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L E T T E R  
TO  
*The* P E O P L E  
OF  
E N G L A N D,  
UPON  
*The* P R E S E N T C R I S I S,  
BY  
JAMES EDWARD HAMILTON, Esq;

L O N D O N :

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TO THE  
PEOPLE of ENGLAND.

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**B**EING now upon the eve of a war, when on account of the great burthens we actually labour under, many well meaning individuals may have disagreeable forebodings of the consequences, however gloriously carried on. To dispel such gloomy prospects, which might be attended with effects extremely prejudicial to the national character, I am emboldened to lay before the public a system of taxation, which will shew, that the resources of this country are far from being exhausted, and, moreover, prove that it was never yet capable of such vigorous exertions as it actually is.

But, first I shall observe, that our actual taxes are not more burthensome, nor even so much so, as they were a century ago: for at that time, when the total income of all classes in *England* can hardly be estimated at more than *fifty* millions sterling, the peace establishment was about *four* millions

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or *eight per cent.* whereas now that the total income of all classes in *Great Britain*, at least amounts to *two hundred millions*, our *necessary* taxes amount only to *fourteen millions and a half* annually, or about *seven and quarter per cent.* but then it is far easier and less burthenfome to collect *fourteen millions and half* or *seven and quarter per cent.* out of an annual revenue of *two hundred millions*, arising from a country of the same superficies, than it is to collect *four millions* from the same country, yielding a total revenue of only *fifty millions*. Thus, there are English counties which yield a revenue equal to that of all Scotland, though not a fifth part of its extent; and without half the expence to the public, or inconvenience to individuals.

Let us now cast a view on our relative situation. France is not capable of the same exertions, nor will she be for some time, as she was a century ago; whereas we are *four* times more powerful at the least. Spain, perhaps, is more powerful than she was a hundred years ago. Austria, Russia, and Prussia, are now so nearly balanced, that without any interference on our part, there is no probability that the beam will be permitted, by any of these potentates, to incline much on either side: and certainly no one of them would suffer France, had she the inclination and ability,

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to atchieve any material advantages against either of the other two. But a century ago, France would have thought very little, indeed, about entering the lists against these *three* potentates united; neither would they be able to resist her. So that at present, it depends upon ourselves, whether we chuse to engage in Continental politics or not. In either case, no bad consequences would follow; whereas a century ago, our indifference would probably have been attended with the subjugation of Germany, the Low Countries, Italy, and Spain, to the House of Bourbon. Our actual situation then is truly an enviable one, in comparison with that of the last century.

The system of taxation, which I could wish to have established, in the stead of that which actually exists, is as follows.

One Penny a Pound on Butcher's Meat, would produce about	£.3,000,000
Halfpenny a Pound on Wheaten Meal	5,000,000
A Farthing a Pound on Horse Corn	5,000,000
A Farthing a Pound on all Distillable or Distilled, or brewed Grain	3,000,000
Excise on Spirituous Liquors, a few Port Duties, more for Regulation than Finance, and Incidents	2,000,000
Land Tax	2,000,000
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	20,000,000
Expence of Collection	1,000,000
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Net Income	19,000,000
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I presume it will immediately be exclaimed, What!!! Tax the staff of life, when the poor are scarcely able to maintain themselves? This I utterly deny. In no part of the world do the ordinary wages of a common labouring man, who are the worst paid of any class in Britain, bear a greater disproportion to the necessaries of life; that is, the ordinary wages of a day labourer in England can purchase *more* of the real necessaries of life, than the ordinary wages of the same class of people in any other part of the world. For, admitting that the ordinary wages of a labouring man in the neighbourhood of London to be 1s. 6d. a day throughout the year, he can purchase with it *four* pounds of wholesome meat, and of a better quality than can be purchased in any other part of the world, with the ordinary day-labourers wages. Thus at Cork, one of the cheapest towns in Ireland, a day-labourer's wages being at an average about 7d. a day the year through, will, during the slaughtering season (a third part of the year) certainly purchase four pounds of good meat: but then the four succeeding months, from February to May both inclusive, it will not purchase *two* pounds of good beef, and the four following months, not *three* pounds of good meat upon an average. But flesh meat, though it should be a considerable part of a labouring

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ing man's expences, yet in no case ought it ever to exceed a third part of his daily disbursement; therefore, though Britons pay higher for this article, as also for all other sorts of butcher's meat, yet, in revenge, by adopting the above system of taxation, they will have almost all the other necessaries of life upon easier terms than any other people whatever, who will gladly send the produce of their respective countries to us, in exchange for our manufactures: or rather, their productions will be carried to us by our own merchants, who understand the business so much better than themselves; thus our navy will be increased. Hence the impropriety of our corn laws, either respecting importation or exportation; it being the interest of the mechanic to buy his bread where he can get it best and cheapest, as also of the farmer's, to sell the produce of his land to the best advantage, and to buy the productions of art where they can be got best and cheapest. Both, unless government interferes, will however take care not to lose his neighbours custom.

