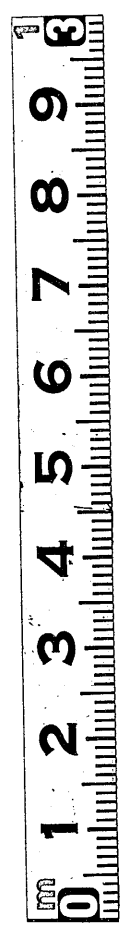


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DISPERSION  
OF THE  
*GLOOMY APPREHENSIONS,*  
OF LATE  
REPEATEDLY SUGGESTED,  
FROM THE  
DECLINE OF OUR CORN-TRADE, &c.

DISPERSION

OF THE

*GLOOMY APPREHENSIONS,*

OF LATE

REPEATEDLY SUGGESTED,

FROM THE

DECLINE OF OUR CORN-TRADE,

AND

CONCLUSIONS

OF A

DIRECTLY OPPOSITE TENDENCY

ESTABLISHED UPON

*WELL-AUTHENTICATED FACTS:*

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

OBSERVATIONS

UPON THE

FIRST REPORT

FROM THE

COMMITTEE ON WASTE-LANDS, &c.

---

BY THE REV. JOHN HOWLETT,  
VICAR OF GREAT DUNMOW, ESSEX.

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DISPERSION, &c.

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**I**N a late ingenious and elaborate publication, and, in many respects, of high utility and importance, well deserving the public thanks, entitled *An Inquiry into the Corn-Laws and Corn-Trade of Great Britain, and their Influence on the Prosperity of the Kingdom, by the late Alexander Dirom, Esq. of Muireisk, in the County of Aberdeen*, some conclusions are deduced from the gradual decline, and almost total annihilation, of our exports of grain; which, if well founded, are truly alarming; but, if groundless, their fallacy ought to be detected, and the real truth clearly evinced and firmly established.

This writer states, that, from nearly the commencement of the present century, when the

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corn-

corn-laws of 1688, &c. encouraging exportation, had begun to operate; our exports of grain continually increased, and our imports as constantly diminished, till about the year 1750, when the former exceeded the latter by an annual average of above 800,000 quarters; but that, from that period, a melancholy reverse took place; that our imports constantly gained on our exports, till at length, during the twelve years from 1773 to 1784 inclusive, the balance of importation against us amounted yearly to 311,176 quarters.

The prosperous state of our corn-trade, in the first of the above periods, our author imputes to the operation of those corn-laws, the essence of which was established in 1688; and continued, with little interruption, till 1750; that the reverse which then took place arose from the alterations made in those laws, of which there were not less than twelve, between 1750 and 1773, when the fatal blow was given to exportation, and, as it were, a new system introduced, solely tending to promote importation.

After having established, as he conceived, the idea of the pernicious influence of the change in our corn-laws, he intimates that our agriculture, which gradually advanced, from the commencement

of

of the present century, out of the lowest state of depression till it arrived, between the year 1730 and 1750, at the highest degree of prosperity, has ever since been rapidly declining; that our farmers never were so prosperous and successful as during the period last-mentioned; that the principal increase of our population, in the course of this century, was prior to the year 1750; and that 137,256 persons were employed in the cultivation of our lands between the years 1741 and 1750 more than between the years 1773 and 1784.\*

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Dismal

\* The Monthly Reviewers, in their Review for August, 1796, seem to have adopted some of the above discouraging conclusions, and to have zealously endeavoured to confirm and establish them. As the decisions of these gentlemen, whatever may be their real merits, have certainly a powerful influence upon the minds of the public, and as their work is commonly read by twenty times the number of persons who read the generality of other publications, those especially of the kind of that under our present consideration, it becomes of proportionably greater importance, that the fallacies of the writer now in our view, if fallacies they really are, should be fully and clearly detected. The general substance of their final decided deductions is contained in the following table, and in their subsequent observations upon it.

TABLE

Difmal and alarming apprehensions are here suggested with a witness; but, to our comfort be it

TABLE of Exports and Imports of Corn of all Sorts to and from Great-Britain, from 1710 to 1793, inclusive.

Dates inclusive.	Quarters imported.	Quarters exported.		Aver. price of Wheat.	
1710			} During this period, the law of 1688 was allowed to act without control, unless where marked in the table.	s.	d.
1720	71	449,193		44	10
1730	924*	536,336		33	8
1740	4,090	549,477			
1750	1,111	922,467			
1760			} During this period, the law of 1773 operated.		
1770	265,732	429,017			
1780	515,636	239,948	} The law of 1791 operated now.	45	10
1790	613,088	284,714			
1793	1,322,828	227,273			

“This short table,” say the Reviewers, “exhibits a striking reverse in the state of this country respecting the production of corn, which demands the serious consideration of every householder in the kingdom. During the first period, our exports went on in a regular train, while our imports were trifling, and it may be said stationary. During the second period, our exports have continued gradually to decrease, while our imports have as regularly, though much more rapidly, increased; so that, in the course of forty years, the imports have risen from next to nothing to little less than one million and a half of quarters; while the exports have, in the same period of time, fallen from one million of quarters nearly to nothing, as it will probably be found to be at this time. Such a regular progression, corresponding so exactly with the changes which have taken

it remembered, they are utterly void of foundation. The general fact, indeed, the decline of our corn-trade, B 3

taken place in our corn-laws, clearly indicates, that those laws, if they have not been the only cause of this deplorable change in the state of this country, have at least had a considerable influence on it, and that these laws claim a very serious revival on the part of the legislature; in doing which, the present volume ought to be carefully consulted.”

These reasonings and conclusions, whatever plausibility they may derive from a mere inspection of the above table, independently of the various facts and circumstances which have actually occurred in the kingdom at large, I flatter myself that those, who shall do me the honour closely and candidly to peruse what is advanced in the following pages, will be convinced, that most, if not all, of them are entirely void of foundation; and that the striking reverse respecting our production of corn, and the deplorable change in the state of this country, are altogether imaginary.

I hereby intend no particular disparagement of these writers. No man, or body of men, especially one from year to year perpetually changing and fluctuating, is infallible or free from error. I presume not to determine how far the very general charge is true, that the accounts given, by the Monthly Reviewers, of many of the numerous publications coming before them, furnish no correct idea of their respective merits, or even of their precise purpose and intention. For my own part, I feel no scruple to assert, that their occasional masterly criticisms upon books of almost every denomination, moral, philosophical, theological, medical, chemical, mathematical, have very justly acquired them no very inferior degree of reputation.

trade, is readily admitted, it being clear and indubitable. But, as to the causes and consequences, with the various reasonings and conclusions thereto attached, they are all, as it appears me, egregious misconceptions; most of the supposed facts have never existed, and the deductions fairly to be drawn from that which is readily allowed, instead of being gloomy and despondent, when viewed in connection with the numerous co-existing circumstances, are the most satisfactory and pleasing.

