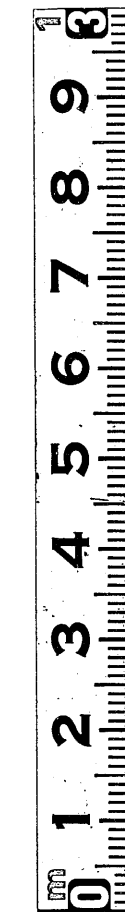


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REFLECTIONS

ON THE PRESENT

High Price of Provisions;

A N D

The COMPLAINTS and DISTURBANCES arising therefrom.

People not perceiving a Scarcity, are apt to be jealous one of another; each suspecting another's inequality of gain to rob him of his share, every one will be employing his skill and power, the best he can, to procure to himself the same plenty as formerly.—This is but scrambling amongst ourselves, and helps no more against our want, than the struggling for a short coverlet, by those who lie together, till it is pulled to pieces, will preserve them from the cold.—The labourer's share being seldom more than a bare subsistence, never allows that body of men time or opportunity to raise their thoughts above that, or to contest with the richer for theirs;—unless when some uncommon and great distress, uniting them in one universal ferment, makes them forget respect, and emboldens them to carve to their wants with armed force; and then sometimes they break in upon the rich, and sweep all like a deluge. But this rarely happens, but in the MAL-ADMINISTRATION OF NEGLECTED OR MISMANAGED GOVERNMENT.

Locke on Money, Interest, Trade, &c. page 115.

L O N D O N :
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MDCCLXVI.

REFLECTIONS, &c.

THE wisdom of many modern governments has been exercised in laying open trade and encouraging agriculture, thereby providing, in the most effectual manner, for the proper supply of provisions; for, on the experience of the past and present times, it appears, that after sufficient laws are framed against frauds and deceits, the buyers and sellers may be left to settle the prices of all things between themselves. According to the maxim of Seneca, "No matter what the price is, so the buyer and seller agree upon it;" the magistrate has no occasion to interfere; for the nature of trade requires that both the contracting parties should look about them, if they would not be deceived.

The industrious husbandman will not fail to improve his lands when the advantage thereof accrues to himself, and he is at liberty to resort to any market where he can get most money, and to sell or keep the produce of his lands, agreeable to his own humour or interest: for he knows, as well as the trader, that in determining a price, the supply and the demand are

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proportioned to each other; that unless there be an inequality, the buyers cannot sink, nor the sellers raise prices. It is the interest of both to attend exactly to this point, and they are equally checks on each other. "The prince or magistrate (as the Baron De Montesquieu observes*) can no more ascertain the value of merchandizes, than he can establish by a decree, that the relation one has to ten is equal to that of one to twenty. Julian's lowering the price of provisions at Antioch was the cause of a terrible famine."

All traders have reciprocal wants, and they barter with each other only in proportion to their wants; it is therefore a true maxim, that no one should be excluded from trading with another, except for very good reasons, such as the prohibition of exportation, to prevent a temporary scarcity; but a perpetual prohibition would deprive the industrious husbandman and the manufacturer from the privilege of procuring the intrinsic value of their commodity, or that natural price which would be fixed on it, if it had a fair chance to be exchanged for any other commodity, or for money. "For if we compare the mass of gold and silver in the whole world with the quantity of merchandizes therein contained, it is certain that every commodity or merchandize in particular may be compared to a certain portion of the entire mass of gold or silver." † The most ignorant people have ideas of that which constitutes property, and our natures recoil against all invaders of it. The public papers from Berlin say, that

* B. xxii. Chap. 8. † Sp. of Laws, B. xxii. Chap. 37.

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that the people there can hardly believe the French have obtained a monopoly of all the salt-petre of the Russian empire that is to be exported; as it would be too strong a measure for a minister, even in Russia, to hinder the people from selling their produce to those who give most.

It was not uncommon, in former days, for acts of parliament to be made in England for fixing prices on many commodities; but in the most trying circumstances, viz. times of extreme scarcity, it has been found necessary to repeal such laws as related to the prices of provisions; for the people who were owners of them would not sell at all, whilst they were restrained to this parliamentary price; therefore, tho' there was the form of law for settling rates for the purchase of necessaries, yet if people would not bring them to market (which no legislative authority could oblige them to do) what was to be done? The revoking such acts, and leaving people to buy and sell as they could, became indispensable at last; and 'tis impossible to say, at this time of day, what dire effects such absurd restrictions might have on the kingdom; but thus much we know, that the husbandmen of former days were so discouraged, they would not cultivate their lands, because in times of plenty they could not find a vent for their produce (all exportation of provision being then prohibited); therefore a few unfriendly seasons always occasioned great scarcity, and were sometimes productive of dreadful famines. A description of one famine, about 1314, is given in the note from Rapin*.

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* "The loss sustained by the English in the wars was followed by a dreadful famine, which lasted three years, and destroyed

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“ The spirit of trade, saith the baron De Montesquieu,† produces in the mind of man a certain sense of exact justice.” He says likewise, “ Those who traffic with each other become reciprocally dependent ; one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling ; and it is the opinion of being in great certainty, as to the possession and security of property in com-

destroyed an infinite number of people. In vain did the parliament endeavour to help it by settling the price of provisions ; they were forced the next year to revoke the act that had been passed on that account, in which it was enacted and proclaimed, that the best ox, not fed with grain, should be sold for 16 shillings and no more ; and if fed with corn, then for 24 shillings at most ; the best live fat cow for 12 shillings ; a fat hog two years old, 3 shillings and 4 pence ; a fat weather, 20 pence at most ; a fat hen for one penny ; two chickens, one penny ; and 24 eggs for one penny ; and those who would not sell these things so, were to forfeit them to the king. Mean time the famine raged in so terrible a manner, that one can hardly give credit to what historians say of it. They are not content with telling us, the most loathed animals were used for food ; but, what is much more horrible, people were forced to hide their children with all imaginable care, to prevent their being stolen and eaten by thieves. They assure us, that men themselves took precautions to hinder their being murdered in private places, knowing there were but too many instances that some had been served in that manner, to feed such as could find no other subsistence. We are told likewise, that the prisoners in the goals devoured one another in a barbarous manner, the extreme scarcity of provisions not permitting their being allowed necessary food. The bloody-flux, caused by gross feeding, completed the misery of the English ; such numbers died every day, that hardly could the living suffice to bury the dead. The only remedy that could be found against the famine, but which was not capable of bringing all the necessary relief, was to prohibit, on pain of death, the brewing any sort of beer, to the end the corn usually expended that way, might serve to make bread.”

† Sp. of Laws, B. xx. Chap. 2.

[5]

“ commercial states, which induces the merchants to undertake great things.”

The great advantages accruing to any nation by encouragements to agriculture and commerce, have not escaped the observation of British legislators, by whom many excellent laws have been framed, relative to these subjects ; it must therefore be owing to the inattention of those great men, who have in other respects so well distinguished themselves, that the oppressive and narrow-spirited regulations of Edward the Sixth are still unrepealed ; or else to an opinion generally received, that being obscure and contradictory, they lay dormant ; or, that as they do not now operate in the regulation of any of the ways of trade, they ought to be regarded no more than a dead letter ; for were these narrow and malignant schemes to be put in execution, our husbandmen, as Mr. Hume observes, would be reduced to the same state of sloth and ignorance that prevailed formerly ; the greatest part of the land would lie uncultivated ; and in that abject condition all our domestic commerce would necessarily languish, till a gradual decline overwhelmed it with unavoidable destruction.

Due care is taken by all good legislators, to make every possible provision for the inferior orders, the manufacturer, the mechanic, and the labourer : these constitute a great part of the community, and contribute much to the strength and opulence of a kingdom. But the regulations made concerning provisions for the support even of those useful members of society, are to be consistent with the strictest rules of justice and equity ; for the ruling power should both defend individuals in the possession of their property, and insure the means of subsistence to all who

[6]

use honest endeavours to obtain it. This subsistence therefore must be provided without encroaching on the rights of private people, otherwise we recur to the savage laws of force, instead of those which are framed for the good of society.

