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OBSERVATIONS
ON
THE ACT

WHICH PASSED INTO A LAW THE 28TH OF
JULY, 1800,

To Incorporate certain Persons by the Name of
THE LONDON COMPANY,

FOR THE
MANUFACTURE OF FLOUR, MEAL, AND BREAD;
SHEWING

The Excellence of the Plan proposed, and that its Adoption
will in future prevent

AN ARTIFICIAL SCARCITY OF WHEAT,
AND WILL PROVE A DEATH-BLOW TO
MONOPOLIZERS, FORESTALLERS,
AND REGRATERS

OF THAT ESSENTIAL ARTICLE;

INCLUDING A COPIOUS ABRIDGMENT OF THE ABOVE ACT,
AND THE NAMES OF THE PRESENT PROPRIETORS.

BY J. H. PRINCE,

Author of the Christian's Duty to God and the Constitution, &c.

“Curst be Monopoly, that imp of hell, and curst his deeds
and fruits!—To endless shame he is consign'd to all the
woes that he hath wrought! Curst be he in the house and at
the market! Conscience, perform thy office in the minds of
all his guilty friends and advocates—still haunt them night and
day.—Torment their fancies by the fearful forms of slaugh-
tered men, nor suffer them to enjoy their ill-gotten wealth.”

LONDON:

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PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THAT there never was any real scarcity of wheat or other grain in this country is a fact, which, I believe, cannot be easily controverted.—Whilst the poor have been famishing for want of bread, the farmers' barns have been well stored with corn, and the granaries belonging to the dealers in that article heavy laden with the product of former seasons, but the respective proprietors declined bringing it to market so long as the price continued getting up; their insatiable avarice being never satisfied, but (to use a scripture expression) like the horse leech, ever crying, Give, Give. Nothing can demonstrate this fact better than the extraordinary supplies that issued from all quarters so soon as the same began to fall; the consequence was, that the markets were overstocked—the price still lowered—the rogues IN-GRAIN looked blank, but the countenance of the poor, and all well-wishers to their country, cleared up to see *the biters bit*. These *knowing ones* were so conscious that the article in question would continue falling, that, in order to get the greater quantity off their hands, they sold considerably under the price of the day, and, converting corn into meal, either employed bakers, or sold flour to

them at such a rate, that they were enabled to sell loaves three-pence under the assize price, thereby affording the best proof that we can have, THAT BREAD WILL CERTAINLY BE MUCH CHEAPER YET.—I want no better proof—these gentry are possessed of the means of ascertaining the fact, or they would not be fit for their *diabolical* occupation; and if *they* sell under the price of the day, it must be because they know if they keep it longer they will not even get that price for it. As to the flimsy pretence that they did it for the good of the poor, and to bring down what they were pleased to call the full price bakers, no man of common rationality will give them credit for it—that was their ostensible reason, but their real motive is unfolded as above.

If I were inclined to urge reasons in support of my assertion, *that there has not been any real scarcity*, I have plenty that present themselves to my view; but as I should consider it an affront to my countrymen to attempt demonstrating that which few entertain doubts of, I shall content myself with making one or two remarks, merely for the conviction of those few.

We have been continually told in the public prints that great quantities of corn have been imported, from time to time, into this country. Once

I recollect reading that there was a greater number of ships arrived, laden with that article, in the course of a certain time then last, than had ever been known at any former period. Now it is well known that we have had but one very bad year for the growth of corn, namely, the last; and it is also well known that this country will produce enough corn one good harvest to supply its inhabitants for two years; therefore, what with the old corn in hand, the corn produced in the last year (for, thank God, there was a considerable quantity saved, notwithstanding the heavy rains) and the immense quantities which were imported from abroad, in the name of common sense, how could there be a scarcity; even allowing for the necessary and unavoidable exportation of that article into our own dominions abroad, and to supply our brave soldiers on the Continent? No! the only scarcity that we have had has been an artificial one, caused by the wickedness of men of unweildy fortunes, who, by monopolizing and forestalling, have kept back the corn from market, and thereby, as well as by regrating of the little brought there, kept up the price.