With regard to the state of agriculture in this kingdom, I might safely appeal to any persons, competently skilled in the subject, whether, from the year 1700 to 1740 or 50, it was not comparatively stagnant? and whether, since that time, it has not been improved, increased, and extended, with an accelerated degree of rapidity, unparalleled in any former period? Nay, is not the comparative state of rents in the two periods a presumptive evidence hereof? In the former, with very few exceptions, were they not nearly stationary? In the latter, the augmentation has been great and general. In most places they have been increased one-

putation. I have been their constant reader for now almost forty years, and I am ready to acknowledge my high obligations to them for the pleasing amusement and great variety of instruction they have often afforded me.

fourth;

fourth; in many, one-third; in some, one-half. Nay, in the neighbourhood of our large manufacturing-towns, they have been *trippled* and *quadrupled*. In the mean time, have not rates, taxes, and the expenses of farming and living, been generally increased in full proportion? Whence have these numerous augmented demands been answered, but from a more spirited, a more extended, and improved, cultivation? If these demands had not been answered, a diminution of rents would have inevitably followed.

Respecting our farmers themselves, it would perhaps be difficult to fix upon an æra in which they were in a more wretched and distressed condition than between the years 1730 and 1750; or in a more flourishing and prosperous one than from the year 1750, not only to the year 1784, but even to the present moment. In the former period, they were perpetually breaking, and sinking into poverty; in the latter, they have been as perpetually rising, faster and faster, into wealth and affluence. Nor is either to be wondered at. In the former, the average-price of wheat was only about 32s. a quarter, and all other kinds of grain, with every other article of agricultural produce, proportionably cheap; in the latter, wheat has been almost 50s. a quarter, other grains equally dear, while butter, cheese, oxen, sheep, hogs, have

B 4

have been dearer still. Has the advance of rents, rates, tithes, taxes, &c. been equivalent? That it has not, I appeal to the numerous estates purchased by the farmers. I could point out twenty instances of persons, within fifteen miles of this place, who, from an original capital of 1000 or 1500*l.* have, during the period in question, bought farms of from 50 to 200*l.* a year, and even considerably more. I contemplate these facts with high satisfaction. The labours of no order of men are more deserving of such rewards. Base and mean would be the landlords or the tithe-men who should take advantage of this to raise their rents or their tithes to an undue height, or so as to prove an insuperable impediment in the way of such spirited and successful industry. The latter, indeed, whether clerical or lay, can do but little. Their boundaries are fixed and narrow, and they cannot go beyond them; but the former have no other limits than individual wisdom and discretion, which may sometimes be greatly deficient, and finally prove injurious to themselves and their tenants.

With respect to our population, so far from the greatest increase of it in the present century having been prior to 1750, as our author apprehends, though progressive, indeed, through the whole, its great and rapid augmentation, both in England and Scotland, has been during the last forty years.

In

In Scotland, Sir John Sinclair has collected very ample proof that the number of people has been increased nearly 500,000; and, with respect to England and Wales, I think I have myself pretty satisfactory evidence that the advance has been little less than two millions; and, of course, in Great Britain collectively about two millions and a half.

If the number of our inhabitants, and the state of our agriculture, have been thus advanced and improved, we thence discover how groundless is that other assertion of our author, that there were 137,256 more persons employed in cultivating our lands, between 1741 and 1750, than between 1773 and 1784. The truth of the case must have been greatly the reverse. Nay, admitting his own principles of calculation, as stated in page 141, 142, 143, of his Inquiry, (which, however, I by no means do, except merely for argument-sake,) and supposing no abridgements of agricultural labour to have been introduced, there must have been in the latter period 300,000 persons more employed in cultivating the ground, or in manufacturing grain, than in the former; and that, at present, the increase must have been advanced to 400,000. But of this we shall probably see more as we proceed, as well as farther confirmation of our increased and improved agriculture.

Having

Having thus, in some measure, dispersed the gloomy conclusions, drawn by our author from his general maxim, or rather having shewn the absolute *non-existence* of those facts, by which he endeavours to corroborate and establish it; our prospect is somewhat brightened, and we may cheerfully proceed to examine the maxim itself, *that the change in our corn-laws has been the cause of the great and rapid decline of our exportation of grain.*

Now I do not see there is any necessity to suppose that it has been any cause at all, and for this plain and obvious reason:—there have been other causes in abundance, of certain and indubitable operation, amply sufficient to account for it, without allowing the smallest influence whatever to the corn-laws.

One of these causes, and that a leading one, has been already noted; the vast increase of our population, and consequently a proportionable increased consumption. The number of people I have stated to have been augmented nearly two millions and a half within the compass of the last forty or fifty years. Now two millions and a half of people will annually consume very little less than two millions and half quarters of wheats. But how stands our excess of exportation and importation during

during the two periods in question to answer this prodigiously increased consumption? The annual average excess of exportation during the ten *favourite* years, beginning with 1741 and ending with 1750, according to Mr. Dirom's tables, was about 371,925 quarters. The annual excess of importation over exportation, according to Mr. Mackie's tables, during the nine years, ending with 1793, was only 36,893 quarters; which, added to the excess of exportation in the former period, amounts to 408,818 quarters. But our annual increased consumption has been nearly two millions and a half; consequently we have an annual deficiency of above two millions of quarters. Whence has this deficiency been supplied? Doubtless from our increased produce. Where then has been the pernicious influence of the change in our corn-laws so heavily complained of? It is vanished into empty air.

But, perhaps, it may be said, that the whole increased number of people does not consume wheat. Granted. But this will only enlarge the increased consumption of grain. If these additional inhabitants live upon barley, they will each require twelve bushels a year, instead of the eight of wheat: if upon oats, nearly sixteen bushels. But we need not trouble ourselves greatly about this distinction. It is notorious that the proportion of persons



persons consuming wheaten bread is vastly increased. Luxury, that most voracious and devouring monster, is grown as much as population. Prodigious multitudes now consume the finest wheat, whose ancestors were confined to oats and barley.

In the collection of papers commonly called the *Corn-Tracts*, published about fifty years ago, and which, upon the whole, is one of the most valuable publications on those subjects which I know of, the editor, after estimating the then population of England and Wales at six millions, which was pretty nearly the fact, computes the number of persons who used wheaten bread to be 3,750,000.\* This computation, though not pretended to be completely accurate, is, however, founded on data so extremely plausible, that I see no material or solid objection to its general truth and sufficient correctness. But how prodigiously is this number increased since that time? The consumption of wheat in all the northern counties was then but little: at present, from the vast increase of manufactures, of wealth, and opulence, it must be considerable; and allowing the population of England and Wales to be advanced from six millions to eight, and supposing the consumers

\* Page 140, &c.

of

of wheat to be increased from the proportion of fifteen to twenty-four of the total population, at the first period, to that of three-quarters of it in the latter, that is from 3,750,000 to 6,000,000, the number of persons who now eat wheaten bread in England and Wales is two millions and a quarter more than it was forty or fifty years ago.

