INTRODUCTION.

DISTRESSES OF THE COUNTRY IN 1816—METHOD OF SUCCESSFULLY SUPPORTING THE PEOPLE IN PARLIAMENT.

The return of peace did not bring back prosperity to any portion of the inhabitants of this country. Whether it was that a war of twenty-three years duration had carried all the functions of the body politic to an unnatural state, only to be maintained by the stimulants which war supplies, in place of more wholesome support; or that the drains of the heavy expenditure, created by the hostilities carried on all over the globe, had exhausted our resources; or that the mere transition from one state to another, operated on the political system, giving it the sudden shock that a sudden relief from pain or from want would communicate to the natural frame; certain it is, that there had never during the whole contest just closed, been more general embarrassment felt, than was suffered, first by the agricultural interest in 1816, and then by the manufacturing classes the year after. The relief obtained from the burden of eighteen millions, by the repeal of the income tax and war malt duties in 1816, however important, appeared to make but little impression upon the mass of distress; and men were heard in all directions regretting the change from war to peace, farmers wishing Napoleon back again, and merchants sighing for the times when no ships but our own could keep the sea. The coun-
try, therefore, had recourse to the Parliament, and approached both Houses, but especially that of their representatives, with numerous petitions, setting forth in moving terms, the calamities that had befallen all the industrious classes, and praying for some measures which might tend to their relief. These petitions were less numerous in 1816, because the meetings upon the Income Tax then engrossed the attention of the people; and its repeal was expected to relieve the distresses of the farmers. But in the following session, when the distress extended to the manufacturing classes, the petitions increased in number, and were directed in some instances by fallacious views, to extremely injudicious measures, the most numerous signed of them all having for its prayer the prohibition of exporting cotton twist, upon the notion that this encouraged foreign manufactures at the expense of our own. The course of petitioning had come of late years into great favour with the country, and it seems important to explain in what way this opinion arose.

In the long inquiry which occupied the House in 1812, respecting the Orders in Council, the efforts of the petitions against that policy had been attended with the most complete success. Although opposed by the whole weight of the government both in public and out of doors; although at first vigorously resisted by the energy, the acuteness, the activity, and the expertness, which made Mr. Perceval one of the best debaters of his day; although, after his death, the struggle was maintained by the father of the system with all his fire and with his full knowledge of the whole subject—nay, although the Ministry brought to bear upon the question, what is reckoned the most formible engine that any government can set in motion against its adversaries in any single measure, the announcement that their official existence depended upon the result—yet had the country gained a signal and complete victory, and the favourite policy of the cabinet had been at once and entirely surrendered to the pressing instance of the Petitioners. When men came to consider how this battle had been gained, no doubt could remain in their minds as to the causes of success. It appeared clear that, as far as any thing was to be expected from the direct expression of the people's voice through their regular organs in Parliament, nothing could well be more desperate than the prospect of the Petitioners. But indirectly, the country could make its voice heard and its influence felt. It was roused extensively to the consideration of the question. Meetings were generally held, and many petitions came from them, while others proceeded
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from persons who signed them, without otherwise bearing a part in any public debates. The plan was now adopted by Mr. Brougham and Mr. Baring of promoting discussion on all fair occasions connected with the subject. The interlocutory debates arising from questions raised by the examination of the witnesses, provided many such opportunities. Motions for the production of papers and accounts added to their number; and each petition that came up from the country was made studiously, but very naturally, the subject of a conversation which often swelled into a long debate. The effects of this series of discussion, lasting for six or seven weeks, were prodigious. They strongly excited the country, and they communicated in their turn the influence of that excitement to the House itself. They brought the public feeling to bear directly upon the members who represented counties or towns, but they were not without their influence upon those who had no constituents at all. They were besides of the most signal use in promoting the most thorough and sifting examination of every part of the subject—bringing all statements of facts to the test of rigorous scrutiny—trying by the criterion of free debate, liberated from the fetters of mere form, the soundness of every position and conclusiveness of every reason—and making it quite impossible for sophistry to seek shelter behind vague assertion, or imbecile and fallacious argument to escape exposure behind the convenient screen of those parliamentary rules which govern more regular debates. Hardly an hour passed without detecting some false statement or illogical argument; hardly a night passed without gaining some convert to the cause of truth; and real representatives who could face their constituents, and borough members who had no dread of the county or of the society they lived in, provided their support of the vicious and unpopular system were confined to a single vote by which its fate should be decided once for all, would no longer venture to hold out, during all the skirmishes and other movements that prepared the way for the great engagement, and they dreaded still more the endless remonstrances by letter and by conference of deputations, which they had to undergo while the matter hung in so lengthened a suspense, and the country was all the while exerting its activity to attain the common object. This battle, then, for the people, was fought by the joint efforts of themselves out of doors, and of their supporters in the House of Commons, and by the mutual action and reaction of the House and the people upon each other. It is a battle which may always be renewed, and is always of certain success on any ground naturally adapted to
its movements; that is to say, wherever a great popular feeling can be excited and maintained and wherever there are persons of firmness and spirit to set themselves at the head of the people, regardless of the frowns and the threats of power. It is equally certain that such a fight never can be fought, with any chance of success, where the people are indifferent to the subject, and where they have no leaders in Parliament adequate to the occasion.

The Session 1816 offered an example yet more remarkable of the same tactics being attended with equally single success. On the termination of the war, the government were determined, instead of repealing the whole Income tax, which the act enforcing it declared to be "for and during the continuance of the war and no longer," to retain one half of it, that is, to reduce it from ten to five per cent., and thus keep a revenue raised from this source of between seven and eight millions, instead of fifteen. As soon as this intention was announced, several meetings were held, and two or three petitions were presented. The Ministers perceived the risk they ran, if the former policy should be pursued, of continued discussion for a length of time; and they saw the vast importance of dispatch. Accordingly, the Chancellor of the Exchequer* gave notice on the Tuesday for his motion on the Thursday immediately following. The Opposition took alarm, and Mr. Brougham declared, on presenting a petition numerous signed from one of the London parishes, that if the hurry now indicated should be persevered in he should avail himself of all the means of delay afforded by the forms of the House. Lord Folkestone,† one of the most strenuous, and in those days one of the most active and powerful supporters of the popular cause, vigourously seconded this menace, in which he entirely joined. On the next day more petitions were flung in; more discussions took place, and the Government postponed for a week the introduction of the Bill. That week proved quite decisive; for so many meetings were held, and so many petitions sent up, that the Bill was put off from time to time, and did not finally make its appearance till the 17th of March. Above six weeks were almost entirely spent by the House of Commons in receiving the numberless petitions poured in from all quarters against the tax. For it was speedily seen that the campaign of 1812 was renewed, and that the same leaders, Messrs. Brougham and Baring, had the management of the operations.

At first the Ministers pursued the course of obstinate silence. The Opposition debated each petition in vain;

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* Mr. Vansittart.
† Now Earl of Radnor.
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every minister and ministerial member held his peace. No arguments, no facts, no sarcasms, no taunts, could rouse them; no expression of the feelings of the country, no reference to the anxiety of particular constituencies, could draw a word from the Ministers and their supporters. At length it was perceived that their antagonists did not the less debate, and that consequently the scheme had failed in its purpose of stifling discussion. The only effect of it, then, was, that all the debating was on one side, and this both became hurtful to the Government in the House, and more hurtful still in the country. They were forced into discussion, therefore; and then began a scene of unexampled interest which lasted until the second reading of the Bill. Each night, at a little after four, commenced the series of debates which lasted until past midnight. These were of infinite variety. Arguments urged by different speakers; instances of oppression and hardship recounted; anecdotes of local suffering and personal inconvenience; accounts of the remarkable passages at different meetings; personal altercations interspersed with more general matter—all filled up the measure of the night's bill of fare; and all were so blended and so variegated, that no one ever perceived any hour thus spent to pass tediously away. Those not immediately concerned, Peers, or persons belonging to neither House, flocked to the spectacle which each day presented. The interest excited out of doors kept pace with that of the spectators; and those who carried on these active operations shewed a vigour and constancy of purpose, an unwearied readiness for the combat, which astonished while it animated all beholders. It is recounted of this remarkable struggle, that one night towards the latter end of the period in question, when at a late hour, the house having been in debate from four o'clock, one speaker had resumed his seat, the whole members sitting upon one entire bench rose at once and addressed the chair,—a testimony of unabated spirit and unquenchable animation which drew forth the loudest cheers from all sides of the House.

