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LETTERS
TO A
Member of the British Parliament,
ON THE ABSURDITY OF
POPULAR PREJUDICES.

BY
THOMAS PARSONS.

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Cruttwell, Printer, Bath.

0582

LETTERS

TO A

Member of the British Parliament,

ON THE ABSURDITY OF

POPULAR PREJUDICES;

THE CAUSES OF THE

PRESENT HIGH PRICE OF FOOD;

THE MEANS OF

SPEEDY ALLEVIATION;

AND

THE MEASURES MOST PROPER FOR
SECURING FUTURE PLENTY.

BY

THOMAS PARSONS.

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1800.

LETTER I.

SIR,

THE indulgence you have shewn your present Correspondent, on former occasions, encourages me to rely with confidence on your candour, whilst I submit to your judgment a Series of Observations, which the peculiar circumstances of the times have suggested; and which may not be absolutely uninteresting to others, though, perhaps, analogous to the reflections which the same subjects may have rendered familiar to you.

Permit me to begin this correspondence, by some strictures on the unmerited abuse, with which an unthinking populace, (I wish no superior description of our countrymen were comprehended in the charge) irritated by the excessive price of provisions, has so wantonly and cruelly vilified those who are employed in their distribution.

The odium that has lately been, with extraordinary industry, accumulated upon those classes of men, who are cultivating the land, and dispersing its produce to every market, and to every house, is not merely ridiculous, it is enormously criminal. If the

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amateurs of musick and the drama consider themselves obliged by the exertions of an exquisite singer, or an actor of superior talents, for whose performances they pay liberally; surely our obligations to those who supply us with our *daily bread*, are not less solid and forcible: and to disgust and intimidate, by groundless aspersions, unprovoked menaces, and infernal denunciations, a large number of our fellow-subjects, who are engaged in the most important and interesting occupation, is not only ungrateful, but pregnant with incalculable mischief; as such calumny can only tend to drive from their employments those of them as can either secure an independency, or divert their capitals and their attention to less hazardous pursuits.

Many of the Middle-men, (as they are denominated) and of the Importers of Grain, declare that, unless they are protected from insult and the fury of a mob, they will no longer continue their exertions to supply the markets, or to import, at very serious risks, corn of foreign growth, let the consequence be what it may. And what would be the consequence of their abandoning their business? Why, that the great markets could not, for a considerable time at least, be supplied; and that the metropolis, and other large cities, must be subjected to the immediate apprehensions of famine! Whoever were the authors and propagators of such unmerited censures, they deserve, (humanity wishes to except those
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who were simply inconsiderate) to be branded with eternal folly, and to feel the just resentment of an abused and indignant people.

We have heard numerous and lamentable complaints of the *numbers* employed in the various departments of the Corn-Trade. But does not the most superficial observer perceive, through the whole extent of trade, that the more numerous the candidates for publick favour are, the cheaper the publick is supplied? Were any article in general use produced and sold by only one person, is it rational to expect that the consumer could purchase the article so good or so cheap, as if there were twenty competitors in the same branch, each solicitous for his custom, and rivalling each other in their efforts to accommodate him? The very circumstance complained of, is itself the best possible security the body of the people can enjoy, against monopoly and excessive gains.

Inclusive of the grower of corn, and the manufacturer of bread, the number engaged in the corn-trade far exceeds, probably, the number employed in any other line of business; "and their dispersed situation renders it *altogether impossible* for them "to enter into any general combination."*

The vehement outcry against the numerous dealers in grain has scarce grated with harsh dissonance upon the ear, but we are told in the same

* Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. p. 294.

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breath, that the scarcity is artificial, and entirely owing to *monopoly*! As if the very great number of Farmers, Corn-Factors, Millers, and Bakers, was more favourable to monopoly, than a smaller number would be. It is the privilege of ignorance to accumulate arguments destructive to each other, and yet arrive at the same conclusion.

But let Folly assume the reins, we will try to gratify her wayward-humour. At the first evolution of her magick wand, the Factors, Millers, and Bakers are annihilated. The Farmer, yes we must take care of him, the Farmer shall *be*, and, if possible, *do* every thing. He shall till the ground, secure his corn, and grind, dress, and convert it into bread, and then convey it to every house. I hope this is simplifying the business sufficiently. But fair and softly; how does the Farmer relish all this bustle? He finds himself in want of three additional capitals; he requires granaries, mills, and ovens; clever servants in each separate business; cattle and carriages proper for the conveyance of his corn, his meal, and his bread; and he wants all the skill, attention, and time, which his supernumerary trades claim; and all this added to his farming stock of experience, money, and labour. Folly waves her wand again and again; but alas! these good things will not come, though she may call. Our dim-sighted conductress was in too much haste to commence her enterprize, to reflect upon the minute circumstances necessary to its completion. Well, the Farmer

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flounders on, without adequate means, without judgment, distracted by numerous and contradictory claims; and is convinced at last to his sorrow, that in attempting every thing, he is rendered incapable of doing any thing. He casts an eye of anxious regret upon his little farm, that was just sufficient to occupy all his powers, and sees his neglected fields reduced almost to a state of nature: the docket is struck, the unhappy man and his family are reduced to beggary, and the publick suffer a loss of the crops his land might have produced, and of all those astonishing advantages which Folly had pourtrayed and predicted.

