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A
L E T T E R
TO A
MEMBER of PARLIAMENT.

PROPOSING
AMENDMENTS to the LAWS against Fore-
stallers, Ingrossers, and Regraters.

AND
Recommending MEANS to prevent for the
future Extravagant high Prices of Corn in
this Kingdom.

AND ALSO
Giving REASONS for Repealing, or at least Altering,
the Law allowing Bounty-Money on the Expor-
tation of Wheat to Foreign Parts.



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A
L E T T E R
T O A
M E M B E R O F P A R L I A M E N T .

S I R,

I NEED not remind you of the Distresses your Neighbours felt, when you left the Country, from the high Price of Provisions, and chiefly of Bread-Corn.

The Difficulties they laboured under have not yet lessen'd ; the Manufacturers and Labourers are much reduced, and can scarce subsist ; many Freeholders of small Estates and large Families, who have heretofore paid Poor-Rates to the Relief of others, want that themselves.

The melancholy State of so many useful People demands the particular Care and Attention

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which in the end will be the total ruin of this Country

[4]

tention of both Houses of Parliament; and is of far more Consequence to the Publick, than many of the Disputes amongst the Ambitious, who shall be in or out of Place.

His Majesty, out of tender Regard to his distressed Subjects, has, like a kind Father of his People, recommended their Case to the Consideration of his Parliament. And the Nation expects from the Justice and Wisdom of the two Houses, that such Provision will be made, which will, as far as human Prudence can devise, prevent such grievous Hardships as have been lately felt in many Parts of this Kingdom, by Multitudes of the poorer Sort; the Strength and Support of the Kingdom, and without whom the Rich themselves would starve.

I shall forbear animadverting on those uncharitable Persons, who have since the great Rise in the Price of Corn become Purchasers of it for Sale; and greatly improved their Fortunes by taking advantage of the Necessities of the Poor. Many of these new Dealers were before opulent; and had they, as some of late have meritoriously done, purchased Grain to retail again at Prime-

[5]

Prime-Cost to the Poor, they would have deserved the Thanks of their Neighbours for rescuing them out of the Hands of Ingrossers, Foretallers, and Regraters, instead of being deemed Partners with them in their Iniquities.

Great Inconveniences arise from the present Method Badgers, Bread-bakers and Corn-factors use, of buying Corn at Farm-Houses. It has in every Age been thought beneficial to the Publick to encourage the Sale of all Sorts of Provisions at publick Fairs and Markets, and to prevent all clandestine and private Jobbing. Hence all the various Acts relating to Weights and Measures, and those against Ingrossers, Foretallers, and Regraters. But such are either defective and want to be explained, or the Difficulty is great in putting them (in many Instances) in Execution against the Offenders; and the Penalty of 5*l.* is too small, especially as one Moiety goes to the King. Thus these wholesome Laws are render'd in some Respects ineffectual.

By the Statute of 5 and 6 of *Edward* the 6th, every Person who buys Corn or Grain

[6]

to sell again is deemed an Ingrosser ; with a Proviso and Exception to Badgers, Laders, and Kidders, licenced by three Justices in open Sessions ; and such Badgers, &c. are to sell the same Corn or Grain in some open Fair or Market, or to Persons for their own Use in their Houses, within one Month after it is bought by them and not forestalled ; and they are not to sell it again in the same Market where it was bought, or within four Miles thereof.

The Statute of 5 of *Eliz.* describes the Qualification a Person ought to have to intitle him to a Licence ; and requires Bonds and Sureties for such Persons against Forestalling or Ingrossing, &c. with a Proviso that no Person, by virtue of any such Licence, shall buy any Corn or Grain out of open Fairs or Markets to sell again, unless such Person shall be thereunto licenced, by special and express Words contained in such Licence.

