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THEIR
CAUSES AND REMEDIES.

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THEIR

CAUSES AND REMEDIES;

ADDRESSED

TO ALL RANKS OF PEOPLE.

BY AN INDEPENDENT GENTLEMAN.

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THOUGHTS

ON THE

PRESENT PRICES OF PROVISIONS,

THEIR

CAUSES AND REMEDIES.

FEELING it to be the duty of every man to turn his thoughts to the present very distressful state of the country, so far as relates to the enormous price of provisions, which threatens the whole community with destruction, and by offering such of them as may, after mature consideration, appear to bear most upon the point, afford a chance at least for some alleviation of the evil, I beg leave respectfully to submit the result of my reflections on the subject to the judgment of the public.

Meaning simply to render myself intelligible to all classes of readers, without any attempt at elegance, or a diction unsuitable to my subject, I shall enter upon it without further preface.

And in the first place take occasion to observe,
That the causes of the mischief in all its branches

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are deep, and complicated; but, if I am not grossly mistaken, principally these.

1st. A deficiency, to a certain amount, in the arvest of 99; by no means, however, so great, or so important in its consequences, as generally supposed.

2dly. Certain impediments lately thrown in the way of imports from the Baltic, furnishing rather a pretext for rise in our markets, than imposing the necessity of it.

3dly. The increase of taxation, bearing nearly in equal proportion on all articles of consumption.

4thly. The increase of real capital seeking to invest itself in the most beneficial speculations.

5thly. The increase of artificial capital by paper circulation to an enormous amount, particularly through the medium of country banks, a circumstance bearing on the present question more forcibly than can well be imagined.

6thly. The great increase of wealth in a more striking proportion in the farming, or producing classes, arising from the high prices of their articles for some years past, to which no small addition has been made by the accumulation of farms, which not only extends to an increase of the farmer's

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mer's opulence, but gives him a sort of monopoly within his sphere of action.

7thly. The increase of that spirit of rapacity and speculation which, with the new doctrines on almost every other subject, seems to pervade all orders and ranks of men, blinding them to all interests but their own, and even those the most present and most blended with immediate personal enjoyment, and inducing them to hold all public principle, nay, all regard for every thing, and every individual beyond the narrow limits of self, and its immediate connexions, as the extreme of folly, worthy only the contempt of the more enlightened; a contempt, indeed, with which we find it but too generally treated.

Various other collateral causes might be adduced, such as the state of warfare, in which we are engaged, which of course throws something into the scale of evil, by inducing a more wasteful consumption, necessitating contracts of a large and expensive description, and obstructing to a certain degree the channels of external supply: yet by no means so much as is really supposed by some, and pretended by others for purposes best known to themselves; but if the above assigned are, as it is presumed, sufficient to the effects, it would be idle to look for others, and thereby, swelling the pamphlet by more minute details into a volume, divert the reader's attention from the more important points.

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To many of these causes of evil my readers must be sensible no remedy, or at least no immediate one, can be applied.

The deficiency of a former season cannot be supplied.

Other countries cannot be compelled to export their corn in opposition to the will of their own governments.

Taxation cannot be thrown off.

Capitals, real or artificial, cannot be lessened, and if they could, the *cui-bono*, as applicable to the immediate evil, is at best questionable.

The opulence of farmers cannot be instantly reduced, nor might it be desirable, if it could.

And with respect to the pressure of war, whilst the blessings of a secure and honourable peace must be almost universally allowed, surely no one, animated by the smallest spark of genuine patriotism, would advise the laying of all the honours and all the fortunes of the British nation at the foot of an inveterate and insulting foe, through the idle and unfounded hope of instant alleviation of the burthens that oppress us; a foe, who, as the reward of our humiliation, would but add loss to loss, and misery to misery, till he crushed us beyond the probability of rising again, and ever more rivalling him in arts or in arms, or in any thing contributing

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contributing to constitute the greatness, the power, or the happiness of a state. This would prove a worse bargain than that of Esau; for if he lost his birthright, he got at least his pottage, whilst we should lose both the one and the other in the desperate speculation, without even the reasonable chance of any compensating advantage whatever.

But the selfish passions of men, if they cannot be totally subdued and eradicated, may be controlled in their exercise to the prejudice of the community by the strong hand of law, and to that object shall my principal attention be directed, knowing but too well, that without such controul at this critical moment, the whole state, which now totters to its base, will soon crumble into dust, and leave not a wreck behind.

The remedial measures, then, which I shall take the freedom of suggesting are these, as least liable to solid objection; in which, even where the objection is strongest, I humbly conceive it not to be one tenth so strong as the evil intended to be remedied.

1st. That an account be taken of all grain in the island, with the greatest accuracy of which it is susceptible; and also of all lands sown, or to be sown, with grain, or other crops, of whatever denomination.

2dly. That a similar account of all live stock and other articles of provision be likewise taken.

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And that of reports, made quarterly, half yearly, or yearly, from these, as circumstances might render expedient, a register be kept subject to public, or at least parliamentary, inspection.

3dly. That magazines of rice be formed in different parts of the kingdom, to be sold at a price not exceeding three-pence per pound; the loss, if any, to be sustained by Government. Of which article, that all parochial relief, in the way of subsistence, so far as circumstances permit, be made to consist.

This would not only be found an economical species of food, in the present state of things, but the lower orders would thereby be habituated to the use of it, than which nothing, whilst European grain continues so dear, could be more generally advantageous.

4thly, and finally. That the magistrates of every county in the island be authorized by act of parliament, at their general quarterly meetings, adjournable as necessity or expedience might require, to fix and publish a maximum of prices, both of provisions and agricultural labour, within their respective districts, in which combining every consideration of general, or local plenty or scarcity; of reasonable profit to the proprietor, with the ordinary means of the consumer; they would be able, and certainly would not want the inclination,

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to strike such an average of prices as might produce general satisfaction, and clear up the cloud that now hangs over the public mind, *in a single day*. I speak of a *maximum*, though rather a term of ominous import, preferably to a fixed and settled assize; because I would not wish to clog the operations or improvements of agriculture in any of its branches, by too close a limitation.

To exemplify in one instance for all. The fair price of wheat cannot at this moment, in my judgment, be more than seven shillings and six-pence per bushel; to avoid cavil, suppose it to be eight shillings, which gives three pounds four shillings for the quarter. What I mean by a fair price is this: let any candid and reasonable farmer be asked, whether this price would not enable him not only to pay his rent, and his taxes, and the charges of his own maintenance and that of his necessary and immediate dependants, but to lay up a decent provision, such as other ordinary trades furnish, for the comforts of age, and the support of a growing family? Let him be asked, whether, when he bargained with his landlord for his last lease, if he possesses one, he had any such prices as the present in view, and whether forty, or at the most fifty shillings per quarter for his wheat, did not then bound his most sanguine expectations: if he answers, as I am assured he must, if he answers truly, in the affirmative, do I impose any hardships on this man, in saying, you shall not

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not fatten on the wants and miseries of your fellow citizens, or demand a price for your commodity beyond their ability to pay? As you agree that eight shillings constitute the highest fair value of your commodity, you cannot be hurt if I fix your maximum at ten, between which, and the lowest at which you can afford it, the price will necessarily fluctuate according to quality, or other accidental circumstances; that floating value will act as an encouragement to your future exertions in agriculture, the premium being at least equal to one quarter of the whole value of the article, when that being assumed at eight, I fix the price at ten shillings per bushel.

The magistrates who fix this value on your commodity, are not only the virtual representation of all the higher orders of the gentry of your country, but are also your landlords, your neighbours, and your friends; possessing no interest distinct from your's, and only placed by the law as the true and real guardians of your rights and property, in common with those of your less opulent fellow citizens. Whatever risk of prejudice exists in the case is clearly in your favour, for they are opulent in a still greater degree than yourselves, and the greater part of the lands you cultivate is their property, or that of their relatives and connexions; they will not depreciate your commodities below their fair value, for their own sakes; and were it not for the confidence placed in their integrity, their

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their humanity, and their more enlightened views of your true and substantial interests, as combined with their own, and those of the whole community at large, the other members of that community would have stronger reason for apprehending that the maximum should be too high, than you, that it should be too low. Rest therefore easy on the subject, and as the law has for ages heretofore placed a very considerable portion of the administration of justice in their hands, be satisfied that it has now given additional powers to enable them to stand not only between you and your starving fellow citizens, but between you and the pernicious effects of your own rapacious speculations; by which, if suffered to proceed, you would eventually find yourselves involved in one common ruin with the present objects of your oppression. This language I conceive must be unanswerable by the farmer; but another contest, and that supported upon more plausible and popular grounds, I foresee, remains for me with a different description of men, for the most part the illuminati of society, who, with the best intentions possible, taking up all economic subjects upon broad and general principles, allow no place in their universal system for anomalies; nor conceive it possible, that any error should have crept into calculations, deduced with such apparent accuracy from data, which they have long considered as irrefragable at least, if not self-evident.

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1st. In the first place they will say, that every branch of commerce should be left perfectly free and open, so that commodities may find their just level at market; prices being in exact ratio with quantity, and demand.

2dly. That a maximum disturbs that ordinary and proper course of trade, by the substitution of an arbitrary for a natural measure of prices, which, proportioned as above suggested, ought to be left at their own just position, without any external pressure whatever.

3dly. That it discourages agriculture in all its branches, by imposing restrictions on the whole producing class, by far the most useful of the community, which, already burthened with accumulated taxations, would but ill bear this extraordinary diminution of its fair profits.

4thly. That it is in direct opposition to the theory of a free government, protecting property in all its branches, and all its operations, as the best means of general security against oppression of every kind.

5thly. That things left to themselves will come round; that proprietors cannot hold up their commodities for any length of time, beyond a fair level, by any combinations whatever; and that but to touch this holy of holies of free trade, this ark of

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of proprietary covenant, with a single finger, though to save it from falling to the ground, is sacrilege in the extreme.

6thly. That if the profits of agriculture, or of the trading in provisions, be so considerable, a greater number will be induced to engage in them, and thereby the produce be eventually increased.

7thly. That high prices are the best security against real famine, acting like short allowance on board ship, in diminution of the consumption; and that in fact the best granaries the people at large can have, are the rick-yards and storehouses of the farmers.

8thly. That a maximum is of Jacobin origin, a principle by which a neighbouring country was, no long time since, brought to the brink of ruin, tending to flatter the passions and prejudices of the lower orders, at the expence not only of their superiors at the moment, but at that of their own best interests in future, by laying the foundation of real scarcity hereafter.

Perhaps others equally plausible might be added; but these being as I conceive the most prominent on the canvass, I shall content myself with answering each of them to the best of my abilities, as concisely, yet as fully as possible, and leave the impartial public to judge finally between us.

