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A
L E T T E R
ON THE
REGISTERING and NUMBERING
THE
P E O P L E
OF
G R E A T B R I T A I N .

Price Sixpence.

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A
LETTER
 TO A
 MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT,
 ON THE
 REGISTERING and NUMBERING
 THE
PEOPLE
 OF
GREAT BRITAIN.

Humbly Inscib'd
 To S—D—M, Esq;

L O N D O N:
 Printed for W. OWEN, at *Temple-bar.*
 MDCCLIII.

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A
LETTER
 TO A
 MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT.

S I R,

AS the Freedom of the Press, that is, of Printing, Writing, and Speaking, is not only the Birth-right of *Englishmen*, but likewise of Use to those in Power, I think it will be preserved.

PRINTING is of Use to those in Power, since it gives them notice of the Cause of Discontent, before they
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can be united into Opposition; and it will discover Opposition before it becomes Disaffection: Therefore the Saying of *Pizarro*, the Conqueror of *Peru*, was extremely judicious. “Hinder them not from talking, for Discontent, *says he*, if vented in Words, is like Gunpowder in open Air, but if, like Gunpowder, it be pent up in Minds, the whole is blown up in one universal Destruction, before they hear the Noise, or know the Cause.”

I HOPE, therefore, I shall reap the universal Indulgence, and not be blamed for printing this Letter, which I have wrote to a Friend, in answer to his Desires.

IT has been an ancient Custom, and of great Use, to print the Arguments for and against Bills, and much encouraged by the Members of both Houses: Each Member of the House of Commons is either a Knight of the Shire, or a Person returned from some
City

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City or Borough, in answer to the King's Writ, ordering them to send Men to give their Advice upon the arduous Business of the Realm. These Representatives of the People are powerful, *because they are the Representatives of the whole, and whilst they act for the People, and are beloved by them, they are a Pyramid standing upon its Base; but if the Representatives should ever act in such a Manner as to be disliked and disowned by the People, they would be like a Pyramid set up upon its Point, and would have no more Security against each Blast, than such a Gothic Kind of Architecture.*

THE Desire of serving the People of *England* at large, hath been the ruling Passion of the House of Commons; they have been the Favourites of the People, and indeed are the People: And God forbid any hot-headed young Men should ever imagine, that when they are chosen into the House of Commons, they cease to be obliged to act according to the Opinion of the
B.2 People

People of *England*, their Constituents, Now, to act according to the Opinion of the People of *England*, it is necessary to know their Thoughts; and if every Man who has Reason and Experience, can by the Press communicate to the Public his Opinion of Bills depending in Parliament, thereby the Representatives of the Nation will be better able to judge, since it is impossible for any one Man to know all Things by his own Experience, but by reading Pamphlets of all Sides, he may be able to know what is said of both Sides of the Question; and altho' a great deal of wicked and sad Stuff may be printed, yet the wise Member of Parliament, like the Bee, will gather Honey even from Weeds.

These, Reader, were the Reasons made me venture to print a Letter which I wrote to my Friend, and made that Letter the longer, because I did intend to print it.

To

To _____ Esq;

S I R,
 YOU did me the Honour to ask my Opinion of the great Utility of knowing the Number of the People, the Decrease and Increase of them; in Theory I join with you that it may be useful, but from Practice, I from long Experience judge it must be disadvantageous to attempt the Knowledge. I would not be guilty of averring what I do not prove; the imaginary one knoweth the Numbers of the People, and reasoning from thence, must lead into dangerous Errors if the given Number be untrue. Now the going from House to House to ask the Numbers of the Persons who have been in the House that Day, cannot be any Certainty, since the Person who answers may not know the Numbers; and if the Overseer or Person (Enquirer) is to go into every

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very Room and search the House, it will be inconvenient to the Inhabitants, and what Lords and Gentlemen of Fortune, and even the poorest People would hardly submit to. And yet I wish from what you say, the Overseers may not imagine they are impowered so to do; besides this, the Overseer must be many Days going through large Parishes, and if so, they one Day may number several Hundreds, nay, Thousands of People, either at Fairs or Markets; or in *London*, Lodgers who have changed their Habitations in many Places. And 'tis well known, that in *London* and *Bristol*, and other Towns, there are many Hundreds of Houses that receive forty or fifty Lodgers, or more, of poor People, who lye a Night and remove, and may again be numbered in the Place where they remove to. Besides the Harvest People, who at the Time of the Year when the Numbering is appointed, are in Motion from all Parts, as well from *Wales*, *Ireland* and *Scotland*,

