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Review

A
LETTER
ON
PARLIAMENTARY REFORM;
CONTAINING
THE SKETCH OF A PLAN.

By JOHN HORNE TOOKE, Esq.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

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1782

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Letter was first published in 1782, addressed to LORD ASHBURTON.—It was written by Mr. HORNE in consequence of the Debate on Parliamentary Reform in the House of Commons on the 7th of May in that year; and as the opinion of so able and celebrated a man as Mr. HORNE TOOKE must have great weight, and be eagerly sought after, it is naturally concluded, that re-publishing this Letter will be highly acceptable at this time, when the same measure is again so much agitated.

A L E T.

LETTER

TO

LORD ASHBURTON,

FROM

MR. HORNE.

Occasioned by the DEBATE in the HOUSE OF
COMMONS, on the 7th of May, 1782,

ON MR. PITT'S MOTION

FOR A REFORM OF PARLIAMENT.

MY LORD,
THE importance of the subject on
which I address your Lordship, suffi-
ciently dispenses with preface, introduc-
tion, apology, compliment, or ornament.

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And the criticalness of the moment excuses hasty publication. It would be ridiculous to cast a thought on the manner of my expression, if the matter is useful.

By the vote of the House of Commons on Tuesday last, Parliament, it seems, do not yet think it necessary to take into consideration the state of representation in this country. However, my Lord, notwithstanding that vote, I am still sanguine enough to believe that we are at the eve of a peaceful revolution, more important than any which has happened since the settlement of our Saxon ancestors in this country; and which will convey down to endless posterity all the blessings of which political society is capable.

My Lord, my expectations are greatly raised

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raised, instead of being depressed, by the objections which were urged against Mr. Pitt's motion,

One Gentleman says, "He cannot see any good purpose the motion would answer; for it would not assist Government with a ship, a man, or a guinea, towards carrying on the war with vigour, or towards establishing that much wished-for object, peace."

My Lord, I hope the measure will be made to produce to Government both *ships* and *men* and *guineas*. For they would be very poor politicians indeed, who could not, in one measure, comprehend many purposes: and still poorer, who should miss the present opportunity of obtaining, by this one measure of Reform, every desirable object of the State.

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Another gentleman apprehends, that
 "nothing less than giving every man in
 "the kingdom a vote, would give uni-
 "versal satisfaction."

My Lord, I trust that there are very
 few persons in this kingdom who desire so
 improper and impracticable a measure.
 But if there were many, the wisdom of
 Parliament would correct their plan, and
 the corrected would be well pleased at
 the correction.

Other gentlemen assert, that "the
 "Constitution as it now stands, has stood
 "for ages without any material altera-
 "tion."

My Lord, it will not be difficult to
 prove the contrary, by an easy inquiry;
 and if they will begin with the last un-
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exampled alteration recently made, by
 the late Administration, at SALTASH, the
 objectors will hardly have countenance
 to proceed any further.

Another gentleman, "thinks the ques-
 "tion premature, and that this is not the
 "time."

Another, that "the people do not de-
 "fire it."

And another, that the people CANNOT,
 indeed desire it at any time; because
 "they have no voice but in the House
 "of Commons."

My Lord, it would be safer for this lat-
 ter doctrine, if another similar doctrine
 could be coupled with it; and if it could be
 proved that the people have no HANDS
 neither

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neither but in the House of Commons. This VIRTUAL voice of the people of England resembles too nearly the VIRTUAL representation of the people of America in the same place, to be attended with any happy consequences.

But, my Lord, I turn with pleasure from these little subterfuges, towards what I suppose to be passing in your Lordship's mind. The end which I believe your Lordship to have at all times in your view, is, happiness to all beings capable of happiness : and especially *human* happiness, as universally extended as possible. But though an individual's wishes may be, and ought to be, unbounded; however exalted, his actual endeavours must usually be limited : and therefore NATIONAL happiness, with the permanent

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permanent security of that happiness, is the ultimate object of a Patriot.

To this end all his other objects must be considered only as means. Even freedom itself is valuable, only as a means indispensably necessary to that end.

My Lord, I find myself compelled to repeat these well-known sentiments ; because most of the errors of mankind in all their pursuits, arise from stopping short in their progress, and mistaking some means for the end. We every day behold it in the practice of the covetous, the ambitious, &c. And *at this moment*, I conceive it to be necessary to warn the well-meaning Patriot from the same mistake.