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To the first and second I shall then concisely answer, that things have been hitherto suffered to take their course undisturbed, and find their natural level; but either that level has not been found, or is far above the reach of the lower orders, and must be brought down to it with a strong hand, or those orders actually perish, and drag down all the others in their fall.

To the third I say, that so far from tending to discourage agriculture, it seems to furnish its most substantial and permanent encouragement; for it not only gives a premium, beyond the fair price of commodities, to the cultivator, but equalizes the price of labour at the same time, to the diminution of poor rates, and of all the evils necessarily incident to the degraded poverty and wretchedness of a starving multitude.

To the fourth I say, if it be the theory of a free government to protect property in all its branches, and all its operations, it is, or at least ought to be, the theory of every government; free or otherwise, to provide by wise and firm regulations for the decent support of all its members, and guard against the evils of hoarding avarice, or rapacious speculation. If I see a very large proportion of the labouring and most useful part of a community suffering under the severest distress, it will neither stop their clamours, or answer my argument, to be told, that property must be protected

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tected in all its extortions, not only to the immediate destruction of the present sufferers, but the eventual one of the proprietors themselves; besides, my maximum takes away no protection it ought to have, but, on the contrary, places the interests of its holders on the firm basis of moderation and justice.

To the fifth I say, that the probability is, that things left to themselves will not come round, at least within any period calculated to save the community from perdition. If immediately subsequent to a harvest, allowed by most intelligent people to be considerably above an average crop, prices are at their present standard, what reasonable prospect is there of their being lower at any period preceding the ensuing harvest, or indeed even then, or at any future time whatever? Whilst we are so fearful of touching a single stone of this sacred edifice, take care that the whole fall not in ruins on our heads.

Sixthly, I say, that whether the profits of agriculture and the provision trade do, or do not, induce a larger number to engage in them, and thereby render the produce eventually greater, is not to the present point, which looks to an instant remedy for an instant evil, and will not admit of the smallest compromise or delay whatever.

Seventhly,

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Seventhly, That no commander is justified in putting his crew on short allowance, till it has been clearly ascertained that the ship's provisions are likely to prove insufficient, which has not been done in the present instance; for it is much doubted, and I confess myself to stand in the number of the doubters, whether any real scarcity at all exists; and were I to give an opinion on the subject, it should be, that on an accurate account taken of all the grain in the island, it would result, that not only a quantity equal to the produce of the last harvest, allowing for subsequent consumption, would be found, but a certain portion even of the preceding one, with probably a considerable addition arising out of the large importations made into this country in the course of the last year. I would ask besides, even were it otherwise, in what is an actual famine worse than an artificial one? If the farmer keeps up his prices beyond my means of purchase, what matters it to me whether his granaries be full or empty; as relative to my physical necessities, it makes no difference whatever—as relative to my feelings, it is better they should be empty than otherwise; for if general famine overspread the land, I must bend like others with due humility under the inflictions of a hand too powerful for human controul, and which on the whole dispenses all for the best—whilst every mortal instrument is in motion to resist the oppressions of an artificial dearth, occasioned by the vile rapacity of worms like myself, and calculated

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by the strongest workings of our nature to render the power obnoxious to censure that protects them.

Eighthly, That my maximum, in the first place, has no more than a mere verbal similitude, without any substantial analogy whatever to that of France; in the next, that were it otherwise, a principle stands or falls by its own truth and reasonableness, and not by any arguments drawn from analogies not perfectly in point; and in the third I should say, that so far from nearly effecting the ruin of France, that very measure alone saved it from entire destruction.

The fact is, the wild government of that nation finding its treasury empty, without any means of recruiting it with the precious metals, at the instigation of *Mirabeau*, issued paper money, termed *assignats* from their being assigned on certain branches of the revenue, or on the whole collectively. These soon depreciated in value, and the strong, ferocious, and unprincipled dictatorship of Robespierre seeing it impossible to carry on the operations of government subject to that depreciation, issued an edict enforcing the receipt of that paper at *par*; so that when a hundred livres in assignats, were not in fact worth ten or five, or perhaps one, in the precious metals, all individuals were compelled to receive them at *par*, that is, as a hundred livres in actual money. This was injustice

justice and cruelty in the extreme ; but it effected its purpose, and by enabling the government to make its payments, formed at that time the great and efficient momentum of the revolutionary machine.

It is unnecessary to say, that the maximum proposed above has no analogy whatever to that ; but even if it had, and yet afforded reasonable matter of hope of saving the state from destruction, I should strongly advise its instant adoption.

But further, on the subject of a maximum, the writer is bold to say, that, so far from its being a new principle, in our own government, as well as every other in Europe, it has been adopted in certain instances, and acknowledged as beneficial. Have not our magistrates already a power of fixing harvest wages ; and if they have, why has not one man an equal right to put an arbitrary price upon his labour, as another has upon his commodities ? Are not the wages of many trades, as those of taylor, and certain others, fixed by act of parliament ?

What is the assize of bread but a maximum ? Upon the principle of perfectly free trade, the baker has an equal right with other dealers and manufacturers of provisions to sell his commodity at any price he pleases.

But,

But, more than all, where is the principle of free trade in the article of money, that great and universal commodity, which, pervading every branch of commercial intercourse, influences, in a greater or lesser degree, all the operations of civil society ? On what grounds, if this theory be perfect in all its parts, is a man restrained by the strongest legal coercions from turning his money to the best advantage, and fixing his own price upon it ? Yet, if he takes more than 5 per cent. per ann. he incurs not only legal penalties, but the infamy of usurious rapacity into the bargain.

Has not this limitation extended itself to every nation in Europe, and, perhaps, in a certain measure, to every civilized and trading nation on the globe, upon principles of practical expediency, forming one of the leading features of all their commercial dealings ?

The utility of that breach of principle I know has been doubted, and the doubt supported in a very able manner by the ingenious author of the *Essay on Usury* ; yet the law remains unshaken ; and, were it repealed to-morrow, I am inclined to think the evil would infinitely over-balance the good.

Now all the instances of maximum given above, are those of a close, severe, and narrowly-limited maximum, which must, under various circumstances

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stances, be attended with singular inconvenience. For to exemplify, how can an artizan or a labourer work for the same wages when his provisions are at double and treble their former price?

How can a necessitous man get money at 5 per cent. however great his wants, when even government securities produce a great deal more?

Here the hardships are apparent, yet the law remains in force, in defiance both of the theory and, in those instances, of the practical expedience too. In some cases the inconvenience becomes so great as to call for immediate remedy, as in the instance of hackney coaches, &c. &c. ; had not the fares been lately raised by an act of the legislature, there would not at this moment have been a single vehicle of that description within the bills of mortality. Upon the ground of a perfect and all pervading theory, the hackney coachman is as fully justified in setting an arbitrary price upon his fare, as the farmer on his corn or his butter. When a theory is clearly and avowedly deviated from in so many instances ; and when to preserve it sacred and untouched in a single one, subjects at least one very large part of your whole population, the middle ranks of society, to evident distress ; and consigns another still much larger portion, the labouring class, to famine and despair ; I say, under such circumstances, the most pertinacious adherent to his theory, if not wholly blinded by his

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his partialities, must be inclined to suspect some fundamental error in it, and listen at least, with becoming temper and moderation, to the voice that points it out, and recommends an experiment of its violation in a single instance, for a chance, at least, of saving the whole community from that yawning gulph that opens for its destruction. The fact is, the theory is unsound when practically applied in many instances, with little else to support it than the blinded zeal of its worshippers.

To enter into minute details might be both tedious and unnecessary ; suffice it to say, the system is a monstrous abortion of the French economic school, promulgated by the elder Mirabeau and others of that sect, and reduced to practice by Turgot, who, promoted in an evil day for the fortunes of France to the direction of her finances, introduced irremediable distress into every branch of her internal economy ; and had finally famished one part of the state, and, by corrupting the other from its allegiance and attachment to its sovereign and all its ancient customs, overturned the whole fabric of government twenty years before its time, had not his incapacity or ill intention been demonstrated to the satisfaction of his royal master, and produced his dismissal. The same system was afterwards continued down by Condorcet, and in fact forms one principal link of the grand Jacobinical chain, by which true freedom,

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with all its concomitant enjoyments, and every thing that renders a state of civil society preferable to a savage one, has been since, in some countries, bound to the earth.

Long, very long, may these evils be averted from this island! but if we once receive wild theories, however plausibly recommended by the names of a Mirabeau, a Turgot, a Condorcet, or an Adam Smith, as the palladium of our liberties and our happiness, we admit the horse of death within our walls, and have only to await in trembling expectation the final hour of our destinies.

It is seen and acknowledged, then, that this theory is broken through in various instances, such as in the fixing a maximum of wages, and of fares, and of the loan of money, and perhaps, on investigation, of many other matters; why, then, should it be considered un repealable as the decrees of Fate in the single article of provisions—that which bears more than all the rest, in the ratio of a hundred or a thousand perhaps to one, on the wants and comforts of the whole community at large, and of the lower and labouring classes in particular?

Upon what ground, let it be asked, have those restrictions on the liberty of certain classes of individuals been laid? The answer is, on that of practical expedience.

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expedience. Is it then likely to prove less recommended by this useful principle, that the holder of provisions should be stopt in his extortions from driving one part of the community into evident distress, and the other into open insurrection, than that the artizan and labourer should be restrained in their demands, or the monied man from taking six-pence beyond *five per cent.* on his loans?

Will any reasonable creature pretend to affirm, that the evil resulting from the one bears any proportion to that derived from the other; yet every one knows and feels that whilst those less necessary restrictions remain in full force, it is deemed little less than sacrilege to think of imposing the other; nor is the subject touched upon without a sort of horror and apprehension of consequences bordering on superstitious veneration.

Let us now turn our minds to the consideration of facts, and see how far they bear us out in the application of this principle of practical expedience.

In several parts of the island, the many, impelled for the most part I verily believe by the cravings of resistless appetite, and driven to madness by the disappointed hopes of plenty, after what had been generally deemed a productive harvest, however certain individuals amongst them might have been actuated by less pardonable motives, or however
much

much the passions of the multitude might have been worked upon by certain designing and ill-intentioned leaders, broke out into open insurrection, and yielded in many places not more to the military force brought against them, than to the mild persuasions of their fellow citizens, placing in their just light the natural consequences of their improper conduct, and engaging to remedy the evil by every legal method in their power—now the principal purport of all these engagements entered into, was the establishment of that very maximum by voluntary compact, which I am advising to legalize, and render binding on the whole society—for observe the natural progress of voluntary compact, and trace it to its final consequences, and its nullity will be in a moment acknowledged.

