroughs, and recommend to the General Meeting of the County of York to adhere in their Instructions to the Second Proposition in their Form of Association, for reinforcing the sound part of our Representation, by the Addition of One Hundred Members, to be proportionally chosen by the Counties and the Metropolis.

The Yorkshire Committee having so freely suggested their Sentiments on these important Matters, do most earnestly intreat the Committee of —, with equal freedom, to communicate their opinion and advice, which will be received with the greatest deference and respect.

I have the honour to be, SIR,

Your most humble Servant,

C. WYVILL.

COPY of a LETTER sent to the Rev.
Mr. WYVILL, by Order of the COMMIT-
TEE of ASSOCIATION of the LIVERY
LONDON.

GUILDHALL, LONDON, Nov. 27, 1782.

S I R,

THE Committee of Association of the Livery of London acceded, with much pleasure, to the sentiments and advice of the Chairman of the Committee of Association for the Country of York, with which they were made acquainted at the Thatched-House Tavern, at a General Meeting of all the Members of Committees of the Associating Counties and Boroughs then present in London, previous to the prorogation last Summer. With great satisfaction they have found, that the County of Middlesex, the City of Westminster, and other places, have also conformed strictly to the Resolution then unanimously taken, viz. "to avoid any specific Propositions relative to the Parliamentary Reform."

The wisdom of such general application, as well as the great respect which this Committee

entertains for the Gentlemen of the Yorkshire Committee, and the earnest desire of union and harmony, forbid them in any manner to mention or bring forward any particular Plan or Proposition.

This Committee hope for a mature and well-digested Reform of Parliament, which they trust will proceed from the investigation of a Committee of the House of Commons. And they beg leave to propose to the Committee of York, the propriety of suspending or postponing Instructions to their Representatives, until the fate of the General Petitions is decided.

I have the honour to be,

With great respect, SIR,

Your most obedient and

Most humble servant,

BRASS CROSBY, Chairman.

Rev. Mr. Wyvill, Chairman of
the Yorkshire Committee.

[10]

The following LETTER is a Copy of the Answer sent by the Rev. Mr. WYVILL, to Mr. Alderman CROSBY, Chairman of the COMMITTEE of the LIVERY of LONDON.

BURTON-HALL, Dec. 7, 1782.

S I R,

I AM happy that my political conduct at any time has been honoured with the approbation of the Committee of the Livery of London. But I cannot flatter myself, that the part I took in the transactions at the Thatched House in May last, deserved any peculiar commendation; or that opinions delivered there by so humble an individual possessed that weight of influence, which the Committee are pleased to ascribe to them. On the other hand, I trust I shall be able to satisfy the Committee, that their disapprobation of my conduct in a recent instance, which I observe, with much concern, conveyed in the same letter which has bestowed upon me such unmerited praise, is founded on a mistaken view of my sentiments and actions.

I do

[11]

I do admit, Sir, that at the Thatched-House I did object, with some respectable Gentlemen of other Counties, to a vote of thanks to the Duke of Richmond, in all the various shapes in which it was offered to the Meeting. To me, who hold his Grace in high respect, as a firm and intrepid assertor of our Free Constitution, this was a painful opposition. But, in my conception, public duty bound me to oppose the respective motions for that purpose; not because his Grace was the proposer of a specific plan for a Reformation of Parliament, but because his specific plan appeared to me impracticable, and not to be attained by any regular or constitutional effort of the people; and therefore any resolution of thanks, which might be construed by the Public as a declaration in favour of his Grace's System, could only tend to defeat that more safe and moderate proposal for restoring the Constitution, which their peaceful endeavours might probably obtain. In this opposition the worthy Members of the corporation of London, then present, generally concurred; by their influence the several motions were withdrawn; and consequently, it became unnecessary to urge

C 2

any

[12]

any farther objections against the Plan itself, considered with respect to its utility in the present circumstances of this country. I do admit also, that although no formal resolution was passed upon the subject, yet it was agreed at the Thatched House, and I concurred in the agreement, that it was expedient the intended Petition for Redress of our Parliamentary Grievances should be drawn up *in general terms*. But I certainly did not bind myself "to avoid any specific Propositions relative to the Parliamentary Reform," in any other mode of declaration, whenever a proper degree of union upon the subject could be accomplished. And I do not find the other Yorkshire Gentlemen, who had been present at the Thatched House, understood this agreement in a different manner. At the late Meeting of the Yorkshire Committee, several of those Gentlemen attended; and to their recollection the objection did not occur, when the circular letter was proposed.

In my opinion, the want of unanimity among the agents of the people, in favour of any specific plan, is the unfortunate circumstance which threatens most their total disappointment.

[13]

disappointment. For if no means can be devised to unite the body of the people, in support of some rational and substantial improvement of the Constitution, their continued dissensions, no doubt, will furnish to the timid or interested obstructors of Reformation, a ready answer to their Petition: "Why should Parliament admit a change, till it is known what change will satisfy the nation? When the people themselves are agreed what redress they ought to ask, then, and not before, let Parliament deliberate what redress they ought to grant." It is obvious indeed, that till that general union of the people shall take place, discordant Petitions, recommending to Parliament different specific plans of Reformation, would but expose the people to the derision of their adversaries. But it behoves their agents to consider, that no time should be lost, no endeavours should be unemployed, to conciliate and to unite the various friends of Reformation, before the season for that work be irrecoverably past. At length the whirl of casual events has brought on the favourable opportunity; but if they omit to improve the fleeting advantage, a few short months

months may frustrate every future attempt to retrieve their neglect.

“The Committee of London hope for a mature and well-digested Reform of Parliament, which they trust will proceed from the investigation of a Committee of the House of Commons.” I freely own my hopes are placed upon a different foundation, viz. on the firmness and energy of the British People, pointing out the principle of that Reformation which they request; specifying the extent to which they desire it may proceed; and leaving the minute detail of Reformation to be settled by Parliament itself: But if the late overture of the Yorkshire Committee, and every other attempt to accomplish a more general union of the people, for the prosecution of some specific plan of Reformation of equal extent, should prove unsuccessful, it may be expected that any correction of Parliamentary Abuses, which may flow from the spontaneous act and pleasure of Parliament, will be much inferior to that plan of Constitutional Improvement, which the Yorkshire Gentlemen have proposed. In my apprehension, any change that may be made will

will also originate with less propriety, and, in point of precedent, with less safety from Parliament, than from the special applications of the people, by instructions to their respective Members. Such were my sentiments before the Meeting of the Thatched House; and they remain unaltered since, by conversation or correspondence.

The general phrase is, that “something must be done.” What probably will be done, may perhaps in some measure be collected from the Message which I had the honour to receive from Lord Shelburne in August last; the purport of which was soon after communicated to the Committee of London. His Lordship undoubtedly stands pledged to support the Propositions of the Yorkshire Association; *i. e.* To promote the addition of one hundred Members to the Counties and the Metropolis, and the repeal of the Septennial Bill. But if Petitions, in general terms alone, shall be presented to Parliament, and no Instructions shall be offered to our several Representatives for the amputation of rotten Boroughs, I see no reason to suppose that any abolition of their obnoxious Franchises will take

take place, against the manifest interest of many powerful Members of Parliament; except by the slow operation of a Parliamentary Tribunal in some rare instance disfranchising an unfortunate Borough, on proof of Corruption too flagrant to be dissembled. I am far from meaning to disparage the measure for reinforcing the sound part of our Representation: If nothing better can be obtained, I shall be thankful even for that additional security to our freedom. But I am convinced that an adequate abolition of the little decayed Boroughs would strongly corroborate that security; and I conceive that both might yet be accomplished by a timely and vigorous exertion of the People for those special purposes.

With these impressions on my mind, I attended the late Meeting of the Yorkshire Committee; and having produced to that Assembly a Copy of the Message from Lord Shelburne, and stated to them my subsequent correspondence on that subject with his Lordship, which appeared at once to confirm the Message, and to be improper for public inspection *at that time*, my production of the correspondence in question

was

was not required by the Committee. But it was not my advice to the Committee to acquiesce in these declarations of support from Lord Shelburne. At the Thatched-House Meeting I had opposed thanking the Duke of Richmond for his impracticable plan; at the Yorkshire Meeting I exhorted the Committee not to content themselves with the mere Augmentation of County Members, &c. which the Cabinet seemed disposed to promote; but, as far as it is possible without risking that acquisition, to attempt the still superior improvement of an adequate amputation of the little decayed Boroughs. What I ventured to suggest on this occasion, was honoured with the approbation of that respectable Assembly, and was carried into effect in the Circular Letter, which the Committee of London has already seen.

From this explanation of my political conduct and sentiments for some time past, I trust I shall be justified in the opinion of that Committee, as having acted, in circumstances of some difficulty, an honest and consistent part. But this is a matter comparatively of small moment. I am confident

D

dent

[18]

fidest from this state of some late transactions, whatever the final determination of that Committee may be on the subject of the Circular Letter, they will approve the caution, the perseverance, the well-tempered zeal of the Yorkshire Committee.

With respect to the propriety of "postponing Instructions to their Representatives, until the fate of the General Petitions is decided," which your respected Committee proposes to that of Yorkshire, I would beg leave to suggest one short observation; which is, That when the fate of the Petitions shall be decided, any Instructions upon the subject will probably come too late. If, in consequence of an application *in general terms* to Parliament, the Representation of the Counties and the Metropolis shall be reinforced by the addition of fifty or sixty Members, any future application to the Legislature for farther improvement, in this age at least, cannot with any probability be expected to receive the countenance and support of the nation.—If therefore the Committee of London have no objection to the Propositions offered by the Yorkshire Gentlemen, their concurrence *now* can alone
be

[19]

be of any avail. If they decline giving their sanction to that proposal, from a preference to the Duke of Richmond's scheme, I beg leave to declare my firm opinion, as I did before the Thatched-House Meeting, that there exists not the smallest probability that his Grace's plan will be adopted by the Towns and Counties of Great-Britain in any considerable proportion.

I have the Honour to be, SIR,

Your most obedient Servant,

C. W Y V I L L.

Brass Crosby, Esq. Chairman, &c.

D 2

To

[20]

To Mr. HENRY JOY, Junior, Secretary
of the Committee of Correspondence, at
Belfast.

Burton-Hall, near Bedal, August 22, 1783.

S I R,

ACCORDING to your desire, my answer to the Queries of the Committee of Correspondence at Belfast, was transmitted to Lieutenant Colonel Sharman, at Liffburn, on the 12th instant. But wishing to guard against a miscarriage, which in the hurry of a General Election may be possible, I take the liberty to trouble you with a duplicate of my answer.

The Committee of Yorkshire is expected to meet about the end of September; when your Letters, and the other papers communicated by your respectable Committee, will be laid before the Yorkshire gentlemen. I am firmly persuaded they will rejoice at the noble spirit of reformation which has arisen in Ireland; they will sincerely wish to their worthy fellow-subjects complete success: I trust also, they will be most
ready

[21]

ready to co-operate with them in any legal mode which can be devised, mutually to assist each other, in the laudable and necessary undertaking to obtain a substantial reformation in Parliament, in the respective kingdoms of Ireland and Great-Britain.

I am, Sir, with great respect,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

C. W Y V I L L,

Mr. WYVILL's Answer to the Queries proposed by the Committee of Correspondence at Belfast.

