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THE
SYSTEM
OCCASIONED BY THE
SPEECH
OF
LEONARD SMELT, Esq.
Late Sub-Governor to their Royal Highnesses
THE
PRINCE OF WALES,
AND
BISHOP OF OSNABRUGH,
At the MEETING at
YORK,
DECEMBER 30, 1779.

From whence
But from the author of all ill, could spring
So deep a malice ——— though slow
Yet ever plotting ——— So much the fear
Of thunder, and the sword of Michael
Wrought still within them; and no less desire
To found this nether empire, which might rise
By *policy* and long process of time.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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T H E

S Y S T E M, &c.

I Have read lately in the public Papers a Speech, said to have been delivered by Mr. Smelt, late Sub-governor to their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and the Bishop of Osnabrugh, at a meeting holden at York the 30th of December. I have waited for some time to see whether that gentleman would not disavow the publication in the most authentic manner; but as he has thought fit to acquiesce in silence under the imputation of it, I am no longer at liberty to doubt that it conveys his real sentiments, and contains a faithful representation of those opinions which he chose to make public upon that solemn occasion.

It is not to Mr. Smelt that I now address myself. Though he is personally a stranger to me, I am willing to believe implicitly in

[4]

the testimonies that were that day given to the virtues of his *private* character, even by those who differed the most widely from the maxims he endeavoured to establish, and the arguments he laboured to enforce. I am, therefore, to give him credit as an honest man, that he spoke what he sincerely thought. He affirms, that "during his retirement, he had dedicated his time to the study of the constitution, and other national objects." His opinions, therefore, are not lightly taken up. They are founded upon study and mature deliberation: it would be the height of presumption to think any arguments of mine could convert him to the cause of freedom. Much less shall I be inclined to attribute to him those motives of self-interest, which he so ostentatiously disclaims in his own person; but which he has so *liberally* ascribed to the conduct of others; many of whom, if he had allowed himself to reflect, or had wished to inform himself, have given proofs of their public disinterestedness, at least equal to the sacrifice *he then* made, to entitle himself to the confidence of his hearers. I will tell him only, that his principles are not my

[5]

my principles; and I trust it will be found that they are not the principles of the constitution, or of the people of England; at least of those who have not lived so near the *splendour of Majesty*, as to be dazzled by its rays. Various are the delusions by which the minds of men are warped from sound judgment. It would be endless to investigate the secret causes which produce a perversion of the understanding; let it suffice when they bring forth dangerous and alarming doctrines, if the errors be confuted, and the safety and happiness of mankind preserved from the effects of their baneful tendency.

It is then to the people of England at large, it is to the body of the Freeholders, I address myself as an Englishman, and as a Freeholder. It is their attention I wish to awaken at this awful crisis. The appeal must be made to their feelings and understandings; and by their decision, we must abide. They alone can preserve the constitution by the known means which that very constitution has placed in their power, unless the revived doctrines of Toryism, *which are now avowed openly*, by one who must

[6]

must be considered as speaking the language of the Court, should receive their sanction and adoption.

The system of our Government is by no means intricate: like most useful machines, it consists but of few parts, and they are simple. King, Lords, and Commons. When united, they form the legislative body, the supreme power; when considered separately, they not only have each of them their peculiar function, but are contrived to act as checks upon each other. Either of these powers annihilated or absorbed into another, the constitution is changed. A new Government must arise, as different from the present as the constitutions of Russia, of Venice, or of Holland. The Commons chosen out of the body of the people, and returning back to the mass of their constituents at stated periods, form the Democratical part, and are the guardians of our purse and liberty. The Lords, who not being a fluctuating body, by their birth are entitled to their seats in the great hereditary Council of the kingdom, form an Aristocratical power; to give gravity, dignity, and consistency to our laws, by
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[7]

