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From the Author

A LETTER
ON
THE CORN LAWS.

Price Two Shillings and Sixpence.

A

LETTER

FROM

EARL STANHOPE,

ON

THE CORN LAWS.

LONDON:

JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.

1826.

LETTER, &c.

DEAR SIR,

THE subject upon which you have addressed me is of such great importance, and of such general interest, that I am desirous of expressing my thoughts very fully upon it; but I wish also to spare your time and patience, and to state them as concisely as may be in my power. In writing to a person so enlightened and impartial as yourself, it would be superfluous to expatiate at length upon several topics to which I may have occasion to advert, and it will be sufficient to give a hasty sketch of my opinions. One of the first observations which will strike you in considering this subject is, that the proposed alteration of the Corn Laws is defended upon grounds which are totally different, and, indeed, utterly incompatible with each other. The advocates of the measure represent to the Artisans that it would lower the price of Provisions, to the Master Manufacturers that it would lower the Wages of Labour, and to the Farmers and Landlords that it would not much

reduce the prices of Corn, and that the Importation would be inconsiderable in its amount. Now, it is obvious that if it were to benefit the Manufacturers by lowering the Wages of Labour, and if they were to be reduced in the same proportion as the prices of Provisions, which would undoubtedly be the case, it could bring no advantage whatever to the Artisans, or, as they are now called, the "Operatives." It is also perfectly clear that the measure ought not to lower, and, in fact, would not lower the Wages of Labour, unless it produced a great reduction in the prices of Provisions; but it is endeavoured at the same time to persuade the Farmers, that such would not be the result of an alteration of the Corn Laws.

I know not whether the Artisans deceive themselves, or whether they are deluded by others upon this subject; but they are quite mistaken if they suppose that they could receive by a reduction in the prices of Corn any relief whatever from those sufferings, which have excited so much sympathy and sorrow. The cause of their sufferings has been, as is allowed on all sides, the want of employment, and not the dearness of Provisions, which, upon many occasions, and for considerable periods, had been much dearer than they are at present, without affecting their prosperity. If the contrary had been the case, if there had been no want of employment, but if Provisions had been at an

exorbitant price, the effect would have been shewn by an attempt on the part of the Artisans to raise the Wages of Labour, and this would not have failed to have taken place under the abolition of the Laws against Combination. The abolition of those salutary Statutes is one of those rash and dangerous experiments that are so much the fashion in our days, and the result has been, as it always must be, mischievous to the interests of society; but it ought, under many circumstances, to prevent a renewal of those complaints, which in former times have been made by the Artisans on the dearness of Provisions. If the Artisans expect that the price of Bread could be considerably and permanently lowered, without lowering also the Wages of Labour, they fall into the same error as an ignorant person, who expressed a wish that the prices could be restored which are known to have existed in remote periods of our History, and delighted himself with the idea, that he would then be enabled to purchase a Cow for a few shillings; but in those times the Wages of a Labourer were from 3d. to 4d. per day. It appears by the *Chronicon Preciosum* of Bishop Fleetwood, that during the sixty years which preceded 1706 the price of a Quarter of Wheat was on an Average 49s. 10½d., and during the first twenty years of that period, that is from 1646 to 1666, its Average Price was 57s. 5½d. or nearly the same price as at present,

even without considering the alteration in the value of money. According to Sir George Shuckburgh's Table of the comparative Values of Money at different periods, the Sum of 49s. 10½d., being the Average Price of a Quarter of Wheat for those sixty years, was, even in the year 1800, equivalent to above £6. 11s. No reasonable person can either expect or wish that such should be the price at present; and I mention this fact only to shew that the price of Wheat has not increased in the same proportion as that of other articles, that it cannot now be considered as excessive, and that it is even low as compared with the prices of those times. It is not denied by any person that a cheapness of Provisions is of itself an advantage, but it is that cheapness which is the result of abundance, and which tends to promote general prosperity, without impoverishing any class of the Community. As a cheapness of Provisions must no doubt be generally desired, it is not surprising that any measure, which professes to have that object in view, should find numerous and zealous advocates; but it ought to be considered, that cheapness of Provisions is injurious to the Community, when it is at once the cause and the effect of public distress, and when it diminishes both the means of Consumption and the demand for Employment. It is unnecessary to observe to you, that a demand for Employment is essential to the welfare of the Labourer,

who would otherwise derive no benefit from any cheapness of Provisions; and I need not, in illustration of this observation, remind you of a true anecdote which we heard of an Irishman, who, some years ago, complained of the dearth of this Country, and said, that at home he could "live like a Prince for a shilling." Upon being asked why, under such circumstances, he had left his home, he replied, "how was the shilling to be got?"

The Manufacturers are as much deceived or deluded as the Artisans, if they imagine that they would become prosperous by lowering the prices of Provisions. How does it happen that they enjoyed great Prosperity when Provisions were very dear, and that they now suffer adversity when they are comparatively cheap, and when, from the distress of the Manufacturing Districts, the Wages of Labour are very low? The answer is obvious, because there then existed a greater demand for their Goods than is the case at present. This has arisen in great measure from over-trading and over-speculation, from a spirit, which, unfortunately, is too prevalent in this Country, of inordinate gain, and the evil has been aggravated by the failure of Country Banks, and of Mercantile Houses, and the general derangement of the Circulation. The alarm which Government excited at the opening of the last Session of Parliament, and the mischievous measures which were adopted

with respect to the Currency, contributed also very considerably to increase the distress. The cure of that distress, as far as it was practicable by legislative measures, was to have been found by taking an opposite course, by extending, instead of restricting, the Currency, by following the dictates of prudence, and of practical wisdom, and not the idle theories of visionary enthusiasts. The distress of the Manufacturers naturally produced that of the Artisans, and such distress must necessarily exist whenever Production increases in a greater ratio than Consumption. Such must be the effect of the use, or rather abuse, which has been lately made of Machinery in Manufactures, and which has also led to consequences the most alarming as well as the most afflicting, by depriving of employment many hundred thousands of Artisans, whose deplorable situation is too well known to you to require any comment. Take, for example, the case which I know to have occurred of a Manufacturer at Bolton, who formerly employed *sixteen hundred* Artisans, but who by the pernicious introduction of *new* Machinery, reduced in a short time their number to *ninety*.