The Intention of these Statutes is easily evaded from the Difficulties attending Prosecutions in many Cases, especially in the Instances of Persons hoarding Corn bought

[7]

by them for a longer Time than a Month. I apprehend, as the Law now stands, the Prosecutor must prove, that the Badger, charged with keeping bought Corn in his Hands longer than one Month, had at a certain Time so long before bought such a Parcel of Grain ; and that he had, at the Time the Prosecution commenced, that or a Part of that identical Corn then unfold. All these Facts can scarce be proved by any Persons, but such who have the Care of such Grain, who are not likely to be Witnesses ; tho' the Badger at that Time may have the whole Quantity in his Granaries. It will be scarce possible in many Cases to convict, unless after Proof given by the Prosecutor that the Offender did at such a Time purchase such a Quantity of Grain, the further Proof shall lie on the Defendant that he had disposed at publick Markets of the Grain he had bought, as the Law requires. The Penalty, to bear the Prosecutor's Charges only, ought to be 20 or 30*l.* Some would pay so small a Sum as 5*l.* rather than sell their Grain as the Act requires, if they have a large Quantity by them, in hopes of a higher Market, and getting

[8]

getting much more than 5% by detaining it longer.

It is now not difficult for Badgers, Bread-bakers, and Factors, to get Licences, and buy at several Farmers Houses large Quantities of Grain, and hoard them up; if their own Storehouses are full, they can agree with the Farmer to keep their Grain 'till they shall send for it. Thus less Grain comes to Market; the Price of it rises; and if other Farmers should bring to Market a Quantity on such Rise, these Dealers in Corn may, by throwing in more Corn so as to overstock the Market, lower the Price greatly for that Day, and may have Persons towards the End of the Market to buy up as much as they brought into it, at a low Price again, and be no Losers; and then go about the Country again to buy Corn, which the Farmers will be inclined to sell, on an Offer of something above the last Market-Price; and thus these Dealers, by keeping the Grain so bought from coming to Market in any large Quantity, can raise and fall the Markets as their Interest directs. I wish I could say, that this has not been the Practice; there is strong Reason to suspect

[9]

spect it has been so in some Places. And it may always be the Case, if any Person may be a Badger, with a *special Licence* to buy Corn out of Markets; especially if there is not an easier Way provided for convicting Offenders on their hoarding up Corn, than that at present directed, and the Penalty is not increased. I think, if Bread-bakers are at all allowed to be Badgers, with a Liberty of buying Grain out of Markets, the Laws relating to fixing the Assize of Bread will avail little; the Magistrates are tied to the Price of Wheat for their Guide, in fixing the Price of Bread; and if Bread-bakers can fix or influence the Price of Wheat, they do, in reality, fix the Price of Bread, and their own Profit also. It is certain that of late Bread-bakers have become Badgers and principal Corn-Merchants, and even Millers also. Now Millers are not allowed to deal in Corn; Butchers cannot be Graziers to feed Cattle; and I think Bread-bakers should be confin'd to purchase their Grain and Flour in open Markets only, and not as Badgers. I see little Reason for those special Words mention'd in the 5th of *Eliz.* being inserted in any Licences at all; if all Grain (Wheat especially, and Flour) was brought

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[10]

when corn
exceeds
4th Bushel

brought to Market, it would be no worse for the Farmer, and better for the Publick; except such Grain as shall be bought by Persons for their own Use, and not to sell again; but certainly Bread-bakers should not be Badgers.

The Obligations on Buyers of Corn or Flour, to vend the same again in one Month after the Purchase of it, according as the Law now stands, is very proper; but there are particular Cases where it might be hard to force such an expeditious Sale, and such would be impracticable in others; so that Part of the present Law wants an Alteration. For Instance, where Grain is bought to go to foreign Parts, it could not be intended to come within that Rule. And where Grain ground or unground is bought by any Persons in one Part of the Kingdom, to be sent by Water to another distant Part of it, it can seldom happen that such purchased Grain shall be in the Hands of the Purchaser in less Time, if so soon, as one Month after it is bought; and the Quantity may be large in Comparison of what is usually bought in Markets: and therefore it would be but reasonable to allow

[11]

low a longer Time to dispose of such imported Grain, Meal or Flour, whether it should be imported from any Part of the Kingdom, or from abroad. I should imagine that the Importer cannot have Reason to complain, if the Quantity imported be only 500 Bushels, if he be obliged to sell the same in open Market in one Month after he had received it; and if it shall exceed 500 Bushels, and be under 1000 Bushels, he then may be allowed two Months to dispose of it; and three Months, if the Quantity exceeds 1000 Bushels; provided the said Importer does not dispose of less in any one Month than 500 Bushels: for as he bought it to come to Market, he ought not to keep it from it, as some have done when Grain has been at a very high Price, in hopes of it being still dearer. Some with that View have kept it 'till it has received so much Damage as not to be fit to be used; the Owner in such Cases is rightly fitted, but the Publick suffers.