I. IN all attempts by a free people to improve the frame of their legislature, it seems adviseable as much as may be possible, to preserve ancient foundations, and to suffer every part of the fabric to stand, which is not absolutely incapable of substantial repair. In my opinion, it is unnecessary and inexpedient to disfranchise the populous Boroughs in Ireland, in which the right of election is invested in a few persons. In such Boroughs, a due extension of the right of suffrage is sufficient to obtain
every

[22]

every desirable purpose, but all the little depopulated Boroughs ought certainly to be disfranchised; and their privilege of Parliamentary representation should be transferred, to oppose those populous districts which are unrepresented, or whose share of representation is inadequate.

II. If in consequence of the proposed disfranchisement of the smallest class of Boroughs, a sufficient share of the representation can be transferred to the largest districts, it does not seem necessary that the number of the Irish House of Commons should be increased. The liberty of the nation may be well protected by a House of Commons, whose Members do not exceed three hundred; if those Members be firmly connected with the body of the nation. But if from the paucity of Boroughs proper to be disfranchised, or from the influence of powerful men interested to preserve such Boroughs, a sufficient share of the representation cannot be transferred to the largest districts; the present number of the House of Commons in Ireland, compared with the elective body, is by no means so large as to forbid any addition of Members. For what
secures

[23]

secures a Parliament in the interest of the public? DUE ELECTION, AND A SPEEDY RETURN INTO THE COMMON MASS. A Senate thus constituted would instantly feel what the community felt, and faithfully act according to the wishes of the constituents. These are essential requisites in the formation and conduct of a House of Commons; and where they are found, it is of little moment, whether the Assembly consists of three hundred persons, or of any larger number, not exceeding those limits, beyond which it is not easy to preserve order in a deliberative assembly. On these grounds it may be presumed, that no solid objection to an augmentation of the Irish House of Commons could be offered, even if the present elective body were incapable of increase. But since the time is perhaps arrived, or may not be very distant, when the Catholics of Ireland might be safely admitted a participation in the right of election, the difficulty wholly vanishes.

III. Where property is very unequally distributed, aristocratical influence will be found to operate extensively; and no means
can

[24]

can be devised completely to guard the community against the mischievous consequences of that influence, without a breach in the laws of property, which hardly ever can be justifiable. But the regulations may be framed, by which the danger from the excessive power of the aristocracy may be averted; and in some tolerable degree that share of influence may be obtained by the people, without which they cannot possess a free constitution, or have any substantial security that the true interests of the nation will be steadily pursued by Government. Laws extending the right of suffrage to fit classes of men; prohibiting bribery and expence at elections; and facilitating the voters access to the place of polling; those are the most obvious and effectual means by which the Commons may be protected against a domineering aristocracy, without recurring to the desperate expedient of an Agrarian law. And since the counties of Ireland are inadequately represented, and since the natural luxury of the rich, and the growing industry of the poor, will combine to lessen the evil complained of, it seems advisable that the county representation should be re-

inforced

[25]

inforced, and at the same time, that every proper regulation to check the excess of aristocratical influence, should be introduced.

IV. The fourth Query has been, in some measure, answered in the reply to the third. It seems not to admit a doubt, that the right of suffrage should be extended to Ireland. But the difficult part of the question is, to whom? Conscious I am how delicate the subject is, I cannot, however, decline to give my sentiments upon it with plainness and unreserved sincerity:

It is the right of mankind to be governed by their own consent, given personally, or by representation, On this principle all just Government has been originally formed: It was the principle on which our Saxon ancestors founded their Constitution; and though it must be admitted, that from the first introduction of a deputed Assembly of the people in England, the principle never was strictly adhered to, and that in fact, the rights of election was not universally enjoyed, even before the Statute of Disfranchisement passed, in the eighth year of

E Henry

[26]

Henry the Sixth, yet the principle was still appealed to, and by a legal fiction supposed to exist in practice.

Such was the happy equality of mankind in the earlier stages of society, ill exchanged, in my opinion, for the glare and glitter of a more splendid scene, where the loss of the political happiness of the many, is poorly compensated by the pomp and magnificence of a few individuals.

In countries where property is equally divided, or nearly so, it can hardly be supposed, that the unlimited right of suffrage may not be established. If such an exception to all political experience should occur, the circumstances which could occasion the limitation, must be of a very extraordinary nature. But it states where property has been distributed with considerable inequality, some diminution of popular privileges has usually taken place: and as far in the greatest part of the globe, where the extreme of riches and poverty almost divide each community, those privileges have been trampled under the foot of their tyrannical rulers, and scarcely a vestige of them is to
be

[27]

be found; even in those free countries of Ireland and Britain, there seems to have been a culpable propensity to contract these rights to a degree for which there was no sufficient reason. The interests of mankind require, that the basis of society should be broad; the rulers of justice require, that their natural rights should not be taken away, but upon proof of misusage, or political delinquency. I am satisfied, therefore, that where the right of universal suffrage has not been found actually inconsistent with the public safety, it ought not to be abridged. But in all cases, where the claims of individuals are incompatible with the public good, the privileges of a part of the community must be postponed to the welfare of the whole. For the law of self-preservation is to societies, as to individuals, an indefeasible law; and by that law, societies are justifiable which eject the full employment of the rights of citizens, persons to whom those rights could not be continued without danger to the public. The election franchise may be considered as both a privilege and a trust; and men who have been found incapable of executing that trust, in a manner not advantageous to

E 2

the

the community, are unfit to remain invest-
 ed with it. That trust may be as properly
 taken from such men, as by the con-
 cession of the advocates for its widest
 extension, it may be withheld from women,
 minors, and persons of some other descrip-
 tions. But men, from whom this franchise
 has been taken, ought to be permitted to
 renounce their allegiance to the State, and
 transfer it to another. If, in this case, they
 acquiesce under the deprivation, without
 renouncing their allegiance to the State, or
 even expressing any dissatisfaction, their ac-
 quiescence would amount to a tacit accept-
 ance of virtual representation; and they
 would still be governed, as they ought to
 be, by their own consent.

In communities in which this depriva-
 tion has already taken place, similar rea-
 soning will determine to what classes of
 men the election franchise ought to be re-
 stored, or may be justly refused. It ought
 to be restored to all who may be reasonably
 expected to exercise it for the public good.
 This is indisputably clear; and it seems
 equally certain, that it may be justly re-
 fused to all to whom it would be unsafe to
 impart

impart it; whom candour would judge
 most likely to misuse their privilege, and to
 be guilty of that political delinquency for
 which their original deprivation would be
 justifiable.

Those observations are alike applicable to
 the case of Britain and of Ireland. In
 both countries, numerous classes of men
 have been deprived of this franchise, but
 the liberal temper of the times, aided in each
 by some favourable concomitant circum-
 stances, has brought this question to a se-
 rious discussion; what restoration of the
 right of election ought to be proposed, or
 is fit to be established? The mere inequa-
 lity of property alone, is by no means a
 valid objection to the most extensive Re-
 storation. For if, from the love of order,
 justice, and liberty, prevalent in the lower
 classes, and the meek and unambitious
 spirit of superiors, no material danger were
 to be apprehended from the influence of a
 wealthy aristocracy, or from numerous and
 frequent assemblies of the populace; in
 such circumstances, notwithstanding the
 unequal division of property, the right of
 suffrage

[30]

suffrage might be safely restored to the exclusive classes, and therefore it ought not to be refused.

Whether Ireland be a country thus fortunately circumstanced, or not, it behoves the Delegates of Ulster to consider with strict impartiality? In what degree the manners of the Irish people are corrupt, to what extent the property of their country is unequally distributed, the Delegates will be most competent to judge. But if aristocratical power be found too predominant in the counties of Ireland, under the present limitations of the right of election; as it is stated to be, in the letter of the 19th of July, by the Committee of Belfast; the extension of the right to persons in the situation of absolute dependence on the great, would render their power wholly irresistible. If the capital contain a numerous and profligate populace, the periodical assemblies of that populace, for the purpose of elections, would, too probably, produce tumults, and all the wild and pernicious effects of frantic insurrection. Evils like these would be more intolerable, than those

[31]

those abuses which are now so justly complained of; and unless some effectual remedy were speedily applied to them, would lead Ireland through a series of calamity, to the utter ruin of its constitution.

Prefuming Ireland to be a country nearly in this situation, I cannot venture to recommend the restoration of universal suffrage. In my opinion, the circumstances here described must be considerably altered, before the refusal of that unlimited privilege can be thought unjust. At present, the utmost length to which the right of election there seems safely communicable, is to impart it to every class of men, who, from the possession of property to some small amount, may be thought likely to exercise their franchise freely, and for the public good. To concede the right of suffrage in Ireland beyond that boundary, appears not consistent with national prudence, or the safety of the Public; and therefore, in my apprehension, is not required by justice.— In this opinion I am countenanced by the general practice of the Free States of antiquity; I am supported by that of modern Europe, and the more recent example of America.

[32]

America. In the American Republics, property is more equally divided, and the manners of the people are more simple, orderly, and incorrupt, than they are in these kingdoms. And yet, in some of them, qualification of property has been thought necessary to entitle inhabitants to the rights of voting. In Massachusetts, and some other American States, the landed qualification exceeds that of any English Freeholders.—I should be still farther confirmed in these sentiments, if the excluded classes discovered no anxiety to regain this important privilege, even when it became the subject of national debate. For why should the work of Political Reformation be loaded with great, and perhaps insurmountable difficulties, by struggling to impart to the non-electors, a franchise which they are neither likely to exercise with discretion, nor solicitous to obtain.

By the rule here suggested, all persons paying taxes within the counties, cities, and boroughs of Ireland, would be comprehended among their voters; and to the county electors also would be added persons holding land by copyhold, by leasehold for
life,

[33]

life, or a term exceeding thirty years, equal in value to the present freehold qualifications.

By the same rule it is understood, that Catholics of similar qualifications in property would be admitted to the choice of representatives, together with their Protestant Brethren.

It must be confessed, that this concession to humanity and liberal policy, could not be proposed in Britain with any prospect of success. But Ireland, by granting a complete toleration to Catholics, has displayed the true spirit of candour and equity. And on this great occasion of reforming its constitution, the same equitable spirit will naturally lead that country, not to exclude those men from the primary right of citizens, by whose assistance its own independence and dignity were obtained. The Catholics of former ages may have been justly degraded from the class of electors, because an attachment to a foreign Potentate, dangerous to the peace and welfare of their country, may then have formed an essential part of their religious creed. But why

F

should

should men whose religious opinions are now deemed inoffensive to the State, and therefore fit to be tolerated by law, be thought unfit to concur with their fellow citizens in the election of representatives? The established religion would be secure as it is at present; because Catholic voters could not elect Catholic representatives. However, their mode of Christianity may be disapproved, however necessary it may be to oppose the re-admission of that system, as the religion of our country, and no person disapproves it more completely or would resist its establishment more strenuously than the writer of this paper; yet surely, in mere matters of civil concern, the profession of errors allowed to be harmless to the state, ought not to be a disqualification.—Surely Christians of every sect ought to be permitted to enjoy those political privileges, from which persons untingered by any religion are not excluded.

If on this occasion the right of suffrage should be extended to Catholics, let them receive the indulgence not from the insidious clemency of a Court, but from the friendship and magnanimity of their Protestant

testant fellow-subjects, and the peace and liberty of Ireland will be unhurt by the concession.

V. Elections by ballot seem to be unadvisable. In places where no undue influence can be exerted, the concealment of the ballot is totally unnecessary. But, where the influence is predominant, it ought to be resisted, not by a practice encouraging cowardly dissimulation and breach of promise, but by open and honourable means; by means consonant with truth, integrity, and the courageous spirit of liberty.

VI. The duration of Parliaments ought to be limited to a shorter term than eight years. It should be found as practicable to obtain annual as triennial Parliaments, the preference in point of efficacy seems due to annual Parliaments. But the beneficial effect of triennial, or of annual Parliaments will not be felt till the representation has been meliorated, and elections have been rendered uncorrupt and inexpensive.

