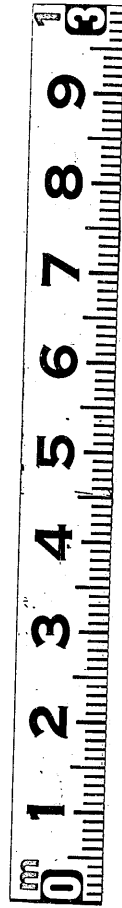


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AN
ESSAY

On the apparent Causes of the present
ENORMOUS PRICES
Of the two principal NECESSARIES of LIFE,
CORN and MEAT;

WITH A
PLAN FOR REMEDY,
OR
IMMEDIATE ALLEVIATION THEREOF;

TOGETHER WITH
Observations and occasional Strictures
ON THE
PRACTICE OF THE TIMES;

Humbly submitted to the serious Perusal and Consideration
of a *CANDID PUBLIC*, and especially the Inhabitants
of Newcastle and its Vicinity.

BEING a Work calculated to correct, 'tis presum'd, (if
adopted) effectually, the Abuses and mal-Practices, which
have but too long obtained in the *CORN-TRADE*, with the
Butchers, and in letting of Farms, &c. &c.

NEWCASTLE:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY M. ANGUS, AND SOLD
BY THE DIFFERENT BOOK-SELLERS IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY.

1795.

A N
ESSAY, &c.

AT a time when the public cry, it seems, is but too justly excited against the enormous enhancement of the prices of almost every necessary of life, and especially corn and meat; it may not be amiss, or unseasonable, to endeavour to trace them to their source, the seemingly obvious causes thereof, (it having, I believe, been already ascertained, that there exists no real scarcity,) and also point out a remedy, or present alleviation.

The importance of the subject, I must confess, requires a much abler pen than mine to do it justice; and I feel myself
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very incompetent to the task: however, if the following hints, or observations, should carry any conviction, and substantiate the grounds on which they are founded, a wide field will open for some more versed in the business to take it up on a much larger scale, perhaps, hereafter, if thought proper.— Understanding, therefore, that government have taken up the matter seriously, but that no plan has yet been offered, or adopted by them, in order either to stem the progress of so alarming an evil, or to effect any, even the least reduction thereof,—I would beg leave to submit a few remarks on this very interesting, general concern, to your impartial consideration, as an humble attempt to serve my country at this juncture.

As I have before observed, its being, I believe, understood, that no actual scarcity exists as the cause for the present enormous prices of those before-mentioned articles; there must therefore exist some latent

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latent mysterious cause productive of the present artificial scarcity, or rather dearth of them.

Now, I believe, it will be also acknowledged, that in proportion as those two principal necessaries of life have advanced in price, so have corn-factors, millers, and butchers, increased in number: These not content with a fair and just trade, have ever, at least, I believe, since the revolution, (like the rector with his pluralities) been preying, as it were, upon the very vitals of poor John Bull, by some illicit practice or other. Hence, then, I presume, we may in some measure, fairly account how this numerous body are enabled to drain the markets at advanced prices; (which the miller manufactures into flour, and sells wholesale and retail): This is from time to time deposited in granary, and thereby becomes dictator as it were to future markets; which, whether thinly or plentifully supplied, is sure to meet

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a ready sale from them as before; so that the public are thereby reduced to the necessity of giving at least the same prices (should it happen that there is any left for them after these are glutted) or go without, or else apply to them for what they may want at a still greater disadvantage; by which practice, I think it will appear, that they must thereby become possess'd regularly week after week, of nearly, perhaps, the gross quantity of each market; and so in time may engross the chief stock of the country; which constitutes them as it were substitutes for your markets at last. This, I think, evidently appears instanced in the circumstances of the present situation of the country, which they seem to have drained nearly of her stock. The miller too may now be said to be a petty corn-factor, as well as a flour-factor, according to the present practice of transacting the business: But surely it cannot be deem'd either just or proper that he should become purveyor for the

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the public, whose proper province should be only to grind your corn; for doing which he either pays himself by a mouter, or charges so much per boll; and there is an end of the business. Besides, I understand, that when any of this most invaluable grain happens to spoil in their hands, either from being too long kept, or some other cause, that they will presumptuously destroy it, by throwing it into a contiguous river.—This is a practice, by the bye, which must not only be offensive to God, but a reproach upon any enlightened nation to suffer.—Another, and perhaps not the least, cause, we may attribute the extravagant advance on land of late years; and the still worse practice of consolidating farms, which enables the engrossers, in a great measure, not only to keep the markets thinly supplied, by withholding their quota, and so have a serious effect, at particular periods, on their prices; but also as it greatly tends to depopulate the country, by the reduction