We are, to be sure, brought into a strange dilemma; but we need not wonder at the issue of our adventure, when we recollect to whose conduct we committed its success. From this whimsical excursion, let us, however, deduce one serious and useful observation-----one business, generally, is enough for one man. The suppression, or the diminished number, of any one class now occupied in growing wheat, transporting it from one place to another, dressing it, and converting it into bread, would be a great publick injury; as it would necessarily require that the remaining dealers should obtain larger capitals, and do more business, which would, in many instances, cripple the trade; and as it would lessen the number of hands in which, in that case, our grand supplies would be deposited.

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The Farmer cannot be employed to equal advantage, either for the community or himself, in any other way, than by devoting the whole of his abilities to his own proper business: The Corn-Dealer is best occupied in finding out the cheapest and most plentiful sources for grain, and in transporting it to those places where, from local circumstances, it is dear; he thus assists essentially to equalize the distribution of the national stock; and at the same time contributes to equalize the price as nearly as different situations and distances will admit: the Miller, by attending solely to his purchases, and the preparation of his corn for the Baker, will be usefully engaged; and the Baker, by attending to his own business exclusively, will make a better article, and serve the publick and himself to better purpose, than he possibly could do, were his attention divided and perplexed with a variety of concerns.

The principles and characters of these different classes of Traders are, I suppose, equal to those of any other description of men in business: we have no reason to expect they should be superior, nor is there the least ground for suspecting or representing them to be inferior. They are men, they are Englishmen; and I presume they profess themselves to be Christians; and why they should be exhibited as objects of detestation, I know not. Perhaps some of their opponents can explain the true cause of all that obloquy to which they have been subjected; but
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it may not be improper for them to observe, however unfashionable the reference, that the identical passage in Holy Writ, that excludes *extortioners* from the kingdom of heaven, excludes *revilers* also.*

It is true that the popular prejudice, in times of scarcity, against those who trade in the essential articles of food, receives some degree of sanction from antiquity. An Act of Parliament, subjecting the corn-trade to various embarrassing restrictions, (*still, I believe, in existence*) passed in the reign of Edward the VIth, proves the prevailing opinion to have been much the same at that period, as at the present; and it proves moreover that, in the course of two or three centuries, with all our boasted improvements, we are not grown much wiser.†

The desire of gain is the grand principle that excites, and keeps in motion, the vast and complica-

* 1 Cor. vi. 10.

† “The popular fear of engrossing and forestalling may be compared to the popular terrors and suspicions of witchcraft.—The unfortunate wretches, accused of this latter crime, were not more innocent of the misfortunes imputed to them, than those who have been accused of the former. The law, which put an end to all prosecutions against witchcraft, which put it out of any man’s power to gratify his own malice, by accusing his neighbour of that imaginary crime, seems effectually to have put an end to those fears and suspicions, by taking away the great cause which encouraged and supported them. The law which should restore entire freedom to the inland-trade of corn, would probably prove as effectual to put an end to the popular fears of engrossing and forestalling.”—Smith’s Inquiry into the nature and causes of the Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. p. 309.

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ted machine of trade and commerce. The emulation of contending interests, in the pursuit of the same object, accelerates the genius and activity of the adventurers, and induces each to promote his individual advantage, by accommodating the publick on the best terms. Next therefore in order, competition follows interest; and the more numerous the competitors, the better and cheaper will the ultimate purchaser be supplied:—And thus private emolument and publick advantage are inseparably connected, and the union must be preserved inviolate, or both will suffer, but mostly the latter. The more our inland-trade is exempted from legal restrictions, and the more numerous the venders of articles in general and constant demand, the more freely will the current of business flow, and with greater facility extend to every individual.

These maxims, I presume, Sir, cannot be controverted; and if those who may honour this temporary correspondence with their notice, will condescend to devote a small degree of attention to the subject, they may be induced, perhaps, to resign to others the invidious task of circulating unjust reproach, and unfounded censure, and be influenced to contribute, by a zeal more laudably directed, to alleviate that calamity, which we all feel and deplore.

I have the honour to be,

With great respect, Sir,

Your obedient humble servant,

T. P.

LETTER II.

SIR,

AMONGST the numerous expedients which contracted information has suggested, for accommodating the community, it has been strenuously recommended to the poor to bake their own bread; and it has been proposed, in order to facilitate the project, that corn-markets should be established generally, for the purpose of retailing wheat in small quantities.

Allow me to consider for a moment, both the practicability and the utility of this pretended improvement. If the *principle* be just and wise, its extension to any and every other article of domestic consumption will be so too: but if it be absurd in every other application, it may be fairly inferred, that in the case of private baking, it will also be absurd.

In order that the poorer classes may be supplied with small quantities of wheat, the markets must be *universal*, for it cannot be supposed eligible for the labouring poor to travel far to purchase the commodity.

dity. The scheme looks rather unpromising in the outset, for by what means can farmers be induced or compelled to abandon a large market, in order to attend the limited demands of a hamlet? Will the projector open his market at noon, or at night? If at noon, the purchasers must be losing their time, in which they might be earning bread, and waste it in purchasing the material for making it. If at night, can he prevail upon the farmer to acquiesce in his scheme?