no bad
thought

Several Alterations, I apprehend, are proper to be made to the Laws relating to Forestallers and Ingrossers; and I have hinted some which may contribute towards
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[12]

the preventing many Mischiefs: but I think all that can possibly be done towards redressing any Grievances arising from Transgressors of those Laws will prove ineffectual, in some particular Times, unless Alterations also are made in the Laws now in force tolerating the unreasonable Exportation of Grain.

That the Exportation of Grain to Foreign Parts, when it is at a low Rate at home, is a publick Benefit, is indisputably true. And it is as undoubtedly a publick Grievance to export it when it is dear at home; which too many have severely felt.

1689

The Act of 1st. of W. and M. c. 12. recites, that the Exportation of Corn and Grain into Foreign Parts, when the Price is at a low Rate in this Kingdom, has been a great Advantage to the Owners of Land and Trade of this Kingdom in general.

This all will agree to; but that Act goes further, and supposes Wheat to be at a low Rate when it does not exceed 48s. a Quarter, Winchester Measure; which no one can agree to at this time. Grain of all sorts,

This is the legal Standard if other measures are used they must be reduced to the Winchester measure but all grain should be sold by weight

[13]

but particularly Wheat, was when that Act passed excessive dear; and it continued so for many Years; insomuch that in Kent Turneps made a considerable Share of the Bread in 1693. In many Parts of the Kingdom the Commonalty then, and till of late Years, eat Bread made of Rye, others Rye and Wheat mixed, some of Barley, some of Oats; thus, the Demand for Wheat was not then so great; the Consumption of it at home was chiefly amongst the better sort of People; and therefore that Law was not so burthensome on the Community. Wheat is now become the principal Grain used for Bread; and there is not I verily believe a Man in Britain, even interested in the Sale of it, that will declare Wheat to be at a low Rate, or cheap, when at 48s. a Quarter, to wit, 6s. a Bushel; nay, not at a low Rate when at 40s. a Quarter, or 5s. a Bushel: consequently, the Reasons of that Act do not now subsist; and Grain ought not to be exported when it is at so high a Rate. But it is amazing, that a Premium of 5s. a Quarter should continue to be allowed and paid to the Exporter of Grain, when at such extravagant Prices; that, in my Judgment, is not only laying

and so they do now

The mean rate in the midland of England is under 4 p Bushel

And a Table should be made^{C 2} to regulate the prices of these sorts of Bread^{an} Wheat bread being in many places not the food of the poor Labourer

[14]

an unnecessary, heavy Tax, but in reality hiring Persons at a high Rate to export Grain at unseasonable Times when it is wanted at home; and thro' Mistake is a sort of Encouragement to distress our own Manufacturers and poor Labourers.

It has been often remarked, that when Wheat has been at a moderate Price at *Bear Key* it has been dear in other Places: this Year, when it was only 5s. there, it was 7 or 8s. in some Parts of the Kingdom. *London* is not only the chief Mart for Grain growing in several inland adjacent Counties, but in those on the southern and eastern Coasts of the Kingdom; and it often happens too, that at some Ports lying near a Corn-Country thinly inhabited Corn shall be at a moderate Price, and high at the same time in the manufacturing Parts and Places more populous. In such Cases, Corn is bought at the Places where it is not so much wanted to supply those where it is, and each receive a Benefit. We have had recent Instances of this; for had it not been for the Supplies procured in time from the southern Counties of the Kingdom, many thousand Families in the more northern

must

[15]

must have perished, or else——But I wont say what would have been the Consequence; the Thought is dreadful. But suppose the Demand abroad had been very great at the Time when Corn was absolutely wanted at home, and the Surplus-Corn in the South had been bought up and sent to Foreign Parts before the Factors in the northern Counties had been able to purchase any considerable Quantity, (which might have been the Case if we had not had a War with *France*; or the like Want of Grain had been in some of the southern Parts of *Europe*, as has often happened;) for under the Law as it now stands, Grain might have been exported 'till lately at one Port or another: I need not ask what would have been the Event? The many Insurrections, Plunderings, and Blood spilt on the unhappy Disturbances occasion'd by the high Price of Grain, and Scarcity of it in many Places, have been but trifling Maladies to those we might have expected if such Supplies could not have been got at all; and it was very near coming to that unhappy Pass, so much Corn having been before that Time exported; nay some Ships were sent abroad from the South, when