their property, the rank they hold, and the respect they owe to their situations. To preserve activity, energy, and decision in the Government, the *executive principle* is devolved upon the Monarch, under certain limitations, who is responsible to the other two branches, through his Ministers, for the exercise of the trust reposed in him. Suppose now, for a moment, that the House of Commons could either become incorporated with the Lords, or sitting separate, could vote to themselves the same privileges, assuming to them and their heirs for ever those seats in the Legislature which they now hold by the election of the people. Suppose that the House of Peers were to be deprived of their hereditary honours, and to be sent to Parliament by the voices of the Freeholders; does not every one see that such a change must essentially alter the whole system in favour of Democracy or Aristocracy? Again, let the King have the power of naming the Members of the House of Commons, or displacing the Peers at his pleasure; or let offices and the executive powers of the Government be assumed by either, or both the Houses of Parliament;
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[8]

does any one doubt that such an encroachment, on one side or the other, must either annihilate the share our constitution has allotted to Monarchy, or render it absolute: in short, that our King would either become a Despot or a Doge of Venice. Now if an open encroachment of one branch upon the other necessarily destroys that equilibrium upon which depends the œconomy of the whole, will it be the less destroyed in that the encroachment is brought on silently, gradually, imperceptibly, but as effectually by *fraud* as if by *force*? The difference will only be this---That in the latter instance, the people have their rights *stolen* from them; are lulled into security by a false appearance, which, like the Senate of Augustus, interposes to their resentments a specious phantom, instead of a reality; outward forms, which they have been accustomed to respect, but which bind only the yoke of tyranny the faster upon their necks, by the semblance of having given their own consents to those edicts, which the will of the Prince shall have thought fit to impose upon them. Better, if they chuse slavery, that they should freely *give* what they

[9]

they think it not worth while to *defend*, and, like the people of Denmark, make a voluntary surrender of their liberties at the feet of the Throne. They will then know at least, the form of Government they live under, and where to direct their indignation, when the oppressions of power shall be no longer supportable.

I flatter myself, I need say no more to prove that he, who is a friend to the constitution of Great-Britain, must be tried by this test, and by this test alone: does he endeavour to keep separate, and to maintain the energy of the three component parts of it, or does he by weakening or blending them endeavour to throw more power into any one of them, than was assigned to it in its institution. The reader will observe, that I do not here assert, that no man can think himself a sincere friend to the interests of his country, who wishes an alteration in the form of our Government. Men think so variously in political speculations, that I should not be surpris'd if there were found amongst us some few, (and very few I trust they are) whose opinion might lead them to the side of a Government

[10]

vernment merely popular : I wish I could add, that I believe Mr. Smelt to be the only man amongst us, whose opinions lean to the throwing the whole power into the Crown. These are the two extremes equally to be dreaded by the friend to the constitution, whose motto is the old adage, *nolumus Leges Angliæ mutari.*

Human institutions must, from their nature, be imperfect, and imperfections there certainly are in our form of government, as in every other. It is impossible that a system so finely imagined, and which embraces in it the objects of all other forms of government, can be totally exempt from their defects. But if those defects arise not from the *principles* of our constitution, but from the passions of human nature, which no laws can keep within the exact bounds that duty prescribes to them, there is no other remedy than, that every honest citizen should keep up a diligent and unwearied attention, to oppose the growing evil, before it becomes too strong for their endeavours, and for all the guards which the laws and the wisdom of our ancestors have provided for our security.

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[11]

To consider whether such defects had not actually produced a danger, which, if not immediately attended to, will subvert *in toto* the spirit and soul of our constitution, after having already occasioned to us such political evils and distresses, as affect the very existence of our State. To provide some remedy for the cause, and to stop if possible, the ruin brought upon us as the effect, I take to have been the occasion of the meeting holden in the first county of the kingdom, on the 30th of December. If the distresses of the country are real, and if they can in a great measure be fairly traced up to the amazing increase of the influence of the Crown, will not every Englishman, who has the good of his country at heart, unite in thinking it high time to oppose that influence, to mitigate at least, as far as possible, the effects of it upon the two other branches of the Legislature? If any man can be found, to doubt whether such influence be really increased, or in what proportion, let him cast his eyes only on the state of the revenue, under the administration of the Crown, at any former period, and compare it with the state at present,

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sent, I will trust to him, in the conclusion, that in a mixed Government, like ours, the Prince who acquires to himself the powers of corruption, will employ it to that purpose.