However, at some part or other of the twenty-four hours, the labouring man has procured his peck or half-bushel of wheat, and he must then trudge to the mill, at one, two, or three miles distance, and return home, "with many a weary step and slow." He then, a proper time having elapsed for the grinding his corn, and separating the meal from the bran, goes a second time to the mill, and if he be fortunate he may find it ready for him; but chance more probably may render a third expedition necessary. He pays for the operation, and submits to the toll; and when he returns, yeast must be procured, and he sets his dough to ferment: he was no judge of the commodity he bought, he is not absolutely sure it was the meal produced by the identical corn he carried to the mill; it does not rise, he is vexed, and a domestic squabble ensues, his innocent and perhaps ignorant wife bears the blame; but at length, in some slovenly or sluttish manner, it is formed into something

thing resembling loaves, and the last operation must be performed: it must be taken to a bake-house at a distance, or be baked at home: in the former case, time is required to convey it there, and another portion of time to fetch it again: if he has an oven (which I presume cannot be universally the fact) he must be at the expence of fuel, or he must procure it, at no other expence than a little more loss of time, from the adjoining fences. By some means or other the baking is effected, and after so much toil and waste of time, the family are furnished with an inferior article, and, all circumstances considered, dearer than the baker would have supplied them, without stirring from their home. In addition to this statement, which is I believe tolerably correct, I beg leave to add, that a friend of mine assures me, when travelling through Wales, and some remote parts of England, he has repeatedly noticed that the poor people who came from a distance to purchase little modicums of corn, were by far the most deplorable-looking creatures in the market; and from that fact, which often struck his attention, he inferred that making bread in poor families only contributed to make them poorer.

But let the proposal be successful in its utmost extent, let it be admitted, that the poor man obtains his bread better and cheaper than he could purchase it of the baker, what good is done? Will not its superior goodness and inferior price induce a more profuse

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profuse consumption of the article? And is it in a period of alarming scarcity, when the most economical use of bread is absolutely necessary, that our sapient proposer is anxious to promote its consumption?

Both the impracticability and inutility of the project are so obvious, that we need no supplementary aids to effect conviction. The principle is erroneous, and the structure founded upon it can be but "the baseless fabrick of a vision."

The poor man wants shoes or wearing-apparel; he can buy the materials, but can he make those materials into the articles he requires? He stands in need of a chissel, a saw, a pick-axe, or a spade; he can indeed easily procure iron and steel, but can he convert them into the implements he wants? No, he must have the former made, and buy the latter ready-made, and by this mode he will obtain the articles he desires, incomparably better and incomparably cheaper, than by wasting his time in unavailing efforts to perform, what his talents and habits totally disqualify him for effecting. Let us vary the illustration as we please, we are inevitably driven to the same conclusion. Encourage the workman to follow his own occupation, but do not tempt him to deviate from it: as he knows that he can perform his proper business better and cheaper than a man who has never been accustomed to it, he may rationally infer that persons constantly employed in other
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branches of business, can supply him also better and cheaper than he can possibly supply himself.

It is by the minute division of labour, that all manufactured articles come to the hand of the consumer, so complete, and at prices so low, as to advance our surprise to astonishment, when we reflect on the numerous distinct operations which almost every article in common use passes through. Let any person attempt the making a needle or a button, and he will be convinced of the vast importance of those divisions, and of the wonderful dexterity acquired by a limitation to one part only of a manufactory. It is equally a fact, that by splitting trade into separate parts, the public is best supplied with commodities of every kind. Persons only *occasionally* employed in a particular branch, can never attain that dexterity in manual operation, nor that perfection of workmanship, which will be acquired by the person who is *wholly* devoted to that branch. Nor can the versatile genius who aims at success in a variety of distinct occupations, ever equal plodding industry steadily pursuing one detached and simple line of business. The writer has often amused himself in making various trivial articles, but he always found that they cost him more than the common price of perhaps better-made articles, and his whole compensation consisted in the pleasure he derived from mechanical operations, and the gratification of saying, "this is my own performance."

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But whence does the proposal originate? Why, in the mistaken notion, that the more persons are employed in the sale of corn, and in making of bread, the dearer the latter becomes; and that if all the intermediate classes between the grower and the consumer could be dismissed, the latter would be better supplied. The preceding letter is intended to expose the fallacy of such notions; and we proceed to offer an apology for one class of very useful men, the bakers; who, by such projects, are implicated in imaginary guilt.

These proposals carry with them insinuations unfavourable to the integrity of tradesmen in that occupation. Why else are we recommended to bake ourselves? I believe they are the only order of men in business, whose profits are regulated specifically by law; and one should imagine this circumstance, peculiar to them, would shield them from every charge of exorbitant gain. It is a curious fact, and it serves to exemplify popular consistency, that in the city, from whence I write, those bakers who made and sold bread under the customary and legal price, and that for a considerable length of time, were, in a superior degree to others, the objects of insult and menace. I take it for granted there are, and I am sure there ought to be, some bakers who have acquired wealth; but as far as my observation extends, the proportion of even moderately-rich men in that line, is, when compared with most other trades,

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trades, very small. I have no doubt, sir, if you will give yourself the trouble to make inquiries in the metropolis, but that the answers will confirm this representation. And presuming upon the fact, I consider all the odium with which they have been loaded, as extortionate and oppressive, as so much unmerited scandal. The ridiculous charges brought against them, for adulteration and noxious admixture, deserve no serious notice. They suggest indeed, a new idea; for they imply that, by their medical skill and address in combining and proportioning acids and alkalies, purgatives and astringents, they are competent to preserve the public body in health, without the aid of the apothecary!