Sir William Temple observes, that trade thrives best in free states; for in them it finds something peculiarly proper and natural to its prosperity. Under arbitrary restraints it will always decay; "for when men are in doubt of enjoying what they get, their diffidence extinguishes industry. And as trade cannot live without mutual trust amongst private men, so it cannot grow or thrive to any degree, without a confidence both of public and private safety; and consequently a trust in the government, from an opinion of its strength, wisdom, and justice." *

As maxims which have been founded on the observation and experience of great and eminent men who have wrote on these important subjects, will best serve to illustrate the arguments which may be offered to prove, that every undue restraint on the freedom of trade will inevitably be attended with the most pernicious consequences; the reader must expect to find such maxims frequently introduced, in the course of the following pages, the more effectually to convince those who still entertain little prejudices, and are either influenced by first appearances or terrified by trifling difficulties.

It is perhaps never more incumbent on magistrates to be extremely strict and vigilant in ascertaining

* Observations on the United Provinces. Edit. 1693. page 214.

[7]

taining the distinctions between one man's effects and another's; and preserving the rights of property to each, than in times of dearth and scarcity; because there is the utmost danger that all the bonds of society will be broken, as soon as people begin to dread a real famine; for when that is the case, mankind is reduced to a state of war: necessity has no laws; and people will feed on each other, rather than be utterly destitute of food.

Therefore, altho' in such times of dearth there may seem to be many hard and unconscionable bargains made, yet while society exists, and both buyer and seller are under the protection of laws, the rule in trade still to be observed, is the consent of the parties who fix the price; since by the law of nature every man is free to make the best advantage he can, provided there be no deceit in the coin, or imposition in the commodity.

The legislature cannot, by interposition in these matters, attempt a remedy without invading the property of one subject in favour of another; "for no public rights can be supposed to extend to the doing a private injury, any more than private rights should be extended to the power of doing a public injury, as both practices would be repugnant to the principles of social compact."

It may here be observed, that in order to obtain a supply of provisions on such terms as are consistent with the general and equitable rules of society, many foreign princes and states, who have been alarmed with apprehensions of approaching scarcity, have lately been buying and procuring provisions from neighbouring countries which are blessed with greater plenty than their

their own, and give extraordinary encouragement to those who improve and cultivate lands for the future encrease of supplies. These so salutary measures are highly commendable, and truly conformable to the rules of well ordered society ; as would an equal tax on the rich to buy at any rate, and in any part of the world, all necessary provision for the helpless and the distressed.

Bags of money, which will procure corn, are equal to bags of hoarded corn ; if therefore, on any exigency, the legislative power touches the corn of one subject, and spares the gold of another, it acts oppressively and unjustly.

The man who has lead (for instance) to sell, and would buy gold for one purpose, and wheat for another, may as well complain that in the way of traffic he who has gold values it too highly, as that he who has wheat over-rates his commodity, and he has also just the same pretence to plunder one as the other ; for, as Mr. Locke very wisely observes, " He that will justly estimate that value of any thing, must consider its quantity in proportion to its vent, for this alone regulates the price."*

It is in vain therefore to attempt an effectual reduction in the price of any thing by law : an act for such a purpose would serve only to increase the arts of the buyer and seller to evade the law : it might give them trouble and perplexity, but would not answer the purpose for which it was intended.

But supposing the act so contrived that it answer'd the purpose of it's institution, and actually ascertained the intrinsic value of a commodity ; never-

* Essays on Money, Interest, &c. p. 61.

nevertheless, the strict execution of such a law would be attended with that worst of all oppressions, the invasion of property ; and what obligation can a man owe, or what allegiance can be due to any state, that will not defend him in his right over his own goods ?

The affection of every subject will be secured to government, while government yields him a necessary protection ; and it must be owing to the indolence and weakness of those in power, if the people are not kept in due order and subjection.

It must be acknowledged that it is a matter deserving consideration, how far the internal frame of our great state machine is ill constructed or impaired ; and how far any neglect in the reparation of its faults may have contributed to advance the price of all provisions and manufactures, so as to endanger the ruin of the very commerce which has made us great.

Among many other causes which enhance the price of commodities, one of the chief is the want of that protection from government, which secures the property of inferior traders, so necessary, as above hinted, to the well being of a state.

The difficulty also, not to say the impossibility of recovering small debts (viz. such as are under the value of 10 l. or in some places 40 s) obliges the trader to exact large profits on those things which he sells to poor labourers or manufacturers.

'Tis utterly impossible to hinder one man from trusting another, by any discouragements from government ; it seems likewise to be a dangerous experiment in society to destroy the trust and confidence which even the meanest people repose in each other, by giving impunity to those
wretches

wretches who shall violate such trust or confidence.

Yet there have not been wanting men in this kingdom, who, finding applications by great numbers of the lower ranks of people for relief in these matters, incommodious to them as magistrates, have insisted on the necessity of discouraging and destroying all such private credit as falls within those narrow bounds; and who, to that end, would put it out of the power of creditors for small sums, to find redress by law.

From hence it is, that we have more general complaints of profligacy and wickedness in the common people, than any other country. Profusion and drunkenness are the vices of English ease and spirit; and perhaps our climate may contribute to these evident imperfections. The unhappy man who exhausts in an evening the industry of a week, sinks the reward of his labour, deadens his vigour, and perhaps destroys his health; and all this he will say he has a right to do as a freeborn Englishman: for whatever restraints are laid on trade, there are very few laws made for keeping the common people within the bounds of morality or temperance. The ecclesiastical laws do not operate against poor people; we therefore inflict no punishments on them for adultery, incest, lying, and other vices very pernicious to society. A poor wretch may promise very punctually to pay a debt, and may perhaps intend it when he first obtains the loan of any thing; but if he should be dishonest, or should be disabled by any accident from performing such a promise, how is he to be compelled?

The laws of England do not consider labour and money † or land to be on a par, so that the workman who earns half an ounce of silver every day, is as well able to pay any sum of money, and contribute to any public expence, as he who has an estate in land of forty-five pounds a year; therefore our laws do not compel a man to labour for the payment of debts; for if he is thrown into prison, his labour is lost to his creditor, and perhaps to the public; and in many instances, if he can prove himself to be destitute of money or goods, the creditor is obliged to cancel the debt, whilst the landed man in the like circumstances may be kept a prisoner during life.

But that kind of dishonesty in the lowest of the people, which has the worst effect on the prices of our manufacturers, is the refusing to pay such debts as the law does not take cognizance of, nor punish in any adequate manner, viz. debts which are under ten pounds. In this case the debtor knows that the money cannot be recovered but at an expence exceeding ten pounds, if he has any mind to contest the point with his creditor; so that nothing but the spirit of revenge ever stirs up traders to punish this kind of dishonesty, because 'tis attended with such expence and trouble.

The trader takes another method to indemnify himself. As he neither will, nor can bear these losses without inevitable ruin, he makes the honest and industrious poor people pay every one of them a part of their dishonest neighbour's

† Sir William Petty looked upon this notion of the par of land and labour, to be one of the most important considerations in political oecomonics.

debts, by exacting such a profit on his goods, as, however necessary to his support under these circumstances, would be exorbitant if he did not run such risks.

The uncertainty therefore of payment in such cases, is one cause of the exorbitant profits on the necessaries of life. The traders, however, are not herein deserving of blame; for they do no more than reason and law will justify. Every man who has prudence will, in every action of life, endeavour to proportion his gains to his risks; or, in other words, no man will undertake any business but with a view to an adequate reward. The method then to be taken by the legislature with such retailers, should be to lessen the risk, by vesting a power in some of the inferior departments of magistracy, to hear and determine in a summary manner (perhaps the assistance of a jury, to be summoned as easily as a coroner's jury, would give most satisfaction to the people and be an ease to magistrates) such causes between debtor and creditor as shall not be of a concern or value exceeding ten pounds.

It is left to the breast of magistrates, in many instances, to determine (without a jury) matters of much greater consequence to the liberty and property of British subjects, particularly in affairs relating to the excise; land-tax; and post-office; than any unjust or injudicious determination on this point could occasion.

It is not foreign to the present purpose just to hint, that the laws in England relating to the parish poor, or the abuse and neglect of those laws, must very much affect the prices of all things. The hand that is idle, instead of being a benefit, becomes detrimental to society; because it steals from

from the hand which is employed; and because the nourishment which should support the industrious is drained away to feed the lazy. In other countries every man must work, or expect a speedy distress; here there is no such dread among the lower ranks of people: they generally rely on the parish for a maintenance on every frivolous pretence; and they demand relief in cases wherein they would be afraid to request a charity in some countries.