At length came the 17th of March, the day appointed for the decision; but it was soon found that this had been, with the debate, wholly anticipated. The usual number of petitions, and even more, were poured thickly in during some hours; little or no debating took place upon them; unusual anxiety for the result of such long continued labour, and such lengthened excitement, kept all silent and in suspense; when, about eleven o'clock, Sir William Curtis, representing the City of London, proceeded up the House, bearing
in his arms the petition, which he presented without any remark, of the great meeting of the Bankers and Merchants holden in the Egyptian Hall, and signed by Twelve Thousand persons. The division took place after a debate that did not last half an hour; no one could indeed be heard in an assembly so impatient for the decision; and by a majority of thirty-seven voices, the tax was defeated for ever, and the wholesome principle, as Mr. Wilberforce well observed, was laid down, that war and income tax are wedded together.

The same display which led to such important and even glorious success the cause of the people, in an unreformed Parliament, is to the full as requisite now, and would produce, if possible, greater results. Neither Slavery, nor Limited Suffrage, nor Petty Constituencies, nor refusal of the Ballot would stand before it half a session. But unhappily it has seemed good to the Whig Government that they should adopt a course of proceeding which renders all the tactics of 1812 and 1816 impracticable. Forgetting what it was that raised to power, the remote cause of the Tory downfall, the policy which produced all the triumphs of liberal opinions; forgetting, too, that though now in office, they may to-morrow be restored to that Opposition from which the triumphs of 1812 and 1816 raised them,—they have resolved that no petition shall now be discussed—that whoever presents it shall merely state its substance, after telling the body and the place it comes from—and that no other member shall make it the subject of any observation. To this plan for stifling the people’s voice, and giving the Ministers of the day and their majority in Parliament an absolute control over the policy of the empire, disarming the Opposition of their main weapon, and shearing the people of their chief strength, the Speaker, Mr. Abercromby, has unhappily lent the support of his authority, if he was not indeed the author of the scheme. It is of little moment to reflect that but for the policy of former and better times, this distinguished and excellent person would now have been in the honourable but cheerless exile of an Edinburgh sinecure judgeship, as his ministerial coadjutors would have been doomed to exclusion from power on the benches of an eternal Opposition. It is of more importance to remark, that unless a speedy end is put to the present course of proceeding, the mainstay of English liberty, the only effectual safeguard against misgovernment and oppression, is taken from the people of these realms.
SPEECH
ON THE
DISTRESSED STATE OF AGRICULTURE,
DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
APRIL 9, 1816.

MR. BROGDEN; I feel very sensibly the disadvantages under which I rise to enter upon the discussion of this momentous subject; not only because I am in all respects so ill qualified to handle it successfully, but because a pretty general indisposition has been expressed by the House, to proceeding in the inquiry this night. Nevertheless, as I was one of those who objected to delay, and as I stated my readiness to go on with the debate, I am desirous of delivering my sentiments, such as they are, upon the present occasion, that I may lay before the Committee the ideas (whatever they may be worth) which I have gathered from an honest and patient attention to the subject matter of our investigation.

There is one branch of the argument which I shall pass over altogether, I mean the amount of the distresses which are now universally admitted to prevail over almost every part of the empire. Upon this topic all men are agreed; the statements connected with it are as unquestionable as they are afflicting; each day's experience since my honourable friend's motion* has added to their number and increased their force; and the petition from Cambridgeshire presented at an early part of this evening, has laid before you a fact, to which all the former expositions of distress afforded no parallel, that in one parish, every proprietor and tenant being ruined with a single exception, the whole poor rates of the parish thus wholly inhabited by paupers, are now paid by an individual, whose fortune, once ample, is thus swept entirely away. Of the nature and extent of evil, then, it is quite superfluous to speak; I purpose, with your permission, to apply myself to the examination of its causes, and to such

* Mr. (now Lord) Western.
a view of the remedies or palliatives proposed, as may naturally be suggested by a consideration of those causes. Without entering somewhat at large into the origin of our present difficulties, I am afraid we shall be apt to go astray in our search after the means of relief.

A circumstance which must strike every observer who turns his attention toward this state of the country, is the comparative state of prices before and since the late war. In 1792, the average price of wheat was 47s. the quarter; now its price is 57s., almost 20 per cent. higher; and yet no complaint was ever heard of low prices before the war, nor were any of those signs of distress to be perceived, which in these times claim our pity in every part of the empire. This consideration is of itself sufficient to shew, that over-trading—that excess of cultivation is not the only cause of the evil we complain of; and may warn us against the error of imputing it to the operation of any one cause alone; for I am certainly disposed to rank the great extension of cultivation among the principal causes, or at least to regard it as lying near the foundation of the mischief. In attempting to unravel the difficulties of this question, I trust the Committee will believe me, when I say that I approach it, as I should the solution of a problem in the mathematics, without the smallest taint of party feeling, and with no other view whatsoever than a desire to discover the truth; upon a question of great and universal concernment.

The first circumstance to which I would solicit the attention of the Committee, as lying at the root of the matter, is the progress of agriculture during the long period of the last war—I mean from the year 1792 downwards. The commencement of hostilities in 1793 produced the stagnation of trade and manufactures which usually accompanies a transition from peace to war; but these difficulties were of uncommon short duration, and the brilliant success of our arms at sea, the capture of some of the enemy's colonies, the revolt of others, and the crippled state of his mercantile resources at home, from internal confusion, speedily diminished his commerce in an extraordinary degree, augmenting our own in nearly the same proportion. As his conquests or influence extended over other nations possessed of trade or colonial establishments, these in their turn became exposed to our maritime hostility, and lost their commerce and their plantations; so that in a very short time this country obtained a mercantile and colonial monopoly altogether unprecedented, even in the most successful of her
former wars. The consequence was, a sudden extension of our manufacturing industry and wealth; and a proportionate improvement in our agriculture. But although his effect began to be perceivable soon after the first success of the war, it was not fully produced until a few years had elapsed, and a number circumstances, in some measure accidental, happened to coincide with those which might more reasonably have been expected to occur during the course of the war, in promoting, I might almost say in forcing, the cultivation of the country. I should be disposed to take the ten years from 1797 to 1808, as the period when all those circumstances, of what nature soever, concurred to produce the same effect. It will be worth the attention of the Committee to observe how singularly this period is filled with events, all tending one way, all bearing upon the extension of agriculture.

The French commerce and colonies had been previously destroyed; and in 1797, 1798, and 1799, those of Spain and Holland shared the same fate. About this time our monopoly might be said to have reached its height. But several accidental events now concurred with those results of the war, and influenced the progress of cultivation in a visible manner. The scarcity of wheat in 1796, and all sorts of grain in 1799 and 1800, raised the prices so much as to force a vast portion of land into cultivation. In 1797, and still more after 1800, lands were broken up which had never before known the plough, and many wastes were taken in, the tillage of which prudence would perhaps never have authorized. Somewhat of the same effect was thus produced which arose from the destruction of the principal French West Indian colonies early in the late war. The sudden diminution in the supply of sugar raised its price beyond all example, and occasioned a vast extent of new land to be cleared and planted, promoting at the same time the culture of the old plantations. The African slave trade, and the conquest of the Dutch, French, and Spanish settlements, with the consequent influx of British capital, facilitated the progress of West Indian agriculture, until, in the course of a few years, the blank created by the commotions at St. Domingo and Guadaloupe was much more than supplied; sugars fell as far below their ordinary price as they had lately risen above it; all West Indian proprietors were distressed, and many utterly ruined; the colonies, generally speaking, were in a state nearly resembling the most suffering districts of the mother country at the present time; and relief was only afforded by the abandonment of many estates, chiefly
such as were loaded with debts and consisted of inferior lands, the supply being thus restored to a level with the demand. I do not mention the cases as in all respects parallel, but they agree in many of their principal circumstances.