But the proportionate increased consumption of wheat in England is not nearly so great as in Scotland. The agricultural surveyor of Mid-Lothian tells us, "that about the year 1735, the total annual consumption of wheat in that whole county did not much exceed 25,000 bolls; but that at present it amounts to about 144,540, a quantity nearly six times greater than was consumed only sixty years ago."\*

The same writer also informs us, "that the whole county, fifty years ago, did not sow above a thousand acres of wheat, and about the year 1727, not above five hundred; but that there are now seven or eight thousand; and the total consumption of the county is estimated to be three times its produce." Putting all these circumstances together, and making thereupon the requisite calculations, it should seem that the single county of

\* The survey was published in 1795.

Mid-

Mid-Lothian annually consumes, at present, above fifty thousand quarters of wheat more than it did fifty years ago. But Mid-Lothian contains but about a fourteenth part of the population of Scotland: should we suppose that the rest of that country has increased its consumption of wheat in the same proportion, we should have an annual increased consumption 700,000 quarters. But the rest of the kingdom has, perhaps, not so rapidly advanced in luxury, and, therefore, this conclusion, probably, to its full extent, cannot be admitted. Let us suppose then, that the aggregate increased consumption of the entire kingdom of Scotland is merely six times that of the county of Mid-Lothian, (which is surely a moderate supposition,) and we have an annual increased consumption of 300,000 quarters of wheat in Scotland alone; nearly equal to double the annual excess of importation during the twenty-three years, ending with 1793; and almost three-quarters of the aggregate amount of the annual excess of exportation during the ten years, beginning with the year 1741, added to the excess of annual importation during the ten years, ending with 1793. And the general result, with regard to Great Britain at large, is, that its increased annual consumption of wheat alone, as before intimated, is not greatly inferior to two millions and a half of quarters.

But

But men, women, and children, are not the only consumers of the fruits of the earth. Oxen, sheep, hogs, come in for a large proportion; all of which have been amazingly increased within the period before us. I find, that the annual average number of beasts sent to Smithfield-market during the ten years, ending with 1785, was 25,344 more than the annual average sent thither during the ten years, ending with 1750; that the annual average increase of sheep, for the corresponding periods, was 131,995; and I know no reason to suppose that the increase of hogs has not been in full proportion. To these we may add the increased number of all these animals sent to the towns of Sheffield, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, &c. whose inhabitants have been augmented in a three-fold proportion more than those of the city of London. The consumption of our army and navy, meantime, has been almost trippled. Laying all these circumstances together, it will not, I presume, be deemed an extravagant estimate, that the annual increased supply of sheep, during the period in question, has been nearly 300,000, of oxen 60,000, of hogs 40,000, and, if we come down to the present time, much greater still.—What, let me ask, has been the prodigiously increased quantity of grass and hay, natural and artificial, of turnips, potatoes, carrots, beans, pease, barley,

barley, to feed this amazingly augmented number of creatures?\*

But the greatest consumers of all are still behind; I mean our *horses*, which are multiplied almost beyond conception, especially those kept for pleasure, and those employed in carriers waggons, post-chaises, and in mail, stage, and hackney, coaches. The first of these are highly fed, from the vanity of shew and appearance; and those of all the latter descriptions, from the necessity of perpetual or vigorous exertion. The increase of these several denominations, Mr. Mackie, in his Second Letter on the Corn-Laws, subjoined to Mr. Dirom's Inquiry, p. 255, estimates at 400,000; and he allows three acres of fertile land for the maintenance of each horse, which allowance requires 1,200,000 acres for the support of the whole number. But the allowance of only three acres for the maintenance of a horse of the above descriptions, comprehending his supply of hay, grass, and corn, I

\* The merely increased number of the above animals presents a very inadequate idea of the actually increased quantity of provisions they furnish, and of the produce of the fruits of the earth they consume before they come to market. The breed of them is considerably improved, and they are generally fattened to a so much higher degree, and larger size, that it would be a moderate estimate to suppose, that five, on a medium of the present period, are equal to six of the former.

am inclined to think, is by much too little. It is true, he adapts his calculation to *fertile* land, whether arable, meadow, or pasture; and it must be fertile indeed, to produce on a medium what he supposes; the arable sixty bushels of oats an acre, and the meadow 4000 pounds of hay. The former would never answer in the culture of wheat, nor would the latter ever be broken up for the plough. Mr. Kent, I believe, somewhere states the quantity of land, of the common medium quality, as necessary for the support of a horse, at seven acres; and, if confined to horses of the most continual and vigorous exertion, the statement, perhaps, is not extravagant; as would appear from a detail of particulars. But, taking the average of the above horses, five acres is probably not too much; and we have, upon this allowance, the produce of two millions of acres of that species of land for the sustenance of these additional horses, which might have been applied to the cultivation of wheat. Now, giving these horses only two bushels per week a piece, on the medium of summer and winter, and they will annually consume almost five millions and a half quarters of grain. What have the excess of our exports, during the first period in question, added to the excess of our imports in the last, done towards the supply of this prodigious quantity? Comparatively nothing. For, I find, from Mr. Dirom's tables, that the

annual exports of oats and oatmeal, for the ten years ending with 1750, added to the annual excess of importation of the same articles, for the twenty years ending with 1790, as appears by our corn-register, is less than 300,000 quarters. Oatmeal, indeed, our horses consume little or nothing of; I therefore set the omission of that article against their consumption of *beans*; and the 300,000 quarters, now mentioned, is scarcely an eighteenth part of the maintenance, in the article of *grain* alone, of the above additional number of horses. Whence has arisen this amazing supply? Undoubtedly from our increased produce. Where then, I repeat the question, and it cannot be repeated too often, nor too zealously pressed upon the mind of the reader, where has been the pernicious influence of the change in our corn-laws? How has it impeded or obstructed the progress and improvement of our agriculture?—Where is the ground for alarm from the decline of our exports and the increase of our imports of grain? Where is “*that striking reverse in the state of this country respecting the production of corn, which demands the serious consideration of every householder in the kingdom?*” If there has been a *striking reverse*, it is a *striking reverse* to our infinite advantage; and, instead of exciting dismal and gloomy conceptions, it ought to inspire the most cheerful and encouraging ideas. For, to take a slight retrospection of what

what is above-observed relative to this subject, our population, within the last fifty years, has advanced nearly two millions and a half; our oxen have been increased 60,000, our sheep almost 300,000, our hogs scarcely less than 40,000, our horses employed in the most vigorous exertions, and the most richly and highly fed, have been augmented 400,000; our army and navy, and mercantile shipping, have been trippled: all these have required an additional annual supply of little less than seven or eight millions of quarters of grain; of wheat and barley, of pease and beans, and oats. To all this we may add an immense quantity of hay and grass, natural and artificial, of turnips, cabbages, potatoes, carrots, &c. Whence have all these been furnished, but from the increased produce of our soil? Not the tenth part of the augmented quantity of *grain* alone has been brought from abroad; and of the other articles nothing at all. The average-excess of our imports over our exports, on a medium of nine years, ending with 1793, according to Mr. Mackie’s tables, annexed to his first Letter following the Inquiry, p. 201, amounts to only 564,185 quarters. This, considering the above facts, is comparatively a trifle: instead of being surpris’d that it is so much, we may be justly astonish’d that it is no more; and, so far from suggesting gloomy and alarming apprehensions, it may justly inspire ideas

the most pleasing and comfortable. For it is indubitably clear, that our agriculture is advanced most wonderfully; and yet it is no less certain, that our population, our trade, our commerce, our manufactures, and our general prosperity, have advanced faster still.