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Scotland, as from different Parts of *England*, who make above a fourth Part of the Husbandry People of the Kingdom. As you know I am now very aged, I remember when the Numbering the People in King *William's* Time was attempted with the greatest Care imaginable. Mr. *Lock*, Sir *Isaac Newton*, and other great and curious Men were then alive. And to render the Thing effectual, it was thought that giving the Government a Poll-Tax would make the Matter be carefully executed. The Poll-Tax was pass'd; but those great Men found, that notwithstanding all the Endeavours of the Government, no Foundation could be laid upon the Numbers returned. As the Numbers returned by this new Method must be uncertain, if it should be the given Premisses, for Reasoning and Measures should be taken upon that Conclusion, what Errors must arise from Measures taken upon false Premisses? And these Errors are of the highest Consequence, if

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if the Arguments drawn from this Numbering of the People (as you suggest) be to determine.

FIRST, To Naturalize or not Naturalize all Foreigners.

SECONDLY, How many may be taken out of every Parish for Sea or Land Service.

THIRDLY, How many may be taken away for the Plantations, if such Measures should be taken upon false Premises, and how fatal must be the Consequence.

And indeed I cannot conceive that this Government will take any such Measures at all ; the present Ministry have acted with great Candor, Mildness and good Sense, for the Years they have subsisted. And I believe they will never suffer a general Naturalization, since they know it will not invite over any one rich or industrious Foreigner. And the bringing

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ing over Beggars like the *Palatines*, would only create a general Discontent amongst the Natives of *Britain*, who pay Taxes ; and depreciate the Value of Naturalization, which Foreigners now pay yearly for getting. 'Tis well known that Human Nature takes what it cannot obtain, and despises that which is easily had. I am persuaded the present Ministry would never think of violating the Laws of the Land, so much as to take away Men from their Parishes for either Land or Sea Service. Besides, it would destroy the whole Discipline of the Fleet and the Army. Sailors must be bred as such, and are itinerant Men ; therefore the Parishes could not furnish such ; and the Officers in the Land Service are best Judges who are fittest to be Soldiers, and give Money to such as are willing to enlist, and whom they approve of. If instead of this, you should send Men from the Parishes who are mostly awkward and unfit

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fit for Service, you would throw your Troops into the miserable Condition which the Pressing Act did.

As to the Third, I cannot conceive that the Lords of Trade would ever think of using this Power, if it should be given to them, towards taking out of every Parish so many Persons according to their Numbers for the Plantations; the Expence of carrying them over would be too great for the Kingdom to bear, besides the Distress of the Families who lost them, and the Misery of the People who by Force would be obliged to change their Climate and manner of living, and where they might die of Sickness before they could become useful.

I humbly therefore presume, none of these three can be Arguments for, but be rather strong ones against giving a Power which this good Ministry will not make Use of, but which

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which may be the laying a Temptation in the Way of future Ministers, to persuade them to do Things destructive to themselves and their Country.

'Tis a new Thing in *England* for Overseers to go from House to House to enquire the Circumstances of People, their Wives, their Children, and Lodgers, and to know their Ages; and the People who should obstruct such Inquisition to be punished.— Whether the hindering an Overseer to go into every Room in the House be an Obstruction? Whether Noblemen's Houses are to be opened to an Overseer on Demand? And as they are to return the Sexes, whether they are to examine them? are Matters that may be asked. And if the Overseers think that the hindering these Enquiries be Obstructions, the People who oppose them will be under Judgment for the Penalty?

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THE Return of the Number of the Poor, you say, may be of Use with Respect to regulating the Poor's-Tax ; and also towards laying a greater and more proportionable Land-Tax on the distant Counties.

GIVE me Leave to say, Sir, That the Poor's-Tax is in each Parish laid by the Inhabitants *Volenti non fit Injurius*, they give no more than what they think necessary for the Maintenance of their People ; and if it is misapplied, the very People who give it, and misapply, must suffer for so doing. The Return so made may tempt a future Minister by the Vastness of the Sum, to take it for the public Service, not considering the Vastness of the Numbers of People maintained by it, Numbers of whom must perish if removed to distant Work-Houses, whilst they subsist in their own Parishes, where the Sick recover, and the Young grow up to future Labour.