Together with the scarcities of 1796 and 1800, the financial and military operations of the war, concurred to raise the prices of agricultural produce. Those operations did not certainly create capital, or multiply the number of mouths for consuming food; but they collected capital in masses to be expended less economically in feeding a number of persons more carelessly than the same individuals would have been supported by part of the same capital, had it been left in the hands of private persons. I desire to be understood as casting no reflection upon the administration of the revenue appropriated to the demands of the war, because it is quite unnecessary at present to express my opinion upon this point. Every one must admit that a given sum in the hands of government, even of the most economical ministers, especially if allotted to meeting the various pressing exigencies of warfare, must be expended with much less care and parsimony than the same sums appropriated to the uses of private families under all the checks imposed by individual prudence. The tendency of such a national expenditure unquestionably is, to raise prices above their natural level for a time at least, and thus to force cultivation forward, although, in a long course of years, the same capital in the hands of the community would have been much more augmented, and would gradually and healthfully have increased the production of the country in a greater, but not in a disproportionate degree. It is not, however, for, its effect in stimulating agriculture that any man will be disposed to quarrel with the war and its expenditure. Had it no other sins to answer for, this might well be forgiven.

While the circumstances which I have mentioned were disposing men to extend the cultivation of the kingdom, an event occurred, which in its consequences mightily facilitated this operation. I allude to the stoppage of the Bank of England, in the early part of 1797. The alarm in which that extraordinary measure originated, very speedily subsided; and with the restoration of confidence, came a disposition to accommodate, on the part of bankers and other dealers in money and credit, wholly unexampled. The Bank of England soon increased its issues; and the numbers of country banks were everywhere augmented. In districts where no such establishment had ever before been known, they were to be found actively engaged in discounting and
lending—and in issuing their own notes. In places too small to support a bank, there were agents appointed by Banks fixed at some distance: or a shopkeeper or tradesman, added to his usual and regular calling, the new employment of cashing bills and passing notes. It is true that the check which had now been removed from the great Bank in London, still operated to a certain extent upon the minor dealers in credit; thus scattered over the country; they were obliged to pay, if required, in Bank of England paper, although the issuers of that paper were not compelled to pay in specie. But this was rather a nominal than a real restraint; for if the holders of country bank paper could not obtain gold in exchange, they preferred coarse notes with the names of Mr. or Sir John such-a-one, whom they knew, to notes somewhat better engraved, but worth just as little, and with the names of a governor and company and a Mr. Newland, whom they knew nothing about—so that the country banks enjoyed the same facility, with the bank in London, of increasing their issues; and they used it with much less reserve. Hence the unlimited accommodation which they afforded to farmers, and generally to all speculators in land. They assisted all adventurers more or less, but adventurers in land most of all, because they had better security to give, and were supposed to be engaged in a less hazardous line of trade. I must here repeat the remark I made upon the tendency of the war to promote cultivation. If the stoppage of the Bank had produced no worse effects than throwing dormant capital into circulation, and affording a stimulus to industry, especially to agriculture, I should have little to say against that measure—nay it might have been rather beneficial than hurtful, at least in this point of view, had the accommodation which it afforded been withdrawn more gradually, and at all events, not at the particular moment, when perhaps the state of things required it to be still farther extended.

Another circumstance to which I shall advert, also occurred within the period in question, between 1797 and 1808 I mean the great extension of our colonial possessions. The value of those establishments is, I believe, somewhat underrated in this country; not that we are slow to parade their importance in several particulars—on the contrary we are prone to magnify them in our accounts of exports and imports, and of the quantity of tonnage, and the number of seamen employed in our trade; but we seldom, if ever, reflect on the vast effects produced by them upon the agriculture of the mother country. In promoting this,
their wealth operates both through the channels of commerce and of remittances, almost as directly as the riches of one district of this island expand themselves over and fertilize another less wealthy territory in its neighbourhood. The conquest and rapid cultivation of the Dutch colonies, to take the most remarkable instance, may be traced in its effects upon many a once barren tract of land in the northern parts of Great Britain, where by the names of the farms and of their occupiers you may be reminded of those lucrative speculations in Surinam, Demerara, and Berbice, to which the agriculture of the mother country owed these accessions.

The last circumstance I shall mention as falling within the same period, is the completion of our commercial and manufacturing monopoly, by the destruction of almost all other trade and peaceful industry, the final result of Buonaparte's continental and military system. In the end, indeed, we felt the effects of this prodigious attempt, as I shall presently have occasion to state; but for some time it only consummated the ruin of our competitors, and gave new resources to our seaport and manufacturing towns. The effects of this increase upon the industry of the country, at a period when men were singularly prone to farming speculations, cannot easily be overrated. We are apt to suppose the sphere of such influence much more contracted than it really is. If any one is desirous of perceiving how widely it extends, I think I can furnish him with a medium through which he may view it. When the measures of the enemy, which began with the Berlin and Milan Lecrees, had, through the co-operation of our own Orders in Council, succeeded in crippling the trade of almost all our great towns, the distresses of the merchant and manufacturer affected not merely the farmer in his neighbourhood, but lowered the cattle and corn markets to a great distance, so that fat beasts were sold at very low prices, one hundred, and even one hundred and fifty miles from the manufacturing districts in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, in consequence of the distresses prevailing over those parts of the country. In like manner, it is evident that the earlier events of the war, which suddenly promoted the wealth of the great towns, tended as rapidly to augment the cultivation of even the remote provinces.

Now, Sir, having ascertained the existence of so many and such powerful causes, uniting their forces in one direction, during the period I have mentioned, and all tending manifestly to promote the agriculture of the country, some of
them by tempting men to embark in farming concerns, others by furnishing them with the means of speculation, even if we do not take into the account such circumstances as the general progress of the arts and the depreciation in the value of the circulating medium, and the consequent rise in the money price of produce, which I am very far from underrating, but only pass over for the present as operating less exclusively upon the cultivation of land than the other circumstances which I have enumerated, I say even if these considerations are omitted, enough has been shown to prove that a start must have been made in the productive powers of this island, quite unexampled in any equal period of its former history. When, on the other hand, I reflect upon the nature of the causes which I have enumerated, and find that most of them are of sudden occurrence, and that their combination in the short space of about ten years was accidental; when, moreover, I perceive that the most material of them were of a temporary duration, and could not remain long to support the great cultivation which they had occasioned, I am disposed to think that I have got hold of a principle upon which something like an overtrading in agriculture, and a consequent redundancy of produce, may be inferred to have happened, how difficult soever it may be to ascertain the amount of this excess by any strict calculation. In truth I am little inclined to resort to estimates upon the present question; where circumstances are clearly proved to have existed, the natural operation of which plainly was such as I have described, it is unnecessary to seek among statistical returns for evidence of effects which we know must have been produced. I have heard of conjectures as to the number of acres enclosed, during the ten years I am referring to, in which there may have been 1200 Enclosure bills passed. Some of my honourable friends near me, I know, have estimated this amount at two millions, which I mention not so much from any reliance upon the accuracy of the statement, as out of respect for them, and because this admission is at variance with their own doctrine, that there has been no excessive cultivation. But it is evident that such an estimate, even if correct to an acre, would by no means shew the increase of production, for a good deal of the land enclosed by act of parliament was formerly cultivated in common field; and, on the other hand, the improvements in the cultivation of the old enclosures have probably done more to augment the whole agricultural produce, than all the new lands that have been taken in. If, however, we take the total amount, every thing included, to be equal to the pro-
duce of two millions of acres added to the former produce, and if it be true that the population has only increased two millions during the same period, there will appear to have been an increase of nearly six millions of quarters in the supply, and only an increase in the permanent demand, in the proportion of two millions. But, as I have already said, these estimates are not to be trusted either way, and I had much rather rest upon the broad principle furnished by a reference to the known events in the history of the late war, down to the year 1808. The improvements in most parts of the country have been going on so visibly, that the most careless observer must have been struck by them. Not only wastes have disappeared for miles and miles, giving place to houses, fences, and crops; not only have even the most inconsiderable commons, the very village greens, and the little stripes of sward by the way side, been, in many places, subjected to division and exclusive ownership, and cut up into corn-fields in the rage for farming; not only have stubborn soils been forced to bear crops by mere weight of metal, by sinking money in the earth, as it has been called,—but the land that formerly grew something has been fatigued with labour, and loaded with capital, until it yielded much more; the work both of men and cattle has been economized, new skill has been applied, and a more dexterous combination of different kinds of husbandry been practised, until, without at all comprehending the waste lands wholly added to the productive territory of the island, it may be safely said, not perhaps that two blades of grass now grow where only one grew before, but I am sure, that five grow where four used to be; and that this kingdom which foreigners were wont to taunt as a mere manufacturing and trading country, inhabited by a shopkeeping nation, is in reality for its size, by far the greatest agricultural state in the world.