I presume it is now clearly evident, that the great and acknowledged decline in our exports has not been productive of a correspondent decline in our agriculture: I think it is no less manifest, that the various changes in our corn-laws are so far from having been the only, or even any considerable, cause of the decrease of our exports, that there is no necessity for supposing they have been any cause at all. These conclusions I should think myself fully authorized in drawing, from the several facts and reasonings above-adduced, though I saw a perfect correspondence between the various successive alterations in our corn-laws, the gradual increase of our exports, and the subsequent rapid progression of our imports; and, for this plain and obvious reason, there may be a complete coincidence of events, without there being the smallest connection between them, as cause and effect. But has there really been, in the present case, the coincidence or correspondence supposed? A slight examination of facts will prove the contrary. We shall soon discover that the comparative influence

of

of the laws in question has been, and, in the nature of things, can have been, at most but a mere trifle. The grand and leading error in our reasonings upon this subject seems to be, that we ascribe too much to human contrivance; too little to providential superintendence. A single bad season, and a general, though very slight, failure in our crops, even only to the amount of a sack an acre, in the present extent of our cultivation, would be more than equivalent to twice the amount of either the exports or imports which have ever taken place in Great Britain, and would effectually defeat the operation of the wisest and most judicious legal regulations.

The whole course of Mr. Dirom's tables, giving the annual medium price of wheat for a long succession of years, affords a strong presumptive confirmation of this idea, though intended to establish the contrary. The most essential of the salutary laws, so much boasted of, was passed in the year 1688; and, if its beneficial effects were truly what has been imagined, they must have been strikingly visible in the course of the ten or twelve years immediately subsequent. But how was the fact? The average-price of wheat, during the ten years ending with 1700, was 3*l.* 8*s.* 3*d.* per quarter, as high as 5*l.* would be now, that is 25*l.* a load; whereas, the average of the preceding ten years

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ending

ending with the year 1690, before the law could possibly have had any sensible operation, it was only 2*l.* 6*s.* 11*d.* that is under 12*l.* a load. The medium of the ten years ending with 1710, when the spirit of the law had been exerting itself for two-and-twenty years, and must surely have done its utmost, was 2*l.* 11*s.* 10*d.*; the prices, too, throughout that whole period were most strikingly various, even from so low as 1*l.* 14*s.* 2*d.* a quarter to so high as 4*l.* 14*s.* 2*d.* and no less than five years, in the same compass of time, the medium price was 21*l.* a load, almost equivalent to what 30*l.* would be now, due regard being had to the present expence of culture, to taxes, poor's rates, and the high price of every necessary of life. Where, then, was the beneficial operation of the law? It does not appear. Could this strange variety of price arise from any thing but the variety of the seasons, which no laws can prevent or compensate for?

The same conclusions naturally present themselves if we descend so low as to this side the year 1750, when our author supposes his favourite law of 1688. had acquired its utmost vigour.

The abundant produce of the two years, 1753 and 1754, sunk the price of wheat to a medium of the years 1754 and 1755, of 8*l.* 10*s.* a load; and

and yet the two deficient crops of 1755 and 1756, immediately, almost doubled this price, and it remained for three years in succession at a medium of nearly 13*l.* a load; which filled the kingdom with riots and tumults from one end to the other, and occasioned as much nonsense to be talked, written, and printed, about *monopolizing, forestalling, regrating, and withholding, of corn, of engrossing, enlarging, and consolidating, of farms,* as we have been pestered with in consequence of the two still more deficient crops of 1794 and 1795.\*

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If

\* Nay, the folly of the inhabitants of London, in the year 1757, exceeded almost any thing they have shewn in the years 1795 and 1796. They applied to the Lords of the Privy-Council, and proposed to their Lordships "to put in execution the powers given by an act, 25 Hen. VIII. to fix the price at which wheat and flour should be sold." Corn-Tracts, p. 29. Had this request been complied with, the citizens would have stood a fair chance of soon being starved. They pique themselves upon their superior wisdom, and are often not a little amused and diverted with the ignorance and absurdities of the country-people, and some times, perhaps, and in some respects, very justly. But, were the latter disposed to retaliate, they might have ample room for it, they being full as well acquainted with the affairs and transactions of the town as the former are with the business and productions of the country. This is applicable not merely to the sentiments of the populace, which are generally guided by misapprehension and ignorant prejudice, but to the solemn resolutions of their Courts, which are always

If we come down lower still to the twenty years ending with 1793, when the supposed ruinous laws

always composed of many individuals of liberal education, and possessing the means of extensive intelligence. *The Court of Common-Council*, about ten years ago, instituted an inquiry into the cause of the high price of butcher's meat, and procured the most clear and satisfactory evidence that it arose from the uncommon scarcity of sheep and oxen, occasioned by severe winters and dry summers: they notwithstanding ascribed it to causes as little concerned in it as Tenterden steeple in the production of the Goodwin sands. *The Court of Aldermen*, in the summer 1796, gravely assembled on account of the excessive dearth of wheat, and, after long deliberation, most sagely concluded, there was abundance of corn in the country if they could but bring it to market; though it was notorious that the millers, for thirty miles around the capital, were forced, from the unusual scarcity, to attend the London markets to procure a bare current supply for their customers; and though there was also the highest probability that the annual medium deficiency of the two preceding crops was not less than 1,500,000 quarters. Besides, with respect to the farmers themselves, they must have been arrant fools, or downright madmen, to withhold their corn a moment longer than the urgency of their other business required. They every day saw vast quantities of wheat coming up the Thames from abroad; they knew too that the most unheard-of exertions were making to bring still more from every quarter of the globe; the prospect likewise of the growing crop was one of the finest that was almost ever seen. From a combination of all these circumstances, it was more than probable, that, for every bushel kept back only two or three months, the owners must lose at least

laws completed in 1773 must have had their full effect, the medium price of those twenty years was only

least 50 per cent. Uniting all these particulars, where was the wisdom of the above resolution? According to my ideas, both that, and the general strain of almost all the London newspapers at the time respecting these subjects, merited the severest reprehension, they being directly calculated to raise discontent, and encourage riots and tumults in every part of the nation, and actually would have done so but from the strong arm of government occasionally interposed. The conduct of neither can surely admit of any palliation, but on the supposition of the grossest ignorance or the strangest misinformation.