You will, perhaps, ask, whether it would be proper, or even practicable, to prohibit or restrict the use of such Machinery? If it were not, justice and reason, and respect for the interests of those who have been so cruelly injured, ought to impose upon the Manufac-

turers, as a legal obligation, that which is already a moral duty on their part, the charge of supporting at their sole expence, and without any assistance from the Poor's Rates, all those Artisans who have been thus, by the undue profits of their employers deprived of Bread. We hear much about Liberty, but, according to the most extended definition which was given of it at the commencement of the French Revolution, it was stated to consist in the right of doing any thing which did not injure another; and I would ask, what greater injury can be inflicted than the loss of all means of employment, and therefore of subsistence, not from temporary causes, but from such as are permanent in their operation? It was for the sole and selfish interest, as it appeared to them, of the Manufacturers, but to the utter ruin and destruction of many Artisans, that such Machinery was adopted, and it would not, therefore, be too much to expect from the former, that an evil which has been produced for their own immediate benefit, should be remedied at their own exclusive expence. If their judgment had been formed with prudence, and without prejudice, they would indeed have seen that such measures were contrary to their own interests, as well as to those of the Artisans, and were repugnant to reason as well as to humanity.

We have also heard much about the Freedom of Trade, and our Government has lately had the kindness to remove the prohibition on the importation of Silks, for which they will no doubt receive the cordial thanks of *half a million of our Countrymen*, who supported themselves by that Manufacture. This has been done without obtaining any corresponding advantage from those Countries, which, according to general report, have recently sent to us immense quantities of that article; and it has been done in direct opposition to the urgent entreaties of our own Silk Manufacturers, and at a time when they were in the greatest distress. I am ready to believe that English Silks will be as good in quality, and probably as cheap in price as those imported from abroad; but we know the force of prejudice and fashion, and I very much fear that Foreign Silks will continue to receive the preference. If any foreign Government had in consequence been induced to afford encouragement to our Trade, the measure, though very injurious in itself, might in other respects have been attended with some advantage, and have received in consequence some palliation; but, as such is not the case, the evil which it has produced is unalloyed by any good whatever. Our Trade with Foreign Countries ought, as it appears to me, to be regulated by the principle of Retaliation,

or by that of Reciprocity. Where our Manufactures are proscribed, Retaliation is requisite, in order to preserve a favourable Balance of Trade: Reciprocity is reasonable and beneficial where our Manufactures are admitted. I am aware that the old fashioned doctrines about the Balance of Trade are held in utter contempt by the "liberal" Politicians, and by the "Political Economists" of the present day, who contend that one Country cannot purchase of another without selling to it for the same or nearly the same amount, and they apply this doctrine to a Trade in Corn. The proposition is, however, false in theory, and contrary to fact; and it is disproved by the example, amongst others, of the Trade which is carried on with China. That melancholy period is fresh in our recollection, when Buonaparte proscribed our Manufactures in all the Countries which groaned under his iron scourge, and we recollect also that many of our Countrymen, who often boast of their patriotism, consumed at that time as large a quantity as at any other of French Wines, &c., although the money with which they were purchased increased the resources of an inveterate and implacable enemy.

It is allowed, and indeed it would be difficult to deny, and impossible to disprove the proposition, that the Home Market is of all others the most important, and is alone to be consi-

dered as secure, since it is not influenced by the Laws and Regulations of Foreign Countries, nor, when due protection is afforded, by the competition of Foreign Manufacturers. In Germany, as well as in France, there exists a general spirit of improvement and competition, which, amongst the excellent and enlightened People who inhabit the former of those Countries, does not arise from any jealous or hostile feeling towards the English, but from a natural and laudable desire to perfect their own Manufactures, and to promote their own prosperity. The same desire which animates them individually, may at any one moment induce a Foreign Sovereign to issue an Edict prohibiting altogether the use of any English Goods, and such may probably be the case when their own Manufactures are sufficiently improved. Such an Edict could not give to our Government any right whatever of remonstrance, although it might affect to a very considerable extent the welfare of our Manufacturers and Merchants. Look at the example of Austria, a Country which is most unjustly calumniated, but which one of our Countrymen, who fills a very high situation, and who, with extensive opportunities of observation, possesses great accuracy of judgment, describes as being happier and better governed than any other which he had ever seen upon the Continent. I wish that you would or could visit that Country, and you

would see that many of its Manufactures, those which are required for the luxuries as well as for the comforts of life, have attained a very high degree of perfection; and you would find upon inquiry, that this has arisen not from a system of Free Trade, under which their own industry had languished till the time of the Emperor Joseph II., but under that prohibitive system which in this Country it is now the fashion to condemn.