Previous to the year 1810 or 1811, no great effect appears to have been felt in the corn market from all this system of improvement. The measures taken to increase our produce had not begun fully to operate, and the new enclosures had not yielded their due returns. The crop of 1810 was not a very good one, and that of 1811 was extremely bad. But about 1812 when the new cultivation and the improvements in farms generally, may be supposed to have produced their full effect, there began a series of events, some of them accidental and beyond human foresight to anticipate, others less strange perhaps in themselves, but in their union scarcely more to be expected, all operating in the same direction, and that direction the very opposite, as far as regards agriculture, to
the line in which the no less unparalleled combination of circumstances already mentioned, had been operating in the preceding years. The harvest of 1812 was a very abundant one; that of 1813, I believe, exceeded any that had ever been known; and the crop of 1814 was not much inferior. But the political events of those three years had an influence still more important upon the markets. Here I must take leave to state how widely I differ with my honourable friend the member for Essex,* respecting the effects of the peace. In the able and luminous speech with which he introduced this subject to the House, and in which he shewed at once the greatest industry, talent, and moderation, he contended that the termination of hostilities could not be assigned as the cause of the depression in prices, because those prices had begun to fall during the war; and he observed in confirmation of his position, that after former treaties of peace, agricultural produce had risen. The facts upon which he relied when taken altogether, far from supporting his doctrine, furnish me with a satisfactory answer to it. After the peace of Paris, it is true, wheat rose from 36s. to 41s. the quarter, in 1763, and to 42s. 6d. on an average of five years, ending 1767. So, after the peace of Versailles, it rose 5s. the quarter. But the statements upon which my honourable friend relied, as decisive in his favour, were taken from the period in question, viz. the year 1813. In January of that year, the market price of wheat was 120s., and in November it had fallen to 75s. The victualling contracts of Portsmouth were made in January at 123s. 10d.; in November at 67s. 10d. Those of Plymouth, in February at 121s. 9d., in September at 86s. Those of Deptford, in February for flour per sack—at 100s. 3d., in November at 65s. Now I beg the committee's attention to these facts, because when coupled with the well known events of the year 1813, they clearly refute my honourable friend's argument, pretended to be built upon them. In January and February wheat and flour were high; in September they had fallen very considerably, owing; partly no doubt, to the very abundant harvest reaped during the interval, but in no small degree owing to the important change in public affairs, which had taken place during the same interval. The destruction of Bonaparte's grand army had been effected the winter before, and had laid the foundation of the deliverance of Europe, but that happy event had not been completed. The most gigantic enterprise which unprincipled force had ever attempted in modern times, had been defeated by a lucky concurrence of ac-

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* Mr. (now Lord) Western.
AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS.

cidents with the violence that gave birth to the project; but much of its author's power still remained unbroken, and no man could foresee that the blind fury which had borne him into jeopardy, would still hurry him to ruin. At all events, a new and a desperate struggle was inevitable, and the great prize of peace on the one side, or universal empire on the other, was to be fought for once more in the ensuing campaign. In the spring and summer of 1813, this battle was fought; and the enemy, after incredible efforts of gallantry and skill, was repulsed—but nothing more. Peace seemed considerably more probable, therefore, in September, than it had been in January; but it was not certain. The improvement in our prospects, however, co-operated with the harvest, and prices were lowered from 122s. to 86s. Soon after this period came the decisive battle of Leipsic; peace was now certain, and all that remained to be settled was the terms upon which it should be made, and the degree of security which should attend it; for the struggle which followed could be said to decide nothing more. Accordingly, in the interval between September and November, prices had fallen from 86 to 68, in round numbers. Contractors could no longer expect the same terms when in all likelihood this was their last bidding. Government was not pressed as before, when its difficulties were so nearly at an end; and the market felt the effects not only of an extraordinary crop, but of the approaching times of peace, when the demands of government should be withdrawn, and the supplies of the continent poured in. No man who attends to these facts and dates can entertain a reasonable doubt that the fall of prices was in some degree connected with the approaching termination of the war.

In truth, Sir, it is impossible to overlook the tendency of such a change as the peace brought about in all the great markets of agricultural produce. A sudden diminution in the expenditure of Government, to the amount of above fifty millions, could not be effected without greatly deranging all markets, both for manufactures and produce directly; and by affecting the markets for manufactures, it must also have influenced circuitously those in which the farmer is more immediately interested. To take only a few specimens of these effects: Can it be denied that the stoppage of the exportation of grain, provisions, and even forage, to the Peninsula, had an influence in lowering the prices of those articles at home? When orders are no longer given for clothing in Yorkshire, and arms in Warwickshire, does the change which throws so many manufacturers out of employment produce no
diminution in the demand for food, and no increase in the levy of parish rates? Look at the effects of the government retiring from the Irish provision market, now that three-fourths of the navy are dismantled. Beside the accounts from the sister kingdom, every gentleman connected with the north and west of England knows, that last summer and autumn the droves of Irish cattle poured through Liverpool, Bristol, and the Welsh ports, covered the roads for miles; and that the price of butcher's meat, and the rents of grazing farms, which had till then kept up, notwithstanding the fall of grain and of corn lands, began to be sensibly affected. I state these circumstances with the more satisfaction because they are in their nature temporary, and we are led to a somewhat more comfortable prospect by the consideration, that whatever part of the present distresses is ascribable to the change from war to peace, may reasonably be expected to diminish every day, at least as soon as the results of the peace shall enable the general trade of the country to resume its natural and accustomed channels; and shall supply the blank occasioned directly and circuitously in the demands for produce, by the diminished expenditure of government.

The next circumstance to which I shall advert as materially operating against agriculture, is the distress in the commercial world during the latter years of the war. It is very certain that the effects of the fatal year 1810, continue to be felt at this day in the mercantile world. The foundations were then laid of many failures, which have only been delayed by the natural efforts of unfortunate men to ward off a blow they could not escape; efforts which it is impossible very harshly to blame, although undoubtedly the delay of the crash has in most instances only rendered it more pernicious to creditors, and extended its effect more widely, occasioning, perhaps, several failures instead of one. The difficulties of 1812 are fresh in the recollection of the Committee, and are still working their effects in many parts of the country, although the repeal of the Orders in Council, by enabling us to export goods, which were all paid for to the amount of seven or eight millions, afforded a most seasonable and important relief, and enabled capitalists to lower their stock on hand in a great proportion. That stock, however, began to increase during the unhappy continuance of the American war; and the peace, unexpectedly made, in Europe, followed by the treaty with America, soon produced an effect to which I must request the serious attention of the Committee, because I believe its nature and extent are by no means well understood. After the cramped state in which the enemy's
measures, and our own retaliation (as we termed it), had kept our trade for some years, when the events of spring 1814 suddenly opened the Continent, a rage for exporting goods of every kind burst forth, only to be explained by reflecting on the previous restrictions we had been labouring under, and only to be equalled (though not in extent), by some of the mercantile delusions connected with South American speculations. Every thing that could be shipped was sent off; all the capital that could be laid hold of was embarked. The frenzy, I can call it nothing less, after the experience of 1806 and 1810, descended to persons in the humblest circumstances, and the furthest removed, by their pursuits, from commercial cares. It may give the Committee some idea of this disease, if I state what I know to have happened in one or two places. Not only clerks and labourers, but menial servants, engaged the little sums which they had been laying up for a provision against old age and sickness; persons went round tempting them to adventure in the trade to Holland, and Germany, and the Baltic; they risked their mite in the hopes of boundless profits; it went with the millions of the more regular traders; the bubble soon burst, like its predecessors of the South Sea, the Mississippi, and Buenos Ayres; English goods were selling for much less in Holland and the north of Europe, than in London and Manchester; in most places they were lying a dead weight without any sale at all; and either no returns whatever were received, or pounds came back for thousands that had gone forth. The great speculators broke; the middling ones lingered out a precarious existence, deprived of all means of continuing their dealings either at home or abroad; the poorer dupes of the delusion had lost their little hoards, and went upon the parish the next mishap that befell them; but the result of the whole has been much commercial distress—a caution now absolutely necessary in trying new adventures—a prodigious diminution in the demand for manufactures, and indirectly a serious defalcation in the effectual demand for the produce of land.