Wheat

[16]

Wheat was risen to an immoderate Price in the North: a plain Proof that the Price of Grain at one Port should not be the Standard for licencing Exportation to Foreign Parts; no, let us feed our own People first; Charity begins at home. But not only Charity but Justice, nay Interest requires us to supply our Manufacturers, Labourers, and others with common Necessaries before we send Provisions abroad. I know some will say that the Scarcity of Grain is intirely owing to the two or three late bad Harvests thro' the Kingdom. I grant that has been the principal Cause, but not totally; we had Corn sufficient in the Kingdom in such Seasons for our own Consumption, tho' not for that and to supply all Markets abroad. The private Gain the Exporters of Grain of late have had is no Satisfaction to the Publick for the Injury done to Millions. If all the Gains, nay the whole Fortunes of the Merchants lately concerned in Exportation of Grain, were confiscated and given to the Poor, they would not satisfy the Damages done to the Kingdom by the unseasonable Exportation of Grain. I do not say that the Exporters designed any Injury, I do not suppose they thought further than
of

[17]

of the Profit arising from the Sale of the Commodity abroad, and justify themselves under the Law. Let us therefore remove the Temptation; we have seen enough to induce us to concert Measures to prevent the like Calamities for the future as far as we are able. It may indeed please God to destroy all the Fruits of the Earth, and bring a Famine on the Land for our Sins; for God knows we are not sufficiently sensible of the many Blessings poured upon us. We have lived in Plenty, even rioted in Luxury, whilst many Nations around us have wanted the common Necessaries of Life, and many Persons been destroyed in an Instant. We have moreover the Enjoyment of our religious and civil Liberties, Blessings disallowed to our neighbouring Nations; we ought not to repine on slender Occasions, but return Thanks with chearful Hearts for the good Things we have had, and that the Seasons have been no worse; they have not been so bad as to have occasion'd a Scarcity in the Land, if we had taken proper Measures in time to have kept that at home which our own People had a natural Right to. Let us therefore not hesitate in fixing on such
Measures

[18]

Measures as will for the future prevent, as far as human Foresight will direct, the Calamities lately felt.

I have proposed some Amendments to the Laws relating to Forestallors, Regraters, and Ingrossers. And as we have seen that the Price of Grain may be moderate at one Place, and otherwise at many other Places in this Kingdom, at the same time; and we also know that the Price of Grain is estimated very high when it is not less than 48s. a Quarter at any Port in the Kingdom; and that it is never thought at a low Rate, especially in the South, when at 4s. 6d. a Bushel, or 36s. a Quarter; and when above 5s. a Bushel, it is called dear; when 48s. very dear. Therefore I propose,

it would be better if reduced to 4s. " That no Wheat, ground or unground, shall be exported from any Part of this Kingdom, when it exceeds the Price of 4s. 6d. or 5s. a Bushel, as shall be thought most proper; but I am rather inclin'd to fix it at 5s. on account of restraining Exportation from any

[19]

" any Port, when the Price is higher at any of the Markets following, to wit, either *Bear-Key*, *Lincoln*, *Derby*, *York*, *Manchester*, *Coventry*, *Gloucester*, *Winchester*, or *Exeter*."

And that the Price of Wheat at such Places may be easily known,

" The respective Mayors, or other chief Magistrates of every such City or Town, shall be obliged every first and third Week in every Month, to transmit each a Certificate of the Price Wheat bore a Bushel, *Winchester* Measure, at such Places the preceding Market-day, to the Commissioners of the Customs in *London*, to be by them inserted in the *Saturday's Gazette* every such Week.