The farmers and holders of provisions in the neighbourhoods of great towns, such as Birmingham, Nottingham, and others that might be named, very justly alarmed at the menaces of an enraged mob, followed up by actual violence, willingly acceded to any agreements that were proposed to them, and promised to bring in their corn, and all other their articles of provisions, at moderated prices.

No sooner, however, was the storm allayed by the intervention of the military, and they found once more effectual protection in their extortions, under the strong arm of law, than they began to rescind

rescind their compacts, and consider present profit, however obtained, so that they could be protected in the attainment and subsequent secure possession of it, as preferable to all the credit of honourable conduct, or the self-approbation of virtue, acting upon the broad principles of good faith and reciprocity.

Ask the inhabitants of these above-mentioned towns, whether this was not strictly the fact—they laid down their maximum of wheat, if I recollect rightly, at four pounds per quarter, full twenty shillings, in my judgment at least, beyond the fair value; yet were not the farmers satisfied with that, but broke their agreements, or at least performed them in so scanty and limited a manner, as to render them useless on any great scale; and soon, very soon, in those very same markets, or those of the neighbouring districts, held up that very commodity to five, six, or even seven pounds, for which they had agreed to take four, and ought in truth to have taken three pounds per quarter.

These facts show to demonstration that magistrates, and reasonable people of the better class, have hitherto been able to devise nothing better, nothing more practically expedient than a maximum; and they show besides, with equal conviction, that nothing but legalizing such maximum will produce, beyond the moment, any beneficial effect.

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After all, however, that has been urged in favour of a maximum, it yet may be considered by some as a very strong measure, to be resorted to only in the last necessity; and after the failure of every other, that has been or may be suggested, with any semblance of reason, so as to stand entitled to the smallest serious attention. It is incumbent therefore on the supporter of this measure, as the only one calculated to save the country from ruin, to pass in review the several leading remedial measures that have been publickly suggested, or at least have fallen under the writer's notice; and upon due examination, show how far they are likely to prove effectual to the end proposed.

If it shall result from this investigation, that neither any, or all of them collectively, are equal to the magnitude of the evil, but that something more forcible in its powers, more immediate in its exertions, is necessary to its extirpation, it will then rest with those who adopt the opposite side of the question to show, if it be not a maximum, what in fact it is, that shall lay this giant in the dust?

The writer contends, that nothing else can be applied with the most distant chance of success; and until something better be produced, is fairly, as he conceives, entitled to feel himself superior both in resource and argument to his opponents.

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The remedies then that have been hitherto suggested, are principally these:

1st. Importation to the largest possible amount under bounties, and every other species of encouragement devisable by the wit of man.

2dly. Recommendation to farmers from Government, as well as from all individual proprietors of land, to bring their commodities to market at moderated prices.

3dly. Cultivation of waste lands, by general inclosure bills, and every other species of encouragement.

4thly. Giving of premiums for sowing the largest quantities of grain, and bringing the same to market within a limited time.

5thly. Establishment of large magazines of rice, from which that commodity might be sold at reasonable prices to the lower orders of people.

6thly. Taking an account of all grain, and every other description of provision-stock, so as to ascertain at once the quantities, and the holders.

7thly. To prevent sample-selling, and direct that all articles of provisions be disposed of in open market.

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8thly. To tax all pleasure grounds beyond a certain quantity; or order them to be cultivated under certain regulations.

9thly. To lay a heavy tax on horses kept for pleasure, so as to diminish the number.

10thly. To limit the pernicious and extensive effects of too large a paper currency, by country banks in particular, who should be restrained from making too large advances to farmers, whilst they have a stock in hand, more than sufficient for seed, and the support of their families.

11thly. To enact the severest penalties against all forestallers, regraters, and every description of persons tending, by their pernicious intervention, to enhance the price of commodities, by preventing their being sold at open market, and meeting with that sort of competition which should give them at least a chance for finding their just level.

12thly. To establish public granaries, to be open when grain exceeded a certain price, and shut accordingly when it fell below them.

13thly. Stoppage of the distilleries.

14thly. To encourage non-consumption agreements where the prices of any particular articles bear most strongly on the necessities of the people, and to recommend the avoiding of wasteful expenditure in every branch of domestic œconomy.

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To these probably others might be added, but none besides of any apparent weight having fallen under the writer's observation, he shall content himself with giving distinct answers to each of these under their respective heads, and accompany them with such observations as may occur.

1st. Importation.—Let us see to what extent this experiment has already been made, with the effects produced by it, and take the result as a fair criterion of what may be further expected from it.

From the best accounts I have been able to obtain, the importation has been nearly as follows:

	Quarters.
Annual importation of wheat on an average of the last 25 years - -	162,000
Ditto ditto of the last 10 years - -	400,000
Importation of the last single year, ending September 1800 - - -	900,000
These 900,000 quarters were sold on an average in our markets at ninety-five shillings per quarter, making -	£ 4,275,555
Flour, rye, barley, and oats, imported within that period, (<i>viz.</i> the last year,) amounting in value to upwards of -	1,724,445
Making in the total	£ 6,000,000

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Upon

Upon this very short and plain statement, let me put these questions to any reasonable man.—

Are we likely, with the impediments subsequently thrown in the way of further supplies from the Baltic, to exceed, or even equal, the importation of the last year?

If contrary to every reasonable ground of expectation, we did exceed it even by one moiety, is it probable that it would reach our markets at a price below that of the former year?

Is not in fact every just ground of probability in the teeth of both those suppositions?

If it should not come below the average of these former prices, is it possible for your population to be subsisted at the enormous price of ninety-five shillings per quarter; and is not even a doubt on the subject, monstrous and absurd in the extreme?

2dly. Has not the recommendation of Government, as well as that of individual Landlords, been tried without effect, unless indeed in certain instances where the Tenants held at the will of the Lord, who, if his mandate were disobeyed, might at once have cut up their ill-gotten profits by the roots? Has any beneficial consequences on a large scale been derived from this source; or is it likely that the strong and all-pervading principle of self-interest

terest should be effectually counteracted by any arguments or persuasions whatever?

3dly. Cultivation of waste lands.—Much greater stress appears to have been laid on this measure than it seems fairly entitled to. The writer has the mortification of thinking, that not only no immediate resource, which indeed he considers as entirely out of the question, can be derived from its adoption; but that little, if any in future, in the diminution of prices, is likely to flow from it.

To make himself understood—let the waste lands of Hounslow Heath be assumed as a case in point.

Suppose it were at this moment decided by a majority of proprietors, that a partition and enclosure should take place; the adjustment of claims in the first instance, the carrying the bill through parliament afterwards, and the survey and final allotment by commissioners in the last place, would, under the most favourable circumstances, consume the whole of the summer 1801; so that with the best intentions, combined with the strongest exertions on the part of the proprietors, a very small portion indeed of the whole would be brought into decent cultivation before the year 1802; judge then of the benefit likely to result to a large population, suffering at this moment under the extremities of distress, before the expiration of the year 1800 from the administration of so tardy a remedy!

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a remedy! But the doubts I suggested respecting a future resource from the adoption of this measure, call for further explanation.

Suppose the whole of the cultivable wastes of this island constituted a district as large as the county of York—if you think that too little, add that of Lincoln to it; now if all these wastes were equally well cultivated with the counties above mentioned, there seems no reason why their population should not be equal too; you have then added to the wealth, the industry, and population of your island, just so much as equalizes in quantity and value those two of your largest and richest counties; than which nothing could be more advantageous to the community at large, being in fact a sort of creation of so much additional strength; but what resource does this addition, however flattering in other points of view, furnish against the consequences of dearth, or how contribute in any certain degree to the lowering of prices at any given period?

Do the counties of York and Lincoln, at this moment, do more than provide for their own population; or were they ever able, that we know of, to supply the wants of other districts from a superfluity arising within themselves?

Is it not likely that their imports have been proportioned to those of other counties, and do
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not they feel distress at this moment from the same causes, and in the same proportion, as their neighbours?

What advantage then, as a remedy against dearth and high prices, is to be reasonably expected from the cultivation of all the wastes in the kingdom?

4thly. The giving of premiums for the further encouragement of agriculture, appears in one point of view unnecessary; in the other, to a certain degree pernicious; for what proportion can any premium bear, in the way of incitement, to the enormous prices already given for every article of consumption; and in the next place, were it otherwise, why add fuel to the flame which consumes you, by putting further sums into the pockets of those very men by whom you are already crushed to the earth?

5thly. Establishment of rice-magazines, &c.—This appears likely to prove of some utility, and has been accordingly recommended in a former part of this pamphlet.

6thly. Taking an account of grain, &c. &c.—This has likewise been recommended upon the same principle.

7thly. The

7thly. The prevention of selling by sample.—This would certainly in some instances, and in some districts, tend to the lowering of prices; but would throw the corn trade into such difficulties, as to require very mature deliberation before it were adopted, or the worst of consequences might ensue.

8thly. Tax on pleasure grounds, &c. &c.—This would tend to diminish the pleasures of the country gentleman, and take away one source of his attachment to his paternal soil—an attachment that seems already but too much in its wane, without any such additional cause of further diminution: besides, as a future resource, it would be next to nothing; as a present one, literally nothing.

9thly. Tax on horses kept for pleasure.—This would be liable to nearly the same objection as the preceding, and with as little compensating advantage. Suppose the number of horses subjected to reduction on this account were 6000, which I should imagine a large calculation, unless the tax amounted nearly to a prohibition of using any such horses at all; what great resource then for a population of ten millions could be derived from the consumption of that small number of those useful and beautiful animals? Besides, estimating an average of one man to three horses, you would instantly have two thousand unemployed people to provide for, who are now supported wholly at the expence of the

the upper classes; an evil, perhaps, fully counterbalancing any advantage in the other scale.

10thly. Some regulations respecting the increase and extension of paper currency, particularly through country banks, might be found salutary; but none such could apply any prompt and effectual remedy to the present evil.

11thly. Severer laws enacted against forestalling, regrating, &c. &c. and every other dirty art, whether practised on a smaller or a greater scale, in all the operations of our markets. These might be of some utility; and founded, as they doubtless would be, on the sound principles of justice and common sense, tend to deter the unprincipled from such practices, and of course lower prices in a certain degree; but I much doubt whether with such effect as is generally attributed to them, for reasons I shall hereafter assign.