This species of traffic has been carried on to a most alarming pitch in this country. It seems to have been for many years past *our national sin*.

ENGLAND has been the favorite abode of the vile Monster, MONOPOLY.—Sorry I am that any of my countrymen should have been base enough to admire so foul a fiend. Hear a description of him, as given by the ingenious young author from whom I borrowed my motto: "He is a bulky full-sized beast, with dragon's wings, remarkably alike for weight and swiftness,—his terrific countenance is equally expressive of the ferocity of the tiger and the subtlety of the ape, *his mouth, capacious, reaches from ear to ear*, he has an adder's tongue, a gibbous back and brushy tail; and, strange to tell, from both his hairy sides there grows an ugly vulture's claw, which, with the peculiar darkness of his figure, renders him incomparable in deformity."—Ye monopolists, behold the God *you* worship, and tremble!—The reign of this monster, however, is nearly at an end—it has arrived at its grand climax, and is now very fast approaching to its final dissolution. The establishment under consideration will certainly prove a death-blow to this fiend, as well as to those of forestalling and regrating. In order to prove which, I shall first give an abstract of the Act, and then make some additional observations:

—The title of the Act is as follows:

"An Act to Incorporate certain Persons by the name of the London Company, for the Manufacture of Flour, Meal, and Bread, for a limited time."

"By Section 1st—It is enacted, that Sir Richard Neave, Sir John Call, Sir Robert Preston, Sir Frederick Eden, Barts. John Hatsell, William Devaynes, Robert Biddulph, John Julius Angerstein, John Frere, Thomas William Coke, John Fane, Samuel Bosanquet, Magens Dorrien Magens, Edward Forster, George Hibbert, Job Mathew, Brook Watson, William Robinson, William Mackintosh, Thomas Boddington, Thomas King, Esquires, and Robert Sherson, Doctor in Physic, and all other persons who shall hereafter, either in their own right or in right of any original Subscriber, become Proprietors of or interested in any share of the stock or fund after mentioned, shall be incorporated under the name and style of *The London Company for the Manufacture of Flour, Meal, and Bread.*

"Sect. 2. That it shall be lawful for such persons as aforesaid, to raise and contribute among themselves, a capital, to be used in carrying on the said Manufactory, not exceeding 120,000*l.* and that such capital shall be divided into 4800 parts, or shares of 25*l.* each; which shares shall be deemed personal estate, and be transmissible as such,—

That no Proprietor or Joint Proprietor shall hold more than forty such shares, and if by any contingency he or they become possessed of more than that number, and shall not dispose of the same within six months, it shall be lawful for the Managers of the said Company to sell all such shares, exceeding forty, by public auction, and pay the produce to such Proprietor.

"Sect. 3.—That every person possessed of four or more shares, shall vote in the general and special Meetings of the said Company, in proportion to the number of shares following, viz. for four shares, and less than ten, one vote; for ten shares and less than twenty, two votes; for twenty shares and less than forty, three votes; and for forty shares, four votes; but no person shall be entitled to vote without four shares.

"Sect. 4. That the Election of Officers, and all matters discussed at any Meeting, shall be determined by a majority of votes; and in case of an equal division, the Chairman to have the casting vote.

"Sect. 5. That Joint Proprietors of four or more shares shall vote by the person whose name stands first in the books of the said Company.

"Sect. 6. That no person shall vote upon any question in which he is interested otherwise than as a Proprietor.

"Sect. 7. That there shall be a General Meeting within one month after passing this Act, at which twelve persons (respectively Proprietors of twenty shares) shall be chosen as Managers, who shall continue in office four years, and then one-third shall quit by ballot, and shall not be eligible into the said office till the expiration of one year.

"Sect. 8. That there shall be a General Meeting in April and May, in every year, of which eight days notice shall be given in the London Gazette, and one other public paper, at which one of the Managers shall preside as Chairman; which Meeting may adjourn to such time and place as they think proper, and elect Managers to supply vacancies.