Before I dismiss the principal subject of this letter, I beg leave farther to remark, that in some rural villages, where the cottagers have more room, where they can procure small quantities of wheat or barley of their masters, and where long-established custom has rendered the process familiar, the making of bread is common in poor families. This is all proper; and their situation requiring but little loss of time, all is practicable and perhaps useful. I say perhaps, for were it not that they procure the refuse grain, (which is what, I believe, the great majority of Farmers themselves use) and that at a very inferior price, I conclude they could be no gainers by the method.

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But what is the artisan or labouring man to do, who has only one room for himself, his wife, and two or three children; in which to cook, to eat, to wash, to sleep, and in many instances to work? And yet this is the way in which many hundreds contrive to exist, in and about cities and manufactories.

There is also a very large number of poor people, who could not possibly purchase corn, in the smallest useful quantities. By some regulations adopted in the city of Bath, during the last summer, no bread was made under the size of the half-quarter loaf: the consequence was, that very many poor people were necessitated to purchase the fractional parts of loaves, cut out for that purpose; the reason was clear; they could collect a few half-pence for a small part of a loaf, when they could not raise eight-pence for a whole one. The Magistrates, in kind consideration of this fact, humanely permitted the making of three-penny and two-penny bread; by which measure this class of poor is supplied much more comfortably than when they were obliged to buy fragments of bread, with several surfaces, exposed to the sun, air, flies, dust, and all the contingencies of a huckster's shop. Now it is absurd to suppose, that these people can purchase wheat, and bake for themselves!

But it is time to close this letter. You will, I know, admit, that no circumstance important to
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the welfare and comfort of our fellow-creatures, can be too mean for the consideration of a philanthropist; this is so eminently your characteristic, that I avail myself of its patronage, as rendering all apology superfluous.

With the most perfect esteem,

I am, Sir,

Your obedient humble servant,

T. P.

LETTER III.

SIR,

THE dearness of provisions has, with some variations, continued for several years; but for the most part, advancing. The distress produced thereby has been felt, in some degree, by all ranks of people; but most severely by the lower orders, which constitute the bulk of the nation. The seasons, as they returned, excited the most lively interest, and the flattering expectation of approaching plenty; for ardent wishes will, by even doubtful appearances, easily glide into premature confidence. But disappointment has closed in gloomy sadness the rolling year, and we have sown in hope, but reaped in discontent. The present year has proved in its produce inferior to the previous estimate of even the experienced farmer. Our sufferings, during the last winter, were great, and bore hard upon the middling and lower classes; every eye looked eagerly upon the ripening harvest, forgetting the unpropitious seed-time, and the scarcely-favourable spring; and

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and calculated not only on what was visible, but upon what an interested imagination presumed to be concealed in the charming prospect. Many, besides the writer, thought they had reason to fear the crop would not be plentiful; and many anxious doubts were entertained, that the general exclamations of "a glorious harvest!" might be very incompletely realized. The question is now decided; and notwithstanding the local differences, which must, in the nature of things, annually occur, the dearness of wheat and other kinds of grain, according to the principles which have been adverted to, and which I consider as immutably true, demonstrates the actual deficiency of the late harvest. It is an aggravation of the calamity, that almost every other species of human food is, as well as corn, either imperfect in its formation, or defective in quality and quantity. And these circumstances happening at a time when taxation presses with double weight upon the people, the condition of the great mass of the kingdom is truly pitiable, and calls loudly for every lenient and palliating measure, that combined sagacity and benevolence can devise.

But whilst it is admitted, that unfavourable seasons and deficient crops are one cause of our distress, I cannot in conscience and honour pronounce them to be the only cause. War is, in every instance, a source of affliction to the contending parties, and not unfrequently to the surrounding nations.

A war

A war of eight years continuance, distinguished from all that are past, by unprecedented slaughter and devastation, and raging in the heart of Europe, must have inevitably interrupted the occupations of the husbandman, through extensive regions. And when fertile districts are over-run with destructive celerity, how is it possible that agriculture can continue its exertions, or extort from the sanguinary field the genial fruits of peace? Immense armies must be subsisted; their subsistence is attended with enormous waste, and frequently are their motions marked by flaming magazines, ruined villages, and desolated fields. Whether a country be occupied or traversed by a friendly or a hostile army, the effects differ only in degree; and the retreat of the one may be as destructive as the progress of the other. These ministers of vengeance, wherever they advance, draw from the adjacent territory every supply which the industry of man, the fertility of soil, and the felicity of climate can contribute; the defenceless and perishing inhabitants of that territory must share in the produce of the countries which lie immediately contiguous; and these must balance that loss by supplies drawn from those which are more remote from the dreadful center of fire and blood: thus the circle of consumption spreads wider and wider, until it extends its circumference to nearly the whole of Europe. Nations thus circumstanced are ill-qualified to dispute the claims imposed upon them, and are
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not in a capacity to divert their superfluous produce into a commercial channel. From hence proceeds the extreme difficulty of obtaining supplies from our neighbours, but at prices so excessive, as to render importation hazardous to the enterprising merchant: and I have been assured, that, notwithstanding the liberal encouragement of Government, the speculation has been a losing one.