VII. It would be expedient that a satisfactory compensation should be given by the
F 2 nation

nation to the proprietors of those boroughs which may be abolished. If this were understood to be the intention of the public, a less animated opposition to the disfranchisement of boroughs might be expected. But a more harsh mode of reformation would disgust and exasperate individuals, which would be extremely imprudent, when a slight expence to the whole kingdom might purchase their acquiescence, and preserve general harmony.

Undoubtedly a compensation is what strict justice does not enjoin; the nation has an absolute right to revoke privileges which are become injurious to its welfare; but in the view of equity, as well as that of policy, this more lenient mode of correcting abuses which time has introduced, without any marked criminality of the present proprietors, seems to be preferable.

VIII. From the answers which have been returned to the former queries, my opinion respecting the eighth and last query, in some measure, might be collected. But the reply to the most important question of them all shall not be less explicit than those which
have

have been already given. If then I had the honour to be delegated to attend the meeting at Dungannon, my present ideas on the subject would lead me,

1. To recommend with all possible earnestness, the abolition of every small and decayed borough; and the gift of a reasonable compensation to every person immediately affected by that act, with permission to the disfranchised electors to vote at elections for their respective counties.

2. To propose the reinforcement of the representation, by transferring to the counties, the capital, and the considerable unrepresented town, if there be any such in Ireland, the members taken from the disfranchised boroughs; and also by adding to them as many new members, as might be necessary clearly to turn the balance of legislative power in favour of the counties, principal cities and towns, which form the body of the nation, and in which the strength of the Irish democracy resides.

3. To suggest the utility of extending the right of suffrage to all persons paying taxes
to

to counties, cities, and boroughs; to all copyholders and leaseholders for life, or a term exceeding thirty years, the yearly value of whose estates shall be at least forty shillings; and also the propriety of admitting Christians of every denomination to the equal exercise of that most important right of a citizen.

4. To advise a shorter duration of Parliaments, preferring annual Parliaments to triennial, if equally attainable.

5. And for securing the advantages of those measures in their full extent, to recommend the strictest prohibition of bribery and expence at elections, and regulations facilitating to the respective voters the exercise of their franchise,

Such are the improvements which appear to my mind most practicable, safe, and efficacious, in the present State of Ireland,

— TO RESTORE TO THE PEOPLE UNARMED THEIR JUST AND NECESSARY CONTROUL OVER THE REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY.

To

To some of the Delegates at Dungannon, these propositions might appear not extensive enough. To many more perhaps they might appear too extensive to be at once adopted with prudence.

Having therefore offered these propositions to the meeting, I should think it ill became me to adhere to them with pertinacity. On the contrary, it would be more suitable to my very limited experience, and imperfect knowledge of Irish affairs, and also more conducive to the success of the great cause, to submit my opinion with deference to better informed judgments, and to accede to a less extensive plan for a substantial reformation of Parliament; in favour of which a more general concurrence of the Volunteers might be probable. For that is the best plan of reformation, which is the most effectual that is like to be attained.

The means for obtaining those regulations, or other improvements which may be deemed more salutary, are sufficiently obvious to restore a declining constitution, is the duty, the interest, and the peculiar office

office of the collective body. Self Reformation is as odious a task to corrupt assemblies of men, as it is to profligate individuals. A degenerate Parliament will never seriously engage in that business, but from the impulse of the people. By their active zeal the work of reformation must be begun; by their firmness and perseverance it must be finished. In a more tolerable condition of Parliament, it would be sufficient to state an abuse; and of its own accord an honest House of Commons would immediately apply the proper correction. But when the mischief lies in the frame and disposition of Parliament itself, it behoves the people not only to specify their grievance, but to point out on what principle, and to what extent they expect redress. For, if the popular complaint be well founded, Parliament cannot be qualified to judge for the people with due impartiality; nor indisposed spontaneously to grant that mode of reformation which may appear best adapted to promote their happiness. Hence proceeds the principal difficulty of this great enterprize.—When the claim of independence was the object of pursuit, there was but one simple proposition—every Irishman was agreed. If

the

the Volunteer assemblies should deliberate apart on the general question only, Whether a reformation of Parliament be expedient? there is little reason to apprehend any material diversity of opinion would arise. But, if the question to be considered, should be, What specific plan of reformation is most fit to be proposed to Parliament? the discussion of that proposition in many distinct assemblies might unhappily divide the Volunteers. The reformation of Parliament is an ample field of speculation, in which the sentiments of wise and good men may be widely different. It is a subject of the highest practical importance, on which those various sentiments may be maintained with warmth and eagerness. In the progress of those disputes the Provincial meetings might form different opinions; they might be heated; might be alienated; the ill offices of artful and interested men might increase the disgust; till the formation of a general opinion in favour of any specific plan, would become exceedingly difficult, if not wholly impracticable. In order to guard against so fatal disunion, it seems advisable, if the specific plan ought to originate from the people, that a GENERAL

G

}

ASSEM-

[42]

ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES from every part of Ireland should meet, and determine what that specific plan should be. By such a meeting the Union of the Volunteers might be compleatly preserved; and the application from that meeting for an effectual redress of parliamentary abuses would be presented to Parliament with the weight and authority of the whole collective body. It is needless to add that their requisition must be complied with.

Such is the judgment which I have formed to the most Impartial consideration of the Queries transmitted for my opinion by the Committee of Belfast. I feel myself much honoured by the gentlemen who have called forth my sentiments on this momentous occasion. By imposing that honourable task upon me, they have committed to my hands an important trust, which I am bound to execute with scrupulous fidelity, with conscientious sincerity. I am but too well convinced, that what I have been able to suggest deserves not much of their attention. But the opinion now given has been formed, and delivered under a sense of duty. And if this communication offer nothing

elic

[43]

else which may be fortunate enough to meet their approbation, yet I am confident the Delegates of Ulster will approve the freedom and integrity of my answer.

As a man I sincerely wish the enjoyment of liberty, in its most ample extent, to men in every climate and country; but as fellow-subjects I am deeply and more peculiarly interested in the welfare and happiness of Irishmen. When the Volunteers of Ireland successfully asserted the honour and independence of their country, I rejoiced at its emancipation from an injurious controul. When they abolished persecution, and gave peace and security to millions of their oppressed brethren, my heart concurred and approved the deed. When they checked the corrupt profusion of the public money, I joined with every virtuous man in applauding this prelude to a more important reformation. To restore a sinking constitution is their last and greatest labour. It is a task whose difficulty can only be exceeded by the immense advantages resulting from the performance. Nothing else can give permanent security to the freedom and prosperity of Ireland. When the zeal and

G 2

spirit

[44]

spirit by which the Volunteers gained those benefits to their country shall be relaxed, unless a radical reformation of Parliament shall have been first accomplished, the benefits themselves will not be of long duration: they will be lost again, or they will be left under circumstances of public distress, in which the enjoyment will be impossible. The mischief of a factious and corrupt Government will be felt once more: ministerial profusion will again seduce the senate, and impoverish the community. In this state of things, liberty will be precarious, and commerce and industry will be undone. And then, when the poor Catholic is starving for want of employment, toleration itself will be to him a comfort of little avail. Even the joy excited in the public mind by the acquisition of independence will soon sink, and be lost in the superior sense of domestic misery. But I trust a different, and far happier scene is just ready to open upon Ireland. From the vigour and virtue of Irish people, conducted by the wisdom of their Delegates, a substantial reformation of Parliament, with every national blessing in its train, may soon be expected. Let them but persevere in the same

[45]

same spirited, temperate, and legal conduct, which hitherto has marked their character with honor;—let them be firm—let them be unanimous; and in this just and necessary undertaking, as in all the rest, THE VOLUNTEERS OF IRELAND will command that success which they so well deserve.

C. WYVILL,

REVEREND SIR,

THE Merchant Company here, having taken under consideration the intimation made by the King's Ministers of bringing into Parliament a Bill for equalizing the representation of the people, were unanimously of opinion, that it would tend to the interests of the Burghs of Scotland to have an alteration in the mode of election of their Members of Parliament, and appointed a Committee to correspond with the other Burghs and Committees who may testify their approbation of the alteration, and particularly with the Yorkshire Committee, so as common measures may be followed, being sensible that unanimity will con-

contribute greatly towards carrying the proposed plan into execution.

The Committee therefore beg leave to give the present trouble to know from you the plan proposed to be adopted by the county of York, and will esteem your answer a particular favour, in which it is hoped you will transmit every information you may think material for us to know.

I am respectfully, Reverend Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

JOHN CAMPBELL, *Chairman.*

Stirling, Feb. 26, 1783.

To the Rev. Mr. Wyvill.

S I R,

ENCLOSED in this and another cover I have the honour to transmit to you the papers mentioned in my letter from Wansford, from which the Committee of Merchants of Stirling will be able to collect the information they have desired respecting the

the plan for the Reformation of Parliament which had been adopted by the county of York; and also the reasons why that plan will not be brought forward in Parliament during the present session.

At the first establishment of the English House of Commons, and for many ages after that period, the counties, cities, and principal towns, which form the main body of the nation, returned to Parliament a large majority of Members. Since the reign of Henry VI. the numbers in that House have received a gradual increase; till at last, by the addition of at least one hundred Parliamentary Boroughs, the balance of legislative power has been taken from the freeholders, citizens, and freemen of county towns, &c. and placed in the hands of a few petty Burgeſſes, who bear an inconsiderable proportion to the whole mass of electors. This is a fundamental defect in the present frame of English representation; for although mathematical equality is not to be expected in such matters, yet it never can be thought proper by any rational friend to liberty, that a thirtieth part of the electors of England should appoint a majority

majority of English Representatives. But this inequality is not a mere speculative impropriety; it is a defect, whose mischievous consequences have been severely felt, and threaten the utter ruin of the nation. For hence an intercourse of corruption has been established between Electors, Members, and Ministers of State: hence the Crown and a few great aristocratical families have obtained an unconstitutional influence in that Assembly, which ought to be the unbiassed guardian of the public weal: and hence measures destructive to our best interests have been supported, and may still be carried on against the general sense of the community. Such were the evils felt and apprehended from this great abuse when the counties and the metropolis of England undertook the task of restoring the constitution. Since that period, official and parliamentary regulations have been established, which tend in some degree to palliate the evil. But their beneficial effects can neither be great nor permanent. For although the influence of the Crown may have been diminished, that of the aristocracy seems to have been augmented. The weight taken from the Crown has not been transferred to the

the popular scale, it has been added to that of the Nobility; at least, that body has gained the preponderance, as recent events too plainly indicate. But to the Crown it may soon revert again; and, after every possible vibration of power, there it must ultimately rest, unless the great weight be placed, where it ought to be, in the body of the people. Whether they have most to fear from the undue influence of a single person, or that of a few individuals, is a question which it is of little importance to determine. For it is manifest, that till an effectual barrier *against both* can be provided, the liberty of the British nation cannot be safe; and that barrier can only be found in a House of Commons substantially reformed, and rendered a fair and free representative of the people.

For that purpose, among other improvements, a melioration of Parliamentary Representation has been proposed by the county of York, and by many other considerable districts: But it is not the intention of the Yorkshire Gentlemen, at least as far as I am able to form any judgment of their intention, to press for a perfect equality of

H

repre-

representation. In the present circumstances of the nation, they conceive the plan of universal suffrage is unfit to be recommended; neither likely to be attained by any regular or legal efforts of the people; nor, if it were established, likely to be maintained and exercised in that purity and peace, which alone can render it a blessing to the community. Instead of attempting a Reformation therefore, which, defensible as it may be in theory, seems at present not safely reducible to practice, they have been content to propose a more moderate change, of easier attainment, but effectual in their opinion to replace the rights and liberties of the nation in a state of full and permanent security.