Our great œconomic writer, Adam Smith, the merit of whose investigations on the subject of National Wealth, in its sources, bearings, and relations of various kinds, I will not deny, compares the prejudices against forestallers, regraters, and the whole tribe of middle men, to those that prevailed with our less enlightened ancestors against magicians, witches, and all that description of people accused of employing supernatural agency, to

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the prejudice of the innocent members of the community. But in this he appears to me to have gone too far—perceiving the necessity of a certain order of middle men for the free circulation of commodities, and the prevention by their useful exertions, of partial famine in one district, whilst another was gorged with repletion, by a purchase of commodities at low markets, and a subsequent transfer of them to high ones; he conceived, perhaps, that this principle might be extended indefinitely, and that as in certain manufactures, that of pins for instance, the greater the number of hands through which the article passes, the greater the facility of dispatch, and the lower consequently the price; so in the circulation of grain and other provisions, the multiplication of middle men was of equal utility, and rather tended to keep down prices, than to raise them.

In this, however, he is evidently mistaken; for if one man buys up commodities on their way to open market, and thereby prevents that competition which alone furnishes the chance of prices finding their just level, or another purchases at the opening of a market, to sell before its close at an advanced price; surely both the one and the other of these men are culpable in a high degree, injurious in their conduct to the interests of their fellow citizens, and justly amenable to law for punishment.

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Well did that great man who so worthily presides in our principal Court of Justice throw out, that “in an evil day for England were the statutes against miscreants of this description repealed, whereby tacitly, and by implication as it were, their depredations on the public were permitted with impunity; fortunately however for the country it was not foreseen by the repealer, that the common law still remained in force, the strong coercions of which hung suspended over their heads, and should be suffered to fall with effect, as justice and circumstances rendered necessary.” This was well and truly said, and deserving to be echoed, as in fact it was, through almost every public tribunal in the island.

But there is yet another description of middle men, who acting on a larger scale, and in a more extended sphere, are infinitely more injurious to the community than the paltry, pettifogging culprits above spoken of; of these, one set employs capital in speculating in grain, another in hops, another in butter, and so on through all the circle of commodities of prime necessity, by which a certain monopoly is established, and the marketable prices of any single article can be regulated nearly to a certainty, by a very small number of interested individuals.

Nothing can tend more than this to keep prices above their just level, yet perhaps nothing more difficult

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difficult than its prevention; for how is the precise line to be drawn between the fair merchant buying on the true principles of commerce at an overflowing market, to sell at a scanty one, and thereby diffuse a general and salutary circulation, and the man who buys up the same articles at the same markets, and the same prices, but with very different intentions, known only to himself; not to circulate immediately, but to lay up for the present, and await with the longings of rapacious avarice, the moment of scarcity, when he may throw back his commodities into the very same markets in which he bought them, at a threefold increase of price. This man injures the community, in as much greater a degree than the little people before spoken of, as his capital is larger, and his dealings more extensive than their's.

The account recommended to be taken of stock, would probably in some degree check these practices; but other additional remedies might doubtless be suggested; and I strongly recommend the adoption of such as seem to bid fairest for the prevention of so iniquitous a traffic. Perhaps the forbidding any middle man to keep such a portion of stock in his possession, beyond a limited time, or to sell it afterwards within a certain distance of the district where it was purchased, might tend to lessen the mischief, if not put a total stop to it; but that is a loose suggestion of the writer, rather thrown out to excite others to turn their thoughts

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on the subject, than the result of any deep reflection on it himself. But after all that has been said, or can be said against these different descriptions of unprincipled and pernicious speculators, let us see in what degree they actually operate on prices, and how far the total eradication of them from the community would alleviate the present evil.

Let the instance be taken in wheat, the principal component of British food, from the price of which all other articles of consumption, more or less, find their proportional level.

The farmer, who at the beginning of the last harvest, since which nothing has occurred to afford even a pretence for the rise of prices, if we except a few days of rain towards the conclusion of it, from which very little real injury was sustained; the farmer, I say, who at that time would have thought himself but too fortunate in obtaining three pounds per quarter for his whole crop of that grain, and from the daily fall of prices, began even to despair of that, soon discovered, principally through the means of speculators, some on real, and others on artificial capital, founded on credit, or paper circulation, that more might be had, and willingly listening to the dictates of self-interest, first raised the price to three pounds ten shillings, then to four, to five, to six, and in many instances to seven pounds per quarter; every additional

tional demand, however unreasonable and exorbitant, being in turn acceded to through the craving necessities of the consumers.

Now let it be asked, what has the forestaller, or regrater, or even wholesale speculator, to act upon here? The prices of the farmer himself are far beyond the means of ordinary consumers, for any length of time, to pay, nor can all the arts, or all the combinations of the worst sort of middle men add greatly to the mischief; for whilst he in the first instance, as we daily and hourly see, insists upon these very exorbitant prices for his commodity, of what very great importance is it to the point in question whether a few shillings more be added by the intervention of the people above spoken of between the seller and the buyer?

The gigantic evil that calls for redress is the exorbitant demand of the original holder; nor till that be reduced, were all the forestallers and regraters, and that whole tribe of miscreants, swept in a single day from the face of the earth, would you have your articles of consumption at all brought down to the means of the mass of your numerous population—probably, indeed, not in the smallest degree; for the farmer would then, perhaps, finding the markets still more in his power, and the buyers at his feet, take the profits of the middle man to himself by adding them to the price of his commodity.

commodity. To convince any reasonable mind of this fact, go round to all your markets and see whether the farmer, or original producer, does not demand as high a price of the consumer, who deals with him *at first hand*, as the middle man is able to obtain at the same market.

Have I not myself seen this very thing occur in various instances, of wheat and every other kind of grain, as well as butter, cheese, and in general of every article of prime necessity? In the single one of butter, my servants have regularly for a long continuance, at a country market, given 18d. 20d. 22d. and, in one or two instances, two shillings per lb. for it *at the first hand*, that is, of the farmer himself, or his immediate dependents. What has the middle man to do here? The evil is, that I pay near thrice the fair value of the commodity purchased of the original producer; and nothing that will not compel him by the strong coercions of law to moderate his demand, will in any respect tend to terminate, or even materially diminish it.

12thly. The establishment of granaries.

Little observation occurs to be made on this subject, as an immediate remedy, there being neither time nor means for such establishment in a moment of dearth, real or supposed. To be rendered efficacious, or indeed of the smallest benefit,
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you must fill them, as Joseph did in Egypt, in years of plenty, and open them in those of famine; and then, probably, under proper regulations, they might operate as a maximum, and keep prices nearly on a level in all seasons.

Volumes have been written by economists on both sides of the question, but if the author of these observations were to hazard an opinion, it should be clearly in favour of such establishments on the whole, especially in a manufacturing community, where there are so many mouths to be fed, upon such terms as might not on the one hand, either tend to enhance the price of labour, or on the other, intrench too much on the just rights and fairly appreciated interests of the cultivator.

13thly. Stoppage of the distilleries.

This measure would certainly tend to divert the expenditure from one channel into another more universally beneficial, the immediate food of man: but it is not without its inconveniences, and whilst the holder of provisions has the markets at his command, as at present, I doubt very much whether the advantages in the one scale would not be more than counterbalanced by the disadvantages in the other, and perhaps the difference in prices would be next to nothing, two, or three, or four shillings per quarter, whereas the inconveniences would be these:—

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A considerable loss of revenue, which could at this time be but ill sustained, and if supplied from other sources of taxation, might tend to increase the public distress.

A rise in the article of sugar, which at this time is become almost as useful and as much wanted as any one of prime necessity.

A rise in pork, and in every other commodity to which distillery-grains are any ways applicable, as food or otherwise.

To all which might be added, however adverse I may be to the whole system of dram-drinking, and no one can be more sensible of its pernicious effects both on the health and morals of the lower orders than myself—that the deprivation to a certain degree, at this particular moment of general distress, when the aid of every oblivious antidote to the pressing miseries of existence should be called into action, of what constitutes in many instances the only remaining solace of vulgar life, might be considered as the extreme of cruelty.

14thly. Non-consumption agreements.

On this subject, however commendable an economic and sparing use of the articles of prime necessity in a time of real or supposed scarcity, when prices are so much above the means of the
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mass of ordinary purchasers, may be, I confess myself to entertain much doubt of the efficacy of such agreements upon any great and availing scale. The middle and lower classes are already compelled into œconomy by irresistible necessity; and the upper, however eagerly they adopt in the first instance any plausible and seemingly patriotic resolutions of this nature, it has been universally found by experience, that they very soon become weary of such self-denying ordinances, and fall back with renewed appetite into their former habits of ordinary consumption.

The writer has within these few weeks personally witnessed a confirmation of this remark in a small town on the sea coast, at a considerable distance from the capital, where every infringement of a compact of that nature became of course more the subject of individual animadversion than is possible in the capital itself, or any of those great masses of population accumulated in large cities. It was agreed by the inhabitants and visitors of the place not to exceed the price of 14d. per lb. for butter, a price, by the bye, nearly double its fair value, and orders were given to their servants and dependants accordingly. That price being refused the first, and again the second market day, on the third the liquorish appetites of the buyers gave way to the exorbitant but steady demands of the sellers; and within a very few days afterwards

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afterwards I myself saw that very commodity sold in that market at 22d. the pound.

This seems a case immediately in point, and I entertain little doubt, may be very generally extended to all agreements of this description.

Although this breach of compact in the buyers could not be deemed strictly justifiable, yet founded, as it certainly was, on that great leading principle of human action, a desire of self-gratification by the use of means within its reach, we cannot condemn it as either absurd or unnatural; but on the contrary, acknowledge it such as is most likely to be acted upon by that frail creature man, whenever he finds himself under a similar predicament.

But, after all, may it not be asked with reason, is it just, or proper, or fitting, that the mass of the British nation—a nation abounding in wealth and resources of every kind, acknowledged sovereign paramount of the seas, and mistress of the maritime commerce of the world, should be subjected to degrading privations of this nature, and that too in the midst of surrounding plenty, kept just beyond her grasp, simply by the rapacious hand of fraud and avarice. Why is the ancient fable of Tantalus to be realized in her instance, or of Midas

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Midas starving by the conversion of all that he touched into gold? The lowest and most abject population of a conquered province cannot suffer evils either of greater magnitude or more servile degradation. Has it yet been ascertained to the complete satisfaction of any one rational enquirer, that any scarcity at all exists? Is not, on the contrary, every reasonable presumption strongly in the other scale? The farmer, with his rick-yards full, and his granaries bending beneath the weight of his commodities, knows nothing of general plenty or scarcity, or ever troubles himself with calculations on the subject; he contents himself simply with getting the highest price he can for his article; and when he finds the buyers at his mercy, and dependent on him from day to day for subsistence, takes every advantage, fair or unfair, honourable or dishonourable, in his power; and whilst there is a consuming mouth in the country with the pecuniary means of paying for its consumption, his extortions will find no termination, but in the strong but legal and justifiable means suggested above for their coercion, or the dreadful counteraction of a famishing and desperate multitude.