"Sect. 9. That the Managers, or nine more Proprietors, (who shall together be holders of 200 shares at least) may call a Special Meeting, on giving 14 days notice, by advertisement as aforesaid.

"Sect. 10. That three Managers shall constitute a Meeting, one of whom shall be elected Chairman. All matters discussed at any Meeting shall be determined by majority of votes,—Chairman to have the casting vote. If three Managers shall not attend, the Meeting may be adjourned (by any Proprietor present, or by the Company's chief Clerk, or his deputy) to that day se'nnight.

"Sect. 11. That the Managers shall have full

power to transact all the business of the said Company, and to place and displace officers, clerks, agents, and servants. That the Treasurers shall not issue any sum without an order, signed by the Chairman and one of the Managers present at any Meeting.

"Sect. 12. That every Meeting of Proprietors shall have power to displace any Manager, and elect others, and to make bye-laws, which shall be printed, and placed up in a conspicuous part of the Company's Manufactory.

"Sect. 13. That every General Meeting, or the Managers, may make calls for money, not exceeding 5l. in respect of one share, but no calls to be made at less distance than three calendar months from each other. Money so called for to be paid into the hands of the Treasurers, at such time and place as directed, of which one calendar month's notice shall be given by advertisement, (see sect. 14.)

"Sect. 14. If any person shall neglect to pay such money, within three months, his share shall be forfeited and sold, for the benefit of the undertaking. No advantage to be taken of such forfeiture till notice is given to the owner, or a declaration made thereof, at the first meeting after such forfeiture.

"Sect. 15. That if any Proprietor shall die before he has paid his proportion of the money called for, it shall be lawful for his executor or administrator

to pay the same, who shall be indemnified for so doing.

"Sect. 16. That no dividend of the profits of the said undertaking shall be taken by the Proprietors exceeding 10l. per cent. on the amount of the sums contributed. The surplus shall be applied as Parliament shall direct.

"Sect. 17. That the Managers shall yearly lay before each House of Parliament a true account of the receipt and application of all monies, and of the quantities of wheat or other grain, bought on each day, and the prices paid for the same, and also the quantities in store, and also the quantities of flour and bread manufactured by the said Company in each month, and of the debts and credits of the said Company, and the names of the Members, and the number of shares held by each.

"Sect. 18. That the said Company may manufacture, yearly, any quantity of flour or other meal, not exceeding 120,000 sacks, and make weekly into bread 200 sacks, and sell the same.—Not to sell more than 1000 quarters of wheat in one week.

"Sect. 19. Not to sell bread of a finer quality than *Standard Wheaten Bread*, or bread made of the whole meal, with the bran and pollards only taken out.

"Sect. 20. That the provisions of the Act, 37 Geo. 3d. concerning wheaten and household bread, shall extend to standard wheaten bread; and the

Court of Mayor and Aldermen are empowered to fix the assize of standard wheaten bread upon the same principle as wheaten and household bread, and to make an allowance to the bakers for making and selling the same.

" Sect. 21. That no manager, officer, or servant, whilst such, shall act, either as a principal or agent, in buying or selling wheat, or other grain, or flour, or meal, or make any bread for sale, under the penalty of 40s. for every quarter of wheat or other grain, or sack of flower, or other meal, bought, sold, or made into bread.

" Sect. 22. That Proprietors may sell their shares,—Form of transfer thereof,—such transfer to be registered in the books of the Company, and a copy thereof, signed by their clerk, given to the purchaser.

" Sect. 23. That if the said 120,000l. shall not be found sufficient to carry on the trade of the Company, it shall be lawful for them to raise any further sum, not exceeding 30,000l. by further subscriptions, or by mortgage or bond. (see sect. 24.)

" Sect. 24. Form of such mortgage, which shall be registered as aforesaid.

" Sect. 25. That mortgagees may transfer their mortgages.—Form of such transfer,—same must be registered as aforesaid.

" Sect. 26. That the interest of mortgages shall be

paid half-yearly, in preference to dividends.

" Sect. 27. That no Member or Manager shall, on account of being such, be disabled from sitting in Parliament, or be liable to be made a Bankrupt.