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tion, or rather starving of many families to aggrandize an individual; who may as soon, perhaps sooner, fail on the aggregate, than the poorer industrious one will on the reduc'd. The inhumanity and impolicy of such conduct is too glaring and self-evident to need any comment from me. With regard to the second article, meat, numbers of butchers are now become graziers themselves, therefore will be watchful of any rise of corn to keep pace therewith; which, rather than be behind in, I also understand, they will likewise, at times, make away with quantities of meat, in order to keep up the prices, as it is termed; which makes them equally obnoxious to their country with the other: Nor should these be allowed to be graziers as well as butchers; whereby they have it in their power to withhold that supply which otherwise would come regularly to market. Add to this, the great increase of population at this time, by reason of the considerable influx of foreigners,

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reigners, and others, will, I believe, be admitted to have some effect on their advancement. As to the proportion of farms, I presume it is the opinion of the best judges, that from 500l. or rather, perhaps, 300l. to 50l. per annum, would be the best; and, as allowing sufficient scope to the industrious and ingenious to display their abilities in that line. Whereas, on the other hand, by the larger scale, it only tends to encrease their pride, luxury, dissipation, and improper behaviour, quite inconsistent with their sphere of life. Nor should they be suffer'd to rent, or have in their possession, more than one farm at one time, in the same county at least. Another bad practice has been too prevailing among gentlemen lately; I mean that of letting their farms to others besides farmers, either perhaps to accommodate them, or, because they could afford to give them more rent; thereby depriving the poor industrious farmer of his
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natural means of support. These, together with similar prevailing mal-practices, when maturely weighed, will, I presume, appear obviously the procuring causes of those alarming evils, so justly complained of, because so severely felt by the community at large, and especially by the mechanic and labourer.

All attempts to remove, or even alleviate which, it should seem, have hitherto been baffled; and that the calamity still encreases, and is likely to do so; which makes it more alarming. But not to dwell on those self-evident enormities, to say nothing worse of them, we hasten to the propos'd remedy, or immediate alleviation of them. Now, as those practices (though dreadful in their consequences to the public) seem to have the sanction of law, it will become necessary, I presume, for the interference of the legislature, or other special authority, that those overgrown dealers in the before-mentioned articles of life, may be kept with-

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in bounds, by restricting them to a specific quantity, and rate per pound, the first of corn, (excepting foreign) which they should never exceed having in their hands or possession at one time, either of their own or of others, under heavy penalties, or forfeiture thereof; subjected to inspection by proper officers; and that they should also be obliged to bring the surplus now in their hands, at certain periods to market, and sell it at a market-price. I believe it can be prov'd, that at this moment, (taking advantage of the times) they are selling corn considerably above cent per cent profit. The other should also be compelled to bring all he kills at one time to market, and sell it at a standard rate per pound; which he should not exceed, under forfeiture of all he sells above such rate, to be settled by the chief magistrate. As to the petty artifices of retailers, if justices of the peace, or other magistrates would act up independ-

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dently to their high and important office, the existing laws, I believe, are fully adequate to their suppression. When we turn our eyes to the profligacy and dissipation of the times, and consider seriously by how many ways those principal necessaries of life are uselessly squandered and consumed in luxury and intemperance; they present a prospect too shocking almost for a considerate mind to think of without shuddering for the consequence. The tables of too many tradesmen now, instead of exhibiting a model of frugality and moderation, (which it should be a point with them always to do) exhibit rather a superfluity, little inferior perhaps to that of the nobility; the baneful effects of which, not only in the waste thereby unnecessarily made, but by the bad example set their equals and dependents, must be severely and sensibly felt, and contribute not a little to affect both their price and consumption.—Their adoption also of the

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the follies and levities of the age, in routes, fetes, balls, assemblies, and such like, thereby encouraging luxury and extravagance, must likewise have a serious effect together with their concomitant bad consequences. On a view of their attendants or menial servants, they seem too to be little behind in that respect, thereby occasioning an useless consumption in those before-mentioned articles, (at least in the higher priced); as well as keeping them in idleness, which, if possible, is worse still, especially for themselves, by giving them an idle turn, if not already inclin'd to it, and so render them unfit for any useful situation in life. Reflecting on the various practices for consuming also of oats, pulse, &c. by the keeping of an infinite number of unnecessary horses and dogs, the enormous rise of those articles, I believe, will not appear so surprising: I doubt not but what is expended uselessly on these, will nearly balance the expence attend-