It would not be difficult to name fifty Boroughs, in which a number of voters, less than the tenth part of the freeholders of Yorkshire, return one hundred Members to Parliament. By disfranchising those most obnoxious Boroughs, and adding an adequate number of Representatives to the counties and principal towns, the antient balance in the system of English representation would be restored, without increasing
the

the number of English Representatives. This Reformation would be rendered still more effectual by a shorter duration of Parliament, by the abolition of nominal fictitious votes in Scotland, and the admission of copyholders to the right of suffrage in England. And if this plan of constitutional improvements should be thought not sufficiently comprehensive, it seems by no means unreasonable to presume, that, from a House of Commons thus constituted, the correction of every other abuse, the establishment of every other beneficial regulation, might be readily obtained, by which the mischiefs of *despotic power* on the one hand, and of *factious and corrupt system of Government* on the other, might be for ever excluded.

Such were the general views of that very numerous and respectable Assembly of Gentlemen, held at York on December the 19th last: and it is my firm belief, that if it had been then known to the Yorkshire Gentlemen, that the right of election is monopolized by a few Members of a Council in almost every Borough in Scotland, their zeal for the liberty of their fellow-
H 2 citizens

[52]

citizens would have prompted them, as far as the offer of their assistance might avail, to promote an application to Parliament from the unrepresented Burgeſſes of Scotland, for a proper extension of that right. If the friends to a *General Reform* of Parliament would be conſiſtent, they muſt approve the redreſs of every *local abuſe* reſpecting representation and the right of election; it muſt be their anxious wiſh that the rights of the Britiſh Conſtitution may be diſtributed with an equal and impartial hand in every part of the kingdom: and it is hoped the advocates for *local Reformation* will be found equally diſpoſed to ſupport the *General Plan* whenever it may be brought forward.

The petitions on this ſubject have hitherto conveyed to Parliament in *general terms* the complaint of parliamentary grievances from the Engliſh counties and cities, &c. whoſe purpoſe is, *to avoid the introduction of any plan of Reformation into the Houſe of Commons*, till the fate of Mr. Pitt's intended motion on the ſeventh of May ſhall be determined. If the efforts of that incomparable Senator ſhall be defeated on that day,

by

[53.]

by a combination of men adverſe to the juſt claims of the people, that event ſurely ought not to diſcourage the Committee, or leſſen their zeal in a purſuit ſo juſt and neceſſary. On the contrary, it will afford an additional proof how much it behoves the nation to proſecute theſe claims with increaſing ardour; to concert and adopt a plan of Reformation at once moderate and efficacious; and to ſupport it in the ſucceeding ſeſſion of Parliament by every means which can be deviſed, conſiſtent with law and the conſtitution. On that occaſion, perfect unanimity between the numerous friends of Parliamentary Reformation in all parts of the kingdom cannot be expected; but if they can be generally induced, by the obvious neceſſity for union, to act in concert, and with a mutual confidence, the joint and regular efforts of their Committees to promote the COMMON CAUSE can hardly fail to be crowned with final ſucceſs.

I am, Sir, with great reſpect,

Your moſt obedient ſervant,

C. W Y V I L L.

*John Campbell, Eſq. Chairman of the
Committee of the Merchants of Stirling.*

A Gentle-

A Gentleman who has taken a very distinguished Part in the Business of Parliamentary Reform, received a Letter from an unknown Hand, under the Signature of ACHMET; and being a Stranger to any other Means, the Gentleman has adopted the following Mode of communicating his Sentiments to that Writer.

O N

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

To ACHMET.

S I R,

I HAVE been honoured with your Letter on the subject of Parliamentary Reformation; and I am happy to find my conduct has been approved by a Gentleman whose zeal for the Restoration of our happy Constitution commands my respect and esteem.

I am free to confess, however, that my sentiments differ materially from yours, regarding

garding the practicability of adding to, or taking from the present system of our Representation. You admit that Mr. W. Pitt's motion was as well calculated for those purposes as any that could have been made. In this opinion I perfectly concur with you; at least, I see not what more extensive proposition of reform could have been made with any prospect of success, or on any sufficient ground of popular declaration. But I cannot conclude, because his first proposal of a specific Reform has failed, that his plan is therefore unattainable.

In the year 1780, when the business of Parliamentary Reformation was first recommended to the Public by the Yorkshire Committee, it was thought a bold proposition; and some persons, who now would willingly push the people on to measures of a much wider extent than theirs, and big with hazard, as they conceive, at that time kept aloof, and took no active part in promoting any Reformation. I mean not to censure those Gentlemen, because, though their conduct tends *not to encourage*, but *to alarm and keep back the other Counties who declined joining the late Petitions*, and therefore

is

is not wisely calculated to promote the common cause; yet I am fully persuaded their conduct proceeds from the best and purest intentions. But I mention this circumstance to prove how much the spirit of Reformation has advanced in this capital; and though the Yorkshire Committee are not disposed to go forward to the full extent of universal suffrage, yet the safe but substantial improvements to which their original Association pointed, have gradually gained the approbation of a great majority of independent men in Yorkshire, and in other parts of the kingdom. Similar sentiments are also beginning to prevail in many Counties, lately much averse to any political Reformation; and undoubtedly, as the object of pursuit appears more likely to be attained, and its value is better understood, the ardour of the Public will be proportionably increased.

On the first agitation of so important a question, 149 Members compose, in my opinion, a very respectable Minority in Parliament; they are respectable in point of number; they are respectable from their own weight of property, and from the im-
portance

portance of the districts which many of them represent; and still more respectable from the great and dignified characters which are found among them. In the distinguished list, the names of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox, Lord J. Cavendish, Sir George Savile, Lord Surrey, Mr. Duncombe, Mr. Anderson Pelham, and the Members of the City of London, will be observed with pride and satisfaction. A corrupt Minister, backed by a train of venal adherents, has, indeed, been able to baffle their virtuous efforts. But the men of honour, the friends of the Constitution, for such I confess there were who voted against the measure, must be ashamed to join that despicable crew. They concurred with the noble Lord in rejecting Mr. Pitt's motion, not because they disapproved the propositions themselves, but because they apprehended concession in that instance would open a door to new and dangerous demands. This was the principal objection to the measure; but it behoves the people to convince the worthy Members alluded to, that their apprehensions were ill-founded; it behoves them to act *with prudence as well as with zeal*, and to support with steady
I uniformity

uniformity a moderate but efficacious Plan of Reformation. In that case it surely will not be too much to hope, that honest and independent men may be generally gained over to the Common Cause; and then a dissolution of Parliament, or a Coalition more favourable to the public interest than the present, would turn the scale completely on the side of Reformation.

On the whole, whether we consider the progress of popular zeal for the Constitution, or the number and weight of those men by whom the measure of Reformation was supported in Parliament, there are solid reasons for expecting that perseverance on the ground of Associations will at last prevail.

Impressed as I am with these sentiments, there is nothing I more sincerely deprecate, than any material change of measures by the popular meetings. Their propositions for meliorating the representation of the people, and for shortening the duration of Parliaments, are practicable, and essential in my opinion to the preservation of our liberties. Without them no lasting good can be done, no effectual stand can be made
against

against corruption and the power of the Crown. New propositions would only tend to mislead the people from their true interest, and waste their efforts in pursuits, where success would be wholly improbable, and at the same time inadequate to the grand purpose of constitutional security.

The Propositions suggested in your letter, appear to me by no means so feasible as those recommended by Mr. Pitt, and they are liable to great and perhaps insuperable objections. To revive elections for the Boroughs by the freeholders in each shire, at their respective county courts, would nearly annihilate the commercial interest in Parliament. To re-establish the claims of lords of manors, with courts baron, under Magna Charta, would render the House of Commons, not, what it ought to be, a fair representative of the people, but a mere Aristocratical assembly. As to the Act of Parliament that vacates a seat on the acceptance of a place, any attempt to put a more rigid construction upon it than at present obtains, would be quashed at once by Parliament, or the Courts of Justice. The addition of a fourth branch to the Legisla-

ture seems to be clearly impracticable, and at the same time highly inconvenient, if it were possible that such a measure could be carried.

If I am right in these opinions, I trust, Sir, you will join with me in wishing that the petitioners for a Reform in Parliament may never quit the ground which has been taken; but may persevere with firmness and spirit, till they have obtained *the repeal of the septennial bill*; a reinforcement of the sound part of the constitution, *by an addition of Members to the capital, the counties, and the great unrepresented towns*; and, if possible, *by an adequate abolition of the rotten Boroughs.*

I have only to add, that where my opinions do not meet the sentiments you have adopted, I hope you will believe the difference proceeds not from a spirit of disputation, but from an honest adherence to conviction, on the most attentive consideration I have been able to give to the subject. I am, Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

C. W.

TO LIEUT. COL. SHARMAN, &c.

“ S I R,

“ I HAVE received a letter signed by the Secretary of 45 corps of Volunteers of Ulster, desiring my opinion concerning a Reform of the representation of the Commons in Parliament, may be transmitted to you for the information of the committee appointed by the delegates of those respectable bodies.

“ From the first moment of that question's being agitated in England, I have invariably held one opinion, as to the *right of representation* in theory, as founded on one plain proposition, *viz.* to be free is to be self-governed, and *vice versa.* Therefore every man must either vote in person or by his representative, in making those laws which are to affect his life, liberty and property.

“ I am very ready to admit, however, the possibility of our being obliged to relinquish

quish in practice, what seems perfect in theory; and on that account, I have joined in some associations here, for a reformation which I think far from complete, but the best plan in which a sufficient number of persons were ready to join, so as to give us any prospect of success.

“ In the eight queries contained in the letter to me, there are some which depend on local circumstances, which I am not sufficiently acquainted with to be able to give so direct and explicit an answer as I could wish; I therefore think it is best to give you a brief account of the plan I wish to see adopted in England, and afterwards to enclose you a separate paper containing each query, and the best answer to it which I find myself prepared to give.

“ My favourite plan for this country, to secure a representation tolerably equal, and to make as little alteration in the present mode, as our security will admit, is as follows;

“ Let

“ Let the counties and cities remain just as they are at present.

“ Let the counties be divided into four or more classes, according to their importance in the national scale, considering their population, agriculture and manufactures.

“ Let each return from four to ten or twelve burgeses, making in the whole the same number of members as at present.

“ Let every man paying scot and lot have a vote for burgeses.

“ Let the poll be taken on a certain day in every parish, before the parish-officers and principal inhabitants.

“ Let the constable witness the poll, and attend the Sheriff on a certain day, who, assisted by such magistrates as may chuse to attend, is to cast up the same, and make the return.

“ The foregoing seems to me to be clear of all objection, as it disfranchises nobody;
but

but only restores to liberty such as are now unjustly disfranchised; and as it takes no man out of his parish, removes the only plausible objection to frequent elections.

I am with great regard,

S I R,

Your most obedient

humble servant,

EFFINGHAM."

Aug. 13th, 1783.

" P. S. I beg to observe that no argument has ever yet been produced in favour of a seven years Parliament, which is not equally good for one of seventeen years."

SEPARATE

SEPARATE ANSWERS, &c.

Answer to first Query.

I Would *disfranchise* nobody, but I would communicate to all those who are *at present unjustly disfranchised*, a participation of liberty with the rest of their country. By consolidating the boroughs, and all other householders, every man would be represented by *at least four* members.