No misconduct, extravagance, or debauchery that poor persons have been guilty of, is to be alledged against them by the parish-officers; the poor must be maintained, whether they are disabled from supporting themselves by any inevitable accident, or by their vices.

The necessities of the aged, the sick, and the orphan, ought to be supplied at all times, as should the real wants of all other distressed persons; for momentary necessities will sometimes befall the most industrious: but the baron De Montesquieu gives it as his opinion in these cases, "That as the evil is momentary, transient assistances are much better than perpetual foundations." * May not a hint be taken from the before-mentioned maxim? viz. Labour and money are at all times equivalent to each other (in certain degrees and proportions); any relief therefore granted to poor persons on any emergency, should be deemed a debt contracted by such poor persons, who should always be liable to pay it, whenever bodily health or improved condition enables them to do it.

It is thought a great benefit to the poor in Holland, that they can obtain loans from the pub-

* Sp. of Laws, B. xxiii. Chap. 29.

public on very easy terms ; this relief, by means of the parish-officers in England, would be more extensive. Such officers might enter every sum, print and publish the state of the parish accounts every year, for the inspection of all the parishioners, who would easily judge whether such neighbours as had at any time received relief were able to repay it.

Something should be done ; for 'tis no small burthen on the trade and manufactures of this country, to pay three millions per annum to support in a useless, not to say idle state of life, so great a number of people ; when, by the proper application of a considerably less sum, they might probably be rendered serviceable.

The poor-tax is a growing one ; it has been encreasing ever since its commencement at a prodigious rate ; for at the latter end of the reign of Charles II. it was said to amount to no more than 665362 *l.* per annum.

If any remedy can be applied to the real and increasing evils which have crept into our system of civil government, it were better to have recourse to such remedies, than attempt to force a price on any thing by law.

We know, from the example of the Dutch, that freedom of trade will always fill markets in proportion to the call ; and reduce prices at one market nearly to the level of any other distant market, allowing for carriage.

As the Dutch ports are always open, they have all provisions on the cheapest terms they can be procured in any part of the world ; and it is remarkable, that although they raise no corn, comparatively speaking, yet in dear times theirs is the cheapest market in Europe ; and landed gentlemen in England have formed schemes (which how-

however were never carried into execution) to prohibit the Irish from buying corn of the Dutch, for the sake of keeping up the nominal value of our lands by confining the Irish to our markets.

We of this nation pique ourselves upon being a sensible people (and in some instances very justly) ; yet with regard to the general interest in the necessary supply of provisions, and in the encouragement thereby given to manufactures, no nation is guilty of greater absurdities.

We call this a provision-country ; and in order to obtain a share in the trade of provisions which is carried on throughout the world, we give an enormous bounty ; yet for fear land should not keep up to a certain nominal value, we shut our ports against grain of all sorts ; particularly against oats at certain low prices, and against some other provisions which are raised by our fellow-subjects in Ireland and North-America.

We call this a manufacturing-country, and yet disable our industrious mechanics from furnishing themselves with necessary subsistence at the natural and intrinsic price,* which would empower them to vie with their rivals in other nations. Indeed, we prohibit foreign manufactures from being worn here, though they make a progress all over the world besides, to the infinite detriment of our own.

Trade will follow cheapness ; if we desire a share in the trade of manufactures, can we render those manufactures too cheap ? If a share in the provision-trade, can provisions be too plenty ?

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* Besides which, we impose very unjust and unequal taxes ; a gentleman drinks as good beer at 2 *d.* a quart as a poor mechanic does at 4 *d.* one man pays as much per annum land-tax on 1000 *l.* as another on 10000 *l.*

Two ship-loads of corn, at thirty shillings per quarter, will bring more money into the kingdom, employ more sailors, and more raise the value of land, than one such ship-load at fifty shillings per quarter. Can corn then be too cheap here for our manufactures, for the encouragement of population, or even for the advancement of the landed interest?

We complain of the increase of horses, and of the immense consumption of oats: why should we not import oats at all times? not for horses only, but for all kinds of cattle. How many corn-fed oxen would be brought to market, if oats could be bought cheap enough for that purpose?

Buying up the superfluity of corn, in times of plenty, is a great encouragement in agriculture; if our farmers find themselves under-sold in one sort of grain, they will raise the more of another.

Whenever the laws to prevent the importation of cattle, butter, &c. from Ireland are in force, they give a monopoly to our breeding and dairy counties. The increase of people has increased the consumption of these things; whilst the quantity of old pasture-lands being the same as formerly, the produce of them, viz. cheese, butter, and fat meat, cannot be increased by any improvements in dairy business or grazing, in any due proportion to the increased demand.

This is perhaps the best reason which can be assigned for the extraordinary price which these commodities bear, even in times (within twenty years past) when corn has happened to be cheap.

The inclosure of waste lands, for the purposes of agriculture, will undoubtedly render corn cheap; but as the prices of butter and cheese have not fluctuated so much as the prices of corn, nor
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been rendered much lower by very plentiful crops of pasturage, there is probably no other remedy for the dearth of the former, but open ports, at all times, for Irish provisions.

In our enquiries concerning the probable causes of the rise of all sorts of provisions, we are to distinguish between the gradual rise (from the rates of former days) and the particular and sudden rise which has happened within a few years. The gradual advancement must undoubtedly be imputed to the opulent state of the kingdom.*

Money is at least nine-tenths lower (not in England only, but over most parts of Europe) than it was 100 years ago; † for every augmentation of gold, silver, jewels, or any other valuable merchandize, has this effect, that it heightens the price of labour and of all necessaries. We know by experience, that prices have risen three or four times by large strides, since money has been multiplied by extensive trading; and 'tis generally acknowledged, that paper-currency, or ideal money, has the same effect on trade as real money.

How much the nation is enriched by foreign traffic, no one can ascertain by any calculation; but we know, that the vast increase of the national debt has occasioned a great increase of stock at market; the quantity, when 140 mil-
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* The medium of the annual supplies, granted by parliament to support the wars of King William, were 5,105,505 *l.* of Queen Anne, 5,369,621 *l.* King George II. first war, 6,651,013 *l.* of King George II. and III. 13,229,376.

† In 1237 wheat was by the quarter 3*s.* 4*d.* barley 2*s.* oats 1*s.* In 1258 there was so great a famine that many people were starved, so that a quarter of wheat was sold at 16*s.*

Bp. Fleetwood's Chron. Pretiosum, p. 62.

lions of stock are in circulation, being double to what there was a few years ago, when we owed but 70 millions; the disparity must have the same effect on the prices of commodities as the accumulation of so much real cash; which, added to the profits accruing from our extensive trade for a few years past, occasions as it were a sudden influx of riches, and this, besides its effect on the *gradual* rise of provisions, has contributed, in a great measure, to their *sudden* enhancement. But the sudden rise which we now feel, and which is so generally complained of, as the consequence of forestalling, is absolutely, and beyond doubt, chiefly owing to the shortness of the late corn crops, and the smallness of the quantity at market.

We have had extremes of wet and extremes of dry weather for four or five years past; some of these seasons have been of the longest continuance ever known within the memory of man.

Every body acknowledges that excess either of dry or wet weather will obstruct vegetation, and that very rainy seasons have always been reckoned particularly hurtful to this country: yet we have had such inundations within the above-mentioned space of time, that many thousand acres of our richest and most fruitful lands have been rendered unfit for cattle to stand on; and streams of water have issued from all the *bunger* springs; (as they are called by the country people, because they formerly denoted approaching dearths and famines;) so that it is most probably owing to the cultivation of the more hilly and shallow lands, which in ancient days were not employed in agriculture, (for our fore-fathers would only bestow their labour on the best soils) that we have not experienced such dearths as the same unkindly

unkindly seasons would have occasioned in former times.

It must be acknowledged, however, that besides the scarcity from scorching droughts, and from long continued rains, the home consumption of provisions has been very considerably increased within a few years. Every city and flourishing town in Great-Britain and Ireland is enlarged (London nearly doubled): we are dispersed in colonies, where much of the home produce is taken off; shipping consumes a great deal; manufactures have exceedingly flourished (witness the high prices of wool); and the labouring people who have high wages generally spend all they earn, and therefore consume much more than when wages were low.—To all this may be added, the effects of a brisk exportation, perhaps too much encouraged by the bounty of government.