There is another circumstance, besides the highness of wages, which gives the British labourer an advantage over those of his class in every other part of the world: *the certainty of being employed*: that is, a probability far superior to that which exists  
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in any other part of the globe, unless perhaps in Holland. And it is this which constitutes the happiness and comfort of this most numerous and useful class of society.

It will perhaps be agreeable to the reader to have a comparative statement of what the poor *now* pay, and what they *would* probably pay by the proposed mode of direct taxation; and the proportion of the actual income of a labouring man's family, to the amount of the tax.

A labouring man and his family, consisting of a wife and three children, one capable of work, may at least earn annually 40*l.* According to our present mode of taxation, they may be well supposed to pay about 7*l.* 10*s.* a year; but according to the proposed scheme, I apprehend, they will not pay more than 5*l.* there will remain, of course, 35*l.* to support them, which is twice a greater income, than the same class of people in any country in Europe enjoy, except perhaps in Holland: which sum, besides, will go farther here in purchasing most of the necessaries of life (for such I call decent cloathing) than in any other country. Hence it clearly appears, that the labouring class of poor in this country, who are the worst paid of any in it, enjoy twice a greater income deducting thereout the amount of their annual taxes than the same class in any other country.

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Or in other words, that without paying any taxes, they receive twice as great an income as the same class any where else.

It will be here perhaps objected;—If this be so, how happens it, that the poor are so distressed, and find it so difficult to subsist? The answer to this is obvious; it results from their very prosperity; for what Briton, having money in his pocket to purchase himself and family a comfortable meal, will put up with potatoes and milk as the Irishman, or the Frenchman's dry bread and fruit—what Briton who can afford it (and thank God all who are industrious and provident can) but will have a desire to have himself and family comfortably clad. Here then are the sources whence spring the distresses of the poor; all almost having the means to purchase butcher's meat, even at its present high price, and the supply of the market being *limited*, it necessarily follows that the price will rise in proportion to the demand: so that in fact were the labouring poor entirely freed from taxes, they would be but little benefited, as their incomes being so much increased would enable so many more to go to market than actually do; besides enabling those who at present go to market to disburse more money annually in the purchase of more expensive meat than they now make use of, would so raise the price of  
butcher's

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butcher's meat, as would perhaps be more than an equivalent to the proposed tax. The case, however, is different with regard to manufactures, for by means of human ingenuity these can be multiplied to any extent, and by the improvements in mechanism are continually falling in value. Here, however, we must except those manufactures to which mechanism will not apply; as shoes, &c. but these, if to be had cheaper from other countries, should be thence procured. So that were things put upon their proper footing the labouring poor when complaining of the dearth of the times, would in fact be only lamenting their own prosperity, which enabled so many more than in any other country, to go to market, and to enjoy the decent luxuries of life. Hence it is evident that in those countries in which the wages of the labouring poor enable them to enjoy the decent necessaries of life, that direct taxes upon the bulky and most necessary articles of life, are the least oppressive to them: for the more indirect any tax the heavier it falls upon the consumer. Thus the tax upon leather, which is far from being one of the most indirect taxes, is three-fold upon the consumer, and though shoes are not the *staff* of life, yet I hope that they will ever be deemed an absolute and indispensable article of every freeman.

Moreover, the proposed taxes will chiefly affect the rich, and they are besides of such a nature

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nature as not easily to be evaded. For, if a person keeps a man servant he will pay in these direct taxes, from five to eight guineas annually. If a maid from three to five guineas. If a horse from five to eight guineas. These are the luxuries of life. These are the drones which consume the honey. I will even add, that in consequence of the tax upon horse corn, the breed of horses will be so discouraged, and that of black cattle so encouraged, that together with a premium of a million annually for the *effectual* encouragement of agriculture, that perhaps neither the staff of life, nor butchers meat, would at all rise above what they would do in a few years independently of the proposed impost. There is a material difference with respect to premiums for the encouragement of agriculture, and for the encouragement of manufactures: in the first case, the benefit is universal; in the latter it is partial: the one has our existence for its object; the other only whether the decent conveniences of life shall be procured somewhat cheaper.