" And that all Collectors and Officers of Ports shall take notice thereof, and suffer no Wheat, ground or unground, to be exported

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[20]

“ ported to Foreign Parts when the
 “ Price of such Grain exceeds 5s. a
 “ Bushel, or 40s. a Quarter, at any of
 “ the said Markets.”

Severe Penalties to be inflicted on Persons exporting to Foreign Parts contrary to these Regulations.

In some Reigns in the last Century, Wheat was not to be exported abroad when the Price was 4s. a Bushel; by the 12. *Char.* II. when it was above 3s. a Bushel. Indeed in those Days we had not near so much Land in Tillage, but in answer thereto it may truly be said, that we had not then near so many Mouths to fill; the Kingdom was not so populous; and besides, the Commonalty eat less Wheat in proportion to their Number than they do now. It can never be for the Interest of this trading Kingdom to have Corn at an immoderate Price long together. Tho' the Land-Owner should get more for a Time, in the mean he would be no Gainer if the Price long continued very high, as all Provisions would rise in proportion, and the

[21]

the Poors-Rates *would* increase, and of course Wages and Price of Labour would advance, which might not drop when Corn dropt in Price. No Farmers in the South need to want a Market for their Grain when it is dear in the North; and when it is cheap, or even at a moderate Rate at several different distant Parts of this Kingdom, let it be exported to Foreign Parts.

If any better Scheme can be proposed for the general Weal of the Kingdom, I shall be glad of it; let it be embraced. Some Method ought to be taken to prevent the Insurrections and the Hardships many feel from the Scarcity of Provisions: and the Proposal above is the most likely that has occur'd to me. Occasional Bills to prevent Exportation are only temporary Expedients; but such a Law ought to be made as would guard against future Evils as far as we are able.

I cannot omit speaking my Sentiments on another Part of that Act of the 1st. of W. A.D. 1689 and M. tho' I am apprehensive some Mer-

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chants,

in 1689 according to B^r Fleetwood's table the price of Wheat ^{per} q^t at Windsor market was 1. 10 p^{er} q^t. or under 4 p^{er} Bushel. and the mean price rate of the vicenary immediately preceding was 5. 9²/₃ p^{er} Bushel w^{ch} plainly shew^s the reason why the Legislature fixed

unity at 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ Bushel and the same reason
now lower it to 4 or at least to 4.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ Bushel
[22]

others may be
of a different
opinion

chants, and some of my brother Farmers will differ with me. Present Profit is the Object of too many of every Rank; but private Interest should give way to that of the Publick. I think the Tax laid on the Publick for Bounties on Exportation unnecessary, for a Tax I must call it, since that which is paid by the Officers of the Customs to the Exporter causes a Deficiency of so much in the Revenue, which must be made up another Way. In our Situation we can ill afford to throw away Money; and if I am not misinform'd, within the Compass of some Years some hundred thousand Pounds have been paid as Premiums on Exportation of Grain and Flour.

Now in order to make it manifest that such Premiums have been a publick Benefit, Proof should be given that all or the greatest Part of such Corn which was exported, would not have gone abroad without the Allowance of the Bounty; and that no Part was exported when it was wanted at home.

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[23]

I grant the Exporters would not have had such high Gains without the Bounty; but that is not the Question.

I think I may lay it down for a certain Truth, that whenever Corn is cheap at home and dear abroad, it will find its Way to the Market without a Premium. That whenever it is cheap abroad, it cannot be wanted from this Kingdom; and whenever it is not cheap at home, it ought not to be sent abroad, let the Price be there ever so great; or at least unless upon some very extraordinary Occasion, to the Assistance of an Ally in great Necessity, (as lately to Lisbon) and in such Cases, not to be too often repeated.

rightly
judged

I think it a common Error to suppose the Land-Owner a considerable Gainer by this Premium paid to the Merchant; the Price of Grain abroad does not fix the Price here at home; the Merchant neither pays more or less to the Farmer for the Grain he buys than the Price it bears here. Suppose Wheat was but 20s. a Quarter at home, (and

[24]