The peace with America has produced somewhat of a similar effect, though I am very far from placing the vast exports which it occasioned upon the same footing with those to the European market the year before; both because ultimately the Americans will pay, which the exhausted state of the Continent renders very unlikely; and because it was well worth while to incur a loss upon the first exportation, in order, by the glut, to stifle in the cradle those rising manufactures in the United States, which the war had
forced into existence contrary to the natural course of things. But, in the meantime, the enormous amount of, I believe, eighteen millions worth of goods were exported to North America in one year; I am informed nearly sixteen millions went through the port of Liverpool alone; and, for a considerable part of this, no returns have been received, while still more of it must have been selling at a very scanty profit. The immediate effect has been a sensible increase of the difficulties which I have already described as flowing from the unexpected opening of the European market in the impoverished and unsettled state of the Continent.

And now it was, when a general commercial distress began to prevail, that the consequence of our paper circulation, and the banking operations connected with it, not gradually as had been expected, but almost instantaneously developed themselves. Whether the change of measures, which I am about to mention as one of the principal, if not the very first cause of our present sufferings, began with the country banks, or the bank of England; whether it was the necessary consequence of the difficulties which were pressing upon trade, and which at any rate, it mightly increased, or was the chief cause of those difficulties; whether or not blame is imputable to any persons, or bodies corporate, I will not stop to inquire, for it is wholly immaterial to the present investigation; and when I mention certain known facts in one order rather than another, I do so without intending to assert that they were connected together. The bank of England not very slowly limited its discounts, and diminished its issues of paper about three millions. At one period, indeed, the amount of notes in circulation had exceeded that to which they were now reduced, by six millions; but the average had been for some time about three millions higher. The country banks acting less upon system, and more under the influence of alarm, lessened their discounts in a much greater degree. A single failure would stop all such transactions over a whole district, and I could mention one large stoppage which made it difficult, for a length of time, to discount a bill anywhere in three or four countries. The persons who felt this change most severely were of course those who had been speculating in any way, but above all others, speculators in land; those who had either purchased or improved beyond their actual means, upon the expectation of that credit and accommodation being continued, which had enable them to commence their operations. Ordinary traders have much greater facilities in the money market; and their speculations are much more speedily terminated. The improver of
land has to deal with property not easily convertible into money, and his adventures extend necessarily over a long course of years. Persons in this situation soon found their borrowed capital withdrawn; when the fall of produce made it difficult for them to pay the interest, they were suddenly called upon for the principal; they had gotten into a situation which no prudence could have enabled them to avoid, because it was the result of events which no sagacity could have foreseen; they had for many years been tempted to speculate by a facility of obtaining capital or credit, which in a month or two was utterly withdrawn; and before the least warning had been given, either by the course of events, or by the dealers in money and accommodation, a support was removed, which the most cautious of men might well have expected to be continued indefinitely, or at any rate to be gradually removed. I beg leave in illustration of this matter, to remind the Committee how those undertakings have been carried on which I before described as extending so greatly the agriculture of the country. A man of small fortune, or a farmer making considerable profits by the high prices of the period I have so often alluded to, saw an opportunity of making a desirable purchase, upon an enclosure, or a sale in his neighbourhood. He had scraped together a couple of thousand pounds, perhaps; but the sum required for buying, and then improving the land, was four or five. The banker supplied this difference, and by his accommodations enabled some middleman, trading in credit, to supply it, and the cultivator had every reason to hope he should, in a few years, be able to repay it, by the continued prosperity of farming concerns. At any rate he reckoned upon paying the interest and not being called upon for the principal, in security of which he probably deposited the title-deeds of his purchase as a pledge. The extension of cultivation caused by these very operations, together with the other circumstances to which I have referred, rapidly lowers the price of all produce; the alarm of money-dealers begins to spread; hardly able to pay the interest, which is in reality a fourth more than it was while the currency was depreciated 25 per cent, he is called upon to pay up the principal itself; destitute of any thing that can be turned into money, he is fain to abandon his purchase, with all the improvements which his savings and his toil have made upon it; and the lender finds himself in hardly a better situation, without the means of obtaining payment, and with title-deeds in his hand, which he can turn to no account, unless he brings the land into the market. Now, the certainty of such a measure lowering its price
prevents this step from being taken; and accordingly, great as the distress has been, very little land has been actually sold; not so much as ought to have been, is thrown out of cultivation; good money, to use the common expression, is thrown after bad; the money-dealer becomes, from necessity, a land-jobber; and the distress continues pushing its shoots in all directions, round the whole circle of trade, until, by re-action, the farmer suffers again indirectly, and the total amount of suffering is, if I may so speak, augmented by its universality, and the connexion of its parts. Nor should I be at all surprised, if things were to grow worse before they got better; at least I am very certain that the price of land will be lower before it is higher, from the undoubted fact of many sales that must take place having been delayed as long as possible, in the vain hope of the necessity being evaded.

In referring to the state of credit and circulation, I have purposely avoided dwelling upon the great evils that have resulted from the fluctuations in the value of the currency, not because I underrate them, but because they only affect one class of sufferers from the present distress, I mean those who have made bargains or formed calculations for time; such as persons taking long leases, or borrowing money at a fixed rate of interest, or speculating upon making sales at a future period. Of these classes I shall say a word or two by-and-by. But there is a circumstance affecting all classes, and of which it is quite impossible to exaggerate the importance, in accounting for the changes that have recently afflicted the agriculture of the kingdom—I mean the state of our finances, the complete revolution which the last, twenty-five years have effected in the revenue and expenditure of the country.

During that period our revenue has increased from fifteen to about sixty-six millions; our expenditure in one year exceeded one hundred and twenty-five millions; this year of peace it is to be above seventy-two millions, and no hopes are held out of its being permanently below sixty-five. That such a prodigious change could be wrought in the system of taxation and of public credit, without seriously affecting the landed interest, from which so large a proportion of the taxes is drawn, no man will for a moment suppose. But I believe few have formed to themselves distinct ideas of the manner in which excessive taxation has been operating on agriculture, and very inadequate notions are, I am sure, entertained of the amount of that operation. It is not, indeed, very easy to trace it; and to estimate precisely how
much of the pressure falls exclusively upon the cultivator would be impossible. But I shall take the liberty of submitting to you such means of approximation as I have been able to find, aware of the justice of an observation made this night by the member for Surrey,* that by communicating freely the ideas which have struck each of us upon this great question, we may hope for mutual correction and instruction.

I shall suppose a farm of 400 acres of fair good land, yielding a rent of from L500 to L600 a-year, managed according to the husbandry practised in the northern counties, with which only I can profess any particular acquaintance. It will require for a four years' course, 200 acres being in corn, 100 fallow, and 100 in hay and grass, fourteen plough horses; and supposing a saddle horse, and a servant, and a dog to be paid for, with a farm-house of twelve windows, the assessed taxes will amount to L22, 8s. a-year. This is a clear addition to the expenses of 1792, with which I am making the comparison. I pass over the income tax, as not peculiar to farmers, though it has been peculiarly oppressive to them, wherever the estimated exceeded the real profits. But the principal increase of expense has been upon the labour. The wages of the nine regular men servants who must be employed, have risen since 1792, from L.30 to L.50 each, but I will put the rise only at L.15, making in the whole L.135. Beside this, we must allow for the rise in the day labour required in spring and fall. Upon the 200 acres in corn, this will amount to a rise from 10s. an acre to 15s., or L.50 in all; upon the other 100 acres in hay and grass, the rise will be from 5s. an acre to 7s. 6d., and the same upon the 100 acres of fallow making an addition of L.25, or L.75 for the whole increase upon day labour. Two women servants must be allowed,—and their wages are more increased in proportion than those of men, principally, I believe, from the unwillingness of farmers, wives and daughters to work as they used to do before the more flourishing times; but take the rise on this head only at L.10—and we have the total increase on labour L.220. Black-smiths' and carpenters' bills have in like manner been raised, certainly not less than L.15 each upon such a farm as I am supposing; and the rise on saddlers' bills cannot be estimated at less than L.10, making upon these bills a rise of L.40, which, added to the former heads, gives the total increase in the expenses of cultivating such a farm, as equal to L.282, 8s., independent of the great rise on lime and all sorts of manure.