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THE other Use which you mention may be made of this, that is, levying more by the Land-Tax on the farther Counties, and in *Scotland*, than is now raised by the Cess, is a Matter of too high a Nature for me to speak much upon. And I am persuaded, that the present Ministry is too wise to attempt such a Thing, which in its own Nature is unjust, as well as unpopular. The Quota's of the Counties was laid by Parliament above fifty Years ago ; and the Assessment was settled by the Union. People have purchased under these Quotas, and in their Purchase the Land-Tax has been considered ; therefore altering the Quota is injuring the Purchaser ; nor can the distant Counties, whose Money is spent in *London* by the Resort of their Nobility and Gentry to Parliament, by the Taxes and Excises payed to the Funds, the Interest of which is also spent near *London*, be able to pay equal Taxes with those neighbouring

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bouring Counties, who drain all their Money from them.

You are pleas'd to mention, that the Expence of putting this Matter in Execution will be but small, that is to say, Twenty Shillings to be divided amongst the Overseers of each Parish; give me leave to say, *Sir*, that Twenty Shillings a Year to each Parish amounts to 100,000 Pounds a Year to *England*, since there are about 10,000 Parishes and Places that have Overseers; and the other Things that you mention amounts by Calculation to 10,000 Pounds a Year more. Now, whatever way this is collected, or from whomsoever it is taken, it is a Burden on the Subject; and as you say it is to be perpetual, it is to be looked upon as thirty Times as much, since a perpetual Tax is thirty Years Purchase, at which this makes 600,000 Pounds, which is to be taken from the Poor's Tax, or from the Poor: The Benefit purchas'd with such a Sum by

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a Nation so deeply in Debt as we are, ought to be very apparent; but those Ends which you have mentioned may be obtained by this Measure, seem to me rather injurious than beneficial.

You mention, that the ascertaining the Genealogy and Descents, may be of great Use: Our Ancestors did not think so; when they bought off the Courts of Ward, and, *inquisitio post mortem*, they looked upon this registering of every Man's Death and Birth by the Officers of the Crown, to be a high Badge of Slavery, and so destructive to the Liberties of a free People, that they gave Excise to get rid of this *Egyptian* Bondage; but you say they are only now oblig'd to register with the Parson of the Parish: And why so? Are we to give to the Priests what our Ancestors refus'd to the King? Why should the Dissenter register with the Parson of the Parish, and not with the Minister of his own Congregation? Why should not the *Jew* be allowed to

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to register with his own Priest? Why should not the Nobility be allowed to register in the Herald's-Office? And as for Descent of the Poor, what need they to register? What signifies Genealogy to poor Labourers and Manufacturers, and they are twenty to one of those to whom Genealogy may be of Use, yet all are to pay to the Priest of the Parish? As for Successions, and the Times when Youth comes of Age, we find that they do take Possession of their Estates, and we find few Inconveniencies; and if some Disputes have arisen, a few Inconveniencies can be no Objection to a general Law, since no general Law can be without few Inconveniencies.

You say, that the Overseers are to return all the Males and Females in the Parish to the Justice of Peace: How severe a Task it is for an Overseer to go and examine every one from the Beggar to the Lord in a great Parish, from the sucking Child to the decrepid
old

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old Age? How impossible it is for an Overseer to do this? But yet you say he is obliged to swear to it, and under a considerable Penalty if he does not. What is this but putting the Overseer absolutely in the Power of the Justices of Peace? The Ministers and Overseers of the Parish, you say, are to transmit these to the Clerks of the Peace; and if the Clerk of the Peace exhibits and proves Complaint for Neglect, they are to be fined Ten Pounds for every Offence; in what a perilous Condition will this put every Minister and Overseer!