I have just said that the medium annual deficiency of the crops of 1794 and 1795 was 1,500,000 quarters. I have pretty satisfactory reason to believe it was even considerably more. As far as my own immediate observation extended, it fell short of the average-produce by more than six bushels an acre; but, as in some of the northern counties it was rather abundant, I will set it for the kingdom at large at only four bushels an acre; and that alone, on the supposition that there are three millions and a half of acres employed in the culture of wheat, will give us an aggregate deficiency of almost 1,800,000 quarters, which was, I believe, three times the medium importation of the two years 1795 and 1796. But it is hoped that the single harvest of 1796 has made us ample amends. Its produce was at least eight bushels an acre more than the average of the two preceding years, making the annual difference above three millions of quarters. But this is not all: — the excessive high price of wheat previous to the seed-time of 1795, exciting in our farmers the strange fancy that it would long continue so, induced them to extend their cultivation

only 2*l.* 8*s.* a quarter, that is, 12*l.* a load; which, upon due consideration of every circumstance, was not so much as *nine* would have been for the

cultivation at least a fifteenth part, that is, above two hundred thousand acres in the whole of Great Britain, which, as the crop was almost universally plentiful, gives an addition of above 600,000 quarters; so that the produce of the year 1796 exceeded the medium of the two preceding years by nearly four millions of quarters. At the seed-time of 1796, the autumn being finer and more suitable for the purpose, at least a hundred thousand acres more were sown than in 1795, and, should the harvest of 1797 prove as abundant as that of 1796, I shall not be surpris'd if the price of wheat, before this time twelve months, be reduced to nine, or even eight, pounds a load. There is at present, however, no prospect of such full abundance. Indeed it seems nearly impossible, from the very great failure of the plant in many places, be the remainder of the season ever so favourable.

I cannot finish this note, long as it already is, without remarking, that, had the citizens of London and the inhabitants of every other part of the nation, instead of censuring and calumniating particular descriptions of men, universally adopted the judicious measure recommended by parliament, and enforced by the example of some of the highest characters in the kingdom, that of either eating the coarsest wheaten bread, or mixing with the wheaten flour a third part of some other grain or other ingredient, &c. there cannot be the smallest doubt but that the price of wheat would have been comparatively moderate throughout the summer and autumn of 1796; and that therefore the calumniators have none but themselves to blame for the contrary.

twenty

twenty years ending with 1710, when the laws of 1688, &c. must have operated the most beneficial effects of which they were capable; but when, notwithstanding, the actual average-price was 15*l.* a load, quite equivalent to 20*l.* at present; whereas even the three last years, 1794, 1795, and 1796, in all which the crops were defective, and two of them the most so of any perhaps since the commencement of the present century, the price was only 16*l.* a load; not more than twelve in the former period last-mentioned, five years of which, however, as already observed, the price was 21*l.* equal to at least 28*l.* now.

From these facts, whatever speculation may suggest to the contrary, it appears to me incontrovertibly evident, that our corn-laws, whether for exportation or importation, have had very little influence towards encouraging or discouraging, increasing or diminishing, the growth of wheat.

A presumptive argument to the same purpose may, perhaps, be deduced from the very flourishing and perpetually increasing state of our hop-plantations. The annual average-number of bags of hops, two hundred weight two quarters to the bag, grown in this kingdom during four successive periods of twenty-one years each, has been nearly as follows:

Annual



Annual average of number of bags du- ring the 21 years, ending with 1731,	} 36,527
Ditto, ending with 1752 - - - -	50,752
Ditto, ending with 1773 - - - -	65,799
Ditto, ending with 1794 - - - -	77,195

This amazing advance in our produce of hops, has it been occasioned, or in any degree promoted, by legal regulations; by restraints upon importation, or encouragement to exportation? The former have been trifling, merely the payment of a small duty; on the latter, I know not that any bounty has been granted. If neither restraints nor encouragements have been necessary, with regard to this very expensive article of culture, why should they with respect to corn? The permanent inducement to cultivate them is not greater. A lucky hit, indeed, once in ten or fifteen years, may seem to give them a striking and decided superiority; yet, take the average of twenty years together, and the growth of corn, added to other things immediately connected with it, is at least equally profitable. The produce of hops is extremely different in different years, even in the proportion of almost ten to one. Thus, in the year 1794, it amounted to 151,351 bags; whereas, in the year 1793, it was only 16,860. That of wheat seldom varies so much as from two to one; consequently, the

the chance of a crop of wheat is five times as great as that of a crop of hops. But, then, the preservation of the latter is, in general, more easy than that of the former. Nine-tenths of our farmers are obliged to thresh out their wheat in the course of the year; not only for money to answer their successive current demands, but for the occasional necessary use of the straw. But the large opulent farmers, who can vary the course and order of their business much more than the smaller and poorer ones can, and who may so manage matters as to do without an immediate supply of money or straw; and who have the wisdom and the skill to place their wheat in stacks upon frames of proper elevation from the ground, and to have them well thatched, and well secured at once from the weather and the vermin; such farmers, I say, may keep it from year to year, without any material diminution in its value; whereas, if once threshed, and also taken out of the chaff, it is extremely difficult to preserve it from great and essential detriment for any considerable length of time. Which, by the way, is one recommendation often mentioned, among many and greater ones, of large farmers, that they can often erect the very best and safest granaries for the preservation of corn in times of abundance against those of scarcity and want.

There

There are some other circumstances, it must be acknowledged, which render the case of hops and corn still more dissimilar. The consumption of the former in Europe is by no means so universal as that of the latter: the want of them, too, among ourselves, is not of such incessant urgency, and people can better wait from time to time to avail themselves of the great variety in the markets. I am, however, far from confident that any of these particulars materially affect the propriety or impropriety of legal regulations; and that, therefore, if they are found to be unnecessary in the one case, their utility cannot be very apparent in the other; and, of course, our general argument is hereby at once illustrated and confirmed. The spur of interest alone puts the cultivator in motion. If he has a rational prospect of carrying his produce to an advantageous market, whether it be corn or hops, he will certainly endeavour to raise it; but this prospect, with regard to either the one or the other, you can never give him while the seasons remain as uncertain and precarious as they always have been, and always will be. You can never make him amend, by the wisest of human contrivances, for greatly deficient crops; much less can any additional price compensate for entire destruction by surfeits, blights, and mildews; nor can you afford him nearly so strong encouragement as naturally

turally arises from the increasing manufactures, the increasing wealth, and the increasing population, of his country.

But whatever may be thought of the argument for the above purpose, it suggests a powerful one in favour of two very important points we have before endeavoured to establish, namely, our increased number of people and our increased and improved agriculture.

Our increased number of people must, I conceive, be almost as great as our increased growth of hops. Fifty years ago, the majority of our peasants brewed each of them a cask or two of good ale every year; now a very small proportion of them, from a deficiency of wages, are able to purchase either hops or malt. Our tradesmen, our farmers, and, in general, all of the middle classes, drink more wine and spirits than they formerly did, and of course a less quantity of beer. And yet, notwithstanding these deficiencies, the total consumption of hops, as stated above, is amazingly increased. What is the plain inference but that the number of our inhabitants must have been augmented in somewhat a similar proportion? For, can it be imagined, that the increased exportation of ale, beer, and porter, great as it has been, can have equalled the increased produce? Especially when it is remembered, that  
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the exportation of any article of home-production is comparatively nothing to that applied to domestic use. Is not this strikingly evident with regard to our manufactures of wool, of skins, and of hides? What is the proportion of cloth and leather sent to foreigners abroad to that which is used by ourselves at home?