* Mr. H. Sumner.
Now, I admit that we have no right to set down the whole or nearly the whole of this large sum to the taxes which have been imposed since 1792, but a great part of it manifestly does arise from those taxes. Whatever part arises from the increased prices of grain and other provisions may be deducted, and will fall again with those prices. Whatever remains must be ascribed to the taxes chiefly. Above L.22 of the sum comes from direct taxation. At least one-half of the rise on the saddlers' bills, or L.5 more is owing to the same cause. But a considerable proportion of the grand item of labour is imputable to the taxes also. For let us only reflect on the nature of the duties which have been imposed. Many of them affect articles of prime necessity, as soap, salt, leather, and candles, all of which are ranked among necessaries of life by the writers on these subjects, and, what is a better authority, are felt to be such by the consumers; taxes upon all of which are allowed by those writers to affect directly the price of labour. Now the tax on leather has been doubled within the last four years, being raised from three halfpence, at which it stood before the war—[Here the Chancellor of the Exchequer said across the table, "And ever since the reign of Queen Anne"]—to three-pence, the present duty. The duty on salt, which in 1782, and I believe up to 1792, was only 10d. a bushel, had been raised previous to 1806, to 15s., the present duty. And candles have in the same period been taxed considerably. But these articles are not the only ones which may be reckoned necessaries, and are subjected to additional duties. In most parts of England, beer is to be classed in this list, from the universal custom of drinking it which prevails, and the duties upon it most seriously affect the farmer as a consumer of it, besides their pernicious tendency against his interest as a grower. The duty on malt has been raised from 10s. 7d. per quarter to 34s. 8d., of which 16s. is war duty; that on beer since 1802 has been increased from 5s. 7½d. per barrel to 9s. 7½d., or about 4s., while that on spirits has been raised since 1792 from 7d. to 1s. 9d. per gallon, or 1s. 2d. additional. The total revenue collected from these duties is L.12,350,000, by which the land suffers directly in proportion to the whole amount and indirectly in proportion as its cultivators are consumers of the manufactured article. But the price of agricultural labour is affected likewise by the duties of custom on many imported goods, which long habit has rendered scarcely less essential than some which I have enumerated as articles of first necessity. Of this class is sugar, upon which the heaviest taxes known in the history
of finance, are laid. I believe, indeed, there are many persons who would rather go without soap than sugar; and this is now subject to a duty of 30s. per cwt., instead of 15s., at which it was taxed before 1793. It must also be observed that whatever prohibiting or protecting duties have been laid upon foreign manufactures of articles used in clothing, these fall directly upon the labourer, and in so much tend to raise his wages, for the benefit, not certainly of the farmer, but the manufacturer. It is therefore evident that much of the augmentation in the expense of working a farm, a considerable portion of the sum of £220, which I have stated to have been added since 1792 to that large branch of a farmer's expenditure, is chargeable to the taxes; and a portion also of the sum of £35, the part of the rise in the carpenter's and other bills not directly affected by taxes, must also be charged to the same account. It is impossible to state with any degree of accuracy what the total amount of the increase of taxation has been upon these items; but that it must have been considerable, no one can reasonably doubt; and I beg to warn gentlemen against underrating it, from the fall in the rate of wages that has lately taken place. Labour has indeed come down, and in my opinion, a good deal more than was to be wished, I mean a good deal more than the fall of other prices justified. This fall must have resulted from the general distress of the country, and the number of hands in consequence everywhere thrown out of employment; but it is no sort of proof that the present is the natural and healthy state of wages; or that they will long remain so low; or that the fall in the price of provisions has permanently reduced wages to their level before the war; and therefore it is no kind of evidence that the increase in the expense of cultivation has arisen from the rise in prices alone, and not also from the increase of taxation.

But it may be said that the taxes have not fallen exclusively upon the farmer, and that he only suffers in common with the rest of the country. Now, to this I shall offer, I think, the most satisfactory answers. It must be remembered, in the first place, that part of the taxes fall directly and exclusively upon the landed interest. Some of the assessed taxes, and the enormous malt, beer, and spirit duties are clearly of this description. But next, observe how differently the farmer is circumstanced in these times from the other parts of the community, with respect to the rise in wages, produced partly by the taxes. The commodity in which he deals is on the decline in point of price from over-cultivation; he cannot, therefore, throw the tax upon the consumer. If
manufactured goods are in high demand, the customer pays the duties to which the manufacturer may be subject, either directly or indirectly by the rise in wages caused by those taxes. If those goods are falling in price, the tax presses upon the manufacturer himself. Now this is, and for some time past has been, in a peculiar manner, the state of the farmer, who indeed never has the means of suddenly accommodating the supply of his commodity to the demand, with the nicety and dispatch observable in the operations of trade. But, a still more material circumstance distinguishes the situation of the farmer from that of the manufacturer, relieving the latter at the expense of the former. I allude to the state of the law, which throws upon the land the whole burthen of maintaining the poor, and reduces the price of all labour below its natural level, at the sole expense of the cultivator. It is well known to the committee, that whatever may have been the intention of the legislature, (and the meaning of the statute of Elizabeth is sufficiently plain,) yet, from the defect in the powers of the act, the money raised for the support of the poor is paid entirely by the land. Persons in trade only pay in so far as they are also owners of real property. Thus a manufacturer who is deriving ten or twelve thousand a-year from his trade, is rated as if he only had a large building worth four or five hundred a-year beside his dwelling-house, while his neighbour, who possesses a farm of the same yearly value pays as much; that is, the man of ten thousand a-year in trade, pays no more than the man of five hundred a-year in land. Yet, only observe the difference between the two in their relation to labour and to the poor. The farmer employs a few hands—the manufacturer a whole colony; the farmer causes no material augmentation in the number of paupers—the manufacturer multiplies paupers by wholesale; the one supports—the other makes paupers, manufacturing them just as certainly, and in something of the same proportion as he manufactures goods. The inequality of this distribution is plain enough, but I am now speaking of it in its relation chiefly to the subject of wages. From the abuse of the poor laws, it has become the prevailing practice to support by parish relief, not merely persons who are disabled from working by disease or age, but those who, though in health, cannot earn enough to maintain them; and by a shortsighted policy wholly unaccountable, the custom has spread very widely of keeping down the wages of labour by the application of the poor-rates, as if any thing could equal the folly of paying rates rather than hire; of parting with
the disposition of your own money, and of paying for labour, not in proportion to your own demand for that labour, but in proportion to some general average of the district you chance to live in. I pass over the inevitable effect of this arrangement in raising the total amount of the sums paid for labour, and in throwing upon one farm the expenses of cultivating another less favourably circumstanced; it is enough for my present purpose to remark, that the whole effect of the system is to make the land pay a sum yearly, levied in the most unequal manner, applied in the least economical way, for the purpose of lowering the wages generally, and lowering the wages of manufacturing as well as agricultural labour. From this unquestionable position I draw two inferences, I think equally undeniable, and bearing directly upon the subject of our present inquiry,—the one is, that the effects of taxation in raising the price of labour are not distributed equally over all classes of the community, but fall exclusively upon the land, the land paying for the rise which the taxes have occasioned, both in agricultural labour, and in other kinds of work—the other is, that, even if the fall in the price of provisions should apparently restore wages permanently to their former level, the real rate of wages would still be raised, and the real cost of cultivation be augmented, unless the poor rates also were brought back to their former amount. The sum now levied upon the land for this purpose exceeds eight millions. Before the American war, it was less than two. I think I have said enough to show how immediately, how severely, how exclusively, the rise in the taxes from fifteen to sixty-six millions has pressed upon agriculture; how impossible it is to expect substantial relief as long as that pressure continues.