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My Lord, I shall not waste a word to shew the necessity of a Reform in the Representation of this country. I shall only consider the mode of Reform; and endeavour to shew, that it is not difficult to embrace every interest in the State, and to satisfy well-meaning men of every description. To this end I am compelled first to remove the prejudices, and, indeed, *just objections*, which some persons entertain to all the modes of Reform, which have hitherto been recommended.

My virtuous and inestimable friend, MAJOR CARTWRIGHT, is a zealous and an able advocate for *equal and universal* representation; that is, for an *equal and universal* share of every man in the Government. My Lord, I conceive his argument to be this: Every man has an equal right to freedom and security. No

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man can be free who has not a voice in the framing of those laws, by which he is to be governed. He who is not represented, has not this voice; therefore, every man has an equal right to representation, or to a share in the Government. His final conclusion is, that every man has a right to an equal share in representation.

Now, my Lord, I conceive the error to lie *chiefly* in the conclusion. For there is very great difference between having an *equal right* to a share, and a right to an *equal share*. An estate may be devised by will amongst many persons in different proportions; to one five pounds, to another five hundred, &c. each person will have an equal right to his share; but not a right to an equal share.

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This principle is farther attempted to be enforced by an assertion, that, "The all of one man is as dear to him, as the all of another man is to that other." But, my Lord, this maxim will not hold by any means; for a small all is not, for very good reasons, so dear as a great all. A small all may be lost, and easily regained; it may very often, and with great wisdom, be risked for the chance of a greater; it may be so small, as to be little or not at all worth defending or caring for. *Ibit eo qui zonam perdidit.* But a large all can never be recovered; it has been amassing and accumulating, perhaps, from father to son for many generations; or it has been the product of a long life of industry and talents; or the consequence of some circumstance which will never return. But I am sure I need not dwell upon this. Without placing the extremes

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extremes of fortune in array against each other, every man, whose all has varied at different periods of his life, can speak for himself, and say, whether the dearness in which he held these different alls was equal. The lowest order of men consume their all daily, as fast as they acquire it.

My Lord, justice and policy require that benefit and burthen, that the share of power, and the share of contribution to that power, should be as nearly proportioned as possible. If Aristocracy will have all power, they are tyrants, and unjust to the people; because Aristocracy alone does not bear the whole burthen. If the smallest individual of the people contends to be equal in power to the greatest individual, he too is, in his turn,

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unjust

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unjust in his demands ; for his burthen and contribution are not equal.

Hitherto, my Lord, I have only argued against the *equality* ;---I shall now venture to speak against the *universality* of representation, or of a share in the government ; for the terms amount to the same.

Freedom and security ought surely to be equal and universal. But, my Lord, I am not at all backward to contend, that some of the members of a society may be *free* and *secure*, without having a share in the government. The happiness and freedom, and security of the whole, may even be advanced by the exclusion of some, not from freedom and security, but from a share in the government.

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My Lord, extreme misery, extreme dependence, extreme ignorance, extreme selfishness (I mean that mistaken selfishness, which excludes all public sense), all these are just and proper causes of exclusion from a share in the government, as well as extreme criminality, which is admitted to exclude ; for thither they all tend, and there they frequently finish.

My Lord, I know I shall receive no answer to this, but---the difficulty of drawing the line of exclusion on these accounts ; and the possibility or danger of abuse, by a pretence of these extremities. The bare *possibility* of abuse, I hold to be no argument ; the danger and the difficulty I will shew to be easily removeable.

SKETCH

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SKETCH OF A PLAN.

ENGLAND* and WALES shall be divided † into 513 districts. Each district ‡ shall chuse one representative.

Every

* The present number of members for England and Wales in the House of Commons is 513. The Union with Scotland makes it improper to alter the proportion. It has not appeared that Scotland is at all dissatisfied with the state of its representation: at all events it does not belong to this part of the country, but to that, to settle their own representation to their own satisfaction.

† The old division of the country need not to be departed from, but will exceedingly facilitate the division into districts, for the purpose of representation.

‡ The public ought never to receive a benefit to the injury of an individual. Exclusive claims of representation have

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Every male *native* of Great Britain or Ireland, at the age of twenty-one years, shall be entitled to vote, and shall have become a species of property through the connivance of the nation. Very ample compensation therefore must be made, and easily may be made, to the possessors of this scandalous property.

Who are comprehended here under the description of *native*?

What provisions shall be made relative to the *rates*?

These questions, with a multitude of other questions and objections which may be proposed and offered to every part of this plan, are foreseen, and may easily be determined and obviated.