At the time of the Revolution, "The expences of the late King James the Second, by actual payments in money for three years, from Lady-day, 1685, to Lady-day, 1688," upon a medium, as delivered to Parliament, stood as follows :

To the Navy	417,462	12	10 $\frac{1}{3}$
Ordnance	83,493	9	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Forces	610,883	1	5 $\frac{1}{2}$
Household	66,006	2	2 $\frac{1}{4}$
Treasurer of the Chamber	28,443	5	2 $\frac{3}{4}$
Wardrobe	15,125	3	11 $\frac{1}{2}$
Robes	2,676	14	9
Works	24,663	19	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Foreign Ministers	32,657	9	7
Stables	11,045	13	0 $\frac{2}{3}$
Sundry fees and salaries paid at the Exchequer and alibi	56,495	12	7
Pensions and Annuities	146,703	17	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Band of Pensioners	6,000	0	0
Bounties in great sums paid at the Exchequer	27,680	10	8 $\frac{1}{4}$
Secret Services, per Mr. Guy	89,968	8	2 $\frac{3}{4}$
Per Secretary of State	6,066	13	4
Sir Stephen Fox	9,333	6	8
Privy Purse	26,416	13	4
Mint paid out of coinage			
Jewels and plate	15,740	6	0 $\frac{1}{4}$
Impost Bills	96	12	0
Contingencies not reducible to the foregoing heads	22,403	6	3 $\frac{3}{4}$
Total	£. 1,699,363	2	0

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The amount then of all the expences of Government, when King William came to the Throne, fell short of *one million seven hundred thousand pounds*. It has been calculated that the Civil List alone of George the Third, together with his German revenues, interest of debts due to the late King, hereditary revenue from Ireland, and other payments, (exclusive of the revenues which were produced to him by America, before the war, from quit-rents, &c.) amount to no less a sum than *two millions three hundred and fifty thousand pounds*.

In the supplies for the year 1779,

	£.	s.	d.
The Navy amounted to	4,589,069	6	1
Army	5,308,361	1	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Militia	704,721	4	8
Ordnance	917,374	8	9
Miscellaneous services	3,163,914	8	2
Deficiencies	206,175	17	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
Total	£. 14,889,616	8	4

The total amount of the taxes, including the collecting them is about 13,000,000l. so that adding to them one million vote of credit, they still fall short of these services

[14]

vices alone voted as above, in the sum of 889,616l. 8s. 4d. to which deficiency must be likewise added the deduction of the whole expence of the collection.

The charge then of making good this deficiency; and of the 800,000l. Civil List, which has recently been augmented in one hundred thousand pounds, and is, in future, to have the addition of another hundred thousand pounds, for the maintenance of the Royal Family, together with other expences of Government, not included under the six foregoing heads, can be no otherwise provided for but by increase of the national debt, in some way or other. That debt approaches already to near 200,000,000l. the interest of which is supposed to amount to *half the total of the landed income*. All this annual expence by loan is so much additional means of corruption, jobs, and partialities in the power of the Minister, through whose hands it passes, both in the bargains with the subscribers, and in the expenditure of the money subscribed. Add to all this, the influence acquired to the Crown, not only from the collection of these immense sums issuing through

[15]

through the Treasury, the Collectors and Dispensers of which are at the appointment of that Board; but from the opportunities of favour in all the nominations, through such extended services, by sea and land: the power that is derived from Ireland; 'till lately from America; still from the West-Indies; the disposal of Church benefices; the ascendant the Minister has gained over the East-India Company, where he is become almost *the sole Director*; (a power which would alone suffice for the ambition of the Minister of any kingdom of the second order in Europe) the interference he has found means to introduce into almost every Company established in England. In short, follow, if it is possible, this influence through all its labyrinth, you will scarcely find a family so obscure, in the remotest corner of the island (except those who actually till the soil) that does not, in some degree, through themselves or their connections, look up with hopes or fears to him that *gives*, and to him that *takes away*. Is there a Representative of a county, or a single borough, who is not sooner or later sent

[16]

sent by his constituents to demand favours for individuals, or jobs for corporations?