I have now, Sir, I fear at a very unreasonable, length, gone through the causes which appear to have co-operated in producing our present distresses; and I come at last to a consideration of the means by which the evil may be remedied, or at least rendered supportable. In entering upon this part of the subject, I feel sensibly the delicacy of the ground I am going to tread. No one ought, without the most serious examination of it, to venture an opinion which (from the respect paid to our deliberations in this place,) may have a material influence upon the fortunes of individuals, and, at any rate, may agitate their hopes and fears in a crisis of such general solicitude. I wish, therefore, to state nothing that has not been suggested to my mind by very mature and anxious deliberation; but, whatever may appear justified by such research, I think it my duty to propound,
without the smallest regard to personal considerations, or to the prejudices that may prevail in any quarter.

And, first, I am afraid there is one class of persons who can hardly expect effectual relief from any measures, or from any supposable change of times; I mean those who have been trading largely in land upon borrowed capital. They have speculated upon a continuance of extravagant prices, and the fund is, in all likelihood, gone for ever, out of which their debts were to have been repaid. The fall in the market price of bullion is of itself a severe loss to such adventurers; they have still to pay in money as before, when every hundred pounds is really worth one hundred and twenty-five; they have to pay as much money to their creditors as formerly, and they can only receive three-fourths as much from their customers. I would fain hope, however, that such is not the situation of the great bulk of proprietors, to whom, perhaps, a permanent relief (and even to the speculator a palliative) may possibly be found. Those who have been expending large sums on bad land are in the worst state, and I fear that a good deal which ought never to have been cultivated at all, must be abandoned, and much grass land that should not have been broken up, must be laid down again as well as circumstances will permit, unquestionably at a great loss. The lowering of rents, which has pretty generally taken place, can hardly be reckoned any considerable relief, if other circumstances remain the same. It is a severe loss to the landlord, a loss which he sustains alone of all who have made time bargains; for no one hears of mortgagees or other creditors giving up twenty-five per cent., either on principal or interest, because the value of money has risen in that proportion; but to the tenant it affords a very inadequate relief, for he is complaining of a fall in the price of his gross produce, of above three pounds an acre, (supposing the produce to be three quarters of wheat per acre), and all that the landlord can do for him is to take off five shillings an acre, leaving him to struggle against a loss of fifty-five shillings. But I shall now beg the attention of the Committee to the different measures which have been proposed, and in discussing these, as well as in submitting others to your consideration, I shall be guided by the view which I have taken of the nature and causes of the evil.

The first of these remedies, in point of importance as well as of time, is the Corn Bill of last session. Although that measure is no longer a matter of discussion, yet as I had not the honour of a seat in this house either when my Honour-
able friend* brought forward the bill of 1804, or when he raised the importation price last year from 63s. 6d. to 80s. I deem it more fair not to avoid the topic, but state my opinion frankly upon its merits, the more especially as it has been the object of very strong disapprobation in many parts of the country. I certainly am disposed to think favourably of it, although I am well aware how diffidently it becomes us to speak upon a measure which has divided so widely the ablest men, both in parliament and out of doors, marshalling in almost equally formidable array on the opposite sides of the dispute, the statesmen and the political authors;† whose opinions upon such a subject are the most entitled to respect. As it is impossible, however, upon such a controversy not to oppose great authorities, so it is some comfort that, for the same reason, one has the support also of eminent names; and this emboldens me in stating, that I conceive the measure to be politic, at the least, as a palliative, or as affording the means of carrying the country through difficulties, the greatest pressure of which we may hope will only prove temporary. But then, I can by no means excuse the language of those who deride it merely because it is temporary, or, as they term it an expedient. If it enables us to get over the existing evils, arising, in great part, from a transition to a new state of things, it does a great permanent good; it saves much valuable capital from being totally lost, much skill and labour already bestowed, from being thrown away; and it may thus, even where it fails in affording entire relief, be most important as preventing entire ruin. A measure of this description is only in name one of a temporary nature; its operation is solid and lasting. I pass over its tending to secure a constant and certain supply of food to the community; I am speaking of it merely as a measure calculated for the relief of the agricultural interests, and of all the branches of trade immediately dependent upon them. In the same light may be regarded the extension of the measure to some other kind of agricultural produce, which is at present before parliament.

But I own I view, in a very different light, my Honourable friend's propositions respecting Bounties upon the Exportation of corn. To pass over every other objection to such a plan, if there be any truth in the positions which I think I have established, that the principal causes of our distresses are the too rapid extension of cultivation, and the

* Mr. Western.
† See on the one side, Mr. Malthus's excellent tracts—and, on the other, the very able discussion of the corn bill of 1804, by Mr. Mill.
intolerable weight of the taxes; surely it follows inevitably that to force exportation by a bounty, would only perpetuate the one of these causes, and increase the other. Indeed, I marvel that my Honourable friend could have thought of such a measure in times like the present. Why, its very essence is taxation, and to a vast amount—taxation upon the people of this country to make us sell corn cheap to foreigners—taxation upon the land already oppressed with burthens. And how are such new sums to be levied? We have got rid of the income tax—that is some relief to the farmer. Does my Honourable friend wish this burthen to be once more imposed for the relief of agriculture? Or, does he peradventure desire to see the malt tax again raised from 14s. to 30s. in order to encourage the production of grain? All that has ever been paid in bounties formerly, is a trifle compared with the sums which this new scheme would require. In 1814, for instance, the last year for which we have the return, the whole of the bounties paid by government did not exceed L206,800—a sum, in all probability, very injudiciously bestowed, but still not very ruinous in its amount. A corn bounty, when wheat is selling, perhaps 20s. a quarter higher in this country than in the foreign markets, would cost a million for every million of quarters taken out of the home market: and each effect produced by this forced exportation, in raising the price at home, would render the exportation, more costly.

But nothing, in my humble opinion, can be worse founded than another remedy suggested by my Honourable friend; I mean the exclusion of foreign corn from our warehouses, and the encouragement to store our own grain in the public repositories. Have farmers no barn yards or granaries of their own, in which they can keep their corn until the market is favourable? Are the crops in greater danger of rats there than in the king's warehouses? But it is pretended that foreign corn is at present imported, and fills the public granaries, ready to be poured out the instant that the Gazette gives the signal, by declaring the average to be 80s. for the last six weeks; and my Honourable friend considers that if the permission thus to warehouse foreign grain were withdrawn, no such effect could be produced. Now, I will suffer myself to be devoured by the vermin I have been talking of, if I do not, in a few minutes, shew my Honourable friend himself, the fallacy of this argument. Does he think that merchants wait for the Gazette to learn the price during any period of six weeks? Are they ignorant of the weekly and daily state of the markets? Do they not
know at any moment of any six weeks how the prices are running, and can they form no guess, as the six weeks elapse, of the average at which the Gazette return is likely to state them? Why, the corn merchant does not even wait until a harvest is ripe before he commences his calculations, in order to form his plans of importation. I happen to know a little of this branch of trade, and I can inform my Honourable friend, that there are emissaries sent round the country while the grain is in the ear, to collect samples, which are sifted out and measured and weighed, in order to obtain data upon which the goodness of the crop, it yields, may be estimated, long before a sickle has glanced among the stalks. While my Honourable friend is sitting in his study, forming plans upon the supposition that those corn-mERCHANTS will wait for the periodical promulgation of the average by the King’s printer, they are actually in his fields, committing an innocent trespass, to obtain the earliest information of the next crop as the groundwork of their speculations; and upon this knowledge they speedily begin to act. If the permission to warehouse is withheld, they still must act upon the rise of the markets, and the only difference will be that, instead of collecting the grain on this side of the water, they will have it on the other, to the benefit of foreign merchants, agents, and warehousemen, but just as ready to be poured in as if it were in our own ports. Indeed, any one must be sensible, after a moment’s consideration, that nothing but a confident expectation of the price approaching to 80s. could induce merchants to bring over their cargoes and lodge them in this country, when they know, that until it reaches that point, all the expenses of the importation are incurred for nothing. Whether the voyage is made before or after the day on which the Gazette declares that point to have been attained, must obviously be a matter of perfect indifference; and it is the only thing which the permission or prohibition of warehousing can effect.