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attending the support of the poor in the aggregate. 'Tis pity but the great ones of the earth could be brought to reflect, and weigh seriously the effects of such conduct both on themselves and others, which must eventually affect more or less their poor brethren: Would they not be content only with the name of a christian, (like a man born to a title without an estate in reversion) but be christians indeed, (in doing all the good in their power); and instead thereof, keep an equal number of poor persons, more especially at this time; what an honour would it be to them! how essentially serve their country! and thereby wipe off the stain which has so long, and so much sullied their character; add a true dignity to them, and answer for them in the day of general retribution, when each one must render an account for the talents committed to him; not assuming any merit; "but only as good stewards of the manifold grace of God!"

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God!" Let the miser love his gold, and let the licentious revel never so much, yet let them remember, that God will at last bring them into judgment.

Adverting to what has lately passed, (in consequence of the pretended scarcity) I mean the late act of parliament, imposing a duty on those who wear hair-powder; how little seemingly is the effect in suppressing that extravagant practice! which surely indicates an insensibility at least to the necessity of the times which produc'd it.

The public measures lately taken in alleviation of the present necessity, tho' laudable and salutary in themselves, can have no effect on the markets, or tend in the least to remove the cause of the pretended scarcity, and consequent dearness,—no: we have witnessed (I am sorry to say it) rather the contrary:

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For ever since these benevolent methods have been adopted, the markets have almost regularly continued rising instead of falling: And the farmers, offended seemingly, at the steps taken to enforce them to sell their corn at a reduc'd price from that which they have too long lately received, I fear may operate to their withholding any further supply at present. But I shall be happy to find myself mistaken, in having my fears removed by a full market this week.

The only remedy at present (if any) seems to be lodg'd with the engrossers; and which surely ought to be called forth regularly in aid, and applied to the exigency of the times at a fair and reasonable rate, when I have no doubt, but, by frugal management, there will yet be found a sufficiency to last until the approaching harvest shall come in. The times call particularly loud on magistrates to be
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active and vigilant, that no impositions be play'd off on the public, in their respective districts; and that every regulation be promoted, that can, in any degree, tend to effect the reduction of the before-mentioned articles.

There is, I think, great want of some regulation of the corn-markets; in respect, at least, of the farmers's placing the corn when they have brought it to market, instead of the prevailing practice here, of taking it out of the carts, and putting it directly into a granary, loft, or other repository; they ought, surely, rather to take a part of it into the markets, and let the rest remain in their carts, to be taken thence to market too, if it should be wanted; and if any should be left, after the market is over, either to take it home with them, or lodge it in some place till the next market-day, in order thereby to prevent the sale of it privately; which, it is to be feared,
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is but too much the practice; and so be the means of withholding it coming fairly to the market, which must have, 'tis presum'd, a great effect in keeping up the prices.

I am sorry to observe, that it seems to be understood to be the more general opinion, that many (perhaps the majority) of the acting committee, having some concern in the corn-trade themselves, are thought perhaps not the properest persons for conducting the important business with which they are charged, inasmuch, as it is too nearly connected with their own immediate line of business, to be supposed to discharge it with that disinterestedness the nature of the case seems to require, and which others, of another line, or rather independent of any business, would have been free from any suspicion of; and that to avoid which, the most eligible plan would, I think, have been to have chosen only two or three of those
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for the committee to advise with upon any occasion. But I would willingly hope that they will so conduct their measures, as to do away any imputation of suspicion that may seem to attach on that account, and acquit the import trust delegated to them with full satisfaction to the public, and honour to themselves.

I cannot quit this very interesting subject, however, without congratulating my countrymen, that we are not yet, (God be thank'd) destitute of some good seed, which has lately sprung up, and brought forth abundantly, to the relief of many thousands of our poor brethren, at this calamitous time; may their labours be abundantly blest; "may they not be tired in doing good;" so shall they reap a good reward in due time, "if they faint not."

If these few reflections thrown hastily together, should afford any new
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light on this most important subject, or appear but too justly founded, which I fear they will, let those adventurers reflect in time, whether they will be able to weather the storm which seems ready to fall on their devoted heads.

Thus have I briefly attempted to explore this mysterious business, in hopes some abler hand may take it up as impartially. Whether what is here advanced, is, or is not, but too applicable to the practice of the present times, I must leave to a candid public to decide; and also the issue with them as the proper arbiters; and with them likewise I rest my pretensions of having conscientiously endeavour'd to serve my Country.

A CITIZEN AND FREEMAN.

GATESHEAD, }
July 31st, 1794. }