Answer to 2d Query. The number of members I take to be a matter of indifference, provided they are amply sufficient to attend to all the *local business*, and not too many fit and debate in one chamber. If any *corrupt connexion* is apprehended between the representative Body and the Crown, it is the short duration of Parliaments and not the number of members that must prevent or cure that evil.

Answer to 3d Query. The objection alluded to is, that as now two great families endeavour

K

endeavour

[66]

endeavour to return the two county Members, the same would be done by six families were there six members. I should think it probable, in such a case, that the two most powerful of those families would return four of the Members, and four families next in power would compromise for two; and thus the six united would totally throw out those unconnected with them. This consideration would determine me to leave the county representation untouched.

Answer to 4th Query. I think every man not incapable through infancy, insanity, or criminal conduct, has a right to the franchise of being represented; but I cannot entertain a moment's doubt, in respect of those who bear the public burthens.

Answer to 5th Query. I rather think it would be not wise to have the members returned by ballot; but as I must candidly own, some of the best men in this country are of a different opinion, I will briefly give you the reason for mine. I had an opportunity some years ago, of learning how a ballot might be as easily abused as any other method of voting, and it was upon
the

[67]

the following occasion: The kingdom of Sweden, it is well known, has in the present century enjoyed about fifty years of a free government; during which time, they collected the votes in their diet by ballot. When a Member was bribed, whose promise the briber did not chuse to rely on, it was the custom for him to write on the same paper with his vote, some word or sentence agreed on; by which it was known whether he had earned his wages or not. To prevent this, a law is made, that if any such mark appeared in future, the vote should be null and void.

In the year 1769, I was witness of a strong contest for the choice of a land marshal; when among other exertions of each party, bribery and corruption were not forgot; but as the law above-mentioned prevented the old method, they took the following; instead of desiring any one to vote for the favourite candidate, each manager applied to the supposed friends of the opposite side, and gave them money to destroy their own vote; by which, though they could not encrease their own numbers, they could diminish the number of their adver-
saries.

saries. It is easy to conceive numberless other contrivances, which, *till known*, will serve to evade any regulation that can be made.

But I have a much stronger reason against ballots. It is not merely *influence*, but *secret intelligence*, that I dread. For so long as riches or power can confer any favours or benefits; and so long as good men shall possess gratitude, knaves avarice, or fools pride, so long influence will exist. But while that is brought to light by open voting in the face of our country, it appears to me in a less formidable light, than if it worked in the dark, where I could neither see the nature or extent of my danger.

Answer to 6th Query. I think a triennial Parliament the longest that can be any ways consistent with the idea of any controul in the constituent over his representative. Indeed any fixed duration beyond the session to which Parliament is called by the King's writ, is granting an independence to the representative for that term, and so far making that branch of the legislature an *aristocratic body*.

Answer

Answer to 7th Query. As I cannot suppose it possible that any gentleman has either procured his own return with a view to sell his vote, or taken money to procure the return of another man, I am at a loss to account for a pecuniary claim in *amende* for a *property in the lives and liberty* of a people who call themselves so free, that they assert a negro slave does *ipso facto* obtain his liberty by setting his foot among them. If, however, by any former mistaken notions, such a thing could have happened; if any gentleman has really given a few thousands more than the true value of an estate, on account of a supposed privilege annexed to it; or if a poor Member of a corporation would by the proposed reform really believe that he was unjustly deprived of an octennial twenty pounds, I should think that equity might, at the intercession of liberality, so far relax the severity of her rules, as to permit a sufficient sum to be distributed in *secret service money*, to prevent the general joy from being interrupted by any murmurs of sorrow or discontent.

Answer

Answer to 8th Query. In all the foregoing questions I have considered what I wished to be established here, as equally applicable to Ireland; and have reserved to this place my observations on the only very material difference which strikes me in the situation of the two countries as to their representation. The very extensive line I draw for this country may appear dangerous in Ireland, on account of the great proportion of Roman Catholics in that kingdom, and renders it necessary for me here to make a short observation on that subject. A Papist is not dangerous because he prays to Saints, but because he sets up a foreign jurisdiction, paramount to our laws. I will never fight with my fellow-citizen, because we cannot agree whether a wench in a white sheet, be a sacrament or a ceremony; I will only, as a good Christian ought, pray to God to pardon him all his errors, and me all mine. But, if he will go about to overturn the Protestant succession, or any other security for the liberties of my country, I will, as it is my duty, oppose him to the last drop of my blood. On these principles we have in England, very justly, as I think, relaxed in
the

the severity of our Penal Laws; and I hope the day is not far distant, when bigotry shall have given way to common sense, and our religious opinions be all reconciled to one plain truth, that to outrage the first laws of Nature and Reason, cannot be to serve God.

How far the situation of Ireland in this respect may, or may not warrant what we have done, can only be determined by those who have the opportunity of knowing the numbers and the inclinations of the Roman Catholics; how far the influence of their clergy operates upon them; what security they have given or will give for maintaining the constitution. On these circumstances must depend the answer to the first part of this Question. As to the second part of it, *viz.* "the Steps to be taken," none appear to me more eligible than those we have adopted by county Committees of Correspondence, to endeavour to fix on the principal points.

If the friends of Reform then move Parliament to consider of the present state of Representation, it will appear to every man
so

so unequal, that there can remain no doubt but that the justice and propriety, I may add *the necessity* of a Reform, will be obvious, and consequently with general consent adopted. The mode of Reform coming from Parliament, will give satisfaction to those who (having in some points differed from other Committees, and thinking their opinions equally fit to be followed), will readily submit to such authority.

If I have not given so exactly as I desired my ideas upon a subject I have so much at heart, I hope you will attribute it to my want of ability, and not to any want of inclination to convince you of the truth with which

I have the honour to be,

S I R,

Your most obedient, and

humble Servant,

EFFINGHAM.

Peckham.

To

TO LIEUT. COL. S H A R M A N, &c.

S I R,

IN the letter which I yesterday did myself the honour of addressing to you, I stated, in very general terms, my ideas respecting a reform in your Representation, and the means of effecting it. In this I propose to submit to your consideration some unconnected observations, in explanation or confirmation of the opinions I have already advanced—trusting that your respectable Committee will receive with candour what I shall offer with integrity of purpose.

I am very sensible that you have difficulties to struggle with peculiar to your country—others, which are common to both countries; but none, thank Heaven, which can be esteemed unsurmountable *when we reflect upon THE PAST.*

The plan of universal Representation, by a new arrangement into districts, each
L district

district electing one member, I own, I think is by far the most practicable Plan that can be proposed. The address of the Delegates of the Ulster Regiment asserts, that the right of being governed only by laws of his own making is the birth-right of Man ;—a proposition equally true, whether the terms of it be applied to nations, or the individuals of which they are composed.

Contested elections generally arise from disputes concerning qualifications, which can never be stated in so definite a manner, when any degree of property is established as a requisite, without ministering matter for innumerable perjuries and endless alterations.

It is impossible to conceive that voters in general will put themselves to the expence and trouble of travelling from one side of an extensive county to the other, to give their suffrage without some compensation. Laws to prevent bribery or corruption in such circumstances, have always hitherto been evaded, and thus have encreased the evils they are intended to remedy. A

law

law made to prevent the Candidate from bearing the expences of an Elector inhabiting the extremity of Yorkshire, to the place of Election, will either be eluded, or operate as a disfranchisement. The utmost exertion of human intellect cannot invent a method of taking the suffrages of an extensive county, which is not liable to strong objections. If you encrease the number of county members, the difficulties are encreased: a division of the larger counties into districts appears therefore necessary, whatever be the plan of Reform you shall think proper to adopt, with respect to the qualifications of the voters.

If a less extensive plan than what has been hinted be adopted, it will be prudent to leave the matter open for posterity to improve upon it, if they judge proper.—We know not what is really impracticable before trial—we have seen what Ireland has effected in less than four years. The objections to the plan of the Duke of Richmond and Major Cartwright, and the apprehensions which many entertain of danger, from admitting Roman Catholics to the entire rights of Citizenship, may ap-

L 2

pear

[76]

pear scarcely worthy of a moment's consideration at no very distant period.

Unanimity is certainly most desirable—but there are two sorts of unanimity;—one which consists in blindly following the dictates of a few;—the other is the result of calm and dispassionate enquiry into the real relations of things. I allow on one side, that it would be imprudent to aim at establishing more than what will meet with general concurrence: on the other, I maintain, that many present prejudices may naturally be expected to give way, when a fair appeal is made to the understandings of men, and truth is held forth to public view, by characters who justly possess the confidence of the People. The generous sentiments of the Ulster Volunteers respecting religious toleration, diffused themselves with rapidity inconceivable through the breasts of millions, and I trust, that they will see their fair example followed by more than half the European world. I will only further observe upon this point, that unless enough be done to render the true interest of the country predominant in the House of Commons.—*nothing is done.*

It

[77]

It appears to me, that you will lead the way in the great point of parliamentary reformation.—Next to yourselves Scotland appears most in earnest. It is therefore on many accounts that I wish you may be able to effect your purpose. Your success will greatly facilitate the establishment of a similar reform in this kingdom. I trust, that our Committees will emulate your generosity and candour, and by inviting and cultivating a free and open correspondence, avail themselves of whatever light the friends of liberty in Scotland and Ireland may be able to suggest. I have sent inclosed two of your own addresses, with a resolution of our Society for constitutional information at the head of them. May the spirit they breathe contribute towards the rekindling of that flame of liberty, which once was wont to burn with so bright a lustre in the breasts of Englishmen!

I have also taken the liberty to inclose the report of the Westminster Sub-committee, respecting an annual, equal, and universal representation of the Commons of England, my own address to the Freeholders of Middlesex, and some other tracts which state
with

with better arguments than I can urge, the objections to the less extensive plans that have been proposed in this kingdom. Among these the letter of Mr. Batley to the Rev. Mr. Wyvill, respecting the expediency of adding an hundred county members, appears well worthy of perusal.

I attended closely to the debates of your Parliament, when Mr. Grattan and Mr. Yelverton first proposed their motions in the House of Commons. I saw the force of influence, and I despaired. The Volunteer spirit arose, and Ireland was emancipated from its chains! A new Parliament may contain a greater number of real friends to freedom; but an incurable vice is inherent in its constitution. If it be left to Parliament to form a plan, the scheme will infallibly be defeated. The aristocratic interest united with the regal, like a blight from the East, will assuredly blast every hope of harvest. While you retain the matter in your own hands, you cannot fail of effecting, under providence, the permanent salvation of your Country. At the ensuing meeting it may be agreed how far the exercise of the right of suffrage should extend; a general outline

outline of a plan may be drawn for a division of the counties into districts—the disfranchisement of some boroughs, and the transferring the right of electing Members to more populous townships may be proposed; and the most material regulations respecting the taking of the suffrages of the electors pointed out. At an adjourned meeting you will be able to judge how far Parliament has complied with the wishes of the People. The resolves and instructions of your constituents will give sufficient weight and authority to your proceedings at such a period.

Once more requesting your favourable indulgence, and with my heartiest good wishes for the success of a measure, in the event of which, the cause of public virtue, of civil and religious liberty is so deeply interested,

I remain your obedient servant,

J O H N J E B B.

Brightelmstone, 14th Aug. 1783.