But, if our increased growth of hops implies a highly increased population, does it not also imply an increased and improved agriculture to a degree much higher still? Is there the smallest probability that there has not been a more considerable increase in our production of corn, grass, and hay? Our consumption of hops is confined to human creatures; but our corn, grass, and hay, with various other species of agricultural produce, feed likewise our horses, our oxen, our sheep, our hogs; all which we have above proved to demonstration are multiplied exceedingly. In a word, our increased plantation of hops, when viewed in its various connections and circumstances, clearly evinces our increased number of inhabitants; our increased inhabitants as certainly implies a universally advanced and improved agriculture respecting every production of our soil; and thus they all afford mutual illustration and mutual confirmation each to the other.

I know

I know it has been asserted, that our increase of sheep and oxen has been at the expense of our culture of wheat and other grain, and, in confirmation of this, particular places have been pointed out "in which there are now not 50 acres ploughed yearly, where there used formerly to be 1500, and that scarce an ear of corn is now to be seen in some that bore hundreds of quarters." All this, and much more, might be very safely acknowledged; but then it should be stated at the same time how many thousands, and even hundreds of thousands, of acres now produce the finest corn, wheat and barley, oats, pease and beans, in the greatest abundance, which used barely to maintain, and in a half-starving condition, a few destructive rabbits, paltry geese, and scabby sheep. But, whatever may have been the fact in particular places, it is incontestably certain, that, in a general and national view, our agriculture must have been predominant over our feeding, grazing, and dairying. This is evident not only from our increased population, our increased plantation of hops, and, above all, our increased number of horses, but also from this consideration, that the price of our beef and pork, butter and cheese, has increased more than the price of our corn; as is clearly manifest from the following statements:

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	£.	s.	d.
The average-price of wheat per quarter, for ten years, ending with the year 1770 - - - - -	2	7	8
Ditto, ditto, ending 1796 - - - - -	2	12	6½
Cost of beef, per lb. at the Victualling-Office, on an annual medium of eight years ending with 1776, about - - -	0	0	2¾
Ditto, for eight years ending with 1796, about - - - - -	0	0	4¾
Pork, for eight years ending with 1776, about - - - - -	0	0	4
Ditto, eight years ending with 1796, about - - - - -	0	0	5¾
Butter, eight years ending with 1775, about - - - - -	0	0	5¾
Ditto, eight years ending with 1796, about - - - - -	0	0	6½
Cheese, eight years ending with 1775, about - - - - -	0	0	3¾
Ditto, eight years ending with 1796 -	0	0	4¾

We here see that, in the latter of the two periods, the medium price of wheat is increased only about one-tenth; whereas all the other articles have risen much more considerably; beef almost a fourth, pork more than a fourth; butter above an eighth, cheese upwards of a third.

If

If we judge from private and domestic consumption, especially within thirty or forty miles of the capital, the advance has been vastly greater; beef from 3½*d.* to 6½*d.*; pork from 3½*d.* to 6*d.* and 7*d.*; butter from 6*d.* to 11*d.* or 1*s.*; cheese 4*d.* to 6*d.* and 7*d.* Which ever, therefore, we make the standard for estimation of the advanced price of these articles for either private or public consumption, the natural conclusion is, that the culture of wheat has been more attended to than either feeding, grazing, or dairying.

Were I to limit my views to the county of Essex, I might confidently say that the ruling principle with our farmers, for the last thirty or forty years, has been to extend and improve the cultivation of corn as much as possible, and in preference to every thing else. Hence our woods and groves, and hedge-rows, have been perpetually falling before the axe and the mattock; our more coarse and ordinary pastures have been broken up either directly by the spade or the plough, or by previously paring and burning; and I have little hesitation in asserting, that our medium annual produce of wheat alone, during the last twenty-five years, has been at least a hundred thousand quarters more than during the twenty-five years immediately preceding. It is true, perhaps, that some other counties have in-

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creased their *proportion* of pasture and meadow, such as Somers<sup>et</sup>, Lancaster, Nottingham, Leicester, Lincoln, &c. and for the best reason in the world, that is, they are susceptible of the highest improvement, and productive of the greatest profit, by being applied to the purposes of grazing, feeding, or dairying. But then, on the other hand, many of our counties, for instance, those of Norfolk, Suffolk, York, Salop, &c. the extension and advancement in the culture of corn has been greater than even in Essex; this latter, from its near vicinity to the capital, having been in a much earlier state of progression.

Upon the whole, then, every thing concurs to establish our great and leading points, and to dissipate the gloomy apprehensions repeatedly suggested from the decline of our corn-trade. Every thing concurs to evince the amazingly increased and improved state of our agriculture, especially for the production of grain; and that, consequently, the only fair and just conclusion from the diminution of its exports is, that the increase of our people, the increase of our manufactures, and the increase of the general prosperity of the kingdom, have been so much more considerable still, as even to exceed the wonderfully augmented produce of our soil.

Although

Although I have already, I presume, sufficiently evinced that the influence of all legal regulations with regard to the imports and exports of grain is perfectly trifling, when compared with the influence of the seasons, as well as the influence of the general state of the kingdom, I would, however, by no means have it hence concluded, that I think them at all times, in all cases, absolutely useless. There may be occasions on which they are highly expedient. If there be an uncommon scarcity of grain, we must endeavour to procure it from abroad, or run the hazard of starving; if, on the other hand, the domestic produce be so exceedingly abundant as to sink the price greatly below what the farmer can grow it for, some foreign market must be found, or, from the discouragement thence arising to the culture, it may probably occasion future want. Bounties, too, upon importation in the former instance, and upon exportation in the latter, provided the tricks and frauds of merchants and corn-dealers are effectually guarded against, may not be improper. In these extreme cases I think there can be little doubt. But the principal question is, whether, in the *intermediate* situation of things, legal regulations, pointing out the exact prices at which exportation and importation should each respectively take place, be absolutely necessary or even expedient. For my own part, I am rather

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inclined to think that the whole might safely be left to the natural course of things, and that a free unrestrained trade would be attended with no *permanent* evil.

Were there no general prospect of either exportation or importation, the home-consumption would be the sole object regulating the growth; the farmer would always endeavour to raise it as long as it were worth his while, and no laws could induce him to do it any longer. Whatever he finds most profitable, he will turn his attention to, be it corn, hops, or cattle, and this in time will inevitably produce a general level. Variety of seasons, as better suiting the one or the other, will indeed occasion frequent vibrations of the balance, but all will finally tend to restore and preserve the due equilibrium. And I much question whether any of the corn-laws, through the whole of the present century, have occasioned a single acre more or less to be sown with any species of grain, than there would have been had no such laws ever existed.