Although it is certain and undeniable, that the Home Market is the most valuable and the most important, and that any measure which destroys the prosperity of the Agricultural Classes must deprive the Manufacturers of their best customers, some of the Manufacturers are so blind to their own interests, or have been so much blinded by "Political Economy," that they are clamorous for a Free Trade in Corn. They see in that measure only the effect that it would produce upon the Wages of Labour, which do not, however, depend solely upon the prices of Provisions, but are also affected by the proportion that exists between the Supply and the Demand for Labour. This consideration appears to be entirely forgotten by them, although its truth has been established, not only by theory, but by the unerring test of experience, in a great number of instances, and, therefore, cannot admit of doubt. It is said that Corn is a necessary of life, and ought, con-

sequently, to be purchased where it can be procured at the cheapest price. If it were proposed to apply this doctrine to all other articles which are necessaries or comforts of life, and which, as is well known, are much cheaper on the Continent than in this Country, we should not hear such an outcry against the Corn Laws; and the pretended patriotism of modern innovators would not prevent them from declaiming against a doctrine of which the application would prove most dangerous, nay utterly destructive to the Manufacturers and to the Artisans, as well as to the Landed Interest. The doctrine, if it were correct with respect to Corn, would, however, be equally correct in all its applications, and it would not only be just, but indispensably requisite, that it should be generally applied.

There are, indeed, some persons, who, as they are not themselves Owners or Occupiers of Land, loudly exclaim that the Agricultural Interest "ought to make sacrifices for the general benefit of the Country." Why should the Agricultural Interest be expected to do so more than the Fundholders who receive their Dividends, or the Clergy who receive their Tythes, or any other class of the Community, which enjoys the income arising from its property, or the fruits of its industry and exertions? It is less from the Agricultural Interest, than from any other in the Country, that any sacri-

fice whatever can be reasonably expected or required, as it already bears exclusively, but most unjustly, the enormous, and, in some cases, almost intolerable burthen of the Poor's Rates, (amounting, as they do, to a greater Sum than the whole Revenue of the Prussian Monarchy), and also of the Tythes, and of a great variety of other local charges, which do not in the least affect any other class of the Community. The amount of those Charges has been shown by the Earl of Lauderdale to be *fifty-seven per cent. on the Rent*. I contend also, that the Owners and Occupiers of Land have an undoubted right to the full, secure, and unmolested enjoyment of their Property, of which they could not be deprived without the most flagrant and atrocious injustice; by a measure which would exact the greatest sacrifice exclusively from them, and not from the other classes of the Population, even if such a sacrifice were beneficial to the rest of the Community. I contend, however, and am ready to prove, that the sacrifice would bring ruin upon all classes; and the truth cannot be too frequently repeated, or too forcibly urged, that no class of Society can benefit by the adversity of another, and that no Government has, or can have, the right of plundering one portion of the Community for the profit of another.

You will recollect, that during the Agricultural Distress, with which this Country was so

recently and so severely afflicted, a Report was presented by a Committee of the House of Commons, and that it suggested the expediency of admitting Foreign Corn, as the most effectual remedy for the evil which that Committee was appointed to investigate. The price of Corn was then so low, that in many cases it could not be grown without actual loss, and yet the price was to be still further reduced by importing Corn from abroad; and this was recommended as the cure of the Distress. We were then told that the Harvests had been too abundant, that Providence had been too bountiful, that there was an "excess of production," and too great a quantity of Corn; and it was proposed, as a remedy, to add to that quantity by importation. I do not suppose that such an absurdity was ever devised by any Committee of any other House of Commons, or would have been heard with patience in any other Assembly. It was said that the admission of Foreign Corn would prevent in future the great fluctuation of prices, which no rational person could believe to have been the effect of the Corn Laws, but which was proved by as clear a demonstration as any proposition in Euclid, to have arisen from a very different cause. Have we then forgotten, or can we ever forget, though we should attain the age of Methusalem, the effect of Mr. Peel's Bill, which spread misery and ruin throughout the Country, and which

reduced, to a very considerable extent, not only the prices of Corn, and of other Agricultural produce, but of all articles, even of those which were imported from abroad? That measure, which would have inflicted upon this country a far greater injury than Buonaparte, in all the plenitude of his power, had been able to accomplish, and would have produced public as well as private Bankruptcy, was checked in its progress by our Government, which appears to have discovered, though it had not the candour and the courage to avow, the cause of the evil. That part of Mr. Peel's Bill which was the most reprehensible in its nature, and the most pernicious in its effects, that which related to the issue of one and two pound Notes by Country Banks, was repealed by an Act of Parliament, which, in the course of a very few months, restored Prosperity, though it did not, and could not, cure the mischief which had already been suffered. Till the unfortunate failures took place which arose from a rage for speculation, this Country was, last year, in a state of general and increasing prosperity, and yet the measure which had restored that Prosperity, and which had been the real cure of the distress, has been rescinded in the course of the present year, and that part which I have just mentioned, of Mr. Peel's Bill, has been again enacted with respect to England. What is the Demon of Mischief which threatens to destroy the Prosperity and the Power of this Country, and to plunge it in

Bankruptcy and Ruin? It is, that which calls itself, though very unjustly, "Political Economy;" and may Heaven in its mercy preserve us from all the Professors of that pretended science, who are more to be dreaded than the Plagues of Egypt!