To

To LIEUT. COL. SHARMAN, *Chairman of the COMMITTEE of CORRESPONDENCE, appointed by the Forty-five Volunteer Corps assembled at Lisburn, on the First of July, 1783.*

S I R,

I THINK myself greatly honoured by the letter addressed to me, in the name of the Committee of which you are Chairman. It is indeed with a satisfaction not to be expressed, I find that the people of Ireland, after rescuing their trade and their legislature from the oppression of a sister kingdom, are now undertaking to rescue themselves from an *internal* oppression, no less inconsistent with liberty. The occasion is great, and the undertaking important and arduous in the highest degree. Should they be blest with success, they will have compleated their own happiness, and exhibited an example which will for ever shine in the annals of mankind. The subjoined paper* will shew that

I have

* To the associated VOLUNTEERS of IRELAND.

A native of England, but a citizen of the world, and a warm friend to universal liberty, congratulates them with great

I have been for some time wishing they would carry their views to this object. It was shewn to Mr. Grattan above a year ago, and written when the Duke of Richmond, the Earl of Shelburne, Lord Camden, Mr. Pitt, and other friends to a Parliamentary
M Reform,

great satisfaction, on their success in obtaining, without bloodshed, that precious blessing for which torrents of blood have been shed in America; and, rejoicing in their emancipation, he wishes to propose to them the following queries:

1st. Having seized the favourable opportunity which the war with America has offered them, should they not be anxious about improving it to the utmost, from a conviction that such another opportunity may never offer itself?

2dly. Having succeeded in gaining *external* liberty, should it not be their next concern to gain *internal* liberty? And while they want the latter, can they possess any just security for the former?

3dly. Is not a free and equal representation essential to the *internal* liberty of a kingdom?

4thly. Is Ireland possessed of such a representation? Or is not, on the contrary, a vast majority of its House of Commons chosen, not by the people, (but as in England) by a few Grandees and Beggars?

5thly. By establishing an equal representation, may not the people of Ireland do their sister kingdom a most important service, by provoking its emulation, and rendering it ashamed of its own corrupt and mock representation?

6thly. Have they not reason to expect, from the liberality of the new Ministers, and the endeavours which some of them are now using to gain an equal representation of England, that they will rejoice to see this work undertaken in Ireland, and give it their encouragement and support?

Lastly.

Reform, were in power. We are now governed by an odious Coalition, formed between Whigs and the Conductors of the late war, to gratify ambition and party rage by censuring the Peace. These united parties are, in general, hostile to Reformation; and this will make it more difficult for the people of Ireland to succeed in their views; but *nothing can be difficult to a people determined to recover their rights*—IF UNANIMOUS AND FIRM.—The motive commonly urged to check such exertions, “not to disturb what is quiet,”—would prevent all improvements, and perpetuate darkness and slavery amongst mankind. It would, in particular, had it influenced in America, have prevented the Revolution in favour of the rights of mankind, which has lately taken place there; and had it influenced Ireland, it would have prevented that emancipation of which has been lately so happily

Lastly. Is it not therefore almost certain, that the Volunteers and Patriots of Ireland will easily succeed in this undertaking, if they set themselves to it with that glorious zeal which they have hitherto discovered, and by which they have exhibited to the world an example of public spirit and virtue scarcely ever before known, and which must render them the admiration of future ages? *July, 1782.*

pily effected.—The blessings of legitimate Government, and a free Constitution, are inestimable. Too much cannot be sacrificed to acquire them; and no country has acquired them where the body of the people, equally and fairly represented, have not the chief share in the powers of Government.

I can by no means pretend to that degree of information and knowledge, which is necessary to enable me to give any proper answer to the queries contained in your letter; and the shortness of the time between this and the 20th of August, together with the dissipated state I am now in at Brighthelmstone, will not allow me to be very full and explicit. The Committee will therefore, I hope, accept the following general observations, as the best reply to their queries that I can at present give:—

The principles of civil liberty require, that every independent agent in a State (that is, every one who can be supposed to have a will and judgment of his own) should have a vote in the choice of his Governors.—But it has been seldom practicable to extend

tend the right of voting so far. In America, where new forms of government are established more liberal than any the world has yet seen, this right is limited to persons who pay taxes and possess property. Perhaps it may not be prudent in Ireland to go even this length. In these cases, to avoid the danger of losing all by aiming at too much, the attempts of enlightened men should be governed by a regard to what is most practicable, considering present circumstances, and the attachment which always prevails in a country to old establishments. In England I have wished, that the friends of reformation had confined their views at present to the extension of the right of voting to Copyholders, and Leaseholders; and the substitution of a hundred knights for counties in the room of a hundred members for boroughs. This, though in theory unspeakably too little, would have been a very important reform; and less than this, I have not thought much worth contending for. The people in Ireland are more alive, and therefore, probably much more may be attempted there with success. But how much more I am not qualified to say. Suppose the right of voting was extended to all

all who possess property of a certain value, and every county divided into six districts, each of which should chuse one Representative, leaving the remaining Representatives to be chosen by the largest towns and boroughs.—Would this be too great an object? Is it too much to be undertaken without destroying unanimity?

The duration of Parliaments seems a point of less consequence. If chosen by the People at large, they will be short; for it is impossible that a People should not see that the long possession of power will corrupt, and that their security against the abuse of power depends on keeping their Representatives in a constant state of dependence and responsibility.

If, on the contrary, Parliaments are not chosen by the people, shortening their duration will be no remedy. They will not on this account be less usurpations and mockeries.

Annual Parliaments seem to me preferable to Parliaments of any longer duration; not only because they keep the Representative Body more subject to the controul of its
confli-

[86]

constituents, but also because being chosen more frequently they will be chosen more of course, and with less tumult and riot.

There seems to be no reason for changing the number of the Representative Body in Ireland.

I am so much an enemy to persecution that I cannot help wishing the right of voting could be extended to Papists who possess property in common with Protestants. It is unjust to deprive any man of his Rights on account of his religion, unless self-defence makes it absolutely necessary. The danger from Papists is perhaps more produced by the Penal Laws against them, than by their religion. These detach them from the rest of the community, give them a separate interest, and *make* them enemies. Why should not a Papist be attached to the liberties of his country as well as a Protestant, if he is allowed to share in them? In truth, a country which allows him no rights, he cannot reckon *his* country. It is nothing to him whether it is enslaved or free; nor can he care what becomes of it.

If

[87]

If there is any remedy for the evil which occasions the objection against increasing the number of Members for counties, it is that extension of the right of voting and division of counties into districts which I have mentioned.

The proprietors of the enslaved boroughs do not seem, in reason, entitled to a compensation, because they hold them by usurpation and a kind of robbery. It seems, however, necessary, that a compensation should be allowed—and it would, I suppose, be allowed in England were the rotten boroughs disfranchised. The necessity of abolishing such boroughs, I think, very apparent. There cannot be worse nuisances in a State.

I am sensible, Sir, of the great imperfection of these remarks, and must rely on the candour of the Committee. Indeed they have done me too much honour by supposing me capable of advising them. From the Duke of Richmond, Mr. Pitt, &c. they may receive advice that will be more worth their attention. But there is

on

no one whose heart and wishes are more with them. May Heaven grant them success! and may the example of Ireland influence this country and shame it to imitation.

With all possible respect,

I am, SIR,

Your most obedient and humble servant,

RICHARD PRICE.

Brightelmstone, Aug. 7, 1783.

P. S. Ireland is peculiarly situated in two respects. A great majority of the inhabitants are Papists; and a distribution of property, more unequal than in England or America, subjects them more to aristocratic tyranny. I have hinted, as a remedy for the former inconvenience, the admission of Papists to equal rights; but there may be stronger objections to this than I am aware of.

Trade and liberty, will, it is to be hoped, in time, diffuse property more in Ireland, and produce a less unequal distribution of it.

FRIENDLY

FRIENDLY HINTS to the COMMITTEES
of PARLIAMENTARY REFORMA-
TION in IRELAND.

S I R,

I HAVE just now perused with infinite satisfaction the Duke of Richmond's truly admirable, and in my opinion, unanswerable Letter to Col. Sharman of the Lisburne Volunteers. My own ideas on this important subject have the honour, as far as they go, to coincide with his Grace's general Principles, and decisive Plans.

The enclosed Thoughts, thrown out in consequence of Dr. Price's Letter, after so elaborate a performance as the noble Writer's, must appear to great disadvantage; but, as we see objects in different points of view, some new Argument or useful Hint may arise in the most casual and imperfect Production of men who are used to think for themselves.

N

The

The rights which our common Creator made inherent in, and unalienable from, our nature, as free, moral agents, cannot lawfully by any delegated authority be taken from us, or *granted* to us. It is therefore giving up the point of Right to petition usurped Powers for the exercise of such Rights. It involves gross absurdities and contradictions, in making the prior and original Right to depend upon the authority which is subordinate and derived, and the natural Powers which belong to all men, to be at the disposal of a few.

Dr. Price, in this Letter, seems to have forsaken his old ground of general Principles, to offer incense to expedience, and resign the great Body of the People a sacrifice to the interest and the safety of an Aristocracy. From the elevated Philosopher and Patriot he appears to sink into the State Partizan, when on the greatest occasion that could flatter the liberal mind, and elevate the ideas, he stoops to adopt the selfish maxims of partial Reformation in this corrupt and slavish kingdom, to apply them to an armed nation, able to perfect its Government upon the

true

true Principles of the Constitution, and to fix it in future on a basis of Election-Right, too extended and firm to be shaken. To a nation thus situated, it was enough to say to armed Citizens, Gentlemen, you command the Fate of your Country—If you are armed *for the People*, restore to every man the Rights of Nature, which cannot be lawfully withheld from any—The man who *eats* and is *clothed* at his own expence, pays taxes; and, by his labour and industry, however humble his lot, is a useful member of the Community. Who shall dare to *unman* him, or by what authority to reduce him to Vassalage, to Brutality, by depriving him of his natural inheritance, the Dignity of a Man, the Honour of a Citizen?

If such a line of Exclusion could be drawn against particular Classes and Descriptions of men, it must be only by the great Majority of the nation. But who will presume to draw this Line of Civil Excommunication against the great Majority itself? For it is evident that being thus outlawed and proscribed by Power, they could owe the Government no obedience; but might

N 2

be

be justified in meeting the Law of Power with the Right of Self-defence. Having no lot or portion in the laws or Government, they are not ruled as Free Men; and there is no Power in this State that can treat them as the Vassals and Instruments of other men's Interest or Ambition. Under such circumstances, a general revolt of all the Non-Electors, and unrepresented, could not be deemed Treason or Rebellion, since the Government with regard to them would be Tyranny, as being not only unprotected, but violated in their equal Rights of Men and Citizens.

As no man can be supposed originally to enter into Society under the stigma of such an exclusion from the Community, so no one can be bound to continue under it who has the Virtue to assert his Dignity with his Rights. And when a nation, long groaning under the Oppression of partial Civil Rights, hath the means of full Redress in its hands, shall we insinuate the slow poison of a frigid Caution to chill the ardor of virtuous Enterprize, and frustrate a glorious Reformation, by leaving it ineffectual? A work like this must be carried equally out
of

of the reach of Treachery, and of Power. It must go all lengths, or it is lost. It must trample Tyranny and Corruption under foot, or it will be the Scorn and Derision of Government. Prudential maxims of *practical Reforms*, may suit a Yorkshire Committee, (for Englishmen, shame upon them! are only *Beggars of Rights*) but for a nation where Wisdom hath adopted Strength, and Perfection is within the grasp of Valour, a single chance must not be left in the power of Fate, were it possible to prevent it. A single Vote must not be lost: for such is the vigilant and encroaching nature of Power, that every inch of political Ground, not already occupied and guarded by the People, is instantly seized and fortified by their Oppressors. Free Subjects are never safe, but when they have Suffrages to guard their Rights, and Arms to defend their Suffrages. An Englishman, without a *Vote* or a *Musket*, is stripped more naked and defenceless than the Savage in the Desert. Both his Person and Property are always open to Violation. It is high Time then that this great fundamental Principle of Liberty and the Constitution should be asserted and establish-
ed

ed in the three Kingdoms upon the equal Claims of Freemen and Citizens, instead of those partial Franchises and Qualifications which have been arbitrarily substituted in the Room of natural Rights, to defeat the Gift of God, and deface his Image in the moral and social Freedom of rational Beings. Until this be effected, it is the vainest of all vain Hopes to expect that Representation will ever be so far reformed as to answer its only great End in producing an incorruptible Parliament, and a virtuous Government. Will they who have usurped the Power over the Public Purse quit their Hold without a desperate Struggle, like all other Robbers? Shall we in such a Case rely upon Petitions or upon Pistols? America hath beaten off the Freebooters, and goes now about her Business without Molestation. Ireland has nearly rescued herself from Foreign and Domestic Spoilers; while North's Bagshot Gang continues as usual to bully poor Old England out of her Money and her Freedom.