It will not admit of a doubt, whether we are benefited by the exportation of provisions; reason and experience determine in the affirmative: the people of this kingdom would have but a poor chance in the struggle for a share of the riches of the world, if by laws made here, they were prevented from obtaining the natural price, or what is called the intrinsic value, of all their commodities.

But doubts will arise concerning the propriety of bounties, except in the infant state of any undertaking; and it is a question requiring the most serious consideration, whether the bounty on corn, as it is at present managed, in its effects is not a burthen on our trade and manufactures equal to a tax of 5 s. per quarter on all the wheat which is consumed at home; and in propor-

tion on all other kinds of grain which are intitled to the bounty on exportation.*

This is a tribute paid to the landed interest, rather too great for trade (flourishing even as it is) to bear. The bounty was looked upon, when granted by an act of 1st of William and Mary, as a recompence to the landholders for the too heavy tax (as it was then thought) to be laid on them, and was expected to be really rather a discouragement to manufactures.

If the vast sums of money which have been paid by the government by way of bounty, in the course of seventy-seven years, had been applied to the improvement of the waste lands throughout this island, the rental † would not be less than it is at present, altho' provisions would be much cheaper, so as probably to force a vent for foreign markets, or (which would have been better) exceedingly to multiply the people at home.

In order to ascertain the intrinsic value of any thing, we are to suppose a point or center somewhere; to which point the variations in value must be brought. Suppose, for instance,

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* The British Merchant, vol. ii. p. 247, says, "If we were to become a province to France, we should be obliged to give a bounty on wool, as we do on our corn, that France might have it cheaper than our people." Bounties serve to feed foreigners cheaper than ourselves.

† If Dr. Davenant calculated truly, the whole rental of England in 1600 was only six mills, and the price of lands at 12 years purchase; and in 1688, the rental 14 mills, and the price of lands 18 years purchase: the income on the lands and stock in trade were, however, estimated at 20 mills. When the land-tax took place, it was said lately by a great man, to be now worth 60 mills, but has been still yearly taxed at 20 mills. How many additional duties have been laid in this space of time on beer and malt?

tin could be procured no where in the world but at one port in Cornwall, its value in every other place would be just so much as the amount of carriage, and other contingent expences, added to the prime cost.

Suppose Amsterdam the central point of the price of corn throughout Europe, (or the whole world) the superfluity of English corn must then be regulated by that price, or it will lie on hand and perish.—Where trade is open, no one will give more to his neighbour (in wholesale dealing) for any commodity than what he can purchase it for at some distant place; therefore no one will give more in London, than the price at Amsterdam added to the freight: the intrinsic value being the medium or average price between any two or more places.

The price on any spot where a merchant resides, compared with the prices in other places, determines his choice, whether to buy or sell. The fluctuation of prices is the life and soul of trade.—Suppose the merchant buys wheat in Amsterdam to bring to London, at a time when the price in London is 40s. per quarter; he must buy at, or under, 38s. 6d. the freight at least being 1s. 6d. per quarter: on the other hand, in order to sell for 40s. at Amsterdam, he cannot give more than 38s. 6d. in London.

But the legislature interferes, for the sake of keeping up the nominal value of lands, and allows a bounty on the exportation of such superfluity. In this case the merchant can give in London, 43s. 6d. being 5s. per quarter above its intrinsic value (in every other part of the universe) and of course the whole quantity of wheat in Great Britain, (which will be governed by the

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London market) is raised thereby 5s. per quarter.

The people of this kingdom, besides corn, consume many other necessaries and conveniences of life, which are incumbered with heavy duties at prices far above the real and natural value; therefore the government allows draw-backs on exportation, for the sake of our obtaining a share in the universal trade of those commodities; just as, for the sake of the landed interest, it forces a trade in corn by the allowance of bounty.

But the difference to the people in general between these two circumstances is very great; for the five shillings per quarter above par in the unnatural price (occasioned by the bounty) goes into private hands; while so much as is above par in the natural price on any commodity occasioned by taxes, is applied to public uses, and is conducive to the general good.

For as every man is bound to contribute to the public revenue, in proportion to the benefits he receives from the public protection; so no man has a right to complain, whilst particular care is taken in the imposition of taxes, that they are not unequally laid: for, as Mr. Hobbes very well observes, "A burthen which the whole body of subjects may probably think easy, and gentle, will, if any considerable number release and excuse themselves, lie heavy and insupportable upon the rest."

Equality in these cases is equity. Every one who desires to enjoy the sweets of society, is ready to pay toward the defence of himself and his fortune; nor will he complain when taxes are fairly imposed, and faithfully applied in the service of the public; especially when neither the laws
nor

nor the interpretation of them are made in favour of the rich and the powerful.

Perhaps one of the greatest mischiefs which could attend the partial institution of laws in favour of the rich, would be this, that the honesty of the common people would be corrupted: when they saw themselves oppressed, they would be ready to break out into any outrages which wicked and designing men (taking an advantage of their discontents) might prompt them to.

With respect to the first introduction of the bounty on exportation of corn, it is worthy of remark, that the quick transitions of our lawgivers in some instances from one extreme to another, seem to imply that they have been influenced more by the public opinion, and popular clamour, than by their own mature deliberation.

Poor and distressed persons are at one time such objects of general compassion, that at all events they must be provided for and maintained, as by act 45 Eliz. whether there may be employment for them in their respective parishes or not; but when we consider that act, is it not extraordinary that in the same reign a few years before, the vagabond poor, and idle people were so obnoxious to the government, and deemed so general a nuisance, as to have cruel anti-constitutional martial laws employed against them: the commission issued by the Queen expressing, "that upon signification given by the justices of the peace, they should be openly executed in the presence of such justices, according to the martial law."

How wavering was the conduct of our government in the reign of Charles II, and William and Mary, with respect to that important point,
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the exportation of corn! In the beginning of Charles II's reign, the prohibitive against it was absolute. In 1663 an act passed "*for the encouragement of trade,*" wherein wheat at 48 s. barley at 28 s. the quarter, are permitted to be exported, but encumbered with tonnage and poundage amounting to 20 s. on each quarter of wheat, and 10 s. on each quarter of barley.— In 1670 another act passed "*for the improvement of tillage,*" in which the exportation of corn is allowed, altho' the prices thereof exceed the former rates; and this act greatly lessens the custom and poundage. By these means agriculture was enlarged and improved, and as the advantages of exportation so evidently appeared, could too much be then done to promote it?—If foreigners would buy seven bushels, we would for the sake of export give them the eighth (at 40 s. per quarter); therefore in 1688, the act passed to allow a bounty where corn should be sold at a low price.

Here it is observable, that, notwithstanding money was more valuable then than now, yet by the act in 1670, corn was permitted to be exported when it should be at higher rates than when by the act in 1688, it was intitled to the bounty, viz. the bounty to be paid when wheat should not exceed 48 s. per quarter, &c. which is here reckoned within the boundaries of what the act calls a low price; yet at this price, in the year 1766, when this country abounds with cash and other wealth, we are all in an uproar, and seem to dread a famine, from which commercial states have always the least to fear.

By our extensive trade and navigation we have brought many millions of money into this kingdom, so that the wages of our manufacturers and

labourers exceed those of any other nation, and our people can afford to buy provisions from their mouths.

We have fellow-subjects in America, who have lands so plenty, that they can perhaps raise corn cheaper than any people in Europe.

We have fellow-subjects in Ireland, who sell beef, pork, butter, cattle, &c. to other European nations, cheaper than they can be bought any where else; and we have as absolute a power over their ports, with respect to embargoes and prohibitions, as we have over our ports in America, or our ports immediately at home.

We have shipping in abundance, that can bring the necessaries of life from any cheaper country, where our money will be very acceptable in exchange; and if there be any provisions to be found in the whole world, such provisions are most peculiarly within our reach. Yet among us, the noble, generous, exalted friends to the rights and liberties of mankind;—one fellow subject rails, and even proceeds to outrages against another, because provisions are dear, in such a manner as would scarcely be expected from the lawless Arab or the savage of America; for surely nothing can disgrace a country more than the plundering of merchants and fair traders; men who act agreeable to the laws of their country, and who have an equal title with every other fellow subject to protection.