I know that the present policy of our government is to tax the luxuries of life as they are called, but I hesitate not to affirm, that no conduct can be more impolitic, for it will occasion the expatriating of the little gentry of this kingdom, which class of inhabitants have been in this, and in every other

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country, the most enterprizing and usefu citizens. Men decently educated will now think little of removing to a kingdom where these luxuries will be within their reach: and with them the greatest of all luxuries, equal liberty under a mild government.—

In the above calculations of the produce of the proposed taxes, I have estimated the inhabitants of Great Britain at *twelve* millions, which I thus prove, as well, I apprehend, as the peculiar nature of the subject will admit. England, without including Scotland and Wales, is at least equal to a third part of France, and is *twice* as large as Ireland. But the former contains *twenty-four* millions of inhabitants, and the latter *four* millions: therefore, if England be *only equally* populous as these two kingdoms, it must contain *eight* millions of people. But whoever has travelled through these three countries must have been sensible of its *greatly superior comparative population* over either of them: to say it is only a *third* more, in my apprehension, is speaking greatly within the truth, which, if admitted will make the population of England amount to *twelve* millions; add *two* millions for Wales and Scotland, which must be allowed to be far short of the truth; *fourteen* millions will then be about the actual population of Great Britain, admitting that the actual population of  
France

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France and Ireland to be as I have here laid them down. If their population be contended for to be higher or lower, in an equal proportion should the population of Great Britain be raised or lowered. It is my opinion, however, that the population of neither of these countries, is overrated. Even before the late accurate survey of houses in Ireland was laid before the public, which evinces the truth of the above estimate with respect to it, I had always contended, these three or four years past, that *four* millions were about its actual population.

Again, London and its environs contain more inhabitants than the three most populous towns in France, Paris, Lyons, and Bourdeaux; after which we can reckon ten towns in England which contain a far greater comparative population than any thirty towns in France: whereas, to prove an equal population in this respect, the thirty French towns should contain *three times* the number of people that the *ten* English towns do. Perhaps we have ten English towns nearly as populous as any ten in France, subducting on both sides those already mentioned. Besides, England is a garden. But, except the wine countries and French Flanders, France is miserably cultivated, and countries cannot be cultivated or converted into gardens without hands.

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I must also observe, that this is a question of far greater moment than is commonly imagined. For when it is recollected in other countries, that England contains six or seven millions of inhabitants, as some of our calculators affirm; those nations which consist of 20 or 30 millions will have less backwardness at trying the chances of war with us, than they would have, did they know our actual strength and resources. And now, that foreign nations are struggling for their liberties, (which I trust in God they will most gloriously achieve, as it will contribute so much, not only to their own happiness and prosperity, but also to ours, and to the whole world) and with them will attain to unforeseen power, it is peculiarly necessary to give them proper notions respecting our true state; lest in their enthusiasm they should be incited by some hot heads to attack us to our mutual destruction. For it is too well known, that war has very rarely repaid the expences, &c. attending it.

I have also estimated the horses at a million or one to about every *sixty* acres throughout Great Britain, though I am inclined to think that there are at least half a million more. But having allowed these a daily allowance of fourteen pounds of horse corn which must be deemed an ample one it will be fully compensated by the extra number.

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I cannot help thinking that the presumed paucity of our people, and our inability to encrease *materially* our public revenue have not a little contributed to our actually being on the eve of a war; and that whilst the same errors continue unrefuted by an enumeration of the people, and raising our annual revenue at least *four* millions above our expenditure, we shall ever be subject to this calamity.

But having shewn to the world our, I might almost say, almost infinite resources, which together with the wisdom of our Councils, and the acknowledged bravery of the people, would lay the foundation of a well grounded hope, that no nation whatever would have the folly to attack us, and that the raising our finances so much beyond our annual expenditure is very practicable, I trust has been clearly shewn. I shall farther add, that such a knowledge being spread among our people, would invigorate that enterprising spirit, the most invaluable characteristic of any people, which so strongly distinguishes Britons from all other nations.

A word more, Dr. Price and his disciples who contend for the paucity of our numbers, and the populousness of *enslaved* countries, surely pay but a bad compliment to their *democratic* principles: For if Britain which for a century has enjoyed a prosperity the consequence of an enlightening policy,



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policy, and of the freedom of the press, unknown to other countries, should have nevertheless been gradually losing her people, whilst France in a predicament the very opposite has been encreasing her inhabitants, it will be deemed by all impartial persons an irresistible argument, were it well founded, against a farther enlargement of the liberties of the people for which they so stiffly contend: for an encreasing and a decreasing population are the most unerring tests of the goodness of a political constitution.

For the following reasons, besides many others I could adduce, I enter my protest against indirect taxation, and taxes upon what are vulgarly called the luxuries of life.

First, indirect taxes frequently fall in a duplicate and treplicate proportion upon the consumer beyond what is received by government, thus he is impoverished, and rendered less capable of purchasing the manufactures of Great Britain; and it is well known that Britain is its own best market: besides they must always be in some measure evaded.

2dly. The middling gentry, or those from 200*l.* to 500*l.* a year, being unable to purchase the luxuries of life, and to make an appearance among their countrymen agreeable to their rank and education, will retire into other countries in which they may enjoy those advantages; and thus, one of the most useful classes, even in a political

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litical view, being a natural rein upon the democracy, will be constantly leaving the kingdom.

3dly. Indirect taxes render the people too supine, and inattentive to the measures of government; whereas, direct taxation, would arrest their attention, an advantage which cannot be questioned by the friends of freedom and humanity.

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