The internal distractions which, for several years, made dreadful havoc of the industry and the productions of our sister kingdom, have incapacitated her from contributing so liberally as on former occasions to our supply. The price of provisions in that kingdom is, I understand, at present very high; and this is the natural consequence of past devastation, though probably aggravated by unfavourable seasons.

Now if we reflect upon the state of Europe, upon our own resources, and upon a vast army and navy, composed of several hundred thousand men, in the full vigour of manhood, who must be supplied, and who are supplied, more liberally than formerly; when we advert to the great increase of the merchant-service, and the increased number of men required to navigate their ships; and add to the account the great profusion and waste, the losses and spoliation, which are inseparable from a state of hostility, and that all the supplies, of every description, must almost wholly be drawn from our own limited resources,
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we cannot hesitate in admitting, however ungrateful the inference, that the present war has contributed, and contributes very greatly, to our national distress, and the enormous dearness of provisions.

It is indeed asserted, that all these men must be fed, were they at home in their respective employments; and the assertion is true, but not to the extent which may be insinuated thereby. Their subsistence in their usual places of abode would be similar to that of their countrymen, who remain behind in their usual occupations, subjected to a scanty supply of bread, and rarely gratified with the taste of flesh. They would not be fed to the full with the prime articles of consumption at the public expence, but must reduce themselves to the same system of harsh frugality, which their equals are compelled to adopt. Besides, it may be observed, that we have in the naval and military service large numbers of Irishmen, Dutchmen, and other foreigners, and it cannot be pretended that these men would, in a time of peace, be supported by the produce of Great-Britain.

When men are collected into large masses, their subsistence must necessarily have a more direct and sensible effect on the price of provisions, than would be produced, were the same men equally distributed over the kingdom: just as the immense and incessant demands of the metropolis affect the price of animal, and perhaps some kinds of vegetable, food,
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in the remotest districts. An extensive body of water may move slowly over a spacious vale, and the stream be scarcely perceptible; but contracted into narrower limits, it acquires velocity and force, and forms a rapid current, that absorbs and sweeps away all the gay productions of its contiguous banks.

Were all these brave men at home in their peaceful avocations, they would share with their neighbours in the bounty of nature, and many of them be usefully employed in increasing our stores: whereas now, the venders of butcher's-meat, pork, cheese, butter, &c. in their excursions for collecting supplies for their customers, can only follow contractors and agents, who, having a superior demand, and the purse of the nation in their pockets, leave behind them a diminished quantity, an inferior quality, and an advanced price. Is not the difference evident?

Permit me to terminate this subject, by bringing to your recollection a remark that has possibly often occurred to your contemplative mind. The exigencies of the state in a period of hostility render additional taxation unavoidable. Multiplied taxes must have an influence upon the articles raised for the public use by those upon whom the taxes fall most heavily. It is not a predilection for paradox, but a sincere and supreme attachment to the truth of facts, which induces me to assert, that the farmer pays more taxes of different kinds than any other description
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of men whatever. The operation of direct and oblique taxation is not easily estimated; but in addition to tithes, which are peculiar to the tiller of the ground, the annual rates for the poor draw much more from the farmer's pocket than from that of the merchant, the manufacturer, or the tradesman; for whilst the latter is charged to the rate only for the house he occupies, and in which he may employ a capital of unlimited extent; the former is rated according to the rent of land which he occupies, and that rent, according to a common, but probably incorrect, estimate, constitutes one-third of his annual returns. The increase of taxation, therefore, the immediate effect of war, must tend to advance the price of those commodities which are more obviously affected by it. And this fact supplies us with an additional proof, that a state of hostility contributes to aggravate the public grievances.

The causes are painfully obvious; we are in a state of increased consumption, and diminished resources; and both concur to explain, with distressing perspicuity, the unhappy circumstances of the times. Instead, however, of criminating and recriminating, our time and powers will be directed more usefully in efforts to lighten the load of human misery, and in exertions to alleviate the effects of general scarcity. Presuming on your goodness, I shall, in the following letter, suggest such expedients as appear to be best calculated for those purposes.

I am, sir, &c.

T. P.

LETTER IV.

SIR,

THE period of calamity and general dejection affords the most active stimulus to the benevolent mind, and instead of sinking into despondency, and "fainting in the day of adversity," its energies will be roused, and various efforts be employed, to soften and extenuate the prevailing miseries of human nature. Limited in its powers, and often deluded by fallacious appearances, it may with precipitancy sometimes adopt measures which more deliberate reflexion would reject, and which, instead of alleviating, may increase the evil intended to be remedied. Yet the most interesting exertions of intellect have originated in necessity; and the pressure of adversity, quickening the inventive faculty, calls into existence latent ideas, and associations of thought, proportioned to the extremity of the occasion, and sometimes, at least, adequate to the wished-for relief.

Our present subject is divisible into the *immediate* and the *remote* expedients which merit our attention;

tention; and which may possibly, if realized, contribute to diminish the rigour of our fate.