This, reader, is the situation in which we are told, that the cause of our national calamities proceeds from the *too little power of the Crown*. Alas! what further power can we bestow upon it, unless, by the repeal of all our laws, we submit our lives, our liberties, and the poor remains of our property, to the arbitrary discretion of the Monarch? Thank God we are still permitted to be in possession of our *Habeas Corpus*, that bulwark of our freedom; nor can our blood be spilt but by the consent of our juries. Yet, if the guardians of the common purse are gained by the spirit of corruption, and that spirit is suffered to acquire strength every hour, in the same ratio as our distress accumulates, it needs no prophet from the dead to tell how long those invaluable privileges will remain to us, which I fear we at this moment owe rather to the weakness of our Governors than the virtues of our Parliaments.

Far be it from me to imitate Mr. Smelt in tearing aside the veil that covers the *splendour of Majesty*, by bringing forward the
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[17]

person of the King for the discussion of the public. His Majesty deserves, I dare say, the sacred appellation of a *Patriot*, or well-wisher to his country. What Prince desires its destruction? Mr. Smelt also is a Patriot after his own fashion: but he will permit me to say, the expression of the *only Patriot in the country* does imply a singular mode of thinking or of acting, which distinguishes the person to whom it is applied from all others, who feel themselves, by their honest labours, entitled to that flattering epithet. The private virtues of his Majesty are too well known to need the testimony of any man. The maxim, founded in the *civility of the law*, "that the King can do no wrong," refers us to his Ministers, and to the annals of his reign for his character in the list of Princes.---Our law knows only *the Crown*, not the Prince who wears it. And if the protection of our law is not strong enough to defend us from the errors of the worst of Kings, we shall hold our liberties by a precarious tenure under the wisest and the best of Monarchs; nor would it be sufficient argument to induce us to suffer the chains to be rivetted upon us, that it is left to future times to let us feel the

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weight of them. Cruel, indeed, would it be for Princes, if all the mischiefs of their Governments were to be attributed directly to their personal character. *Educated* in the lust of power by those who will never think their authority sufficient, whilst there is one of the rights of mankind exempted from it; surrounded by flattery and misrepresentation; incapable of seeing for themselves, and trusting always to those whose interest is to deceive; how happy ought they to esteem themselves, when they can act only through the ministry of others, whose misconduct is liable to the revision of the public, and to the chastisement of the laws. This is the language of the British constitution; this that doctrine of Whiggism which is so severely reprobated by the *Instructor* of our future Sovereign---a doctrine as essential, however, to the security, the happiness, and glory of the Prince who has the wisdom to adopt it, as it is necessary to the very existence of a free Government. And what has been the struggle of this reign, but the *contrary principle* unhappily instilled into the bosom of unsuspecting youth by the interested ambition of *Instructors*. The terror of submitting to be advised by those who

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were capable of advising, what evils, what public calamities, what personal insults, and humiliations, has it not occasioned? But, therefore, the power of the Crown should be augmented---No---not all the authority of the most despotic country has ever yet been able to *command* respect where it is not supported by the conduct of the Ministers, and the approbation of an applauding people. In vain have the powers of corruption extended themselves in diffusing the *undue influence* of the Crown, whilst its just prerogatives have fallen into contempt. In vain has an unwearied system been pursued of dividing, weakening, villifying every thing that was great and respectable amongst us. In vain all the arts of a Medicean policy, employed to propagate distrust, dissension, and disunion through the land. Unhappy system! what has it produced, but strength and vigour to our enemies; revolt through all the dependencies of our Empire; faction, ruin, and consternation, in Great Britain.