Having thus examined in detail the several remedial measures suggested, and shown to the best of my abilities, and to my own conviction at least, the insufficiency of each, and all of them collectively,

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to the object proposed, I shall further hazard some few miscellaneous observations, naturally connected with the subject.

It has been plausibly, though I think without any just foundation, urged against a maximum, that being grounded on no fixed principles, it must of necessity be arbitrary. If fixed too high, it is useless; if too low, it creates a greater consumption of the article than the stock will afford.

This strikes the discoverer as a puzzling dilemma, but when examined closely, admits of the easiest solution; for let it be asked, in the first place, why it must of necessity be fixed either too high or too low, and not in that happy medium in which the seller may find his fair profit, and the buyer his means of subsistence at a reasonable rate?

Are these objects absolutely incompatible?

If they are, the whole community goes to inevitable destruction, without resource; if they are not, have they not the best possible chance of being advantageously combined by all the wisdom, and talents, and virtue of the country; judging with impartiality on its resources, and the now contending interests of its numerous members?

Is not the dilemma besides solved by those various instances given above, of the establishment

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ment of a maximum already, in certain articles both of property and labour?

But it is said, a law may be enacted that wheat, or any other article, shall not be sold above a certain price; but the farmer cannot be forced to sell; or, if he is, he cannot be forced to grow any more.

This reasoning appears to me weaker even than the preceding; for can any individual be so mad, so deaf, both to the calls of reason and of interest, as to refuse that price which shall be solemnly adjudged a fair one, by all the principal landholders of his county, without a single motive, or a single interest, substantially different from his own; but merely influenced by larger and more enlightened views, to prevent by moderation that inevitable ruin which awaits his exercise of the power in his hands, on too selfish and narrow a scale?

Is it likely that any sense of injustice arising out of the restraints imposed, or of personal malevolence against the imposers, to whom he is bound by every natural and local tie that can influence the mind of man, should induce him to forego the profits of future cultivation; when besides he must know, on the slightest consideration, that the consequences would rest wholly with himself; for if one individual in a whole county should

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be found so unreasonable as really to act upon such a principle, it would probably be extremely difficult to discover a second; and even were it otherwise, in what a miserable and degrading minority, at the best, would a wretch of this description find himself?

I must confess the very idea, that we should have a single acre in our island less carefully cultivated, or a single bushel of grain less produced from our next, or any ensuing harvest, were a maximum, such as I have taken the freedom of proposing, adopted to-morrow, appears to me unfounded and improbable in the extreme.

With respect to the hardship of being compelled to sell, in addition to what has been already urged on the subject to evince its unreasonableness, I cannot wholly drop it without adding, that in my humble opinion, the producer or proprietor of grain, or other articles of prime necessity, has no more than a *limited right* of property in them, not liable to be exercised at his entire discretion, to the destruction, or even material injury, of the community to which he belongs; if he knows not how himself to set bounds to his avaricious speculations, it is fitting that the law should set them for him, and not permit the substantial interest, nay the very existence of a whole people, to be sacrificed to too scrupulous and delicate an attachment to fine-drawn theories concerning

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ing proprietary rights, the principle besides of which has been already violated in so many instances.

In former periods of our history we learn, that laws establishing a maximum of prices were found necessary, and accordingly enacted at different times; nor do we hear of their having met with opposition at the outset, or been afterwards found either difficult in execution, or pernicious in effect.

They seem indeed to have passed with general acquiescence, as matters of justifiable, or even ordinary regulation, and the necessity of enforcing them was always distinctly stated in the preamble; had they materially tended to the discouragement of agriculture in any of its branches, is it likely they would have met with the concurrence of the great landholders of the kingdom, who then constituted its principal nobility, with nearly all the power, and all the wealth of the state in their possession; or is it likely that such laws should at any time, or under any circumstances, have been called for by an exigence of more imperious necessity than that of the present moment?

But these, it will be said, were regulations of a barbarous and uninformed period, before the true principles of commerce, or what is termed in the modern phrase, statistical œconomy, had been at
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all investigated; since that time maxims of a sounder and more generally beneficial description have been introduced, as the best rules of conduct in matters of this nature, by the researches of a more enlightened philosophy; before the blaze of which, all those petty meteors which conducted, or rather those will-o'-th'-wisps which misled, our ancestors in the arts of government and œconomic regulation, have hid their diminished heads, and are seen no more.

With a due respect, however, for the refinements of later times, and for those improvements in general and particular knowledge, which must be allowed to have taken place, I am yet bold enough to say, that it is probable our ancestors, with all their imputed ignorance and barbarism, possessed as much common sense, and applied it with as much efficacy to the purposes of ordinary life, as their more acute and better-informed posterity; equally too perhaps with them incapable of committing, or at least of repeating, any gross practical mistake in so fundamental a point.

When they found the demands of the producer beyond the means of the consumer, they judged it expedient in some measure to equalize them, and not permit one class of citizens, however useful to the community, to enrich itself by the oppression of the other. This was the plain dictate of common sense, and common feeling, in the days of
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our Henries, and our Edwards, and must remain so unalterably to the last period of recording time.

Still, however, shall I find the modern economist return to the charge with his grand axioms, that the free use of property must be kept inviolate, and that price universally arises in just proportion out of quantity and demand; and if so, to disturb that natural relation, would be eventually productive of more mischief than advantage. I shall beg leave, however, to doubt the truth of his premises in that latter proposition, at least as universally applicable in all instances, and explain the grounds of that doubt in this manner.

Let us suppose forty people to meet at market, one half of them with an intention of selling, the other half of buying; if the first moiety is placed under the same necessity of selling its commodities, as the other is of buying them, after some little unavoidable jarring and difference of pretension, arising from an opposition of interests, it is probable that the two parties will be soon finally agreed about prices, and each attain his end upon fair and reasonable terms.

Here the principle of price, arising out of quantity and demand, holds good, and may be safely admitted as a fair criterion of marketable value.

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But on the other hand, if the twenty sellers must sell, and the twenty buyers are not equally compellable to buy, or the twenty buyers must buy what the twenty sellers are not equally compellable to sell, in either of these cases what becomes of the principle set up as a just standard of value; for in the one case the price may be *sunk to nothing* at the discretion of the buyer, and in the other *raised to any thing* at that of the seller?

Now very much under that *latter* predicament do I consider the markets of the kingdom to stand at this moment.

From the reasons assigned in different parts of this pamphlet, I am induced to think that the capitals and combinations of the producing and middle classes, enable them to hold the consuming ones, the great mass of the population of the island, at their mercy; and to be liable, under existing laws, to no restraints whatever, but those imposed upon themselves by their own discretion.

If a man without the consciousness of any scarcity either within himself, or the circle in which he moves, demands six, and seven, and in some instances eight pounds per quarter for what he would willingly a few months, nay weeks, ago gladly have accepted three; I see no reasons, but such as may arise out of his own mind, influenced by prudential considerations, why he might not as well exact nine or ten, or indeed any further price
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whatever; if you ask him on what grounds he makes such exorbitant demands, he will tell you there is a general scarcity, of which the acquiescence of the buyer in these prices, high as they are, is adduced as the most convincing proof; thus inferring, by a curious sort of logic, the existence of scarcity, from the acquiescence of the starving consumer in prices he cannot withstand; and then, by a conversion of proposition, inferring the equity and moderation of prices from that scarcity, of which no other proof exists, but in the compulsions of his own rapacity.

If you proceed further with your questions, you will find him probably as ignorant of every principle of general regulation and œconomy, of every calculation upon which the proof of actual existence of scarcity or plenty depends, as he is of the laws of the planetary system, or the doctrine of fluxions.

With every motive from within and without, to believe that plenty abounds every where else, as he knows it to do in his own barns and rick-yards, the voice of self-interest whispers in his ear, that the pretence of scarcity, however in opposition to his best conviction, is likely to prove more useful to him, and he adopts and acts upon it without reserve.

I think it will be allowed a very fair mode of reasoning, for the discovery of probabilities at least, to infer by analogy what you do not know, in things

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things of similar natures and descriptions, from what you actually do.

Let us try the question of scarcity by that rule; almost any man may put it to the test of experiment in the course of a day or two, at little trouble or expence, and with a tolerable assurance of accuracy in the result.

Let him go round to any ten or twelve or more of the most substantial farmers in his own neighbourhood, wherever that may chance to be, and convince himself by ocular demonstration, assisted by such information as he may be able to procure on a careful concealment of his purposes, (for if they be known, it will be either none, or leading to error,) whether within those limits any appearances of scarcity exist.

If he finds nothing to justify any suspicion of that tendency, as I am persuaded will be very generally the case, from my own personal observations already made with the same view; let him fairly infer what he has not seen from what he has, and suppose, as I think in most cases he very fairly may, that an average may be struck of the whole from the result of what has fallen under his own particular notice.

If in some districts the produce, from local and accidental circumstances, has been evidently less,
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let him suppose in others it may have been greater, and *vice versa*: but if, as is very reasonable, the result of a single experiment should not satisfy him in a matter of such importance, let him repeat it in some more distant quarter, and again and again in others, till perfect conviction flashes in his mind, that the pretence only, and not the reality, is in fact discoverable any where; and that a general average may be struck on those data of the stock of the whole island at large.

If then there should be no scarcity, what is there to justify the prices? One answers the war; another, the increase of taxation; a third, that of paper circulation; and so on, as has been already mentioned and remarked upon in the former part of this pamphlet. Now, although it has been admitted that all these in a greater or lesser degree contribute to the mass of evil, yet it seems perfectly evident that neither any one, or two, or all of them collectively, justify a moiety of the present prices upon any fair principle of calculation: for the increase of the one in that case should be in tolerably-exact proportion with that of the other, than which nothing can be less consistent with the fact.

To make myself more perfectly intelligible—if those causes operated solely, or indeed in any very striking degree, on the objects of the present question, it is perfectly clear that the average of prices

prices of the first six months of the present should bear that proportion to the average of the first six months of the past year, which the additional quantities of public debt, provided for by taxation, and of paper circulation, emitted since that time, that is, during the interval from one of those six months to the other, bears to the whole mass of debt and paper circulation of the kingdom: but we see the fact directly otherwise; for whilst that addition to our public burthens, and our paper circulation, does not probably amount to a *thirtieth* part of the whole, prices have been more than *doubled* in every article of prime necessity whatever. This shows to demonstration that the principal weight of evil complained of, that *intolerable surplus of weight* which presses the greater part of our population to the earth, does not proceed from those sources; its only true origin being in the arbitrary demands of the producing classes founded on a pretext of scarcity.