The state of the case demands, if possible, instantaneous assistance; and the measures, I beg leave to suggest, as proper to be adopted without delay, are

First, The immediate disuse of all the essential articles of life, in any other form than that of food for man. Starch and hair-powder might be produced probably from substances that never come into the class of eatables; but if not, the appropriation of flour to such purposes is a prostitution of an article to trifles, which should be applied to feed the hungry. The continued use of these articles will occasion the continued manufacture of them; the most efficacious method is, to abolish their use at once. The consumption of flour in pastry, cakes, puddings, buns, &c. is a sacrifice to luxury, for the most part, of that which should be wholly devoted to the making of bread. The article of paste, in a variety of trades, occasions a misapplication of flour, in larger quantities than is generally imagined.— Other glutinous and adhesive substances might be resorted to, and the flour so consumed should be sacred to food only. The distilleries might at once be prohibited from the use of any grain used for food. They have resources in all saccharine substances; and if they had not, we can do much better without ardent spirits, than without bread; and the barley used

used in that business might be usefully appropriated in a better form to the service of man. Malt-liquor of superior strength is principally consumed in ways not very favourable to health, industry, or morality. Suppose the brewers were restrained from making any beer above the strength of porter: a very large quantity of barley, and that of the best quality, might, by such a restriction, be added to the general stock of farinaceous aliment. Oats are, for the most part, consumed by a race of animals, a large proportion of which are a curse to the community. Carriage and saddle-horses are so multiplied, and their consumption of hay and corn so immense, that the legislature might, I think, most commendably limit their number; and direct the corn they devour, into a more useful channel. When it is recollected that oatmeal constitutes, after wheat, one of the most nutritious kinds of food, as many parts of Scotland, the north of England, and some counties in Wales, demonstrate; and that a horse will consume the produce of more land than would be sufficient for the sustenance of several poor families; the reduction of their number cannot but be desirable; and the returns of income will afford the proper data, on which to construct a sumptuary law for that purpose.

Temporary inconveniencies, and restrictions in unessential articles, cannot be deemed formidable objections, when the wants of the human race are so urgent, and our countrymen are perishing for lack of

of bread. No, the feeling, the benevolent heart, would relinquish, with cheerful alacrity, a variety of gratifications, in order to relieve the children of want. And I have such a confidence in the generosity of an English soul, that I feel assured, the restrictions suggested, if matured into legal obligations, would not excite one murmur, but be submitted to with the promptitude of sterling humanity.

Secondly, the introduction of the most effectual substitutes for wheat, and the diffusive use of soups of various composition, is a measure highly deserving general attention. Difference of rank indicates a diversity in their ingredients; but as a liberal supply of soup will lessen the consumption of wheat and butcher's-meat, it is both oeconomic and patriotic to encourage the adoption of it in families as generally as possible. Rice, millet, sago, isinglass, hartshorn shavings, with a long *et cetera*, offer themselves to culinary skill; by which they may, with a numerous class of nourishing roots and green vegetables, be made subservient to the general advantage, and perhaps multiply, rather than lessen, the enjoyments of the table. The opulent and the middling ranks might considerably diversify their food, so as to retrench proportionably the use of bread, which is to the labouring classes emphatically *the staff of life*. Poor wretches! little skilled in cooking, and their time engrossed by incessant toil, they little know the art of dressing and varying their humble and limited repast.

repast. Their circumstances require the utmost simplicity in the composition and the preparation of their food: and many a benevolent proposal for their accommodation has failed of success, from an inattention to this circumstance. If their superiors, who possess an unrestricted choice, deny themselves the liberal use of the most common and essential articles, more will fall to the share of the poor, whose wants are more pressing, and whose choice is greatly confined. Profusion encourages a fastidious taste, and is productive of waste. Were a wealthy family to reduce their weekly consumption of butcher's-meat, only one joint, that single joint, or one equivalent, might regale a poor family for a week together, and they would deem themselves happy in the acquisition. Multiply this supposition by a thousand or ten thousand, and an equal number of families, in the humblest sphere of laborious occupation, would be rendered comfortable by a retrenchment, which, in the supply of a rich man's table for a week, would be imperceptible. Public kitchens for preparing soup, and supplying the poor at a cheap rate, is an experiment that has been tried, and been found highly beneficial. It deserves to be repeated, and extended as generally as possible. Food of this description is best prepared on a large scale; it saves the consumers both time and fuel, and may be rendered more nourishing and more palatable, than the means or the skill of a poor family are equal to.

The philanthropic writer, Count Rumford, has proved, as far as facts can prove, that wholesome, nutritious, and grateful food, may be prepared, with little or no wheat or flesh, and at an expence astonishingly small. The same benevolent author illustrates the practicability of living upon terms very inferior to the expensive modes, (common with us) and yet in a manner favourable and even fully competent to the support of life, the preservation of health and strength, and the enjoyment of comfort; by a description of the manner in which the Bavarian army is accommodated, and annexing the bills of fare which the troops have adopted: and though their pay, including their allowance of ammunition-bread, is not, in our money, more than two-pence three farthings a day for each soldier, yet they contrive to subsist themselves so frugally, as to reserve a part of their daily pay for other gratifications. "What," continues the Count, "would be the surprise of my English reader, upon seeing a whole army, composed of the finest, stoutest, strongest men in the world, who are fed upon that allowance, and whose countenances show the most evident marks of ruddy health, and perfect contentment?"