" Sect. 28. That all actions, commenced against any persons for any thing done in pursuance of this Act, must be brought within six months, and in the county where the matter in dispute shall arise, &c.

" Sect. 29. That his Majesty, by Order in Council, may dissolve the said Company, or suspend all or any of their proceedings; such dissolution or suspension not to take effect sooner than six months from the date of such order.

" Sect. 30. That *this Act* shall be deemed and judicially taken notice of as a *Public Act*."

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS.

It must appear obvious, even to a superficial observer of the plan laid down in the above abstracted Act, that it is a Plan founded in the highest wisdom; and if properly carried into execution, cannot fail of producing the most beneficial effects to the community at large, but more especially to the inhabitants of this great metropolis and its environs.

Here is a Company of *public-spirited Gentlemen*,—men of the first consideration, in point of for-

tune and character, come forward to employ a vast sum of money, 120,000l. chiefly for the benefit of the Public,—I say chiefly for the benefit of the Public, (for the emolument which those gentlemen will derive from the undertaking will be very trifling.) They cannot propose to themselves getting more than 10l. per cent. for the money they advance,—a profit that, I believe, very few of the commonest tradesmen would be contented with. To aggrandize themselves, therefore, cannot be any part of their design, for they have consented to the above restriction, (which the Legislature has very wisely laid upon them) as well as to many other restrictions, equally inimical to such a design.

The regulations of the Company are such, that there can be no undue influence exerted. The Proprietors are to vote in proportion to their number of shares. No Proprietor or Joint Proprietors are to hold more than forty shares; nor is any person to be entitled to vote who does not possess four shares; the latter number intitle the holder or holders to one vote, the former to four; so that the disproportion is not in favor of those who have the most shares, but of those who have the fewest. This is an admirable method to prevent too much power from vesting in a few individuals of the above Company, to the exclusion of (and in pre-

judice to) the rest; for, as every thing is to be determined at their Meetings by a majority of votes, it is of the first consequence that the number of votes each Proprietor shall have should be settled on the most equitable scale;—this is necessary, not only for the benefit of the respective Proprietors, but also for the public, who are very nearly concerned in the questions agitated at their Meetings.

The excellence of the Plan laid down in the Act for the regulation of the above Corporation is not more evident in any particular than in the wise restriction “that no Proprietor or Joint Proprietors shall hold more than forty shares,” thereby preventing the great concerns of such a Company from coming into the hands of a few, which might occasion an abuse of that power, with which the Legislature has invested them. For the greater the number of members in any *Body Corporate*, the less danger there must be of that body’s becoming totally corrupted. Bad as the world is, it would be a breach of Christian charity to suppose that so great a number of gentlemen as there will always be, to form this Company, should ever agree together to injure the Public, (even if they were not restricted by those wise regulations and wholesome laws which form the basis of this establishment,) it would, indeed, be a far easier matter for a few to.

corrupt each other, or be corrupted.

Admitting that all the shares are disposed of (of which there can be no doubt,) there will never be less, on any contingency, than 120 Members ; but there may, and most probably will, be a great many more ; for the sum to be subscribed is 120,000*l.* which is to be divided into 4800 parts, (or shares of 25*l.* each.) Now admitting that every Proprietor or Joint Proprietors should have forty shares each (which is very unlikely,) there will still always be 120 Members intitled to vote.

Another excellent regulation contained in the above Act is, that no Proprietor of any number of shares shall vote on any question in which he is interested, otherwise than as a Proprietor, thereby requiring them to forget their own interest, as individuals, and to act only for the advantage of the Company, which, as I have before shewn, involves that of the Community.

The Managers, although vested with absolute power whilst in office, are liable to be displaced by a Meeting of the Proprietors, whenever they abuse that power.