If the author of these sheets should be thought to express himself with too much vehemence and severity in some instances, he desires to make this excuse;—That he is a great sufferer by outrages, which he thinks have been too much countenanced by many who should better know the duties due to society. He is however injured

in a still more tender part than his property, by attacks on his good name; by the reproaches of his countrymen and acquaintance, with which the injury done to his property by the riotous and plundering mob, (tho' very considerable) are not to be mentioned. To be treated as a contraband dealer; and calumniated, as an enemy to his country, by some whom he would wish to be his friends, are things which sensibly affect him; especially when his only crime is to carry on a fair trade (as he believes his to be) in his proper and constant calling, viz. buying by wholesale in the country, an article of common consumption for the supply of the city of London.

Here he would add a few words in behalf of the poor deluded wretches who have in so many parts of the kingdom been excited to commit such riots, thefts, and other high crimes and misdemeanours, as, if prosecuted to the utmost rigour of the law, would incur the forfeiture of their lives.

When provisions are dear and hunger pinches, 'tis natural for people to complain: the truly industrious poor will do rather more work than abate in quantity of food, which, however, makes work the scarcer; and 'tis double distress to have provisions rise and labour sink. This excites murmuring and discontents, which at first reach only the ears of their immediate employers, who, when urged to pay higher wages on account of the dearness of necessaries, are glad to shift the blame on others, and too readily lay it on the dealers in provision; in this too (fatally for such dealers) they have the countenance of some old laws.—These laws are printed in every news-paper, and stuck up in every corner, by order of the justices, to intri-

midate

midate the engrossers, against whom many murmurings are propagated.—The common people are taught to entertain a very high opinion and reverence for these laws; and indeed they seem chiefly adapted to the capacities and notions of the lowest order of mankind, who have no other idea of trade than the exchange of one thing for another, and can see no reason why the price of food should vary more than the price of labour. The advance of price in the former is imputed to the rapaciousness of the owners,—or to the preference given to foreign nations, who buy up provisions here on purpose to starve, and then to conquer us.—What will not the fear of want (artfully excited by superiors; put a man upon doing?—Under this terror he grows desperate;—groundless terror indeed! when, by submission to the rules of civil society, every poor man (here in England) is entitled to a maintenance when he falls into distress: but some of our rioters have been so infatuated as to think they were only assisting the execution of wholesome laws, and doing their country service.—So far therefore as they were under the influence of ill advisers, they are intitled to compassion from us, and lenity from the laws.

They would of themselves perhaps be less fond of reviving the statutes and regulations of Edward VI. if they were aware that some acts passed in his reign were more severe against certain poor persons, than even against forestallers; for the act 1. Edw. VI. after declaring in the preamble, “that idle and vagabond persons, “being unprofitable members, or rather enemies “of the commonwealth, have been suffered to “remain and increase, whom if they should be “punished with death, whipping, and imprison-

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ment,

ment, it were not without their deserts, for "the example of others,"—it is enacted, That any idle person shall be mark'd with a hot iron in the breast with a V, and shall be a slave, and be oblig'd to work by beating, chaining, &c. and if he run away, he shall suffer death as a felon. Concerning the severity of this act, Mr. Ruffhead observes, that the offence herein punished, viz. the idleness of the poor, was probably more the fault of the state than of the poor themselves.* — The condition of the poor of England (as is most reasonable it should be) is much altered for the better by laws now in force: they have the least cause to complain of any poor in the world; and it is surprising that, even in those days of ignorance fellow-creatures should be so treated only because they were unfortunate. †

The laws concerning trade in provisions made in this reign, will perhaps be found to differ as much from the spirit of the present times, and the nature of commerce, as the above recited act relating to the treatment of the poor. — We were then indeed only emerging from a state of ignorance and darkness, with respect to trade;—this island some ages before, being little better than a barren desert.—Our present opulence, power, and splendor, are, however, owing to trade, and to improved maxims relating thereto.

* Preface to ix. Vol. of Stat. at large, page 10.

† Possibly, from a mistaken notion, (as in the case of witchcraft) that the injunctions of the Old Testament were rules for civil government in christian countries; for Levit. xxv. verse 39 and 47. if a man was waxen poor, he might sell himself, or be sold for a slave. From the same mistaken notion must that statute have had its rise, which prohibited the taking interest of money; yet in the statute made in this king's reign, for the observation of the sabbath, it is permitted that harvest-work may be done on that day.

thereto.—But so long did we remain in ignorance, that until after the Revolution, our native produce and manufactures paid a duty on exportation, and the most useful materials for manufacture paid a duty on importation: this is mentioned to shew, that the ancient laws were not so wise or so salutary as some persons seem desirous to represent them.

Amongst the absurd laws of our forefathers, none are more justly complained of than the statutes relating to provisions of 5 and 6 Edw. VI. However, to shew the narrow spirit of the times, it may be proper to take notice of the act concerning usury, framed by the same parliament, which necessarily must have occasioned a great deal of trouble both to magistrates and people; and was therefore soon after repealed, while those acts which relate to provisions were suffered to remain in force; which can perhaps be no otherwise accounted for, than that the inconvenience of the statutes relative to usury were experienced; but the inconvenience of the others seldom occurred, as they were only in force when provisions were dear.

This parliament, of the 5 and 6 Ed. VI. could not perceive, when money should be lent to purchase land, or any other thing, that it was reasonable for the lender to have some little share of the rent or profits arising from such purchase; therefore it was enacted, That no person should lend any sum of money, for any manner of usury, interest, or increase, to be received or hoped for, above the sum lent, upon pain to forfeit the principal and interest, to suffer imprisonment, and to be fined at the king's pleasure.

'Tis worth observing, that when the profits of commerce and manufactures rendered it necessary

fary to permit the lending of money upon interest, and to fix the legal rate of it at ten in the hundred; the statute Eliz. 13, 8. declares, that all usury which shall or may be reserved above the principal (though permitted by this law of the land) is forbidden by the law of God, and that it is a sin, and detestable.

The proviso in a subsequent act, 21 James I. c. 17. is much more soft and uncensuring, viz. "That no words in this law shall be expounded to allow the practice of usury (by which was then meant, taking the legal interest) in point of religion or conscience."

Thus we see, that in those days of piety, it was equally forbidden by the laws of this land, to take interest on money, or to make profits on provision: but both are not declared equally sinful; for though buying to sell again was deemed to be an hurtful practice, because the profit on such traffic was then thought rather an extortion on the consumer, than a just reward for the labour of procuring provisions, yet it was not represented to be so heinous a sin as taking interest on money, because (as it was thought) money could do no labour.

Those who complain that they are peculiarly hurt by the dearness of provisions, because their incomes only arise from the use of money in the public funds, should pay a little attention to this point, and should consider, whether the dearness is not more owing to the great quantity of funded money, for which so many millions are yearly paid by way of interest, than to any practice that can be proved upon those concerned in the provision-trade.

Is the nature of things changed with the times? Was it harmless then, in the sight of God,
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to buy provisions for the sake of profit, and is it sinful now?

Is it not a happy circumstance to monied people, and to the peace of the kingdom, that the popular indignation is not artfully excited against the proprietors of our funds; and the more especially, as texts of scripture, as well as old statutes, may be urged against putting money to use: yet the monied people ought not to be too secure, for it has been more than once publicly mentioned, as a judicious measure, to pay off the national debt with a sponge.

As the humour of the mob is as changeable as the wind, will it not be prudent, for the sake of that peace and tranquility which the monied people now enjoy, to avoid, as much as possible, every cause of disturbance; especially, to avoid this extraordinary pretence, that the power and spirit of the mob is necessary to enforce the laws?

Notwithstanding the distinctions of some, and the enquiries which have been made by others, whether it be reconcileable to rules of equity, that dealers in victuals should be subjected to particular rates; will it easily enter into the heads of sensible men, that extortion and deceit are not as criminal in traffic for a coat as in traffic for a cow?

The law of nature and the common law of England allow every individual to make the most of his property, by fair dealing and honesty; and, by the statute laws, forestalling, ingrossing, and regrating are expressly permitted, except under certain circumstances; for, by this very statute of 5 and 6 Edward VI. when wheat shall be commonly at the price of 6s. 8d. and barley 3s. 4d. the quarter or under, it shall be lawful to ENCROSS and keep all corn, grain, &c. And by
stat.

stat. 5 Eliz. chap. 5. certain commodities, viz. fish, oil, wine, salt, &c. are, by the express words of the act, permitted to be FORESTALLED and REGRATED.