If, in times like the present, it were possible for us to be astonished at any event which could take place, or at any opinion which could be expressed, we might feel some surprise on finding that the proposal of allowing Corn to be imported, under what is called a Protecting Duty, is not stedfastly and strenuously resisted by the Prime Minister, whose argument upon that point appeared to me unanswerable. He said, in the course of a debate, only two or three years ago, that a Protecting Duty was quite inapplicable, for if the Duty were low it would be of no use whatever, and if it were high it would be utterly impossible to execute the measure in periods of great and general scarcity. He stated, also, and very correctly, that when the Corn Bill was originally discussed, it was represented by its opponents that Wheat would never continue below Eighty Shillings a Quarter, which was then the importation price, but that experience had shewn the very contrary to be the result. The principle of the Corn Laws is of ancient origin, and has been adopted also in other countries. A Statute was passed, in the year 1463, prohibiting the Importation of Wheat and Rye, and of Barley, unless they were above

the prices which were specified in that Act. In France and in Spain the principle has been and is now established by Law, and in several States of the Continent Agriculture is protected by prohibiting, or by loading with very heavy duties, the admission, from foreign Countries, of such articles of produce as might be injurious to the sale of their own, and this is particularly the case with respect to Wines, of which the qualities, as well as the prices, are so different in one Country from what they are in another. The principle is the same, whatever may be the object to which it is applied, and is of the utmost importance when it relates to an article of general produce, or to one which, like Corn, is a necessary of life. I do not mean to assert that the English Corn Laws do not, like many other Acts of Parliament, admit of improvement; or that it is proper or prudent, whenever the average price of Wheat throughout the Country is 70s. per Quarter to allow its importation to an indefinite amount, instead of restricting the importation to that quantity which, under all the circumstances of the case, would appear to be requisite. For the due remuneration of the Cultivators of Corn, the importation price was fixed at 70s.; and it was designed that such should be its average price for any number of years during which it might be sometimes above and sometimes below that price; but the machinery by which it was intended to

carry that object into execution was, however, so ill-contrived, that the average price for any number of years is, and must always be, below the importation price. This arises from the facility which is given, as soon as the average price throughout the Country exceeds 70s., of importing a much larger quantity of Corn than is required by the actual deficiency of a Harvest. As the case at present stands, the Agricultural Interest does not fully receive the protection which the Corn Laws were intended to confer; but it is now proposed, not to perfect, but to overthrow their principle; not to improve but to repeal them, and to substitute in their place a Free Trade in Corn, under a Protecting Duty.

An attempt is made to persuade the Owners and Occupiers of Land, that such a measure would not be injurious to their interests, that the importation would be inconsiderable in quantity, and that it would not much affect the price of Corn. It is even argued, by a distinguished Member of Parliament, that its price would not be lowered by any importation which might take place, whatever were its amount; but it is confessed by the same person, that if he expected a different result he would resist the measure most zealously, and consider it hostile to the best interests of the Country. You will not, however, be disposed to believe, that a very large Importation of Corn,

or of any other article, would not lower the price by glutting the Market; and you saw, very recently, a proof that such would be the effect, even of a small importation, and that Wheat which, till then, had been slowly rising, fell several shillings a Quarter, through the apprehension that Government might allow the definite quantity of half a million of Quarters to be imported. The advocates of the measure betray their real intentions by the anxiety which they evince that a free importation of Corn should be allowed under a Protecting Duty, while, on the other hand, they assert that the price of Corn would not in consequence be much lowered. If it should not be much lowered, the Consumer would receive very little, or no benefit, for the Bakers and other Retailers are not influenced by small reductions in the price of Wheat, and are accustomed in such cases to take larger profits. If it should not be much lowered, what is the supposed advantage which the opponents of the Corn Laws anticipate from their repeal? and of what importance can it be to the Consumers, as such, if the price of Bread continues the same, whether the Wheat from which it was made had been grown in this Country or imported from abroad?

It is said that the quantity which might be imported would be very inconsiderable in its amount, and therefore in its effects; and Mr. Jacob, in the Report which he presented, la-

bours very strenuously, but quite ineffectually, to establish this proposition. He endeavours to shew, that a considerable quantity could not be imported from the North of Europe by the Vistula; but it is quite indifferent to the argument whether Corn is sent to this Country from the North or from the South of Europe, or from any other part of the World, if it is sent at a low price, and in immense quantities. It is known and acknowledged, that the prices are very low in most parts of the Continent, and the Importations which took place when the Ports were open for Wheat, in 1817 and 1818, prove, beyond all possibility of doubt, that immense quantities could be sent to this Country. The amount in value of the Grain and Flour imported in those two years was calculated, by the late Earl of Sheffield, to have been above *twenty-one millions sterling*; and this enormous sum was, as he truly observed, expended "for an article, every grain of which might have been grown in the United Kingdom, if better policy had existed, and due encouragement had been given to the cultivation of our Waste Land," of which, I believe, no civilized part of Europe contains so much as England. We find, by the official information laid before Parliament, that in those *two* years the quantity of Wheat and Wheat Flour, which was imported into this Country, (exclusive of the Importations from Ireland) was 2,616,861 Quarters. You will observe,

that those Importations took place when the present Corn Laws existed, and when the permission to import Corn was granted as *a temporary measure of uncertain duration*, and not as part of a permanent system under which it would, at all times and whatever the prices were in this Country, be admitted into the Ports. It is allowed by Mr. Jacob himself, that "the effect of the stimulus" to foreign cultivation from an alteration in the Corn Laws, "must depend, in a great measure, on the assurance of its duration." Nor can it be doubted that, under a system which would, at all times, allow the importation of Corn, *a much larger quantity would be sent to this Country* than was or could have been the case when the Ports might suddenly and unexpectedly be closed, and great losses might, in consequence, arise to the sellers and to the importers. Mr. Jacob does not even attempt to shew that such a change of circumstances has taken place subsequently to that period as would render impossible, or even improbable, an Importation to the same amount at present. The quantities which have already been imported, and about which no dispute can exist, afford a sufficient and satisfactory answer to all the reasoning contained in Mr. Jacob's Report.