They reprobate all Reformation as Innovation; and when Tyranny becomes Established Government, Innovation is the
most

most mortal Sin against it, although without Innovation the most civilized Kingdoms of Europe had been as savage as the Wilds of Africa or America. But the Truth is, every Thing is dangerous to the State, that is so to Ministers, or to those who contend for the Power: Even a Burke, who boasts of his Philanthropy and Love of Liberty, would have bound America to unlimited Subjection. He hath published his Doubts, whether Statutes enacted by the People's Deputies may not bind the very Consciences of their Masters? And he holds Septennial Parliaments to be a Fundamental of the Constitution, of which they are the Grave, because "the permanent Virtue of the whole House of Cavendish," continues to defend, what the Treason of their Ancestor usurped. The English of all which is, that he, and all such Adventurers for the Power and the Plunder of the People, had rather have the Honour and Benefit of *taking Care of them*, than resign to them such usurped Powers as would enable them effectually *to take Care of themselves*; and consequently to get rid of all such knavish Intruders upon their Rights, Privileges, and Property. It would be difficult
to

[96]

to say whether this Man's Hypocrisy, or a North's barefaced Tyranny reflect the greater Credit on the Alliance.

With regard to Catholics voting in Ireland for Representatives, they are the best Judges who live among them as Neighbours, and Fellow-Citizens. Certainly no Man ought to be persecuted for his Religion, unless his Religion be intolerant to others. Nothing can, or ought to disqualify him from exercising the Rights of a Man and a Citizen, but his having actually resigned his own Judgment and Will, and consequently his Freedom, to the Guidance and Direction of others who may abuse the Trust to the Public Detriment. In that Case, not being a free Agent, but the Puppet of other Movers, he could have no Reason to complain of his own voluntary Exclusion. Self-preservation is the first Duty and Concern of the Individual and the Community. Men who will not do in the like Case, as they are done by, are certainly not entitled upon any Principle of Policy, of Common-sense or Justice to exercise the Privileges of a community. There may be exceptions from the general Rule

of

[97]

of which they are to judge who risk the indulgence. Let the free, honest, and good Citizen be indemnified from the Abuse of his liberal Confidence, and not a Doubt can remain about the equal Rights of all to enjoy this great Public Benefit, which renders every Man the Guardian of his Person, Family, and Property. And this I take to be the true Line of Conduct with regard to the civil Rights and Privileges of Papists under a Protestant Government—In a Word, I consider the Extension of Election Rights beyond the possible Reach of Corrupt Influence from any Quarter, to be the only effectual Barrier of Liberty and the Constitution against every Mode of Attack.

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

THOMAS NORTHCOTE.

October 15, 1783.

O

SIR,

[98]

S I R,

AS an anxious friend to the cause of a Parliamentary Reform, in which both Ireland and England are equally interested, I trust you will excuse the freedom I use in addressing you on this occasion. I cannot doubt but that the principles of the constitution, and that the means necessary to restore freedom to the people, as well as purity to Parliament, are well known to the Gentlemen who in Ireland have taken a leading part in this great work: but yet, as amongst others of their countrymen, that knowledge may not be so generally diffused as might be wished, and as the humblest essays in that line may be of some Use, I have taken the liberty to order some copies of different tracts, which have employed my pen, to be directed to you at Lisburn, for the disposal of the Committee of Correspondence, over which you preside; the acceptance of which on their part I should esteem a particular honour.

In those writings I have thought it my duty to adhere inflexibly to what appeared to me to be the rights of men; and much
thought

[99]

thought has convinced me, that in proportion as those rights shall be departed from, the Reform itself will not only be clogged with difficulties and inconsistencies in the execution, but that, when accomplished, it will proportionally fail in its proposed effects. I confess that in England we have not yet had, at any period, a prospect of effecting a complete Reform; but in Ireland, your Volunteer Army—the most glorious production of public virtue that ever adorned a nation!—have perfection or imperfection wholly in their option. The conduct of that army has hitherto manifested too much wisdom and too much patriotism to leave it doubtful which choice it will make. It would ill suit with the splendour of what is past, that a Reform in the Parliament of Ireland should bear marks of material defectiveness. Such an event would greatly lessen that dignity of character to which she hath attained, and which I trust she means to transmit to latest posterity, by henceforth securing equal justice to her Citizens, and to her Parliament that purity which alone can insure the permanency of her freedom and her glory.

O 2

A close

A close adherence to the genuine principles of freedom, would introduce into her elections, as well as into the frame of her representative body, that which surpasses all human inventions for guarding against the insinuating properties of corruption: I mean simplicity. In providing for the purity of a Parliament, every thing depends on the elections; and the freedom of elections rests on these two pillars:—1st, The multitude of electors; and 2dly, The short duration of power. These two principles necessarily conduct us to universality of suffrage, and Parliaments of a single session; and so sacred, in my humble opinion, are these rights, that on no account or pretence whatever, can they become the subject of voluntary concession. It is time enough to accept of any thing short of these rights, when attainment is impossible, or the contest not attended with any hope of success. These, however, are cases which the magnanimity of Ireland has not left applicable to her: How, then, can she act as though they were. She cannot. Her honour demands of her a complete enfranchisement. A free state, without free citizens, is a sole-

cism

cism in terms. But it is worse than a solecism. It is folly; it is corruption; it is misery; it is disgrace. It is freedom to vice, and chains to virtue.

What has occurred to me as expedient to add to the essentials above noticed, will be seen at large in the several details of which I have treated in the barrier; but as one of those expedients appears to me to merit a distinguished preference to the rest, I will trespass a moment longer on your time to say a few words upon it. The ballot is that to which I allude. It has its enemies. Their arguments certainly deserve attention. I have heard, I believe, the most forcible; and with much truth can say, that I considered them with the utmost impartiality. At one time, indeed, I was prepared to renounce the idea as publicly as I had before expressed myself in its favour. I returned, however, to my original opinion, and with additional decision of mind. To this latter change of sentiment, conversations with Mr. Laurens not a little contributed. From him I learned that in South Carolina, the ballot in their elections was introduced about forty years ago; that its

good

[102]

good effects were immediately observable, that it was ever afterwards considered as a wise measure, and that it was thought to have been particularly serviceable during the most critical periods of the late revolution in that country. These proofs of its happy effects, instantly outweighed all that I had heard advanced of its tending to abate the virtue and courage necessary to freedom. I have since been farther confirmed in my favourable opinion of the ballot, by numerous conversations with tenants and tradesmen; who, for the most part, have laid even as much stress upon this security, as upon the other two; nay, more.

With respect to the universality of suffrage, it may perhaps be observed, that the States of America, in their new constitutions, have thought fit to require qualifications. But although I reverence the wisdom so conspicuous in those constitutions, I cannot, however, admire any rules in practice, which contradict the noblest and clearest of their political reasonings, and which needlessly violate the eternal principles of truth and justice. In sterling money, some of their qualifications are not equal

[103]

equal to ten shillings a year. So trifling an exclusion is the very nonsense of inveterate prejudice.

Since there can be no union between two countries on terms of entire equality, and for a common interest, unless both those countries are equally free, I trust that the friends of the constitution, in both Ireland and England, will hold a regular intercourse, and consider a Reform in their respective legislatures as a common cause. I hope too, they will each have their Society for constitutional information, and that those Societies will correspond and co-operate in their generous scheme.

With that high respect which is due to one who is chosen to preside where all are great, and with my warmest prayers to the Author of all good, that he may give you success in your efforts to establish his laws of human government, I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your well wisher,

JOHN CARTWRIGHT.

Marnham, August 26, 1783.

William Sbarman, Esq.

To

To Lieutenant-Colonel SHARMAN.

S I R,

SINCE I did myself the honour to write to you on the 26th of this month, the news-papers intimate that Dublin will instruct her representatives to make the following points the objects of their exertions, viz.

1. A Bill of Rights.
2. An annual Meeting of the Irish Parliament.
3. An Equalization of commercial Duties, &c.
4. A Tax on Absentees, &c.
5. A dereliction of the late French Duties, &c.
6. The Abrogation of the British Admiralty Court, Post-Office, &c.

Being sorry to observe the attention of any Irish patriots, directed to so many objects, I have presumed once more to trouble you with my thoughts, although to the well informed they may be unnecessary; yet, possibly to others, the sentiments of one wholly unconnected with Ireland, and which are wholly inspired by a warm attachment

tachment to the cause of freedom, may not be altogether useless; especially when placed in the same scale with the opinions and advice of those to whom they look up, for fully and finally settling their constitutions.

That the gentlemen who promoted the Dungannon Meeting, have held forth to their countrymen only one object, is a proof of the soundest wisdom. That attained, what else is wanting! It includes all that citizens can wish. But to call for a Bill of Rights, equalization of duties, and laws of wholesome policy, before you have a constitutional representation, is to demand the fruits of liberty before you have planted the tree. The tree once planted, these, and numberless other blessings, will be the spontaneous produce. To extort from the fears of an unconstitutional Parliament, beneficial laws, and useful declarations, were to waste that time in which a constitutional Parliament itself might be obtained. That alone is the present business of Ireland. Not a thought ought she to bestow upon any other object. To magnify the importance of inferior things, and if possible to divide the public attention, seem to be the only

P

sources

[106]

sources of hope left to the enemies of your freedom. In God's name, then, let the sagacity of Ireland keep pace with her virtue and her courage!

The advantages of adhering to the one object of the Dungannon meeting, will be greater than can be expressed. Your force directed to one point, will produce celerity; will prove irresistible. A handful of enterprising men of address may make their way in any direction, through millions intent on a diversity of pursuits, leading them different ways; but what can penetrate or impede those millions, when condensed to solidity by unity of object and unity of movement!

In using the word *celerity*, I have not meant to recommend any thing hasty in the proceedings of Ireland. Hastiness is only for those who, through want of public virtue and well ordered power, are obliged to snatch in a propitious moment at any necessary good. It is not so with Ireland. On the first of all earthly concerns, she may deliberate as becomes the importance of the occasion, and the dignity of human nature. Her counsels may be the counsels of men,

as

[107]

as free from fear as from a love of servitude.

Individuals in Ireland may bring forward motions for the annual *sittings* of a Parliament, or for a *more* equal representation of the people; but the ripened judgment of the community will require annual *elections*, as well as a representation *equal* and *universal*; in short, a constitutional Parliament, for none else deserves the name.