Compel them to bring their commodities fairly to market, subject to the liberal maximum that should be fixed by the higher and more enlightened orders of the community, and the whole illusion vanishes at once; prices instantly revert to a fair standard between buyer and seller, and in the course of a *single month*, I would pledge my life, not a reasonable nor well-intentioned man in the kingdom, however personally interested on the opposite side of the question, would be found hardy

hardy enough to assert that the regulation was not founded on the strictest principles of justice, as well as dictated by necessity the most urgent. The wonder would simply be why it was not adopted at an earlier period; and why, through a too punctilious attention to the refinements of a wire-drawn theory, neither universally true in principle, or universally observed as a rule of action in practice, we have already so long toiled through such a maze of difficulties, and even subjected our society itself to the risk of utter dissolution.

Before I finally conclude on the subject of prices, it may not be improper to notice an extraordinary fact not wholly from my present purpose:—Some few years ago, when France was distressed with a real scarcity, verging closely on famine, from one extremity of her territory to the other; and when of course that distress pressed more severely on the great masses of her consuming population gathered together in large cities, than elsewhere, the bakers' doors were beset by clamorous and famishing multitudes from an early hour in the morning to a late one in the evening, pressing for a preference in the obtainment of bread for their money.

This scramble of course occasioned not only confusion, but serious riots, which the magistrates were compelled to quell, partly by force, and partly by just and judicious regulations, one of which

which was, that no one person should have more than one loaf of a certain size in the course of one day, so that if any one of the higher orders required more for himself and family, he was under the necessity of sending for it as many servants as he wanted loaves. Now nothing, it must be allowed, could more strongly demonstrate the existence of real scarcity than this; yet the singular circumstance worthy of observation is, that the prices never rose to more than double their former pitch, and that too when they had no impediments of a maximum in their way.

This, in my judgment, not only serves to show the fallacy of the theory on which already so much has been said, or at least the non-universality of its application; for if prices were always constituted by quantity and demand, in the case just cited, they should have been at least ten-fold what they had been at a period of plenty, but one question arises out of it, which I shall beg leave to propose to such as justify the present prices, or at least think them expedient, *as a prevention of quick consumption tending to induce a severer famine hereafter.*

Is it better for a large community, taken in the mass, consisting perhaps of a population of ten millions, like that of Great Britain, to stand under the unhappy predicament France did at that time, or under that in which she does herself at this moment; I mean in the single article of *provisions*;
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for, with respect to any other, the question, to a man of British feelings, might be considered as altogether superfluous? Is it better, upon the whole, that every one, universally, should have but a very scanty portion, or that prices should place the commodity beyond the reach of the lower orders, who constitute the mass, whilst those who could afford to pay them might command any quantities they thought proper?

Although interested myself by personal situation on the adverse side of the question, I must, upon the maturest deliberation, avow myself an advocate for the other, and declare boldly at once, that I think the former preferable to the latter.

If I see myself involved in one common misfortune with all my fellow-citizens, I bear it with the patience and resignation that becomes me, without the smallest portion of envy, hatred, or malice, but, on the contrary, with the feelings of sympathizing compassion, towards those who suffer under the same inflictions with myself; whereas, if I find myself perishing through want in the midst of affluence and plenty; if I see thousands of loaves, and thousands of pounds of meat, *all at my command with money, and not a single one without it*; if I find that the whole produce of my labour, employed most industriously from every Monday morning to every Saturday night throughout the year, will not supply myself and the helpless part of my family, even with the coarsest ordinary provisions,

visions, without any allowance for cloathing, or fuel, or rent, or in short for any of the other numerous contingencies naturally incident to the unhappy condition of human existence in its lowest predicaments: placed in this situation, can any one, judging of our own common nature as it is, and the motives that influence either our reason or our passions, think it probable that my acquiescence in so partial a dispensation will be equally tame and well-assured as in the former instance, where my sufferings were only in common with others, and our means and enjoyments were in some degree at least apparently equalized?

Apply the inferences that will result from the plain answer to this question to the point before us.

Suppose, contrary to every just ground of probability, upon due enquiry, it should appear that the total deficiency of grain and other provisions were equal to one month's consumption of the twelve, would it not be better that every one should have a mouthful at present, subject to certain regulations as to quantity, and the prevention of combinations influenced by improper views, than that a *certain* dearth in present should be raised artificially, to prevent an *uncertain* real one eleven months hence? Are you not full as likely to persuade the mass of people, upon showing them fairly and openly that the kingdom can furnish but eleven months' provision for twelve months' consumption;

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sumption, that they must economize those eleven parts in the best manner in their power, pointing out to them at the same time what appears, upon the maturest consideration, to be the best fitted to that end? I say, is not it to the full as probable, nay, to speak out, infinitely more so, that your persuasions to this purport should produce their effect, than that you should, in the present state of things, persuade the farmers to bring their commodities to market at moderated prices?

But suppose the worst that could happen, that your persuasions failed in their effect equally in one instance as in the other, is there any preposterous inducement to waste in the labouring classes from a quatern loaf at eight-pence, and every other article of provisions at proportionally-reduced prices? Is it probable that those classes would gluttonize and dissipate in useless riot what the earnings of their labour would even *then* but just enable them to obtain? Every reasonable mind revolts at any such idea, and perceives it, at a single glance, altogether unfounded.

But it may be urged, if the labourer cannot be supported on his wages, may it not be better to compel the farmer to raise them, than to lower the price of his commodities? So far as extends to the labourer employed in agriculture, it might possibly be almost the same thing. But what becomes of your other numerous classes of industrious

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trious citizens, your artizans, and manufacturers of every description; upon whose exertions your national wealth and general prosperity depends, in an equal degree at least with those of the cultivator?

Can these people, in any extensive branch of manufacture whatever, sustain the present prices; or can their employers afford to enable them? The thing is totally impossible; so that no alternative remains for your choice, but either to compel an immediate reduction of prices, or destroy every manufacture in your kingdom.

In addition to this, what becomes of all the remainder of your population, not comprehended in any of these classes, yet claiming a right to consideration in common with others; such as small annuitants, persons of slender fortunes, just sufficient for their support in moderate times, with various other descriptions of people, that must occur to every one who turns his mind on the subject, and therefore unnecessary to detail?

Can the greater part of these, or indeed can *any* of them, sustain the present prices without total destruction in many cases, or the most cruel and poignant distress in all?

Having shown, as I think, to the conviction of every thinking mind, the impossibility of bearing those prices, and the consequent necessity of lowering

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ing them, not only with a strong, but a prompt and efficacious hand, least the evil should become too great for remedy, or draw down mischiefs which in their consequences may not be easily retrieved; I should wholly conclude my arguments on the subject of price, had not one of a still stronger nature, more satisfactory, and as I conceive more unanswerable, if possible, at least as I think, than all the former, occurred to me after I had written the preceding sheets. It is this: All commercial and trading undertakings, of every description whatever, are subject to occasional losses.

The merchant experiences them by shipwrecks, by fires, by bankruptcies, and a thousand other accidents; sometimes to so large an amount as to sink him from the height of affluence, to the lowest state of want and wretchedness even in the course of a single day.

The manufacturer and retailer stand under the like predicament; nor is there in fact any one description of men to be found, within the whole circle of civilized society, that is not in a greater or lesser degree subject to contingencies of a like unfortunate complexion; when they occur, the individual either sinks at once under their pressure, or uses his best exertions to relieve himself from it; but never entertains an idea of throwing the *whole* of it insantly
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from himself to others. By gradual and progressive efforts he tries to restore himself to the rank and condition and means he has lost, without a hope, or almost a wish, to effect it at once, and in the first instance, at the expence of his fellows in society.

Not so, however, the farmer; who not only throws the whole burthen of all his losses, through bad seasons, immediately on the consumer, but finds a pretext on those very losses themselves, to better his condition at the expence of the whole suffering community, by raising his prices in a double, treble, or still greater ratio, with the losses sustained.

If his crops have been diminished an eighth or a tenth, by a bad season, there would seem no good reason why he should not abide his loss upon the same principles with other traders, more especially when it is considered that all contingencies of that ordinary and natural description have been already taken into the account of rent, which was fixed at a lower rate for that very reason.

I will, however, yield my consent, for the purpose of giving a more liberal encouragement to agriculture, than to any other profession, trade, or species of undertaking whatever, that he shall tax his customers in full proportion to his losses, so as to place himself in just the same situation
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after a bad season, as a good one; he will then be entitled to a rise on his commodities equal to one eighth, or one tenth of their former price; nor is it possible, as I humbly conceive, upon any principle, not simply of fair dealing, or of justice to the other members of the state, but of the most liberal encouragement, to allow him the smallest fraction beyond it.

Apply this to the produce of the last and present harvests, and observe the result.

In the last year's crop (that of 99), it was affirmed by some men of very sanguine minds, engaged by various interests on that side of the question, but whose opinions stand in no manner confirmed by subsequent information, but on the contrary, strongly and decisively contradicted, that the deficiency amounted to one fourth of the whole.

The crop of the present year is said by some, perhaps equally sanguine on the other side, to exceed an average crop by one third of the whole. To avoid, if possible, all occasion of cavil, I will, for the sake of argument, take the deficiency of the first at the highest statement, *viz. one-fourth*, and diminish the supposed excess of the latter to *one-tenth*, instead of *one-third*.

Upon the principle then of permitting the farmer to throw all his losses upon the public, he is entitled to

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to raise his prices, in the first instance, one fourth beyond his average one; and although the public, upon a reciprocity in the adaptation of that principle, ought to be fairly entitled to a diminution below the average, in the latter instance, of one tenth; yet to give him every further possible advantage, and take away every the most distant pretext of illiberal treatment, I will not only permit him to shift his losses, from bad seasons, from his own shoulders to those of the consumers, but keep all his profits from good ones to himself.

Now let us see how this corresponds with the fact, as to prices.

In the way of concession, and to place myself on that ground on which no intelligent and candid farmer in the kingdom will venture to attack me, I will assume the average price of wheat, upon an average crop, to be three pounds per quarter, notwithstanding my firm assurance that it ought to be considerably less; and then, upon the principle laid down, after the harvest of 99, which fell short by one *fourth*, the price ought to have been raised to *three pounds fifteen shillings*, and after that of 1800, to have been sunk again to *three pounds*.