Does not this striking fact suggest to us, that our veterans of the army and navy. (equal, I dare say, to the Bavarian troops in strength, courage, and generosity) might be induced to submit to some deviations

from their customary food, in order that a somewhat greater proportion of bread, beef, and pork, might be applied to satisfy the craving wants of their poor countrymen? Proper representations of our domestic distresses, and the example of their officers, could not fail to produce in our heroes a cheerful compliance with such a proposal.

Thirdly, Importation. This subject will assuredly engage your attention as a legislator, and such liberal bounties will, I hope, be granted, and such perfect security afforded, as shall encourage the enterprising merchant to procure supplies from other countries, without any apprehensions of pecuniary loss or personal hazard. One circumstance demands to be noticed; wheat imported from a distant part of the world, is, I believe, generally injured in the passage: could not some mode be discovered, or some regulations enforced, by which the deterioration of the precious commodity might be prevented?

I do not, however, apprehend that, in our circumstances, the bounty should attach only to imported wheat. Rice, though, in our esteem, it be inferior to our favourite grain, is of considerable importance; it is generally approved, and may be prepared in the simplest form; on these accounts, a bounty on its importation would operate in favour of the country. The American is usually preferred to the East-Indian rice; this is fortunate, because the comparative shortness of the

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voyage would enable the adventurers in a few months to bring home very large quantities of that useful article. Maize or Indian corn might, with advantage, constitute a part of the import, as it is convertible into very nourishing and wholesome food.

By a combination of such measures, or as many of them as may be judged most easy in practice, and most advantageous in their effect, considerable, speedy, or immediate relief might be obtained; and an important accession of food procured. Rigid œconomy and spirited exertion will do much, with the blessing of Heaven, towards alleviating our calamity, and enabling us to struggle through the difficulties of the year. The increased quantity of land sown to wheat, and the uncommonly favourable seed-time, inspire the most pleasing and consoling prospect of a more liberal produce, and of happier days.

One Letter more will relieve you from this intrusion.

I am, sir,

With the highest regard,

Your obedient humble servant,

T. P.

LETTER V.

SIR,

THE condensed assemblage of the most promising expedients for speedily alleviating the public sufferings, which occupied the preceding letter, leads us to the consideration of measures, highly important, indeed, but more remote in their effects.

When I have observed the vindictive passions, irritated and inflamed by political controversy, and the abuse and invective which party disputes have generated, the warm wish of my heart has been, Oh, that my countrymen, were of one description, promoters of "Peace on earth," and mutual goodwill!

Whatever were the grounds of the present War, and whatever be the necessity of its prolongation, we want repose. After long-protracted conflict, and unnatural effort, nations (like individuals) become exhausted; and require a proportionable period of relaxation and tranquillity, in which to recruit their declining health, and restore to wonted vigour their debilitated powers.

By every generous principle of which your heart is susceptible—a heart formed for the finest sympathies; by your obligations in Parliament, where no motive but the welfare of your country should exist;

exist; by your profession as a Christian, a disciple of "the Prince of Peace," and conscious of your accountableness at the tribunal of Heaven; permit me to persuade, to urge, to conjure you, in the most solemn manner, and under the sanction of all that is interesting and sacred, to promote, by every exertion of ability, activity, and zeal, *the speedy return of Peace!* The juncture is, in my private opinion, favourable;—Our internal calamities are so severely felt, that the most obvious and decisive remedy that offers itself, cannot be viewed with general indifference; and the leading men in the state, would (I do not allow myself to doubt) readily acquiesce in the general wish, were that wish openly avowed. Must we persevere in a state of interminable hostility, because one feels reluctant to retract, and another hesitates to declare his sentiments? This is not a time for empty ceremony and false delicacy; every thing momentous and essential to our well-being demands the acquisition of Peace. War provides neither "seed for the sower, nor bread for the eater;" Peace supplies both; cheers the glad earth with plenty, and renovates every charm of nature. To this object may all your energies be devoted! the blessings of millions will be your reward, and your future reflections upon your past exertions will supply you with a felicity that will flourish, and bloom, and endure, when the trophies of martial prowess shall perish in the dust, and rise no more.

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The next object that imperiously demands the aid of the Legislature, is the extended cultivation of the soil. However artificial wants may be gratified by the luxuries which Commerce may import; however flattering the fortunes which our Manufactures may create; Agriculture, the first object in the world in importance, ought to be the first object of national solicitude. Agriculture calls from the teeming earth, and blesses our dwellings with the most nourishing and delicious viands; and that too, were it not for occasional interruptions, in rich profusion. It associates with these the most proper and comfortable cloathing for an English constitution; and having food and raiment, we shall possess content. With such accommodations, produced in abundance, and obtained with ease, what have we to regret—what to excite anxiety? A wise Government cannot be better employed than in affording every possible encouragement to the cultivation of the country; and though other objects may give a temporary diversion to its patronage and care, it will direct its principal and permanent endeavours, to render fertile those extensive tracts which now lie unproductive, and convert the desert into a fruitful field.