I will not waste your time or my own by a minute examination of that Report which, on the one hand, is extremely defective upon sub-

jects of the greatest importance, while, on the other hand, it is filled with details which are of no importance whatever for the object of his enquiries. The information which he collected respecting the different Tenures, the situation of the Landed Proprietors and of the Peasants, their mode of living, and other points of a similar nature, might, as far as it is given upon good authority, be interesting in a Book of Travels, but does not appear to me to bear upon the question. I am aware that Mr. Jacob acted in conformity to the Instructions which were given to him by the Board of Trade, and I abstain from making any observations upon the conduct or upon the supposed intentions of the person or persons by whom those Instructions were given. If, however, the intention had existed of perplexing the subject by useless details, of presenting an imperfect statement, and of endeavouring to draw the public attention from the real nature of the question, and from those points which it was essential to consider, I must confess that the Instructions were well qualified to answer that purpose. Upon some points I have many reasons to doubt whether all the information which Mr. Jacob received would, if carefully examined, be found to be correct, and upon other points it may be difficult for some persons to ascertain its accuracy, as it does not always state the relative value of Foreign Measures and of Foreign Monies with those of this Country.

He represents that he found severe Agricultural Distress in several parts of the Continent, but that the quantity of Corn in store was inconsiderable. What becomes, then, of the argument respecting an "Excess of Production," if, indeed, the name of argument can be applied to such an assertion? The Agricultural Distress in several parts of the Continent has arisen from two causes, the concurrence of which must necessarily produce that effect, a great decrease of Consumption and a great increase of Taxation. The Consumption was, of course, very considerably diminished by the restoration of Peace, and since that period the burthen of the Taxes has, in those Countries, been very considerably increased. The cause of their Distress is, therefore, evident, and a relief of Taxation would be the cure. In consequence of that Distress it may be true, as Mr. Jacob states, that the Landed Proprietors are impoverished and embarrassed; that the cultivation of their Estates has disimproved, and that its produce has diminished. It cannot, however, be doubted, that if the cultivation of their Lands were encouraged by allowing, at all times, the importation of their Corn into this Country, all those circumstances would cease, and the Cultivators would find no difficulty in obtaining pecuniary assistance when a great and opulent Market was opened for their Produce, and when they could therefore give an adequate

security for the re-payment. It is even probable that British Capital would be advanced for the purpose by some patriotic "Political Economists" in this Country. Take the statements of Mr. Jacob himself with respect to the maritime Provinces of Prussia, which are, he says, "*of more than half the extent of England,*" and you will see that this would be a lucrative speculation.

He observes, in reference to the Royal Domains, that he "*should not estimate the average rent to exceed, if it reaches 1s. 3d. per acre;*" that in general the Soil "*may be easily ploughed by two Oxen, and those of diminished size and no great strength;*" that "*Cows are worth from 30s. to 65s.*" that "*the best Flocks of Merino Sheep, exclusive of the Wool, is averaged to be worth about 6s. or 6s. 8d. per head;*" and that there is a Flock "*yielding on an average 2½lbs. of fine Wool, the annual sales of which amount to one-half more than the value of the Sheep.*" Under the circumstances which he thus describes, if the Market of this country were to be opened to their produce, many English Farmers would find it very profitable to cultivate the lands of Prussia, and quite unprofitable to cultivate their own.

It is stated by Mr. Jacob, that there were no considerable stores of Corn on hand, and that many of the Warehouses were empty. What rea-

son could there have been for filling them when there was no expectation of exporting their contents? Why was there no considerable store of Corn on hand? Because, as Mr. Jacob ought to have known, and as I was informed by a Landed Proprietor of Prussia, the surplus produce, which cannot be contained in the Barns, is *consumed by the Cattle*. It cannot, however, be denied, that the Farmers of that country would not waste their Corn in that manner if they were able to export it, and that they would very much prefer, instead of giving the surplus produce to their Cattle, to send it to England.

I believe that the King of Prussia sees more clearly his own interests than Mr. Jacob, and is better informed of the wants and wishes of his subjects; and in the Answer which he returned to a Deputation on an Exportation of Corn, he expressed a hope that "*a change would take place in the English Corn Laws.*" The King of Prussia would act kindly towards his subjects by endeavouring to obtain, and our Government would act kindly towards all the subjects of these realms by firmly resisting a repeal of these Laws, which are essential to the welfare, security, and independence—and even to the existence of this country. The "*hope*" which the King of Prussia expressed upon this subject, must have strangely surprized Mr. Jacob, as it must have been founded upon the

expectation that some benefit would arise to that country from an alteration in the Corn Laws ; and neither the Sovereign nor his Subjects would receive any benefit from the measure, unless they had Corn to export. To what other cause can we ascribe the extreme anxiety which is evinced upon the subject in many of the Continental States, and must we not believe that if the circumstances were as Mr. Jacob represents them, the question would be viewed by them with indifference ? He admits, indeed, that “ the Market for Wheat which England presents, is the great object of attention to the cultivators of Poland, and to the Merchants at the Ports from whence its Corn must be exported.” He might have added that it is “ the great object of attention” in almost all parts of the Continent ; and he must, in the course of his Travels, have heard in many quarters, if not in all, the most anxious and eager inquiries on the probability or improbability, whether England would permit the importation of Corn. Soon after the passing of the late Act, which most improperly conferred on Government the discretionary power of permitting the importation of half a million of Quarters, I learned that the Prices of Corn rose in several countries of the Continent.