I am fully persuaded, that the encouragement to agriculture, from the best laws which human wisdom can devise, is perfectly trifling, compared to that naturally arising from the increased number of our people, and the increased wealth and prosperity of the kingdom. Hence, and not from laws, has proceeded

proceeded its wonderful advance and improvement hitherto; and hence, or not at all, it must be derived in future. If these go forward, the farmer will strain every nerve to furnish correspondent provisions. His quantities of corn and grass, and hay, will continue to augment, and his numbers of sheep and oxen will continue to multiply. And, should the repeated wise and manly efforts of our governors, to bring about a fair, honourable, and permanent, peace, finally prove successful, two very important sources of ample and abundant supply seem to open before us; one is the speedy enclosure and full cultivation of our remaining waste lands; the other, the improvement that both these and the old enclosures may receive from the easy transportation of manure from all quarters of the kingdom, suited to every variety and diversity of soil, by means of our perpetually increasing inland navigations; for the promoting of which we have been recently assured, upon very high authority, *eight millions sterling* are already employed. Nor is it, I presume, too much to hope for, that our Board of Agriculture will contribute something at least to the furtherance of these great and noble purposes. It was instituted on the most extensive and liberal principles; its inquiries, under the direction of its indefatigable president, have been judiciously conducted; more agricultural information has already been collected, respecting both England and Scot-

land, than we were ever before in possession of; and, from the concurrence of private and public exertions, I do not despair of seeing Great Britain rapidly rise to a pitch of prosperity, glory, and happiness, hitherto unknown.



APPENDIX.

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A P P E N D I X.

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OBSERVATIONS UPON THE FIRST REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE ON WASTE LANDS, &c.

**A**MONG many other articles of important information communicated by the committee, is the astonishing number of bills of enclosure, and of acres enclosed since the commencement of the present reign; which, I flatter myself, affords a strong presumptive confirmation of the leading points I have above endeavoured to establish, especially the great extension and improvement of our agriculture. In the reign of Queen Anne, there were, it seems, only two bills of enclosure; in that of George I. sixteen, and of George II. two hundred and twenty-six; but, in that of George III. one thousand five hundred and thirty-two; that is, in the course of the last thirty-six years, there have been almost seven times the number of enclosures there were in the sixty years immediately preceding. But

But the increase in the extent of land, or number of acres, enclosed, has been vastly greater than the increased number of enclosures. The number of acres enclosed, in the former periods of sixty, was only 33,676; but, in the latter of merely thirty-six years, there have been 2,770,521; that is, there has been an absolute increase of more than eighty to one in the total quantity, and the medium annual increase above one hundred and fifty to one. Does not this suggest the most striking superiority and more rapidly enlarged extension of our agriculture, under the reign of our present amiable and patriotic Sovereign, than what took place in the time of his predecessors? Does it not suggest the amazing augmentation of the quantity of our grass and hay, natural and artificial; of our corn and cattle, and of every other production of our soil, as well as of every kind and species of living creatures fed and nourished by its fruits? The enclosure of almost three millions of acres, whether of wastes and commons, or of open fields, under prior cultivation and management, must have occasioned prodigious expense to the proprietors of the land, and this expense they must necessarily have redeemed by an increase of rent. Accordingly the increased rent of the enclosures, even of common fields, under previous but imperfect culture, has seldom been less than one-fourth, sometimes one-third, and not unfrequently one-half; while the advanced rents of enclosed wastes

wastes and commons have been from almost nothing to 15s. or 20s. an acre. In order to pay these increased rents, the tenants must necessarily, from an improved and extended cultivation, have raised a produce of value equivalent to three, four, or even five, times the increased rent; and that they actually have done so is evident from their increased prosperity and opulence. If, to the increased and improved agriculture of these new enclosed lands, we add that of the old enclosures in the same period of time, as I have already before stated, the confirmation of our general argument is strong and complete.

The several resolutions of the committee respecting the mode of carrying into execution a general bill of enclosure, &c. seem to be extremely judicious, and I heartily wish they may meet with the ready concurrence of parliament. But some of the arguments by which they endeavour to enforce the expediency of such a bill, I must take the liberty to observe, with becoming deference to the judgement of so respectable a body, do not appear altogether satisfactory. They remark, that, upon the supposition of there being 10,000,000 of acres still unenclosed, which would require an act of parliament for their enclosure, and that 50,000 of these might be annually enclosed, under the present system, it would require two hundred years before the whole  
is



is accomplished. True. But where is the necessity for this latter supposition, that only 50,000 acres could or would be annually enclosed under the present system? Is not the contrary the most probable? From their own statements, the annual average number of acres enclosed, during the last thirty-six years, has been almost 80,000, and it is nearly certain, that, during the last twenty-five or thirty years, the medium has been above 100,000. What reason can be given why it should not be as great or greater during the next thirty years? The conviction of the utility and importance of enclosures is stronger and more general than ever. Where is the improbability, therefore, that, instead of there being only 50,000 acres annually enclosed under the present system of distinct and separate bills, there might not be 200,000, which, perhaps, would be an increase adequate to our increasing demands, and would complete the enclosure of the whole ten millions in fifty years.

It is also farther suggested by the committee, that distance from the capital greatly increases the expense and inconvenience of application to parliament for particular bills of enclosure. This is certainly true; but this increased expense and inconvenience do not seem to have been sufficiently great to have prevented such application. For I find that the most extensive, and probably the most

*numerous,*

*numerous,* enclosures have been in the remoter counties of Hereford, Leicester, Lincoln, Derby, York, Durham, and even Northumberland.

I do not hereby intend any objection to a general bill of enclosure; I only wish that no arguments should be used to enforce it but such as are really conclusive, when so many may be urged which truly are so, and have indeed been powerfully recommended by the committee to the attention of parliament.

The committee observe that an addition of only "60,000 acres to the land cultivated for wheat, might have prevented the private distress and misery experienced by the lower orders of the people, in consequence of the late scarcity and high price of provisions, and the expense which the more opulent classes were put to in supporting them upon that occasion." This observation, as it appears to me, is entirely unfounded. The committee, I presume, did not recollect, that, in the autumn of 1795, the additional number to the usual average of acres sown was probably, for reasons already adduced, not only 60,000 but above 200,000; and yet the scarcity and expense in the year 1796 were not prevented; and they seem also to have forgotten that the additional 60,000 would have failed in their produce as much as the land

land in old cultivation, and that consequently the additional supply thence arising would not have been much more than 120,000 quarters, whereas the actual deficiency in the kingdom at large was not less than 1,800,000.

The committee farther remark, " that, for many years posterior to the revolution, the price of corn was steady and uniform, and rather low than otherwise." What is meant by *many years posterior to the revolution* is not absolutely certain, though the obvious sense of the expression seems to be, that, soon after the revolution, the price of corn was moderate and uniform, and continued to be so for a long succession of years. If this was the meaning of the remark, the fact, in both respects, was just the reverse. The lowest annual average-price of wheat per quarter, during the ten years beginning with the year 1691, was 2*l.* 0*s.* 10*d.* more than equal to 2*l.* 15*s.* now; the highest price 4*l.* 5*s.* 2*d.* equivalent to 5*l.* 10*s.* at present. The lowest price during the next ten years beginning with 1701 was 1*l.* 11*s.* 2*d.* not inferior to what 2*l.* 5*s.* would be now; two years after this, that is, in the year 1709, it was 4*l.* 14*s.* 2*d.* equal to 6*l.* of the present time; due regard being had to the increased expense of raising it. Surely, then, during these twenty years, the price of corn was neither *moderate* nor *uniform*.