Can any thing be more absurd? Can any thing expose the ignorance of the times more, even with respect to the internal frame of government* — than a law which lays a restraint on any commodities in trade, at a time when such commodities shall be dear, but takes off those restraints when such commodities shall become cheap.

When a thing is cheap, will it not bear little impediments? will it not force its way like a torrent? Are not the number of difficulties in trade exceedingly increased between the grower and consumer, by unnecessary carriage to markets, by the payment of tolls, and by the necessity of badgers, and licences for these badgers? and do not these regulations necessarily enhance the price?

If badgers are necessary, and 'tis necessary they should be appointed by magistrates, why must they be married men? can they afford to do business on cheaper terms than single men? — Why must they be thirty years of age? can they do more labour, or be more active in their business than single men? — If 'tis proper for all things to be sold *in* market, why are badgers expressly

* The more simple ideas of order and equity are sufficient to guide a legislator, in every thing that regards the internal administration of justice: but the principles of commerce are much more complicated, and require long experience and deep reflection to be well understood in any state. The real consequence of a law or practice is there often contrary to first appearances. *Hume's History of England under the House of Tudor*, vol. i. p. 61.

expressly permitted by licence to buy *out* of market?

Can justices of the peace refuse to grant licences to any person who has the legal qualifications? — Is honesty, or any other moral quality, prescribed by the law? — Are licences void which may happen to be granted to unmarried men, &c.?

If justices of the peace have a power to refuse licences to all but their friends, have they not a power to grant a monopoly? If they have no power to refuse, of what use then is the licence to badgers, but to give such privileges and exclusive rights to certain country-dealers, as are found to restrain trade, and to retard the progress of manufactures in such places as are incorporated, and all men excluded who are not free.*

Can a law be deemed in force now, which restrains buying and selling (at large or in any manner) during such time only as wheat shall be at 10 d. a bushel; especially when subsequent acts have taken off all restraints, for the sake of exportation, and permitted such exportation at more than 6 s. per bushel. — Are not Englishmen to be tried by the strict letter of every law? how then can forestalling, &c. exist now as at first? It was lawful when wheat was at 9 d. a bushel, which was then very common. But as these Statutes of Edward the Sixth have been referred to a few years ago, by the highest authority, and are still so frequently spoken of with reverence and respect, especially amongst the
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* In the year 1533, and not before, foreign butchers were permitted to sell their flesh in Leadenhall market. By foreign butchers Mr. Stow means, such as had not taken the freedom of London.

Bp. Fleetwood's Chron. Preciosum, p. 94.

lowest people, it may not be amiss to put a few queries concerning them.

Is forestalling, or the buying any thing on the road, &c. before it is stalled or placed in the market, a thing practised by any persons in our days? or, if practised, is it hurtful?—If a man buys a thing before 'tis in the market, he has a less demand on the market.—Will it not make an ox, for instance, the dearer to the consumer, if a butcher, twenty miles from Smithfield, must be compelled to go to that market to buy the ox which was passing by his door? and is not the grazier's expence likewise increased, by travelling to such market and back again?

Can the buying, with intent to sell again, which is deemed engrossing, be punishable by a law which was made when there was no buying to sell again, except by the purveyors, &c. who were exempted from the penalties of the act? As at that time the growers of corn and the breeders of cattle sold in small quantities to every consumer in market towns in the country, there was no trading in those things, because people subsisted themselves on the produce of their lands;—therefore it was not so great an absurdity then as it would be now, to make it criminal to buy, with an intent to sell again.

As to regrating, would not any one esteem it a favour, if he happened to come into a market so late, as that all of any commodity which he wanted was bought up, if another person, who had arrived in time, would oblige him with some share of his purchase?

But after all, are not these laws inexplicable, as the exceptions seem to extend to all persons who buy or sell, as butchers, poulterers, &c. in such

such manner as concerns their trade, or any other persons being duly licensed?

The law which forbids farmers to buy for seed, except they sell the same quantity of the same sort of corn in the same market on the same day, is as contradictory to reason and the principles of agriculture as any thing can be. Besides confining the farmer to the very day, by which he may be obliged to submit to an exorbitant price, 'tis frequently the interest of the farmer to have seed from very distant markets, and different soil; whilst, for the sake of change, his seed may be wanted by other farmers, at places that lie in contrary directions.

The statute against unlawful combinations is of a piece with the rest: it is an offence that is not, that cannot be practised by any persons in our days, and as trade is now carried on.—The offence is thus described by the statute 2 and 3 Edward VI. passed A. D. 1548. “Forasmuch
“as of late divers sellers of victuals, not contented with moderate and reasonable gain, but
“minding to have and take for their victuals,
“so much as lust them, have conspired and covenanted together, &c. For reformation
“thereof it is ordained and enacted, by the
“king our sovereign lord, the lords and commons, &c. that if any persons shall conspire,
“covenant, promise, or make any oaths, that
“they shall not sell their victuals but at a certain price or rule, shall forfeit, for the first offence, ten pounds to the king's highness, &c.

Is this a description of the transactions of any set of people in our days? Can our dealers in food fix what price they please on the buyers by any engagements which, by oaths, they may bind themselves to the performance of? Or if 1000

pounds were offered for discovery of an offender, in what manner could it be possible to find him out ?

Can any thing, but a monopoly, enable the feller of any commodity to fix his own price ? Can any capital, or association in Europe, collect in the necessaries of life, a quantity sufficient to raise the general value ?

Can any government on earth raise the rate of interest, or sink it at discretion ? Is not the rate of interest lower in Holland than anywhere else, notwithstanding there is no legal standard, and that any man may sue for ten per cent, or upwards, if he can prove an agreement for it ? Can we in England even fix the value of money ? Is not coin (both gold and silver) daily sold for more than the legal standard ?

Are not the principal buyers of provisions, the exporters, the brewers, the meal-men and the distillers ? Are not these truly informed, concerning the prices of the articles of their consumption in all markets ? Will they not buy where the price is lowest, and regulate the London market accordingly ?

Are there more dealers or jobbers now than there were fifty years ago, in the space of which time, have not provisions been moderately cheap ? Were the jobbers then less covetous of profit, or had they then less power over markets than now ?

Do not jobbers at least reduce prices at those markets to which they bring any provisions from cheaper countries ? If in these after-times, the old statutes concerning provisions have been found pernicious in their effects ; if they have been found incompatible with English liberty, and the rights which every man ought to have over his own goods ; if they have been revived as
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the instruments of oppression by one subject over another, in violation of our improved constitution ; is it not high time to seek for some redress, by an humble petition to parliament, for a repeal or an amendment of these laws ?

For many magistrates have been officiously active, urged, as they say, by the sufferings of the people, to take the letter of these almost forgotten and disregarded statutes for the rule of their conduct in the prosecution of some submissive hucksters, and indigent or terrified jobbers. — Some of these magistrates have even exceeded the letter, and strained the meaning of these exploded laws, in the exercise of their power ; have encouraged and entered into associations, not to suffer any grain to be sold by sample ; have published notices, that they will reward informers against such as buy in that manner, and punish, by prosecution, all those who shall buy or sell any provision, except in open market.

How much soever the principal factors and more opulent husbandmen have affected to despise the menaces and summons of these gentlemen (well knowing they are not invested with so much power, in these points, as they wish to exercise : and conceiving that even these statutes of Edward VI. could never be brought into use and reputation in the king's courts at Westminster, in these better times, and under our improved constitution) : yet 'tis now a matter of serious consideration to such traders and farmers, that, according to the strict letter of these statutes, if revivable, they are liable to many inconveniences in their several callings : harrassed by laws respecting trade, which were framed at a time when there was no trade ; when the buying any provision, with intent to
sell

fell again, was deemed an offence ; when the liberty of Englishmen was put into the hands of petty tyrants, and made dependent on the price of wheat ; when their properties might be seized, under the pretence of hurtful combinations, which (if practicable then) are impracticable now.

For many years past, the traders in, and owners of food have experienced the same protection as the traders in other commodities ; therefore very few of the former entertained apprehensions that they were offending the laws, or were liable to become obnoxious to their neighbours, in those times especially when they might be most useful.

Instead of the esteem which they thought themselves, and those of their profession, intitled to, as necessary members of the community, they have lately experienced abuse and reproach from many people of all ranks and degrees, who are exasperated against them, as the supposed causes of public calamities.