The number of inhabitants of England and Wales are calculated at nine millions. One fourth of that number, or 2,250,000 are estimated to be males of the age of twenty-one years.

If the number of members (513) be multiplied by (4000), the number of votes required for each, it will give 2,052,000.

Although a tenth part of these should forbear to vote, yet the future part of the plan will furnish a great overplus of the number of votes for each district.

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and who at the *time of election* shall have been *rated* for the space of the preceding year, to the land-tax or parish rates in England or Wales, at *2l. per annum*, shall be *intitled* to vote for a representative in parliament of that district in which he is rated.

No election for a representative shall be completed by a smaller number of votes

The manner of payment may be easily settled, and so as to make all improper conduct, or mistake in the payer or receiver, or in the returning-officer, impossible, as well as to prevent any possible doubt or disputes concerning the person elected.

The election levy can never amount to less than four millions one hundred and four thousand pounds annually.

It is here understood, that every person may, if he pleases, vote in every parish in which he is rated; and in every district.

The annual revenue to the state will more effectually secure for ever the annual election of a parliament, than any laws for that purpose which ever were, or can be invented.

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votes than 4000—unless as hereafter provided.

Every elector, at the time of giving his suffrage, shall pay into the hands of the *presiding officer* *2l. 2s.*

The votes for a representative of each district shall be taken at a *certain* place in each parish of the respective district; so that each vote may be taken in that parish where the voter is rated.

Election for representatives in parliament shall be *annual*; and at a *certain* time of the year.

If at any election the number of persons voting in the district shall fall short of 4000, then all persons in the said district, who are rated therein at *20l. per*

D *annum*,

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annum, or upwards (and who have *already voted*) shall be intitled to give a second vote, paying again as before 2*l.* 2*s.*

And if, after this second poll, the number of votes shall still fall short of 4000, then all persons rated in the said district at 50*l.* *per annum*, and upwards (and who have *already voted* in the first and second poll), shall be intitled to give a third vote, paying again as before 2*l.* 2*s.* *

* Perhaps it may be found adviseable, after the second poll, to hold the election no longer in parishes, but in the centre of the district; the persons who are (if necessary) to vote after the two first polls, might better afford to go from home: all of the higher orders waiting the issue of the election on the spot, might proceed to the fourth, fifth, or eighth poll, as necessary or convenient.

The revenue, at its lowest amount, must be certain.

And

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And if, after this third poll, the number of votes shall still fall short of 4000, then all persons rated in the said district at 100*l.* *per annum* and upwards, (and who have already voted in the first, second, and third poll) shall be intitled to give a fourth vote, paying again, as before 2*l.* 2*s.*

And if, after this fourth poll &c. than all persons rated, &c. at 200*l.* &c. (and who have, &c.) shall be intitled to give a fifth vote, &c.

And in like manner, if need be, ascending for every additional 100*l.* rated an additional vote, paying an additional 2*l.* 2*s.*

Every representative shall receive out of the election levy paid by the electors,

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the sum of 400*l.* to be paid to him by the presiding officer of the respective district.

If, at the conclusion of the poll, the number of votes given shall still fall short of 4000; then the majority of votes given shall determine the election: and the deficiency of the sum of eight thousand four hundred pounds, shall be made good by a proportional assessment (by the pound, according to the rates) on such *non voters* who are rated at 20*l.* and upwards, in the said district.

The presiding officer of each district shall, together with his return of the writ, deliver in to the Exchequer, the sum received from the electors (together with the names of those who have polled) except the sum of 400*l.* which he shall

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at the same time pay to the representative,

Each representative shall, before he is permitted to take his seat in Parliament, produce a voucher from the Exchequer for at least 8000*l.* and for as much more (exclusive of 400*l.*) as shall have been paid by the voters at his election.

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My Lord, if some plan on a principle something like the foregoing, should be taken into consideration, the justice and wisdom of parliament would, I doubt not, in the proper places insert the proper figures. But, in my judgment, the qualification which barely *intitles* a man to vote, should be very low, as I have placed it; but the sum to be paid in with the vote should be *higher* than I have placed it; and the assessment for the deficiency ought not to descend lower than on those rated at 20 $\%$. This revenue would be almost if not altogether voluntary. It would be *certain* as to its lowest amount of 4,104,000 l . It would be paid in net, and punctually to Government. It would support a war if necessary;

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necessary; but it would more probably produce an instant peace: for it is a resource which no country but our own can enjoy; and which would instantly cast our enemies into despair. It would enable the present Ministry not only to forbear additional taxes, but immediately to relieve many of the heavy burdens of the people. And it would inspire the people with an ardour to bear any necessary burden cheerfully.