Twenty years are not yet elapsed since his present Majesty, at his accession, found this country the envy of all Europe. The House of Bourbon humbled at her feet---her trade ruined, her fleet annihilated---vanquished

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in Asia, driven from the continent of America, flying before the British flag in all parts of the world---At home, happy and united, we could scarce reap the harvest of our commerce, and our streets resounded with exultation---What was the source of all this national power?---Was it alone the millions we expended? But our disgraces, our ruin, have proved more expensive to us---And the loss of America will have cost us dearer than the war we engaged in for its security, with all our conquests and acquisitions. Has the nation lost its character? Are our seamen less brave, our Commanders less able, than when we gave the law to that element, which now scarcely protects our coasts from insult and invasion? It is that *system* which the *secret Counsellors* of the Crown (be they whom they will) have steadfastly and uniformly supported, that has undone this country. From the first half hour of the present reign, talents have been suspected, reputation esteemed dangerous, popularity a crime, and even the union of friendship, or of kindred, looked upon with jealous eyes---Hence all the artifice by which, one by one, every old servant of the Crown was driven from the Council Board.

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That genius, whose name will never be mentioned but with gratitude and veneration by posterity; that sun which is so lately set to rise no more, was the first sacrifice to this perfidious policy---by degrees the bann was put upon the very name of Whiggism---Those families who had been the foremost in the Revolution, or who had been the firmest supports to the House of Brunswick upon the Throne, were considered as the enemies of the State, and rewarded with disgust and disappointment. *New Counsels and new Counsellors.* The glories of the war, tarnished by a peace, huddled up with such precipitation, that the ablest Minister that then remained to them was removed from his employment, for presuming to demand, at least, some equivalent for the cession of one of our most important conquests. Even a new Administration, when from an opinion of the ability and integrity of the Minister, and the *union of its parts*, it began to take a consistency, and to strike root in the affections of the people, was hastily and with a rude hand plucked up, without one reason being to be assigned for so strange a resolution, but that its *strength* was

was become *formidable*. What changes, what inconsistencies, what *double measures*, have not succeeded through *these advisers*, till the Administration was at last firmly settled upon the present Minister, whose stability has been owing to the vices, not the virtues of his character. Without ambition, without attachment, without public opinions; too indolent to enterprize, too careless to resist, too indifferent to cabal; yielding to the measure suggested at the moment, living by expedients, blind to consequences, and hardened to reputation as to events. Cruel *advisers!* infatuated *system!* If the loss of thirteen provinces, the imminent danger of our islands, the lives of so many thousand fellow subjects, the disgrace of our flag, the starving condition of Ireland, the decay of our manufactures, the condition of the landed property, the near approaches to a public bankruptcy, and the extremities to which despair will drive a distracted people, cannot touch your hearts, let us look to some other quarter for our salvation. Our constitution is as yet entire, though its wheels are clogged by corruption. In despotic countries there is no remedy to bad Government but the sword;
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it is the glory of England, that the people have always the remedy in their hands.---*law*, as well as reason and justice, are on their side---They need only speak through their representatives---the purse is theirs---a general election is at hand---*let them speak and they will be heard*. Let the work of reformation begin, let the real grievances be redressed---let the Ministers of the King feel themselves as they ought, the servants of the Public, not the slavish tools of the closet---let the influence of the Crown receive a check, let the boundless profusion of public money be governed by wise regulations of œconomy, and above all, oblige the secret advisers of the Crown, *those who think its power should be still extended*, to relinquish their wretched system; we shall then, once more, see ostensible and responsible Ministers chosen for their abilities, and supported by the confidence of a united people. The *public* interest will be then their care; the current of profusion will be stopped; and the evils of a civil war which this contest, if continued, will but too certainly produce, may be prevented, by a timely exertion of national spirit, and legal and Parliamentary authority.

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