Yet their prosecutors, who pretend so much to the feelings of humanity for the starving poor, do not examine whether the poor are really starving ; or by what arts or practices any set of men can so effectually engross the fruits of the earth to themselves, as to lay the rest of mankind under contributions :—or how, in these instances, the few should be an over-match for the many ; or the weak overcome the strong.

How contradictory to reason then is it, to suppose a scarcity can be brought about by wicked men ? yet such a notion is not too extravagant to be imbibed by an infinite number of people.—'Tis in vain to talk of reason, or to urge the impossibility of it, by any human means—every extraordinary

dinary event is attributed to some cause or other:—The common people have generally prepossessioned opinions, and a readiness to give an implicit credit to wonders ; they resolve all difficulties in the manner they have been taught ; no matter whether right or wrong :—when their neighbour's cattle happen to die of the murrain or the rot, they often impute the calamity to witchcraft, because they know no better ; and are as strongly attached to many prejudices of their forefathers, as if these prejudices were the most positive truths.

Although the belief of enchantments does not so much prevail in this country as formerly, yet 'tis observable, the repeal of the act against witchcraft could not be accomplished till the reign of George II. Some recent instances of the common people's zeal against witchcraft, seem to shew, that the repeal of that act has not removed the prejudices of many ignorant and obstinate bigots among all ranks of people.

The difficulty which occurred to our forefathers, in discovering the artifices of the engrossers and forestallers, is perhaps the reason, that in the king's commission for the appointment of justices of the peace, enchantments, forceries, arts magic, forestallings, regratings, and ingrossings are ranged together, as offences of a similar nature ; because they were committed by wicked persons, in a manner both amazing and unknown.

It is probably in compliance with these prejudices, that justices of the peace are still directed, by the king's commission, fully to enquire and inform themselves of the truth and reality of these offences, viz. forceries, engrossings, &c. on the oaths of good and lawful men.

Fortunately for the reputed witches, they have not now so much to fear from the laws as the reputed engrossers; for where there can be any pretence for persecution, there will always be found some persons of pernicious principles, who will promote base interests by popular delusions.

The arts of rhetoric were a few years ago employed against witches, in charges from justices of the peace to juries, which, upon the comparison, may be found to vie, in decency of language and minuteness of description, with the celebrated charge concerning forestallers and engrossers, which was delivered to the grand jury of Westminster by Sir John Fielding. One would think this zealous magistrate had imbibed a portion of the same spirit that actuated that Solomon of his age, king James I.* who “ moved, “ (as he tells us) by the fearful abounding, at “ this time in this country, of those detestable “ slaves of the devil, the witches or enchanters, “ dispatched in post his treatise of Deomonologie;” in the conclusion whereof, he gives it as his opinion, that “ Since in a matter of treason against the prince, bairnes or wives, or “ never so diffamed persons, may serve for sufficient witness; by a far greater reason such “ witnesses may be sufficient in matters of high-treason against God :” adding besides, “ That “ there are two other good helps that may be “ used for their trial : the one is the finding of “ their mark, and the trying the insensibility “ thereof; the other is their floating on the water; for it appears, that God hath appointed “ (for a supernatural sign of the monstrous impiety of witches) that the water shall refuse to “ receive

* Works Folio, p. 91, 135 and 136.

“ receive them in her bosome, that have shaken
“ off them the sacred water of baptisme.”

Thus to a fictitious crime is added the most doubtful, equivocal, infamous kind of proof: nevertheless, in the first year of his reign, an act passed to punish the offence with death; and the people, stimulated by the royal example, and that of the two houses of parliament, were so busy in detecting it, that many an old woman,

“ Some only for not being drown'd,
“ Others for sitting above ground,
“ Whole days and nights upon their breeches,
“ And feeling pain, were hang'd for witches.”

HUDIBRAS.

'Tis to be hoped that the zeal at present stirred up against Sir J.—F.—'s monster, (after the first surprize is over) will be more according to knowledge.

This eminent and public-spirited justice of the peace seems to ground his opinion on something more than meer suspicion, concerning “ the “ great number of forestallers, &c. who, he “ says, are a disgrace to human nature, and a “ dishonour to a christian country;” he acknowledges that “ the monsters have seldom “ been exposed to open view.” He is one of the first champions that have opened the hunt after them, and speaks as if he was as expert in the ways of pursuit, and knew their haunts as well as those of the young bucks and old bawds of the Garden; some people may imagine that by the description, so exactly correspondent to their own ideas, he has really caught some of them for very strange and surprising animals: he paints them as “ monsters in human shape, “ and objects shocking to human sight; they col-
G “ lect

“ left together the common necessaries of life,
 “ the better to counteract the benevolence of
 “ Providence, and to grind the face of the poor,
 “ by making an artificial scarcity : their crime
 “ is of the deepest dye, and an insult to God ;”
 nay, so exceedingly horrible and tremendous
 are these creatures, that, according to the ex-
 periences, or the opinion of this gentleman,
 their powers exceed those of enchantment ; for
 “ by their arts and avarice they occasion exorbi-
 “ tant prices, after as plentiful harvests and
 “ abundant pasture, as ever have been remem-
 “ bred ;” they are to be detested as “ much as
 “ blasphemers, incendiaries, and murderers ; and
 “ therefore he hopes the legislature will facili-
 “ tate the prosecution of them.”

After such descriptions of the characters and
 of the crimes of forestallers, regrators, and
 engrossers, can it be wondered at, that the
 common people have been stirred up to extir-
 pate them ?

Those who are sufferers by the mob, yet
 whose lives are spared, have reason (considering
 this description of crimes charged upon them)
 to be thankful they have excited that mercy.

I will not say, on this occasion, that the people
 were industriously frightened with phantoms, by
 those whose business it was to allay their fears ;
 but I will venture to remark, that there has been
 something very unaccountable in the speeches
 and actions of some principal men, from whose
 knowledge and experience in business, a dif-
 ferent conduct might have been expected ; for
 I would not willingly suspect that they desired
 to pay court to the vulgar, or multiply their
 friends into a mob, by ill-timed concessions and
 ill-adviced compliances.

The

The abilities and integrity of the great men,
 into whose hands the care of the nation is com-
 mitted, has been so often proved, that we can-
 not suspect them of a design to facilitate any base
 project against the trade of this country, how
 much soever it may seem that the first and
 greatest outcries against the dealers in provisions,
 have been made by those who appear to be un-
 der ministerial influence.

The ministers at this present time cannot be
 chargeable with setting an example of severe ex-
 pressions in public acts of state, as in the instance
 of the proclamation against forestallers, engros-
 sers, &c. in the reign of the late king, (Nov.
 1756) wherein they are described as open op-
 pressors of the poor, and enemies of their coun-
 try.

It is natural even to the greatest men, and
 oftentimes very commendable, to court applause,
 by pursuing popular measures, in order to con-
 ciliate the esteem of the people ; for 'tis a very
 disagreeable task to make alterations even for
 the better, in times of public discontent ; there-
 fore wise ministers always take care not to excite
 prejudices against a class of men who are under
 the protection of laws, because it is always dan-
 gerous to give such a sanction to the outrages
 which people who are at variance commit against
 each other ; for if it should happen that, besides
 such variance, there should be among them a
 struggle for bread, and party-rage should be
 heightened by hunger, the most dreadful con-
 sequences might ensue.

We are therefore to suppose that the great
 men who were at the helm some time ago, had
 the most exact intelligence of the effects which
 the rains, the floods and inundations had pro-
 duced

duced on the land; when the authority of a proclamation, by command of his present majesty, determined great numbers of people to impute scarcity, not to unkindly seasons, but to artifices of men. We are further to consider that those people who were determined in their opinions, by that authority, might judge too hastily; for it is only expressed, that there was the greatest reason to “suspect that the present high prices
 “of provisions do not arise from scarcity, but
 “from unlawful combinations;—and, in order
 “to prevent all unlawful combinations for the
 “enhancing the price of provisions, and for an
 “encouragement to all who shall discover any
 “concerned in such illegal practices, all persons
 “who shall so discover and cause such offend-
 “ers to be convicted, shall be entitled to a re-
 “ward of one hundred pounds.”