(and it was but about that Price in many Parts for some Years together) and the Price of the same Grain was at *Cadiz* at that Time 50 s. a Quarter, can any one imagine that the Merchant on account of such high Price abroad, or on account of the Bounty, will give to the Farmer one Doit above 20 s. a Quarter the Market-Price at home? How then does the Land-Owner get any thing by the Bounty? But the Merchant's Gain in such Cases would be immoderate; the Bounty would be 25 l. $\frac{1}{4}$ cent. on his Prime-Cost; and he would get 150 l. $\frac{1}{4}$ cent. more, deducting the Freight, only by the Difference of Price at different Markets. In such Cases is not the Tax unnecessarily laid on the Publick? or will any one say that such Corn would not have gone abroad without a Premium? But suppose the Difference of Price to be considerably less, the Merchant will find it his Interest to export Grain without any Bounty at all. It cannot be doubted but that the Premiums lately paid have been extremely injurious to the Publick, if by them Encouragement has been given to export Grain when at a high Price and wanted at home; and if the higher Price abroad was a sufficient Inducement, then the Bounty was un-

[25]

unnecessarily paid. Is it not strange that in so short a Time after Premiums have been given to encourage the Exportation of our Grain out of the Kingdom, we should proffer Premiums to encourage the Importation of the very same Commodity into the Kingdom? This shews the Absurdity and ill Policy of suffering Grain to be exported at all when it is at so high a Price as is now tolerated by Law, as well as the Folly of allowing a Bounty at such Times in particular.

It is very plain that if Premiums are proper to be allowed at all, they should only be so when Corn is at a low Rate at home; but we ought never to allow so high a Bounty as 5 s. a Quarter: and so far should we be from allowing any Bounty when Corn only borders on a high Price, that Grain should not then be exported at all; for there is but a Step betwixt dear and very dear. We have found by Experience when Grain once becomes dear, that some will take the Advantages of the Times, and not take their Grain in haste to publick Markets, but keep it in Store in hopes of

[26]

of its being dearer; and many, if tolerated longer to purchase Grain at Farmers Houses, may buy up large Quantities, raise the Price of Markets, and not retail till there is a great Want, and the Price mounted high. They could not do this so easily if they were restrain'd to the purchasing only in open Markets, and be obliged to part with it as the Law requires in one Month after the Purchase of it.

To my other Proposals therefore, I shall add these, to wit,

*when it exceeds
4^{pp} Bushel*

" That Wheat, ground or un-
" ground, and Meal, shall be sold
" only at publick Markets; unless to
" Persons for their own private Use,
" and not to sell again.

" That no Wheat, ground or un-
" ground, shall be exported abroad
" when it sells for 4os. a Quarter
" (or 5s. a Bushel) at any of the
" Markets aforesaid.

" And

[27]

" And that if any Bounty at all
" should be thought proper to be
" continued on Exportation, which
" I think unnecessary, it should only
" be so on Wheat, ground or un-
" ground, when it does not exceed
" 4s. ^{pp} Bushel at the Port it goes
" from. And that such Premium
" shall not exceed 2s. 6d. ^{pp} Quar-
" ter on Wheat, and 1s. 9d. on
" Rye."

*why not
other grain?*

As to Beans, Pease, Malt, Barley, Oats and Rye, these to remain (except the Alteration of the Bounty on Rye) on the Footing they stand in the Act of 1st of W. and M. in respect to Exportation.

If a Law was made to the Effect above, I cannot see how the Land-Owner would be hurt, and the Publick in general would be greatly benefited.

Nothing above-mention'd is intended to vary the Method of buying and selling Grain, Flour, or Meal in the City of Lon-
don,

[28]

don, or in the Bills within Ten Miles of London. All other Cities, and Towns have certain Market-Days every Week, and Places fixed for Corn-Markets, where the Inhabitants and Neighbours may be supplied. But the Laws made or to be made against Foretallers, Reegraters, and Ingrossers, or which relate to Exportation, should extend to the whole Kingdom.

As you desir'd me to give my Opinion freely, you must excuse my Prolixity. If the Contents of this meet with your Approbation, and you imagine the Publication of it will have any Weight with others, you have my Consent to publish it.

Sir,

Your most obedient

Jan. 1, 1757.
humble Servant,

C. L.