In short, Government has vested them with all necessary authority for doing good, but wisely put it out of their power to do harm to the Public. The extent of their traffic is limited,—they are not,

as a Company, to manufacture more than 120,000 sacks of flour or meal, *yearly* ; nor to make into bread more than 200 sacks, *weekly* ; nor to sell more than 1000 quarters of wheat in that time. As individuals, the Managers must not trade in the above articles, either by themselves or servants, under a severe penalty. Of all the profits which shall arise from such traffic, (and which must far exceed that amount) they are not to take more than 10*l.* per cent. on the principal sum they have contributed towards carrying on the same ; the overplus is to be disposed of as Government shall direct. And in order that Government may ascertain what the extent of their dealings and profits is, annual accounts of both are to be laid before Parliament ; but the last and best check on this Company is, that his Majesty, by Order in Council, can, at any time, dissolve it, or suspend their proceedings.

But, as my chief intention is to shew the certainty of this Company's abolishing forestalling in the article of corn, I shall close with a few more remarks on that subject.

There could not have been a more effectual method adopted to put down monopolizing than the formation of this Company.—With such a capital as 120,000*l.* to begin with, and so large a sum as the Managers can, on any emergency, raise, by

making calls, every three months, if they chuse, on each Member, to contribute at the rate of 5l. for every share they hold, towards carrying on the concerns of this Manufactory. Every call of this kind will produce 24,000l. which, as before stated, may be repeated every three months; besides this, they are at liberty to raise, on any pressing emergency, 30,000l. by mortgage or bond. I say, with such a capital, and such a sum of money always at command, what cannot this Company accomplish? Whenever an opportunity offers, they will have it in their power to buy the largest quantities of grain of all kinds; they will get the start of Monopolizers;—they will not leave them enough to satiate their infernal appetite;—they (the Monopolizers) will find nothing worth laying their devilish claws upon;—they will return home as dejected as they have made millions of their fellow creatures, and curse the day that gave birth to the scheme proposed by *the London Company*. In a word, *that* Company (if I may be allowed the expression) will, in a short time, become the only Monopolizers of corn in this country; and, thanks be to God! they will be such only for the good of their countrymen;—they will hold their vast stores in trust for the nation; their warehouses may be considered as *Public Granaries*, and the corn and meal as depo-

sited there merely for safety, out of the reach of those worst of thieves, Monopolizers, Forestallers, and Regraters.

There is no other way, in my opinion, in the present state of things, to prevent the wicked practice we are speaking of, than this; that while a few sordid individuals (for they are *few*, compared with the bulk of the nation) are either separately or jointly buying up corn for their *own* interest, to aggrandize themselves and quench their insatiable thirst for gain, some *public-spirited souls*, fraught with Heaven-born benevolence, and wishing only to live for the good of others, should engage in the same traffic, but with a very different design; namely, to preserve the fruits of the earth for the benefit of the inhabitants in general;—to bring them forward as occasion shall require, without taking advantage of any temporary rise in the price, and to secure a quantity merely for the purpose of preventing it from getting into the hands of those who would withhold it from the poor, and all others who cannot pay an extraordinary price for it. There have been many worthy individuals, in all ages, who have had a heart to perform this, but not the ability; and those who have had the latter, have not been blest with the former; it was reserved for *The London Flour Company* to rescue this nation from

the paws of those three rapacious animals, Monopoly, &c.

“ To scatter plenty o’er a smiling land,
 “ And read their hist’ry in a nation’s eyes;”

and I have no doubt but they will accomplish it.—
 Their views must have been philanthropic.—Gain
 could not have been their object, or they would
 not have engaged in an undertaking like the pre-
 sent; where they are tied down to make no more
 than 10l. per cent. of their money. I know nothing
 of the present proprietors, but their names, as I find
 them stated in the Act; my praise, therefore, is un-
 sought and unbought; yet I revere them, though
 unknown; I consider them as friends to mankind,
 as benefactors to the Public, and as gentlemen in-
 titled to the warmest thanks of every well-wisher
 to the human race! May God prosper their under-
 taking, and bring it to bear in such a manner as
 may operate to produce all the salutary effects in-
 tended, and so much desired by every good mem-
 ber of the community.

FINIS.

GLENDINNING, Printer, 25, Hatton Garden.