I do not say that the Instructions which were given to Mr. Jacob were *designed* to procure such a Report as might mislead and not inform

the public ; but they excluded altogether that which was obviously a most important and interesting inquiry, the production and prices of all those countries from which Corn could be exported through the Rhine, the Black Sea, and the Adriatic. The mouths of the Rhine are nearer to this country than the mouth of any other large river, and would afford a supply from the fertile countries through which it passes in its long course. The countries which are on the coasts of the Black Sea are known to be very productive, and a Paper which was presented to Parliament, and which communicated the information that had been obtained by the English Consuls, states the average price of Wheat at Odessa to have been 13s. 6d. per Quarter during January last year, when the average price in this country was 66s. 7½d. The exportation by the Adriatic would include that from Hungary, and in some parts of that country the prices of produce are so low that a Horse may be supplied with Oats, Hay, and Straw for *sixpence a week*. You may stare or smile at this statement, but I received it from an Hungarian Nobleman, on whose authority I can rely, and it was confirmed to me by subsequent enquiries.

I might even admit, for the sake of the argument, although I utterly deny the proposition, that no considerable importation would take place as soon as the Corn Laws were repealed ; but it is

certain, from past experience, and from the prices as they are at present, that in a very few months afterwards an enormous quantity would be imported, and therefore the whole train of Mr. Jacob's reasoning upon the subject is futile, and amounts in fact to nothing. Even if it were not certain that an immense importation would be the inevitable consequence, no prudent person would chuse to commit to the chance of an uncertainty the existence of all the Agricultural Classes, and consequently the welfare of the whole Population. When an immense importation had taken place, and the prices of Corn in this country had fallen nearly to a level with those of the Continent, then, as in other cases of rashness and improvidence, we should hear the usual exclamation, "Who would have thought it?" Every person ought to have thought it, and foreseen it, who had reflected upon the subject.

We know, from the information which was transmitted by our Consuls abroad, that the Average Price of a Quarter of Wheat was during last year 15s. 2d. at Copenhagen, where the English Consul stated that "*a large overplus is always ready for exportation*;" and where, as we have recently heard, such is the scarcity of Money, and such the abundance of Produce, that *a portion of the public Taxes is paid in Corn*. The Average Price during that year was at Fiume, 20s. at Trieste 20s. 6d. and at Venice

20s. 3d. where, according to the Statements of the English Consul, the following would be the charges per Quarter:—

	s.	d.
Shipping	0	5 $\frac{1}{4}$
Freight to England	12	6
Duty on Exportation	0	1 $\frac{3}{4}$
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	15	1

Making the Price in England 1l. 13s. 4d.

At Ancona, where there is no Duty on Exportation, the Average Price during that year was very nearly the same; and at Hamburg the Average Price during the same period was 18s., and the charges per Quarter are represented by the English Consul to be—

	s.	d.
Shipping	1	4
Freight	4	6
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	5	10

Making the Price in England 1l. 3s. 10d.

At Embden the Average Price was, during last year, 19s. 3d., at Königsberg, 18s. 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. and at Memel 16s. 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. We find by a Report, which is stated to have been lately presented to the Minister of the Interior in France, that the price of a Quarter of Wheat at Hamburg, Copenhagen, Lubeck, and Stettin, was on an Aver-

age of those four places, *about one-fourth of its price in London, at the same time*; and that Statement is confirmed by the information which is given in the Appendix to Mr. Jacob's Report. And yet, with these facts before our eyes, Mr. Jacob talks of "a Duty in this country of 10s. or 12s. per Quarter." Is it then wished, or intended, to reduce the Owners and Occupiers of Land in this country, to the same level as they are in the maritime Provinces of Prussia, where, according to his own account, Arable Land sells from 15s. to 40s. per acre, and is sometimes let from 6*d.* to 9*d.* per acre?

It is not material to the argument, whether Wheat could be imported into this country at 25s. or at 35s. a Quarter, because the latter price, as well as the former, would be utterly destructive to all those who derive their subsistence from Agriculture, to the Landlords, to the Tenants, and to the Labourers. I know it will be said, that it is intended to propose a Protecting Duty; but would the Amount of that Duty be, not 10s. or 12s. per Quarter, as suggested by Mr. Jacob, but such a Duty as would prevent Foreign Corn from being imported at a lower price than is at present practicable? If so, I ask again, what is the supposed advantage of the measure, which, in the event of a general scarcity on the Continent, would place the consumer in this Country in a worse situation than that in which he would find himself under the

existing Laws, if the average price of Wheat throughout the country were to rise to 70s. a Quarter. Under a Protecting Duty, it would be in the power of Foreign Countries to regulate the prices in this Country, which would then fluctuate in the same proportion as their own. A Protecting Duty would indeed accomplish that which, perhaps, is not the object, but which would certainly be the effect of the measure—it would furnish the Government of this Country with a new source of Revenue, by imposing on the importation of Corn a Tax, which would fall upon that patient Beast of Burthen, the Landed Interest.

I need not trouble you with detailed calculations, which must vary in different Districts, upon the expence of growing Wheat, including the charges of cultivation and the several outgoings. The result of the inquiries which were made upon that subject, and of the evidence which was received, induced both Houses of Parliament to fix the Importation Price, first at 80s. and afterwards at 70s. per Quarter; and I challenge any person to prove that any change of circumstances has subsequently taken place, which would require, or even allow, a reduction of that price. Our opinions ought not to be fluctuating and inconsistent, even if the conduct of Parliament should be so; nor can we be expected or required to "blow hot and cold" upon the same subject, and to admit at

one time, that the Importation Price ought to be fixed at 70s. and at another time, that it ought to be very considerably reduced, although no change of circumstances has occurred which could afford a justification, or even an apology, for such a change of system.