My Lord, if the virtue of the *times*, or if the understanding of the *times*, (I hope I shall not offend any one by laying the fault there) would permit the plan, which I have thus sketched partially and imperfectly on the spur of the present occasion, to be carried to the extent of which it is capable, and that the election levy were by that means to become the

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the only national tax or imposition in the country, the people would instantly be relieved from full three fourths of their present burdens, and the poorer sort from every burden. The constitution of the government would become eternal; the national difficulties would vanish; the landed and commercial interest would flourish; most of the penal laws would be done away; the statutes would at one stroke be reduced to a single volume; and that monstrous tax and burden upon the people of law-suits and processes, (equal to and more vexatious than a hundred other taxes) would be almost abolished. This country would become the refuge, the warehouse, and the metropolis of the world.

But your Lordship will hardly think me serious, if I proceed in this strain.

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I may, however surely, without being too romantic, suppose that some part of the administration may be clear sighted enough to see that the people must be satisfied in their just expectations, and most surely will be so. Ministers will surely grant with a good grace what cannot be much longer withheld. They will at last (if not infatuated) catch the present fortunate opportunity (in the midst of our distresses) to combine an important measure of revenue, with the cession of their rights to the people. They will not wait till the people of Ireland have seized by force what we urge with humble intreaty. They will not wait to be received with scorn and hootings for their offer to us of that, which we should now receive with gratitude.

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I will venture to assert that they have no time to lose.

His Majesty's conduct has rescued his own personal character from censure, (for in spite of forms and decorum Kings have a personal character) and I doubt not he will for ever henceforward remain very dear to his subjects. He stands fully justified from all that has passed; for he has listened to the voice of his people, where the constitution intended that their voice should be heard, and to which place the royal ear is by the same constitution directed. Members are sent to Parliament to keep up the communication between the King and his subjects. There it is, in a real and fair Parliament, that the people wish their voice to be truly heard; and that

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that they may have removed from them the occasion of those honest, because necessary, though irregular meetings, petitions and interference to which they have for some years past been involuntarily driven. But the voice of the people in the present reign has not been heard till lately (and then heard but once) within the walls of the House of Commons, nor will it ever be heard there again; fresh errors and fresh misleadings will again take place; the voice of contractors, of pensioners and jobbers, together with the proprietors of a few decayed burgage tenures, will again be called the only voice of the people, unless the honesty, or the good sense of administration afford the remedy by reforming substantially the vices of representation.

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We have been accustomed to be told, that there was something *behind* the throne? My Lord, there can be nothing behind the throne more malevolent to the rights of the people, than what we now see before it. The people are no longer to be cheated, they look to Administration for the late defeat of their wishes.

What! can they who have carried all for themselves, carry nothing for the people, who, if ministers themselves are to be credited, have pushed them into office? The people know that if all the present administration had chosen to do them justice, if they had been half as unanimous for national rights as they have been for national honours and emoluments, the question would have been highly

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highly carried last Tuesday. Good God! Is it always to be thus? one paymaster *denies*, the other *despises* the voice of the people.

What, says he, the people! If your hands are dirty, will you go to the puddle to clean them? I am heartily sorry, my Lord, that there should be any members of the present Administration who require to be informed, that the same thinness of the web which makes the water-bubble rise; when risen, makes it burst.

If they are timely wise, they will yet give to the people their *sober, moderate, fair and honest* rights.

The prerogative of the Crown, which
is

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is glorious to the Monarch, and beneficial to his subjects, they will place (as it ought to be placed) high, brilliant, and independent.—A great weight at bottom can bear a great weight at top.

Let the Aristocracy unenvied, enjoy their full and honourable proportion of influence to which they are justly intitled in the state; but let them cease, as a faction, to shackle the hands of their Sovereign, whilst they debase and plunder his subjects.

I am happy, my Lord, that, without forfeiting your friendship, I can venture to address these truths to you; and that I am able still to retain all those sentiments of veneration and affection for Lord Ashburton, which the public at large,

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large, and every individual who knows him, have, through the course of his life, entertained for Mr. Dunning.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient Servant,

Friday,

May 10, 1782.

JOHN HORNE *.

* Mr. HORNE had not in the year 1782 taken the additional name of TOOKE.

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