Perhaps

Perhaps it may be said that that period was not sufficiently *long* after the revolution, and that, if we descend to subsequent ones, we shall find the case extremely different. The following table, representing the lowest and highest prices of wheat, upon an annual medium of each ten years in regular succession, the first beginning with 1691, and the last with 1781, with the addition of the same for the six years ending with 1796, will give us a pretty clear conception of this matter.

Dates, or Periods, of Ten Years each.	Lowest Price of Wheat per Quarter.			Highest Price of Wheat per Quarter.		
	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
1st. beginning Anno 1691	2	0	10	4	5	0
2 ditto, ditto . . . 1701	1	11	0	4	14	2
3 . . . . . 1711	1	14	9½	3	4	10
4 . . . . . 1721	1	14	9	2	14	6
5 . . . . . 1731	1	6	9	2	15	0
6 . . . . . 1741	1	4	11	2	7	0
7 . . . . . 1751	1	13	9	3	0	0
8 . . . . . 1761	1	10	3	3	4	3
9 . . . . . 1771	1	13	8	2	12	8
10 . . . . . 1781	1	18	10	2	13	2
Six Years ending . . 1796	2	2	4	3	16	4

This table appears decisive of our purpose. It exhibits, to even the slightest glance, unless my mind be under a strange delusion, the fallacy of the argument advanced by the committee, and affords, at the same time, a strong confirmation of another point I have above endeavoured to establish; namely,

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ly, the *general comparative* insignificance of legal regulation of the exports and imports of corn. In the course of the several periods stated above, there was almost every possible variety of laws on this head, some encouraging exportation, and some in favour of importation; the diversity of price, nevertheless, through every period, each respectively, was extremely great; *greatest* where plausible speculation had taught us to expect the *least*, and *least* where we were to find the *greatest*. The three first decennary periods most nearly subsequent to the revolution, when the *favourite admired* laws of exportation were prevalent, the general price was immoderate, and the fluctuation prodigious, being, on an annual medium, at one time so low as 1*l.* 11*s.* a quarter; at another, after the short interval of only two years, it was raised to 4*l.* 14*s.* 2*d.* The next three similar periods, when the same general system, with small variations, still predominated, the commonest prices were indeed considerably lower, to the absolute ruin of no small proportion of our farmers; but still its elevations and depressions were no less distinguished, it being at one time reduced to 1*l.* 4*s.* 11*d.* the quarter, and advanced at another to 2*l.* 15*s.* If we descend to the twenty years beginning with 1771 and ending with 1790, when the imagined pernicious laws in favour of importation were in full force, the variation of price was about the same, the lowest being

being 1*l.* 13*s.* 8*d.* the highest 2*l.* 13*s.* 2*d.* But the final period of six years, when the public clamours have been the loudest, the diversity of price has been least of all; the smallest being 2*l.* 2*s.* 4*d.* the greatest 3*l.* 16*s.* 4*d.* But hence has arisen so strong an inducement to the farmer to extend the cultivation that I shall not be surpris'd, if, before the end of the present century, near as it is, the diversity will again be as great as in time past.

It is farther asserted by the committee, that “with unsteady prices it is impossible for the landlord to know what rent he ought to demand, or the tenant what he ought to pay.” This, I presume, is applicable only to ignorant landlords and ignorant tenants. Those of an opposite description, whether landlords or tenants, who are at once skilful and judiciously considerate, will not form their estimate from one or two years, of either excessively high or excessively low prices, but from the average of fifteen or twenty in immediate succession. Such will also remember that exceedingly high prices will sometimes ruin individual farmers, who happen not to have a crop equal to the average one of those around them, and that this will most frequently happen to small farmers, for the increase of whose number we have lately had such zealous but unqualified advocates. This, I believe, was actually the deplorable fate of many of our little inconsiderable

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occupiers.

occupiers in the years 1795 and 1796. In the early part of the season, having but a slender scanty produce, they were obliged, in order to answer the current demands upon them for money, especially in the autumns of 1794 and 1795, to sell nearly all of it, at comparatively a moderate price; and, before the following harvests, they were compelled to purchase for their own consumption at one enormously high; the final consequence was their total ruin.

It might, for aught I know, be desirable that the prices should, to a certain degree, be steady and uniform; and still more so that we might be secure in future from that excessive expense in the purchase of corn we have lately incurred. The committee inform us, that, during the three years 1794, 1795, and 1796, it amounted to 7,446,012*l.*; and that by other calculations it appears that the real cost of the corn imported, in the year 1796 alone, was 4,500,000*l.* But to insure the attainment of the former, and the prevention of the latter, will, I conjecture, for ever remain far beyond the reach of human power, till we are indulged with the direction of the seasons, as well as of many other things of high importance, hitherto reserved in the hands of the great and wise Disposer of events. Could we command the clouds to drop down the fostering dews, and give us the former and the latter rain each in its season; could we cause the fertilizing  
showers

showers to descend, and the invigorating sun to shine or to withhold his beams whenever we pleased; could we waft away the blights and frosts, the blasts and mildews, from our grain, and ward off the murrain and the pestilence from our cattle; could we subdue that numerous army of worms and insects, of flies and caterpillars, so cruelly destructive to the labours of the husbandman; and could we also, at the same time, contrive that the wants of our neighbours should always be equal to our abundant superfluities; — then, and not till then, might we expect the above wished-for objects; then might we have tolerably steady and uniform prices for our produce; and then might we be safe from that enormous expenditure in the purchase of foreign corn we have lately been forced to submit to. Till a perfect coincidence of these several circumstances take place, we must humbly acquiesce in the dispensations of the Almighty, who doeth whatsoever pleaseth him in heaven and in earth.

Our recent scarcity was occasioned by only the small deficiency of our average-crops, at the rate of four, or at most six, bushels an acre. How easy to conceive such a difference of seasons to happen as to cause a deficiency of *twelve* bushels instead of *six*! In that case, an addition to our annual average cultivation of not only 60,000 acres, as stated by the committee, but even of 600,000, would be inadequate

quate to the supply of our necessities. But, supposing Providence to indulge us with the same general variety of seasons as heretofore prevalent; and our produce should be just as various as we have experienced in time past, (and this indeed must always be the foundation of the reasonings of such short-sighted creatures as we are,) an additional 500,000 acres, after the utmost exertions of human wisdom, would give us at most a mere probable chance of obtaining the ends just above stated. With regard to *general* legal regulations for these purposes, with all their numerous trains of bounties, drawbacks, &c. (extraordinary emergencies alone excepted, and which perhaps will the seldom occur in some proportion to the paucity of such regulations,) I am deeply persuaded of their comparative insignificance, and that their greatest advantage is to our merchants and traders in corn.

There are some other remarks of the committee, which, in my apprehension, are not perfectly accurate; but, as they are somewhat similar to those already noticed, or fairly deducible from them, I shall not trouble the reader with any attempt to discuss them; I rather choose to indulge the pleasing sentiments of gratitude for that variety of important facts, and momentous intelligence, they have so clearly communicated, and for which they are so justly entitled to the thanks of the public.