We know that a reduction of prices produced the late Agricultural Distress, with which this Country was most severely afflicted; and we cannot doubt for a moment that the same effect would again result from the same cause; and yet, after an experience so melancholy and so recent, it is now proposed to renew again the same calamities which were then suffered. It would seem that the "Political Economists" considered Distress as the object which this Country ought steadily to pursue, and Prosperity as the object which it ought most carefully to avoid. They acknowledge, that it would be utterly impossible for the Owners and Occupiers of Land in this Country to enter into competition with the Growers of Corn in Foreign Countries, where, from several causes, and particularly from the difference in the value of money, and in the amount of Taxation; it is produced at the low prices which I have above mentioned. They acknowledge that the natural and necessary consequence of the measures which they recommend, would be *to throw out of cultivation an immense quantity of Land*: and this they consider as a "national

benefit." Is it possible that such an absurdity could be uttered by any person who still retained the use of his understanding, or that it could be adopted in a Country which calls itself enlightened, or even in one which is still ignorant and uncivilized? Every Landed Proprietor who attends, as it is his duty to do, to the management of his own Estates, is anxious to render every portion of them as productive, and therefore as profitable as is possible, in Corn, or in other articles of consumption; and now we are gravely told, that a Government ought to pursue the very contrary course, and would confer a "benefit" upon the Country by throwing out of cultivation a considerable portion of the Soil. It would, indeed, be an insult to your understanding, if I were to make any comments upon an absurdity which deserves only to be treated with derision and contempt.

I will not now inquire whether some of the persons who profess to believe this absurdity, are or can be sincere in their opinions, or whether they have not *private objects* in view, as appeared to be proved by some examples which we witnessed during the late Agricultural Distress, and whether they do not wish to obtain possession of the Estates of the Landed Proprietors by foreclosing Mortgages, and by involving the Owners in such embarrassments as would induce them to sell on any terms. This object being once accomplished, they would

probably alter entirely their language, and discover, by some new researches in "Political Economy," that Land ought to be productive; that neither the State nor its Subjects ought to be impoverished, and that the Corn Laws were necessary for all the interests of the Country. Let us not forget that a wholesale system of robbery, a plunder more general and indiscriminate than any which disgraced even the blood-stained Annals of the French Revolution, was designated by the mild and gentle appellation of a "*Transfer of Property*." "We are aware," said a late Political Economist, "that the measures which we recommend will ruin entirely all the Nobility, and all the other Landed Proprietors, but what then? Their Estates will pass into other hands, and it is indifferent to the Country to whom they belong." Such was the avowal made by that "Political Economist;" such was the "*Transfer of Property*" which he anticipated; and such was the indifference with which he viewed the result.

It is undoubtedly true, and the proposition ought at present to be re-echoed in a voice of thunder throughout the Country, that the measure would "ruin entirely all the Nobility, and all the other Landed Proprietors," and not them alone, but also the Tenants and the Labourers. When by a great reduction of prices, the Cultivation of Land becomes unprofitable, and is therefore abandoned, it can yield no Rent to

the Landlord and also no profit to the Farmer, and can give no employment to the Labourer. Innumerable multitudes of those who are engaged in the cultivation of the Soil would be deprived of subsistence, and would be driven to seek a scanty and degrading relief from the Poor's Rates. In many cases the Poor's Rates could not be collected, as they are levied solely on the Occupiers of Land, who, far from being able to support others, would, under such circumstances, be unable to provide for their own subsistence; and who, instead of paying Poor's Rates, would be under the necessity of receiving them.

The "*Transfer of Property*" would not, therefore, be confined to "the Nobility, and all the other Landed Proprietors." The Stock of the Farmer would be "transferred" into other hands when it was no longer required for the cultivation of the Land, and the Property which the Peasant had acquired by his honest industry, would be "transferred" to the Parish, when he became permanently a Pauper. Much has been said, with great truth and reason, and too much cannot be said, against the principles and practices of the French Revolution; but is not a general Revolution of Property the most detestable in its nature, and the most destructive in its operation?

Such would be the consequences of throwing out of cultivation a large quantity of Land;

yet those "Political Economists" represent it to be a national advantage. It is said by them, that their doctrine would be applied only to Lands which are of "inferior quality;" but there are in our Island very large Districts which are entirely of that description, and in which there is only a thin covering of Soil over a Bed of Chalk, of Clay, or of Gravel. Unless those Districts, as well as others, were to be cultivated, this Country could not raise a sufficient quantity of Corn for its own subsistence, but must depend upon Foreign Countries for a supply of the first necessary of life; and might, from an immense deficiency at home, and in the event of a scarcity abroad, be exposed to all the horrors and calamities of actual famine.

The value of Pasture Lands would, of course, be very considerably diminished by a great reduction in the price of Corn, and the Rents which they might still continue to yield, would not be such as to enable their Proprietors to inhabit this Country, and to pay the Taxes and all the charges and various expenses to which they are subject while they reside in it. They would, therefore, be compelled to remove to other Countries, where a residence is far less expensive than it is in this, and many of them, from finding it also much more agreeable, would be induced to settle permanently abroad. This would be no evil in the eyes of the "Political Economists," one of whom stated publicly

his opinion, that it would be no injury whatever to the Country, if all the Landed Proprietors were to leave it, to reside constantly abroad, and to spend there all their incomes. If a general "Transfer of Property" is to be effected, the Landed Proprietors have a right to expect that due notice shall be given, and that an Act of Parliament shall empower them, whatever may be the nature of their Family Settlements, to sell all their Estates, and to invest the Proceeds in other Countries, in which their Property would be more secure than it had been under the English Constitution, which is *said* to be "the envy and admiration of other Nations." We know that "the Tree is judged of by its Fruits," and Constitutions are not excepted from that Test. If the Prosperity, and, therefore, the Power of this Country is to be sacrificed at the shrine of "Political Economy;" if general Pauperism, and a Revolution of Property are to ensue, it will not afford me any comfort and consolation to reflect that the evil was accomplished, not by the Edict of the Sovereign, but by an Act of the two Houses of Parliament.