The man, who in the first of these years reaped 400, instead of 500 quarters of wheat, by selling the 400 at three pounds fifteen shillings, would have received just as much as if he had sold the

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500 for three pounds, and of course have sustained no loss whatever from the deficiency of his crop; whereas in the latter year, having had 550 quarters instead of 500, he would of course have put a clear profit of the surplus 50 into his pocket. How is it possible to answer this, but by reverting to the old long-vaunted theory, admitting neither of contradiction or repeal, that quantity and demand constitute value, and have been deemed a fair measure of it by all enlightened writers, and that the free use of property in all its branches must be protected.

The fallacy of it, so far as concerns the present question, seems to be this; because you are able to apply the doctrine of arithmetical proportion to certain matters in statistical œconomy, you conceive it may be equally applied to all, whereas every article *essential to the support of human life*, stands clearly excluded from the laws of any such petty calculations, by the far superior and more universal laws of nature herself.

If I suppose certain quantities of cochineal or indigo, or any such commodities at market, to be at one time represented by 5, and the demand by 10, and at another the quantities to be represented by 10, and the demand by 5, I can easily, on the plain principles of arithmetical proportion, strike the price of each, at the two different markets; but how can that mode of calculation be applied to the articles, above spoken of,
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absolutely necessary to human existence; make the experiment, and see the consequences.

Let the average crop of the whole island be represented by 4; the crop of 1799, being one fourth deficient, must then be 3, and that of 1800, $4\frac{1}{10}$ th, or one tenth more. These numbers are easily obtained; but where is the other, representing the physical wants of your whole population to be found?

If the farmer, it is true, keeps his prices proportioned to his average crops, as combined with the average consumption, you may equalize one with the other, as you have done the average crop, and state these wants at 4; but if, as in the present unhappy instance, he withholds his supply till he gets the price he demands, that 4 may be raised arbitrarily to 8, or to 12, or to 16; or in short to any greater number he pleases: the demands of physical necessity being no ways subjected to arithmetical calculation, or acknowledging any of its laws.

If shut up in a besieged fortress, a pound of gold is demanded of me for a pound of horse-flesh, I give it, if I can, with readiness, rather than perish with hunger; but no reasonable man can be so wedded to theory, as to pretend that in such a bargain there was any criterion of value, except

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upon the ludicrous principle of Hudibras, that

— " The value of a thing,
Is as much money as 'twill bring :"

for the seller might just as well have demanded two pounds of gold as one, or three as two, and I should equally have given them, upon the same grounds of physical necessity.

Two objections, seemingly of some weight, as likely to be started to the establishment of a maximum, having been just suggested to me, I hope to be pardoned by my readers, if I intreat their further patience whilst I advert to them :— the first is, that it tends to prevent importation, the only plain and practical mode, it is said, in which a famine can be prevented, or your evil indeed meet with any very considerable alleviation ; for nothing, do they argue, can be clearer, if your own crop be insufficient to your support, supply the deficiency from without, and feed those markets with foreign grain, which cannot be furnished by your own. To this I beg leave to give an answer under distinct heads.

1st. That it is by no means yet satisfactorily ascertained, that your stock requires *any importation at all* ; but on the contrary, that probabilities lie strongly on the other side.

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2dly. That if it should require it, no available quantities, that is, none sufficient to lower your prices very considerably, are to be obtained.

3dly. That if you could, with all your exertions, procure an importation equal to that of the last year, of which I confess I see no reasonable prospect, upon what ground of reasoning would you build your hopes that the grain, and that too of an inferior quality, could be sold in our markets at less than ninety-five shillings per quarter, the average price which that year's importation produced.

4thly. Is it possible for your population to be subsisted on wheat of that description, at that enormous price ; and what must the best grain of our own growth fetch in just proportion ?

5thly. If the result of the general account taken prove, very contrary to my expectations, that the last year's crop was *one tenth below*, instead of *one tenth above* an average, and that you want something to make up the deficiency, the supply of rice you will be able to command from both the Indies, already recommended as your best succedaneum, together with those various resources of œconomy pointed out by that *most enlightened and patriotic member of society Count Rumford*, which would be resorted to chearfully

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cheerfully by all ranks, from the highest to the lowest, on a clear, plain, and open demonstration of the necessity, would more than fill up all your vacuities, without subjecting you either to the inconvenience of sending so large a quantity of specie out of the kingdom, or to the still greater of enabling fraudulent dealers of every description to mingle so much bad grain with good, and sell the whole at the highest prices, as has been lately practised through every quarter of the island, not less to the *pecuniary distress* of the public than their serious *physical inconvenience*; many of our *epidemic maladies* within this last twelvemonth being clearly referable to that cause.

The other objection I have to meet is, that the number of acting magistrates, usually attending their duty on the bench at quarter sessions, would be too scanty for the decision of such an important matter, as the adjustment of a maximum. The fact is, that although every gentleman of tolerable respectability in a county stands, for the most part, included in its commission of the peace, yet a very small proportional part of them take out their qualifications to act; some deterred by their necessary attention to other duties; others perhaps by a modest consciousness of incapacity to fulfil those of the magistracy; others again, and those constituting no very inconsiderable class, by indolence, and a love of self-indulgence, impatient either of the demands or restraints imposed by the exercise of a burthensome office;

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office; and so with others of different descriptions acting under different motives, as situation or inclination, or chance, may dictate.

Now to obviate the objection at once, and increase the number and respectability of the judges of this important question, without breaking in upon their feelings, their interests, or pursuits in any other lines, I would beg leave to recommend that the statute, which gave the power of fixing the maximum, should likewise, to all the persons named in the commissions of the peace for the respective counties, give that also of *taking out a qualification limited to the exercise of that particular act only*; so that every one so included might be enabled to attend, deliberate, and give his voice simply on that question, without being rendered subject to any other of the burthens of the magistracy.

This would at once not only do away the objection totally, but place the whole adjudication of so mighty an interest on the safest and most permanent foundation possible, the whole collective opulence, power, abilities, and virtue of the country.

If the interests of the community in all its branches cannot be safe in such hands, they can be safe no where; and it would be useless folly to look further.

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Under all circumstances, and in every situation, whether those be right who think with me there is no scarcity, or those who hold the opposite opinion; whether there be more of substantial and reasonable ground for a rise of prices than the writer of this conceives, or it exist only in the causes assigned in these observations, we shall be all equally at our ease under the protection of that truly *respectable tribunal*.

The cultivator will be assured of his fair profits, and the consumer of his subsistence upon equitable terms; and all that heavy cloud of misfortune, which has so long hung over Britain, and threatens at this moment to break upon her with still more portentous ruin, *be blown away in an instant*.

Before he concludes, the writer begs leave to disavow, in the fullest and most explicit terms, his desire or intention of drawing down the odium of the public upon any particular class of men, in whose protection from every kind of violence, no one can feel more warmly or sincerely interested than himself.—Their conduct, considered in its worst point of view, has been excited only in common with all the rest of their species, by that grand stimulus of all human action, self-interest; and the very people who are loudest in their censure might have acted precisely in the same manner in the same situations.

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The individuals who compose it are as respectable as any in the community, and it is one of the proudest boasts of England, to number amongst not only its protectors and encouragers, but its practical professors too, some of the first nobles and principal gentry of her realm; but as he who probes a wound to the bottom, is better assured of effecting a cure, than he who does it but superficially, through a fear of hurting the patient, it is impossible, in the probing of such a wound as this, not to touch in some parts to the quick; so that, after discovering the nature and extent of the ailment, an effectual remedy, or at least one that bears that promise, may be administered.

To have thought the intolerable evils complained of attributable principally to one cause, and one set of men, and not to have afterwards boldly spoken out, through a too delicate apprehension of wounding the feelings of any class in the aggregate, where the injury too, if any, is less felt, would have been a base desertion of the principles by which he was influenced in his first feeble efforts on this subject: but to those inclined to derive from what he has suggested additional motives to lawless violence, or the plunder of their fellow-citizens of whatever description, equally under the protection of the state with themselves, and possessing under its *subsisting dispensations* an indisputable right of using their own property at their own discretion; to such he would say—

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It behoves you to examine the motives, as well as probable consequences of your conduct, before you carry your threatened violences into execution.

If your purpose be to destroy the property of the *farmer*, consider that you thereby meditate the destruction of your own only means of supply; for not only the stock you destroy will be placed irrecoverably beyond your reach, but the stock of other proprietors will be kept out of your markets through an apprehension of the like unwarrantable violation. No man will administer to your future wants who is not by force compelled to it; and consider how very small a proportion the number of such men will bear to that of those who formerly contributed to fill your markets.

Reflect, besides, that the mischief will not ultimately fall *where you intend it*; the farmer is by law entitled to indemnification from the district in which the public violence has been committed, a proportion of which must be defrayed by such of yourselves as contribute to parochial taxation; and to such of you as through poverty stand exempted from those burthens, and depend in a more especial degree upon the voluntary benevolence of your more opulent citizens, it must be apparent, that the sources of that benevolence will be equally diminished in means and in motive; for if those individuals are additionally taxed to compensate the injuries you have wantonly committed, they

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will not only have the less to bestow upon you, but the less good will to bestow it.

Consider, besides, that the individual against whom your immediate malice is directed, has only acted on the general principle of human nature, self-interest, and in a manner strictly authorized by the laws of the land. Place yourselves in his situation, and see whether every individual amongst you, or at least a very great majority, would not have acted just in the same manner.

If you do not exactly know how to form a judgment of that, I will enable you to try it by the test of experiment: let every man of your whole body seriously ask himself, whether, in the course of all his dealings, he has ever neglected to obtain the best market-price he could for the commodity he had to sell.

If he answers negatively, as I am assured he must in nine cases out of ten, or rather in ninety-nine out of a hundred, on what ground does he blame the man whose property he is about to destroy, for the very same thing which he himself would have done under the same circumstances?

If your violence be directed against the *mill*, in addition to all the above considerations, you will have further to reflect, that all your corn will be of little or no utility without mills to grind it;

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that the trade of a miller is that of all others in which suspicion of fraud is most easy, and proof of its real existence most difficult; and, consequently, that you may be mistaken in the very grounds of your complaint against him: and lastly, that as the produce of twenty farms may be ground by one mill, the immediate ill consequences of your violence will be multiplied in that proportion; and you may in some districts be compelled to carry your corn to a distance of several miles to get it manufactured for use, which you could perhaps have done, before these acts of wickedness, at your own doors.

If you go with riotous intentions to the shop of the *baker*, you will have to consider, that as he more directly contributes to your immediate sustenance than the others, you necessarily bring more immediate distress upon yourselves by the destruction of his property. The loaves you destroy, or waste, or plunder to-day, will not only be so much taken from the instant means of your own support, but none will be baked to-morrow, or the following day, or any other day, till the laws have exerted their energy, and given effectual protection to the man who sells them.