Efforts of the most respectable kind have been made, for obtaining a bill for general inclosure; and, I believe, there are various resolutions, in the Journals of the House of Commons, highly favourable to the measure. Why those attempts have been

been hitherto unsuccessful, I know not; but the urgency of our present circumstances pleads forcibly for their renewal, and as loudly for their adoption. The experience of the last nine years, out of which six have been distinguished by a produce defective in quality or quantity, or both, leads us to be anxious for the cause. Is it that our farms, in long-continued cultivation, are impoverished; that the quantity of wheat sown has been less than formerly; that our population is rapidly increasing; or must we attribute it to the just judgment of Heaven? These are serious and weighty inquiries, and I hope, the Honourable Assembly to which you belong, will institute such investigations, as shall procure the best, though it may not be the most consoling, information; as a knowledge of the evil is a considerable advance towards a cure. At any rate, the conversion of unprofitable wastes, and tracts of imperfectly productive lands, (millions of acres under this description, reproach us daily with culpable neglect) will be beneficial to the community, by multiplying the means of subsistence, finding the best possible employment for the poor, and securing us against excessive scarcity in future.

In the prosecution of such a grand and important plan, two things demand peculiar regard. The first is to secure with scrupulous care, and if practicable, even to extend the rights of the poor claimants; and to make it the conditions of inclosure, that

that their allotments shall be attached to their cottages; that their portions shall be fenced off at the general expence, that a proper quantity of land shall be appropriated to coppice-wood, for the exclusive use of the cottagers, and under proper regulations for its growth, distribution, &c. and that every assistance and encouragement shall be given to these diminutive cultivators, to enable and induce them to improve their small portions of land in the best manner. This is a class of people, which, with what are called small farmers, are in some parts of the kingdom almost extinct. It is, however, possible to revive them, and to render them useful to the community, and in a degree respectable themselves. Had a small proportion of the sums annually raised for the parochial poor been devoted to the purpose of multiplying, by well-timed assistance, this useful class of inferior cultivators, our yeomanry would be now much more numerous, virtuous, and independant. A man with ever so limited a property has something of his own, as dear and valuable to him as the estate of the manorial lord is to him: The produce is his own; this will stimulate him to active industry, and capable of supplying his wants comfortably, he will be attached to his home and his family, and consequently improve his moral character.

I have been informed, that an immense addition has been made to the rental of the county of Lincoln, by recent inclosures; that the commissioners very laubably

laudably directed their first attention to the accommodation of the inferior claimants; and that the men of property contiguous continue to assist them, by ploughing their lands at a very low price. And my informant assured me, by this method, by building cottages, and connecting with them small portions of land, which were let at a low rent; and by the establishment of beneficial clubs generally, which the resident clergymen and gentlemen zealously countenanced, that by the accounts of forty-four parishes then before him, the poors'-rate varied from fivepence to twelpence in the pound, only. These gentlemen pursued the most rational method, and realized the maxim of the philanthropic patron of the poor at Munich, "Make the poor comfortable, and be assured they will become industrious and virtuous."

The prodigious influx of working-people to towns and manufactories, were it practicable, requires to be checked rather than promoted. The poor in the rural villages may, by the humane and well-directed efforts of their wealthy neighbours, soon find their circumstances ameliorated, and be put into a safe and decent method of supporting themselves and their families. Small sums, thus applied, would have an effect infinitely superior to that of a forced or even voluntary supply in a different form; in as much as prevention is superior to, and supersedes the necessity of, inefficacious remedies. In the populous haunts of men, prevention or remedy seems to be alike

alike impracticable, and the operation of the latter has been hitherto an aggravation of the evil. Vice and disease unite with poverty to render the poor, in such situations, deplorably wretched. It were therefore judicious, wise, and benevolent, to afford the most liberal inducements to working-people to continue in or return to the country; and the little commons and fragments of waste land might, with great advantage to the public, to parishes, and to the individuals, and with little cost, be appropriated to their use.

The other circumstance that requires circumspection, in an act for general inclosure, is the harassing and vexatious obstructions to improvements, which tythes in kind, or an indeterminate commutation of tythes, will occasion. In the formation and arrangement of new acquisitions of land for cultivation, it is, in every view of the subject, most desirable and judicious to exonerate the cultivators completely from every claim that may check the ardour, or retard the progress, of spirited improvements. The preventive is obvious, practicable, and easy. If the Ministers of Religion have their full shares allotted them, they will be relieved from the unpleasant obligation to enforce claims, which are often discharged with reluctance, and perhaps with some diminution; they will acquire an addition of income, without any addition of duty; and that income will perpetually be regulated by the rents of the adjoining lands; and this,

this, perhaps, is the best standard that can be devised, whereby to adjust their claims generally

By this separation of the minister's portion, the other allotments will be free from interference and interruption; every man will have perfect liberty to push his abilities and industry to the utmost extent, in the full confidence that he shall enjoy the whole reward; and the harmony that should subsist, and be carefully maintained, between the pastor and his flock, will be preserved inviolate.

I sincerely hope that the combined wisdom and energy of both Houses of Parliament will be concentrated upon the subjects, on which an obscure individual has presumed to address you. The most accomplished intellects drew their stores from minds of far inferior talents; and you, who have with such success accumulated so rich a fund of information and diversified science, will not disdain to select from these sheets some ideas that may not be either obsolete or useless. To excite the attention, to rectify popular mistakes, and to rouse the benevolent exertions of my country, are my objects. In the confidence of your candid interpretation of my motive, and that in the motive you will find an ample apology for the writer, I am, with the greatest esteem for your virtues and talents,

SIR,

Your obedient humble Servant, T. P.

BATH, NOV. 20, 1800.

[Crittwell, Printer, Bath.]