You mention, that the Clerks of the Peace are to return Schedules of all these Matters to the Commissioners of Trade and Plantation, who are to make a compleat Abstract for the whole Realm: I have already shewed, that these Abstracts cannot be compleat or just with respect to the Number of People, &c. You have saved me the Trouble of asking, why to the Lords
D of

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of Trade preferable to all other Offices ? for you acquaint me with a Thing I never knew before, that the Lords Commissioners of Trade are appointed by the King's Commission with the Trades, Manufactures, and employing the Poor of the Kingdom : Excuse me, *Sir*, if, notwithstanding what you say, I doubt whether the Lords of Trade have any such Authority. I never heard before, that the Poor were the King's Chattles, nor that the Crown could grant Authority over them by its Letters Patent. I always heard, that the Trade, as well as the People of this Island, were free. I never heard before, that Letters Patent could authorise Commissioners appointed during Pleasure, to have Power or Authority over Trade or Manufactures ; if so, where will be the FREEDOM of TRADE, and where the FREEDOM of ELECTIONS ?

You mention some Doubts, and at the same Time say, you are unwilling
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to express them, lest you should be SINGULAR ; the Man who is SINGULAR in opposing bad Things, gives the highest Instance of *steady Virtue*. *Curtius* was *singular* in leaping into the Gulph, *Regulus* in voluntarily returning to the *Carthaginian* Tortures ; and *Cato's* Mind is celebrated as the *only Thing unsubdued* by *Cæsar*.

MILTON gives you two Characters, the one of *Belial*, who had lately from an Angel of Light fallen into a Coalition with *Lucifer*, a most complying Courtier-like *Demon*.

— On the other Side up rose
Belial, in Act more graceful and
humane :
A fairer Person lost not Heaven ; he
seem'd
For Dignity compos'd, and high
Exploit.
But all was false and hollow, tho'
his Tongue
Drop'd Manna, and cou'd make the
worse appear

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The better Reason, to perplex and
dash
Maturest Counsels ; for his Thoughts
were low,
To Vice industrious, but to nobler
Deeds
Timorous and slothful: yet he pleas'd
the Ear,
And with perswasive Accent thus be-
gan :

The other of *Abdiel*, who was the
single Angel among the numerous
Host of *Lucifer's* Followers that dar-
ed to assert Truth, as you see by the
following Lines, and refused to enter
into any Compromise, tho' he was
single.

LUCIFER's Speech being ended,
Milton says,

Thus far his bold Discourse without
Controul
Had Audience, when among the
Seraphim

Ab-

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Abdiel, than whom none with more
Zeal adorn'd
The Deity, and Divine Command
obey'd
Stood up, and in a Flame of Zeal
severe
The Current of his Fury thus op-
pos'd.

And a little after *Milton* says,

So spake the fervent Angel, but his
Zeal
None seconded, as out of Season
judg'd
Or *Singular* and Rash ; whereat re-
joyc'd
The Apostate.

To which *Lucifer* answers with in-
solent Threats to *Abdiel*, and his Speech
is approved by all.

He said, and as the Sound of Waters
deep,
Hoarse Murmur echo'd to his Words
Applause,

Thro'

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Thro' the infinite Host ; nor less for
 that
 The flaming Seraph, fearless, tho'
 alone,
 Encompass'd round with Foes, thus
 answer'd bold :
 " O alienate from God, O Spirit
 " accurst,
 " Forsaken of all Good, I see thy
 " Fall
 " Determined, and thy hapless Crew
 " involv'd
 " In this perfidious Fraud, &c."
 So spake the Seraph *Abdiel*, faithful
 found
 Among the Faithless, faithful *only*
be
 Among the innumerable false, un-
 mov'd,
 Unshaken, uneduc'd, unterrified,
 His Loyalty he kept, his Love, his
 Zeal,
 Nor *Number* nor *Example* with him
 wrought
 To swerve from Truth, or change
 his constant Mind,
 Though

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Though *Single*, from amidst them
 forth he pass'd,
 Long Way through hostile Scorn,
 which he sustain'd,
Superior, nor of Violence fear'd
 aught.
 And with *retorted Scorn* his Back
 he turn'd
 On those proud Tow'rs to swift De-
 struction doom'd.

But tho' *Lucifer* scorn'd him for Sin-
 gularity ; these are the Applauses he
 meets for that Singularity :

Servant of God, well done, well
 hast thou fought
 The better Fight, who *single* has
 maintain'd
 Against revolted Multitudes the
 Cause
 Of Truth, in Word mightier than
 they in Arms,
 And for the Testimony of Truth
 hast born
 Universal Reproach, far worse to
 bear
 Than

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Than Violence, for this was all thy
Care
To stand approv'd in Sight of God,
tho' Worlds
Judg'd thee *perverse*.

F I N I S.