Remember too, with the generosity natural to Englishmen, that this trade stands the most at your mercy, being carried on in the midst of you by a few individuals, surrounded by hundreds,
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nay, in some instances, by thousands, without other protection than the law, which, however certain in its final energies, may not be always at hand to ward off instant mischief; and its confidence in the good sense and moderation, and well-understood interests of the multitudes, who are supplied by it with daily sustenance.

Remember too, that of all other trades the *baker's* is the most limited in its profits by a *strict assize*, and that he, almost alone of the whole community, is not permitted to bring his commodity to market upon any arbitrary terms of his own fixing, but simply upon those assigned him by the direct laws of his country; whilst every professional fraud alledged against him may be redressed, in a summary manner, by the first magistrate to whom you happen to apply.

The same mode of reasoning, with little alteration, may be applied to all other dealers in provisions; reflect therefore even in the best event, the most fortunate result to yourselves, that the inevitable consequence of your improper conduct will be an increase of your grievances, by *an increase of prices*, proportioned to the waste committed, and the risks to which a further supply is thereby subjected, even if you yourselves escape from personal chastisement at the moment; but it behoves you to reflect, that the state is armed at all times with powers sufficient not only to repress,
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but to punish such acts of wicked and wanton violence; and if it does not on all occasions exercise them with rigour, it is more through compassion for an un-informed and misguided multitude, than through any want of means, which are in fact always at its command.

Remember, that at length its patience may be exhausted, and further moderation become injustice to the other innocent members of the community; and then your wicked deeds will be met *in the moment of their commission*, and effectually repressed by the strong arm of justice, and a thousand other evils be added to those of which you already complain: on the whole then, rest assured, that your best resolves will be to rely with confidence on the unceasing efforts of your superiors for the redress of your grievances, satisfied that whatever energies are to be found in all the collective wisdom, virtue, power, and sincerely-good intention of the state, will be called into *immediate* action for your relief.

It now remains for the writer only to apologize to those, of whatever description, who honour this pamphlet with their attention, for this long intrusion on their patience, and assure them, that however conscious he may be of his own inferiority, in talent or information, to numbers who have the direction of the public interests more immediately in their hands; and no one he thinks can well be
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more so than himself; however unused to address the public through the channel of the press; or however sensible of his inability to satisfy either his readers or himself with any very clear arrangement, or any very elegant expression, of the various ideas that have presented themselves to his mind on this complicated subject; yet could he not, in a matter of such moment to the general interests of the whole community, acquit himself to his own feelings, had he omitted, through any points of false delicacy, to submit the result of his reflections in this mode, to the judgment of the country at large.

Had he not thought, after the maturest deliberation on the subject, presented to him in all the lights, furnished either by his own mind, or the information of others, that the country might be *drained of half her specie by importation; that all her wastes might be brought into cultivation, and every forestaller, regrater, and monopolizer, driven instantly, by the severest penalties, beyond her utmost limits*, without any effectual alleviation of the present evil; never had he obtruded on the public notice his proposal for an adjustment of prices, in the mode suggested in these pages; the *only one*, according to his ideas, at all calculated to afford the most distant chance of cure for the enormous and inveterate malady of the land, and of restoring her to her sound and pristine health *in an instant*; the sole difficulties of which would be, at the outset,
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in procuring its adoption, the application afterwards being easy, and the effect certain.

Without the risk, he repeats it confidently, of a *single acre* worse cultivated, a *single bushel* of corn less produced on that account; without a single individual in the whole island *reasonably* dissatisfied, equal justice being administered to all by the *grandest, most constitutional, and respectable* jury, that ever sat in judgment on the rights of Englishmen, composed of whatever is opulent, or great, or enlightened, or virtuous in the country; we should then rise, as one man, from the unquiet tossings of a turbid and feverish dream, to a new day-spring of renovated health and vigour, with no other sense of past misfortunes, but that of astonishment at our having so long submitted to them, through the apprehension of phantoms of our own creation, supported only by the theories of plausible, but erroneous speculation; incapable, as has been demonstrated by their violation in various instances, of universal application, and subversive of the best rights, and most substantial enjoyments of man, wherever they have been injudiciously introduced, as the unerring rules of his practice.

Eased in a single instant of a burthen so intolerable, Britain might then once more re-assume her lion-port, and hurl defiance at all the enemies of her peace and her happiness; strictly verifying
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the sentiments of her immortal Bard, when he says,

“ This country never did (or ever shall)
Lye at the proud foot of a Conqueror,
But when she first did help to wound herself;
If England to herself do rest but true,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them.”

Without a single well-founded apprehension, that all the powers of hell leagued together for her destruction, would be able to atchieve it, or even materially diminish the smallest portion of her well-earned greatness, raised equally, as it is, on the solid foundations of power and justice; at once the envy, pride, and admiration of the world.

POSTSCRIPT.

POSTSCRIPT.

SINCE the above sheets were written, certain letters of high authority having met my eye, stating the supposed reality of scarcity to a large amount, it might be unbecoming in me to pass them over in total silence. I must, therefore, hope to stand excused both with the Noble Writer himself, for whose good sense and good intentions, as well as superior means of information, no one can entertain a higher respect than myself, as well as with my readers in general, for differing with him *toto cælo* as to the fact, of the truth of which, indeed, scarcely any thing short of proofs deduced from an account of stock actually taken in the mode suggested, would be strong enough for my entire conviction. Throughout the whole circle of my own observation, upon a tolerably extensive scale, nothing has appeared to justify even the suspicion; I have not only seen nothing of that nature myself, but have as yet seen no one that has seen it, or has the most distant reason to suppose it, but upon hearsay information, which not one in fifty has the credulity to believe. The Farmers certainly, within the sphere of my inquiries, know nothing of the matter but from reports, of which they are always ready to avail themselves,

themselves, and would do the very same thing, and persist in the *same* prices, or *increase* them, had they *two* harvests in their barns and rick-yards instead of *one*. It is, however, some satisfaction to me to know, that whether there actually be a deficiency or not, the measure I have had the honour of proposing applies equally in either case, as every circumstance of that nature would necessarily fall under the consideration of the enlightened judges appointed to try the grand issue between the producing and consuming classes, and guide their occasional decisions in the several districts accordingly.

Much additional matter has been likewise suggested on the subject of importation, and the disturbance likely to be given to the whole provision-trade, by the adoption of such a measure; but I have yet heard nothing on either to cause the smallest alteration in my opinion, as delivered in the preceding pages. Before you import at all, you should at least ascertain beyond a doubt that importation is necessary, and not presume that necessity from prices assignable clearly to other causes; besides, were it found to be necessary, the only mode, in my judgment, to render it at all useful, would be to tread over the same ground which Government did very wisely, but subject to much malevolent and ill-founded obloquy, some time ago, and commission agents to purchase on the public

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account, and sell again at reduced prices in the market. That measure was admirably calculated to produce competition, and actually did so, to the great benefit of the consumers; but Ministers, I conclude, finding themselves at once involved in much censure, as well as in much additional trouble arising out of such complicated transactions, gave way to the public cry, and left the whole matter of importation intirely to the efforts of uninfluenced and independent individuals, the consequences of which have been but too severely felt. Were that system to be revived to-morrow, the same outcry would attend it, and the Farmers would just as strongly object to the being beat down in their own markets by the competition of Government-agents, as to the establishment of a maximum, or any other measure calculated to reduce their enormous profits within reasonable bounds. With respect to the injury likely to accrue to capital employed in the provision-trade, I should boldly say, and undertake to prove, that the measure would be still the *more eligible on that account*, as no inconsiderable portion of the evil complained of derives from that source; and that probably *one tenth* of the capital so employed would promote a more salutary circulation than *the whole*; whatever is more than just sufficient is hurtful, all considerable excess becomes so in a most especial degree, to the encouragement of speculation and monopoly, without end.

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The surplus capital, thus driven out of one channel, would soon find its way into others without any national loss whatever; but even were it otherwise, that is, were that excess of capital to be wholly done away, I should prefer, with a view to public utility, *its total annihilation*, to *its application in the present mode*, as much the lesser evil of the two.

But in addition to all these objections, I have heard it urged, not altogether without some plausibility, that the fixing of limits beyond which prices shall not extend, in modern phrase termed a *maximum*, is a matter so perfectly plain and obvious to every capacity, that it must necessarily have occurred to every one that cast his thoughts, however superficially, on the subject; and that nothing but the unanswerable objections arising in every quarter, to its adoption, could have deterred some one writer or other, worthy of attention, from urging it at a moment of such exceeding pressure as the present.

To this the Author, with much humility, opposes the following heads of answer:

That a thing for being plain and obvious, is not on that account the less likely to prove useful.

That although, perhaps, no writer of any celebrity has suggested it in the present instance, yet
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has it been loudly called for by people of all ranks, as absolutely essential to the preservation of the great mass of the community; many of the speeches of leading individuals in different districts have directly pointed to it, and in certain of the petitions presented to his Majesty for a redress of grievances, in that particularly of a great trading city in the West for one, if he mistakes not, it is expressly mentioned. That it has been the principal measure, if not in terms, yet in substance, by which the riots at Birmingham, Nottingham, and certain other places have been appeased; that every reasonable objection that can be raised to it has been, as the Author flatters himself, fully met, and satisfactorily answered, in the preceding pages of this Work; and that if it be attended with any evil at all, which he very much doubts, such *quantum* of evil bears no assignable proportion whatever to that which it is proposed to remedy; that one principal cause of its great unpopularity exists more in sound than in substance, people having been used to consider it as an invention of French and Jacobin origin, giving rise to a large portion of those misfortunes under which that unhappy nation has laboured for such a length of time; whereas it has been irrefragably proved to have no such origin, and that even the nominal species of fraudulent maximum introduced into that Government by the tyranny of its rulers, *alone* saved its Revolution from being strangled in the

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the birth. Finally, that, in fact, so far from the measure's being plain and obvious to the most superficial thinker, it has not yet been the fortune of the writer to find it suggested, under its *present practical modifications*, by any one whatever in writing, conversation, or otherwise. Every maximum that has been hinted at has been an arbitrary measure of prices fixed by the governing powers of the country, in some cases by the influence of a single man, as of Robespierre in the instance above alluded to, or by proclamation or otherwise, as in those furnished by our own history; whereas the maximum here proposed is *no arbitrary measure* whatever, but one fixed from time to time and adjusted to existing circumstances as necessity and expedience dictate, by all that is great and respectable in the country; a circumstance which *alone* does away a thousand objections, and renders its adoption as *constitutionally safe*, as every consumer of the middling and lower classes in the island feels it to be necessary in many, too many instances, to his very *existence*; to his *comfort* and *happiness*, in all.

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