Benevolence to mankind in general, and compassion to the injured, are the virtues of exalted minds; and every one who has the distresses of the poor at heart, will commend such means as these, if they are found to silence the tumultuous cries of the people for bread; but if, after all, such methods should prove inadequate to the grievance, and the offer of such a reward should not bring offenders to justice; what will be thought of it? How will the people determine on the question, whether the combinations are so artfully and secretly entered into, as to evade all the power of laws, and all the vigilance of magistrates? or are such illegal combinations utterly impracticable, in the manner trade is now carried on?—People of different dispositions and capacities will differ in their determinations on these points; and, as is usual, great numbers will adhere to their first received opinions, assert the

the possibility of such combinations, and call out for severe laws to suppress them.

It is indeed acknowledged on all hands, and experience shews, that no laws which were enacted against these combinations will answer the end for which they were intended; and it is confidently asserted by some of the best writers, that 'tis not in the power of laws to regulate the markets of the fruits and productions of the earth: If therefore, upon examination it should appear that the latter opinion is founded in reason and truth, it must be allowed to be extremely hard upon a set of useful (not to say necessary) people, to be stigmatized as guilty of oppression, extortion, and the most atrocious crimes:—People who may possibly be able to make it appear they are only gaining an honest livelihood by fair trade, and are entitled to the public countenance and protection.

But tho' many people are sensible of the inefficacy of these old statutes, yet they desire to have them revived from their dormant state, to be hung over the heads of reputed forestallers in *terrorem*, on extraordinary occasions, or else with them revived, perhaps to remove the odium of mis-management from the magistrates to the traders. But if equitable rules of government are of use to society, why should not every good government adhere to such rules?—If the grievances which are complained of are real, they should be removed, if 'tis within the power of laws to do it: but the laws should be such as are explicit and clear, for all people would willingly know precisely wherein they may become transgressors.

A thorough reformation of all the statutes relating to these subjects, will perhaps meet with

abundance of opposition, especially among people who are bigotted to old customs and long received opinions; and, if we may collect the sense of some of our superiors * from some recent transactions, we have reason to fear that the freedom of trade, particularly of these branches, will be rather abridged than enlarged; for many curious plans have been proposed and recommended to the attention of the legislature, and instructions have been presented to particular members of parliament by their constituents, which exhibit a variety of schemes to restrain farmers and dealers from getting possession of too much land and too much merchandize.—Schemes that promote the tolls of markets and fairs, and keep our good victuals at home for our own eating,—and schemes which in the opinion of many projectors of them, will promote the general good; but in this particular they seem all to agree that 'tis in the power of parliament to produce a plenty, and to apply remedies to all the grievances.

The wisdom of government, in its legislative capacity, and its widely-extended views, will undoubtedly strike out better plans than 'tis in the power of private persons to form; and we are to regard its decisions with decency and respect: yet from the notices we have had, and the causes of fear for our most important interests, it is certainly incumbent on us, to have a jealous and watchful

* Does not the selling wheat and flour at prices below the intrinsic value, by some of the greatest men in the nation, imply they entertain a notion that prices on commodities may be fixed by laws? They would not surely do these things merely to gain popular reputation.

watchful eye over the rights of trade and commerce. It is not the owners of and traders in provision only, that are interested herein; it is the business of every freeholder and trader, and indeed of every Briton, to guard these privileges from violation and encroachment; our liberty and properties are included in them; and we should therefore turn our attention to every thing that will preserve to us and to our posterity, these inexpressible blessings.

The liberty of writing and speaking freely, fully, and impartially, is a part of the rights of every freeborn Briton: those who have suffered injuries have a right to complain, whether injured by partial and severe laws, or by the partial administration of them; and if they apprehend any danger, that through inadvertency, or misinformation, injurious laws will be framed and carried into execution, they may beg leave to recommend one caution, even to legislators; and that is, always to have in their thoughts, that to a free and equitable constitution of government, there is no season so dangerous as the time of popular clamour, for the redress of grievances: at such a time, when men are heated with too much zeal, they are induced to make concessions, and wink at incroachments, which may end in the loss of some valuable privileges to every member of the community.

The present crisis is (if ever there was one) a period of popular clamour. The owners of food, necessary to our subsistence, are represented as the most pernicious enemies to society.—A Cornish tinner,* in a public paper; “desires to kin-
“dle

* London Chronicle, Sept. 23, p. 293.

[48]

“dle in the breasts of exalted spirits, such a
 “flame, as shall, like the blasts of heaven, con-
 “found these authors of public calamities, and
 “all those who shall abet and support them.”
 —nay, to such a length has this singular species
 of persecution been raised, that seemingly good
 men have wished to crush them, by the interpo-
 sition of government.

An hundred instances could be produced to
 shew, that not the common people only, but
 many in superior stations, have exclaimed against
 them, even to execration; and diffused such no-
 tions, concerning all owners of, and traders in
 provision, as have a tendency to the subversion
 of all order and good society.

It is not then to be wondered at, that some,
 among the common people, have been stirred up,
 to the exercise of such enormities as were un-
 known in former times, when the necessaries of
 life have been dearer.

This Banditti, under the pretence of their
 grievances, have broke loose upon us, to punish
 our persons, and to plunder our properties.
 Such injuries, oppressions, and cruelties were per-
 petrated by some of them, as are scarcely cre-
 dible; all order was destroyed by these regu-
 lating mobs; confusion took place; they seized
 our effects, as of right; entered our houses by
 violence, and threatened to drag to death, those
 who should dare to resist them.

These free-booters were not meagre half-
 starved people, nor did they appear to be in-
 want of any of the necessaries of life; they were
 encouraged by great numbers of turbulent dispo-
 sition, in affluent circumstances, who, at length,
 began to be in danger of being preyed upon in
 the same manner.—No one can tell what may
 be

[49]

be the consequence of an inflamed rabble's at-
 tempting the redress of pretended grievances;
 for when riotous and disorderly people are col-
 lected together, and have done one act of vio-
 lence, they soon proceed to another.

To guard against such insurrections for the fu-
 ture, 'tis of the utmost importance, that proper
 methods be taken for keeping the lower ranks
 of people under due subordination.

Our great men and rulers have superior judg-
 ment to those who are not necessarily employed
 on such important objects as the interest of the
 state; on them we may rely for the security of
 every thing that we have a legal claim to; and
 may hope that the defects in our laws, will
 be remedied; for to those defects, to the inat-
 tention of government, and to the mistaken opi-
 nions which have prevailed among all ranks of
 men amongst us, we may fairly attribute a great
 deal of the mismanagement, which, for some years
 past, has been stirring up the levelling principles
 of the lowest people, to enthusiastic rage and
 fury. We may rely on the experience, the acute-
 ness, and the integrity of those great men, that
 they will likewise pay attention to that very im-
 portant point, the supply of necessaries on fair
 and equitable terms. This is all that can be de-
 sired, and hereon a great deal depends;—for
 commercial and manufacturing states must have
 their eyes on the prices of provisions, among their
 neighbours, if they expect their goods to find a
 vent at foreign markets; which cannot be, unless
 they provide both for cheapness of necessaries
 and cheapness of labour at home.—No people
 can deprive us of our trade, unless they are more
 industrious or more temperate than ourselves.
 We sell provisions to foreign manufacturers,
 H there-

[50]

therefore they cannot, in general, be fed much cheaper than ourselves; except the better kinds of provisions are reckoned necessaries here, and luxuries among them.

Let us preserve amongst ourselves the virtues of good citizens, and we shall be able to obtain improvements, in the internal trade, and civil policy of Great-Britain, by means of our already excellent constitution, and under the guardianship of our most auspicious king.

Our extensive foreign trade is the admiration and envy of every power on earth; and we may reasonably hope, that the more enlarged rules of commerce will be made to prevail in our inland traffic; as it is found, by experience, that nothing encourages agriculture, and promotes plenty, so much as the utmost freedom in the trade of corn and every other article of common consumption; and that every restraint on these branches of commerce checks the supply of provisions.

Let every one do his utmost, to procure internal peace and tranquility, to promote trade, agriculture, and manufactures; we have then every real source of prosperity, we may enjoy happiness, and shall experience those attendants on good government, the increase of people, and ascendancy in the world.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

Page 8, line 23. for *that* read *the*; p. 16, l. 32, read *did bear*; p. 17, l. 15, for 100. read 400; p. 20, last note, for *mills* read *millions*; p. 24, l. 2, for *prohibitive* read *prohibition*; p. 25, l. ult. read *their duties to*; p. 32, l. 28, for *single* read *younger*.