Before I conclude, give me leave to say, that, notwithstanding the apparent forgetfulness in this country at the present moment, of that Parliamentary Reform, which in many parts of it was of late so ardently fought, I feel a strong persuasion, that she will not be deaf to the Patriot voice of her sister, Ireland. In my opinion, they are equally interested in each other's prosperity; in each other's freedom. An enslaved nation, in the hands of any government, is an engine of tyranny too dangerous to a free people under the same government, to be an object of indifference. As the freedom of Great Britain could not be secure, were Ireland completely enslaved; so neither

P 2

could

could there be safety to the freedom of Ireland, although ever so well established within, while Great Britain should remain without liberty. By means of a corrupt legislature, faction might send its armies across the Irish channel as it did across the Atlantic.

With the greatest respect, I have the honour to subscribe myself,

Your well-wisher,

JOHN CARTWRIGHT.

Marnham, 31st Aug. 1783.

Lisburn, October 11, 1783.

S I R,

AS Chairman of the Ulster Committee of Correspondence, I am directed to return you our warmest thanks for your very obliging and useful communications on the Subject of a Parliamentary Reform, to assure you, that we entertain the most grateful
sense

sense of your kind attention, and of the great trouble you have taken on this occasion, and to enclose you a copy of the Resolves of the Provincial Assembly of Volunteers.

Our acknowledgments had been sooner made, had not the multiplicity of business which devolved on this Committee, both antecedent and subsequent to the meeting at Dungannon, very much engrossed our time; this seeming neglect we rely on your good nature to excuse.

The Provinces of Leinster and Connaught have already called general meetings on the same subject; Munster had in part declared before; and there is no doubt will now join the rest. You will observe, that in the public resolves of Ulster, we have confined ourselves to such general principles and objects, as we were convinced would secure unanimity both in this and the other Provinces—on the specific mode of Reform the Provinces might differ; different opinions might have arisen amongst ourselves; our plan of Reform (the out lines of which

I annex

I annex) is therefore submitted to the grand National Convention ; what they shall agree upon, the kingdom at large, I dare say, will acquiesce in, and support with their united powers ; and against that union resistance will be vain.

In the course of our deliberations the utmost attention was paid to the opinions and communications of all our illustrious and much respected Correspondents ; we could not, however, in every point apply them to the situation of this kingdom ; and where we find great and good men, equally zealous in the cause, differ with respect to the mode, our only choice was to adopt that which seemed to us most applicable to the country we live in.

Our counties, towns, and parishes are now taking up the subject, and calling public meetings to declare their accession to the Dungannon Resolves, and to instruct their Representatives on the subject of a Parliamentary Reform. We earnestly wish to see the good people of Great Britain press forward in the promotion of the same important

tant object, convinced that the united efforts of the Sister Nations must prove irresistible.

I am, with the utmost respect,

S I R,

Your most obedient humble servant

W. M. S H A R M A N.

*Dr. Jebb,
Parliament-Street.*

[It is presumed, that each of the gentlemen, who communicated their ideas to Colonel Sharman, has received a similar letter.]

HEADS of a PLAN of a PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, proposed by the ULSTER COMMITTEE of CORRESPONDENCE to the PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY of VOLUNTEERS, and by them referred to the GRAND NATIONAL CONVENTION.

Annual Parliaments—Election by Ballot. Mean, decayed, or depopulated Boroughs to be deprived. The diminution of Members thereby occasioned to be supplied by giving Representatives to such considerable Towns as are not now represented, and by encreasing

encreasing the number of Representatives for counties, cities, and great towns.

QUALIFICATION.

In counties, every protestant male, (ideots, criminals, &c. excepted) having inhabited twelve months, and for that time possessed freehold worth forty shillings per annum clear, or any kind of property to the value of 20l. over and above legal debts, to be an elector.—In cities and towns the same qualifications as in counties to entitle a person to vote—also living in a house for which he pays 5l. yearly rent, or more—no menial servants however to vote, either in county, city, or town, unless a householder, paying taxes.

Every person offering to vote, (if required by any candidate or elector) to be obliged to swear to his qualification, and that he will vote for such candidate or candidates, as he believes most likely to support the liberties of the people in Parliament—and also to take the oath against bribery—all votes once given to stand unimpeachable, but any elector swearing falsely, and thereof convicted by verdict of a jury,

to

to forfeit 20l. to the prosecutor, lose his franchise for ever, and suffer the punishment allotted for perjury. If any officer make a false return, and thereof convicted by verdict of a jury, disabilities, heavy penalties, and a new election to take place.

Every Member returned, before taking his seat, besides the present oaths, to swear that he, nor no person for him, at his cost or knowledge, has, directly or indirectly, bribed any elector to vote for him.

A reasonable compensation to be made to the patrons of disfranchised Boroughs, also to those of such as from having the elective suffrage vested in a few, shall become free cities or Boroughs, at the national expence.

Extension of suffrage to such description of Roman Catholics as the National Convention may deem proper objects of that great trust.

Elections to be held on same day in the different baronies, half baronies, or parishes, so as to finish in one, or in a very few days.

Q

Total

[114]

Total exclusion of pensioners and placemen, save that the Lord Lieutenant may appoint any of the public officers of the Crown, not exceeding six at any one time, to sit, debate, and explain the public business, but not to vote.

Since the preceding sheets were worked off, we have procured a Copy of Dr. JEBB's first Letter to Col. SHARMAN, which we now subjoin.

TO LIEUT. COL. SHARMAN, &c.

S I R,

I AM informed by Mr. Jay, in a letter dated the first instant, that the Committee, of which you are Chairman, have done me the honour to desire, that I would communicate to you my sentiments respecting a Parliamentary reform.

Ever since the commencement of the late important movements in your kingdom, I have conceived the reformation of your House of Commons as a measure *essentially necessary*

[115]

necessary to the establishment of the liberties of Ireland upon a permanent foundation.

You have wisely reserved the consideration of this work to the present moment. If it be conducted with the same manly and determined spirit, which has characterized your former exertions, there is no doubt, but that under the providence of Heaven, you will secure to yourselves and your posterity, a portion of natural felicity—of domestic peace—of external honour, for transcending what have hitherto been exhibited or enjoyed in any age or clime.

The matter before you may be considered with respect to the point of *expediency* and the point of *right*.

With respect to the latter, my opinion is divided; by the Constitution a certain portion of the legislative power is reserved to the Commons, who, from the circumstance of their numbers, are obliged to exercise this important function by delegation.

The power of delegation appears to me to be as extensive as the obligation of bearing

Q 2

ing

ing arms for the common defence. I have long considered every restriction of the right of suffrage, as an infringement of the law of Nature, as well as subversive of the Constitution of my country.

I am of opinion, also, that political truth and political expediency are terms synonymous; and therefore am disposed to think, that the only advice I can, with propriety, offer to a body of men who have conducted themselves with so much moderation, magnanimity and public spirit, is, "Go on, as you have begun, investigate the rights of freemen—assert them—establish them in their full extent. I cannot believe that any measure, founded in political truth, can be impossible to such exalted virtue."

However, as many expedients have been suggested upon the idea, that, on account of prejudices, what is strictly right cannot be put in practice, it may not be improper to enquire how far these expedients are likely to answer the intended purpose.

It has been conceived, that the addition of a certain number of county members would

would assist in balancing the corrupt representation of the boroughs—a measure, in my idea, as inexpedient as it is partial and unjust.

First, Because, if it fail in effectually over-balancing the powers of corruption, it encreases the grievance, by exhausting the national expence; as a Minister in such circumstances must employ a greater portion of the public treasure in gaining a majority than before. In Lord North's opinion, such a measure would have nothing in it formidable to an administration determined to govern by Court influence. On the decision of the great debate on this question, he was heard to declare, that the friends of the proposed reform would have been worsted, had the hundred knights been present, the majority that day far exceeding that number.

Secondly, The proposed addition would render the House of Commons too numerous. In Ireland, such an encrease of the county members as would be necessary to form an effectual balance to the borough interest

[118]

interest, would be greater in proportion than in England.

Thirdly, The seats for counties would be disposed of absolutely at the pleasure of a few of the principal landholders—while the great body of the freeholders would enjoy less of the election power than they do at present.

Lastly, The expences of contested elections, especially in the larger counties, would be most enormously encreased. It has also been suggested that it would be expedient to disfranchise some of the boroughs in those counties, where they are most numerous, especially such whose constitution is most exceptionable; and to make a compensation to the present proprietors at the public expence. Nothing can be urged, in my idea, against this measure. So far as it goes, it is both equitable and expedient. The transferring from such boroughs the right of election to townships, or districts, which, from the greater number of inhabitants, and other circumstances, appear more likely to preserve their independence, would be an improvement upon this idea.

[119]

The generous Principles you have adopted respecting Roman Catholics, have been attended with effects very different from what were expected by persons of less enlarged sentiments. There are few, perhaps who would not be alarmed at the idea of concealing to them the power of electing Representatives of their own persuasion. Very many might think it imprudent to allow them the exercise of the right of suffrage, were even their choice restricted to the persons of Protestants.

The local difficulties must be best known to persons on the spot. I can only reason from general principles. If men are allowed to hold property—to possess rights—to bear arms; I cannot see any substantial reason why they should not be also allowed a share in the appointment of those who make the laws. By such generous confidence, I should conceive, their prejudices would be softened, and their attachment to the public, of which they would then become a component part, increased. At any rate, so far as regards Protestants, the right of suffrage may safely be extended far beyond its present limits.

Sessional

Sessional Parliaments (i. e. Parliaments of a single session) are the only Parliaments that can be esteemed constitutional: The nearer you approach to right and antient usage, the nearer you will approach to the point of true political expedience.

With respect to the mode of effecting the reform in question, I own, I feel strong objections to the idea of applying to the House of Commons by petition. If the present mode of delegation answers not the purpose of its institution, it is the proper office of the persons immediately interested (i. e. the *constituent body*), to form a plan for its amendment.

May I be permitted, without imputation of presumption, to express my unreserved opinion on this momentous subject.

After passing resolutions expressive of the rights of the people to review the whole system of delegation, and declaratory of the principles upon which a true and proper representation ought to be constructed, let a committee from yourselves be appointed to draw the outline of a plan which you shall judge

judge to be effectual—the most extensive and liberal that the times will bear.

Let this plan be proposed to the House of Commons; and at the same time, let a certain period be specified, in which you conceive the wisdom of that House may finally complete the plan you shall offer to their consideration. And lastly, let your present assembly be adjourned to a reasonable time beyond the period, in which the plan may be conceived to be offered for assent to the other branches of the Legislature. The intervening conduct of Parliament will suggest the proper measures to be adopted at such adjourned meeting.

Petition implies a power in the House of Commons to reject your suit. It transfers the authority from the senders to the sent; It supposes in the majority of the House a dignity and independence, which the very nature of the petition proves they do not possess. It calls upon them to reform themselves; which a corrupt body of men never did, nor can do.

R

Thus,

[122]

Thus, with an undisguised heart, I have unfolded my idea upon this important question. May consistency, public spirit, and magnanimity, with true wisdom, continue to preside in your assemblies! Though absent in person, yet in spirit, and most fervent wishes for your success, I shall be present with you.

I remain, with great respect,

For the Committee and yourself,

Your obedient servant,

Aug. 13, 1783.

JOHN JEBB.

N E W B O O K S,

Printed for J. STOCKDALE, opposite Burlington-House, Piccadilly.

This Day is Published, Price 2s. 6d. sewed, or 3s. bound,
THE HISTORY of SANDFORD and MERTON,
a work intended for the use of Children.

“ Suffer the little Children to come unto me, and forbid
“ them not.”

Printed for J. Stockdale, opposite Burlington-House,
Piccadilly.

Where may be had in a few days,
Neatly Printed in 3 Vols, 12mo. Price 7s. 6d. sewed, or 9s
bound,