Ruin would fall even on those to whom such measures might appear beneficial, and to whom a dearness of Provisions must of course be injurious. The Annuitants, those who have fixed Incomes, whether derived from Salaries, from Funded Property, from Mortgages, or

from Rent Charges, could no longer receive the same Payments, and would lose much more by the reduction of their Incomes than they could possibly gain by a diminution in the prices of the necessaries of life.

It is only by the prices at which Corn was recently sold in this Country, that the Owners and Occupiers of Land can be enabled to support the Poor, or to pay the heavy Taxes with which they are grievously burthened, and therefore to bear their share of the Interest of the National Debt. It has been asked, "why should the prices of Corn be so different in this Country from what they are on the Continent?" but we might ask in reply, "why should the Debts and Taxes of this Country be so different from theirs?" It would be unjust, nay, more, it would be impracticable for the Government of this Country to exact the present amount of Taxes, if it deprives the people of the resources, from which alone those Payments can be made, nor can a Farmer be expected to pay high Taxes if the prices of his produce are very low. Unless a due proportion exists between the Prices at which an article is sold, and the Charges to which that article is subject, between the Receipts and the necessary Expenditure, it is obviously impossible that any Individual can subsist, or can continue to make the payments which are required from him, and which, like Taxes, are fixed in their nominal amount.

If we examine the proportion which existed between Prices and Payments, during the Reign of King William, we find by Papers which were presented to Parliament, that the Average Price of a Quarter of Wheat was, during that Period, 4*3s.* 6½*d.* which is actually somewhat higher than its average price in this Country during the year 1822. Lord Bolingbroke states, "the *public Revenue* in net money amounted" at the accession of King William "to no more than two millions annually;" and he adds, "this Revenue was raised *without any Tax on Land, or Malt,* and by a very few of those innumerable Duties which have been since laid, to the oppression of the landed and mercantile Interest of the Nation." He states also, that "the *public Debts,* that of the Bankers included, amounted to little more than three hundred thousand pounds, at the beginning of this era." Compare this state of things with that which now exists, when the Public Revenue is above *fifty-two Millions,* when the Funded Debt is more than *seven hundred and eighty-six Millions,* and when the other Payments which are required for the Poor's Rates and other local Taxes, and for the engagements of Individuals, have enormously increased.

Far from considering it as an evil, the Owners and Occupiers of Land would hail it as a blessing, should the prices of their Produce be reduced to what they were at that time, if the

prices of all other articles, the amount of the Taxes, and of the various charges and obligations to which they are subject, were also to be reduced to those which existed at the same period. If our Government cannot, or will not, reduce the latter, it has no right to attempt a reduction of the former, nor can it justly exact the present amount of Taxes, when it adopts measures which would render impracticable their Payment. Should the prices of Corn be considerably reduced in consequence of any legislative measure, it would be requisite upon every principle of justice, and it would upon every consideration be indispensably necessary to reduce also in the same proportion the Interest of the National Debt, the amount of the Taxes, and all the Charges and Engagements of the State, and of its Subjects. A Free Trade in Corn must be accompanied by a Free Trade *in other articles of general consumption*, in order to lower their prices to the same level. Such measures would of course affect the interests of many Classes of the Population, of the Fundholders, of the Manufacturers, and of the Artisans; but they would in such a case be founded in strict justice, they would be necessary not only for the welfare, but even for the existence of the Community, and this Country would have the right to demand their immediate adoption.

In order to avert general Ruin, and a Revo-

lution of Property, which might be followed by a Revolution of the State, I would recommend, as I did some years ago, "large popular Meetings, legally convened, frequently assembled, "numerously attended, and powerfully supported." Fortunately, this is not a party question, but one in which we ought to receive the zealous co-operation of all those who have at heart the happiness and welfare of the Country, whatever difference may exist in their political opinions. Zeal, Activity, and Union, are all that are required to oppose with complete and triumphant success, those who would plunge the whole Community in misery and ruin. From every part of the Country, numerous and energetic Petitions should immediately be poured upon the two Houses of Parliament, to pray that no alteration may be made in the existing Corn Laws, and that the Poor's Rates, and all other Public Burthens, maybe supported equally by all Classes of the Population, and not, as is at present the case, exclusively by the Occupiers of Land. At a crisis like that which now exists, the Country Gentlemen would act most culpably, if they were to continue in that apathy and torpor, which to many of them appears habitual, and which, under such circumstances, would be a violation of their Duty, as well as a sacrifice of their interests. During the late Agricultural Distress, in which I was not one of the greatest sufferers, I endeavoured,

but without success, to convene a General Meeting of the County which I inhabit, and you are already acquainted with the causes of that failure. To yourself, whose Friendship I have so long enjoyed, I need not observe, that I have no party objects to pursue, and no personal ambition to gratify; that I am not desirous of power, of honours, or of public emoluments, but that I wish to preserve, without injury or molestation, the Inheritance of my Ancestors, and am animated with an ardent zeal for the happiness and welfare of my Country.

Excuse the imperfections, whatever they may be, and also the length of this Letter, and believe that I am, with sincere esteem,

very faithfully, your's,

STANHOPE.

Chevening, November 10th, 1826.