The alteration suggested in the Laws relating to Wool, appears to me in a very different light. I had the honour of broaching this important subject on the first day of the session, and every thing that has since come to my knowledge confirms the opinion I then ventured to express. As a committee has been appointed this night to investigate the question, at the suggestion of my Honourable friend,* who has thrown so much light on the whole matter now under discussion, I shall abstain from going into it at length; but

* Mr. Frankland Lewis.
I must beg to press upon your attention how greatly the agricultural interests are concerned in it. The most important relief has been afforded to many part of the country by the good prices which wool has borne during the depression of almost all other produce: I allude especially to the long coarse wool, the ancient and peculiar staple of this island. Ten years ago it was from 9d. to 1s. the pound; now it is 21d., and it was recently as high as 2s. This article is the growth, and has, during the bad times, formed the support of Lincolnshire and the midland counties. Further northwards we have principally the coarse wool from the black-faced sheep. This is grown in the northern counties, and as far as Edinburgh: it used to be 7d. or 8d., and is now 14d. or 15d. the pound. The relief afforded by such prices is not confined to the wool-grower; it extents to all other agriculturists in his neighbourhood; because whatever saves a farmer from distress or ruin upon the general balancing of his accounts, keeps him from glutting the market with his produce or stock, and prevents the general market of agricultural produce from being dispressed. In like manner, the support of the wool districts has extended relief to the other districts, and has produced a favourable effect upon the whole markets of the country, rendering the pressure of the general distress considerably lighter than it would have been had the woolgrower been in the same predicament with all other agriculturists. There is every reason however, to apprehend, that this article also is on the decline: it has actually fallen within the last three months, and would certainly fall much more rapidly, but for the large orders now in the market in consequence of extensive contracts for clothing foreign troops. I have heard of one contract for the uniforms of 150,000 men, which must raise the demand for the wool immediately used in that manufacture. In these circumstances, and indeed at any time, it seems to be a most unwise policy, as far as regards our agriculture, to prohibit the exportation of wool. The finer sort would in all probability find no market abroad, and a permission to export it would therefore have no effect either way; but for the coarse, especially the long wool, there must always be a great demand, as it is absolutely necessary to certain manufactures, and is at present peculiar to this island. It well deserves the attention of the committee, whether the prohibiting laws should not be repealed, which compel the wool grower to sell his commodity at home, in order that the manufacturer may work it, and the consumer may wear it, much cheaper than they would if the farmer had the choice of his market. The
establishment of a free trade would not raise the price above its present standard, nor in all likelihood would it prevent some further fall, but it would at least guard us against the great depression which may now be apprehended. These are points, however, well worthy of inquiry, and I look to the labours of the committee appointed tonight, for much information upon them.

But the most material subject for our consideration, consistently with the view which I have taken of the present distress, is manifestly the burdens peculiarly affecting land; and these are the Tithes, Parish Rates, and General Taxes. Upon the subject of Tithes, I have much to submit to your notice, as it has long and anxiously engaged my attention; but it seems not to be peculiarly connected with our present inquiry, as tithe rather affects the expenditure of capital in improvements, and this is certainly not the predicament of almost any person in these times. I am desirous therefore of deferring to another opportunity the observations which I have to make on the plans of commutation proposed by different gentlemen, particularly by my Honourable friend the member for Hertfordshire,* as well as another method not yet suggested, by which I feel assured an arrangement of this important matter might be made with great facility and safety. The subject of the Poor-rates, however, is one which, in an especial manner, presses for discussion; and I am confident that every one who may have honoured with his attention the observations which I have submitted to you, will perceive how essential some revision of the system is to the welfare of agriculture.

It is clear that the exclusive pressure of parish rates upon the land, was never in contemplation of the legislature; but as the 43d of Elizabeth, whatever it may enact with respect to the persons who shall pay, furnishes no means of obtaining payment in proportion to the profits of trade and professions, the law, if unaltered, must continue to throw the whole burthen upon the land-owner. In addition to this he has to support almost all the public works, as roads, bridges, and churches, in which he is no more interested than the other members of the community. They are made originally at his expense, and kept in repair by him; and although the rest of the country refunds a part of the money originally advanced, yet, every one knows, how seldom this is adequate to his repayment—while the repairs, constantly required, are a certain loss to him. At present, however, I am speaking chiefly of the poor-rates. The devia-

* Mr. Brand.
tion, in some measure necessary, from the intent of the statute of Elizabeth, as to the class who shall pay them, is not more fatal to the interest of the land-owner, than the perversion of that law, without any such excuse, to the support of all poor persons, whether capable or incapable of work, and the supply of money to those who earn what are deemed inadequate gains. I confess that I see but one radical cure for the state into which this last abuse has thrown the country, and which is daily growing worse, deranging its whole economy, debasing its national character—The inequality of the system may be remedied; at least, I would fain hope that some method might be devised, without having recourse to the odious machinery of the income tax, for making the other property bear its share with the land in defraying the expense which should fall equally on all income, if it is to be compulsory upon any. But though great relief may thus be obtained, the worst vices of the system are deeper seated, and admit, I fear, but of one cure. As the law is now administered, under the influence of the habits which have unfortunately grown up with the abuse of it, the lower orders look to parish relief, no longer with dread or shame; but they regard it as a fund out of which their wants may at all times be supplied. To say nothing of the effects of this feeling upon their habits of industry and economy; to pass over its fatal influence on their character, and especially on their spirit of independence; only observe how it removes all check upon imprudent marriages, and tends to multiply the number of the people beyond the means of subsistence—that is, to multiply the numbers of the poor. A young couple who feel inclined to marry, never think, now-a-days, of waiting until they can afford it, until they have a prospect of being able to support a family. They hardly consider whether they are able to support themselves. They know that whatever deficit may arise in their means, the parish must make up; and they take into their account the relief derivable from this source, as confidently and with as little repugnance as if it were a part of their inheritance. It is truly painful to reflect, that our peasantry who, some time ago, used to regard such a supply with dread—used to couple every notion of ruin, misery, and even degradation with the thought of coming upon the parish—should now be accustomed to receive relief almost as if it were a regular part of their wages. I can see but one effectual remedy for this great and growing evil; it is the one which follows so immediately from the principles unfolded in Mr. Malthus's celebrated work. It might be objectionable, on
many grounds, to withhold relief from the future issue of marriages already contracted; but why may not such relief be refused to the children born of marriages to be contracted after a certain period? An exception might perhaps be made in favour of those who are incapable of working from age, or other infirmity, though I know not that it would be better to make their claims a matter of right than an appeal to charitable assistance. But persons able to work, and the issue of marriages had after the law is changed, should certainly be excluded. This change would not operate an immediate reform of the system, but the reform would be a perfectly sure one, and it would commence almost as soon as the law passed. If any gentleman is scared at so great an innovation, I will only ask him to survey the enormous amount and odious nature of the evil complained of, and to make his choice between the expedient suggested, and the mischief so severely felt, not, indeed, as it at present exists, but in the still greater extent towards which it is daily hastening.

The next point to which I shall beg the attention of the Committee, is the means of relieving the land, and indeed the country in general, from the pressure of taxation, which I have shown to have so great a share in the present distresses. That such relief is within our reach, to a very great extent, I hold to be perfectly manifest. The whole sums applicable to the Sinking Fund for the last year amount to £15,627,000, and including the Irish debt, £16,928,000. Of this the financial operations of 1808 and 1813, have appropriated £4,302,000; there remains undisposed of £12,626,000, and the sinking fund on the Austrian and Portuguese loans is £124,000, which makes the whole unapplied fund £12,750,000. Now, of this large revenue, £6,479,000 arises from the one per cent. upon all loans contracted since 1793. It may be thought consistent with good faith to preserve this portion of the fund entire; and before such a plan as I am now suggesting could begin to operate, it would amount to about six millions and a half. The remaining part of the fund, including the annual grants, and the interest of the other redeemed stock, amounting to £6,271,000, or at the period in question to about £6,300,000, might I will venture to say, not only without detriment, but with advantage to the credit of the country, be applied to its relief in the remission of the most oppressive taxes. If a sinking fund of six millions and a half is left, operating at a time when there are no new loans, it will produce a far greater effect in the stock market than the whole fund has ever done during war.
when much more stock was constantly poured in than the commissioners could redeem. Indeed, this is too large a fund to remain so applied in time of peace, and could only be justified by the notion prevailing in some most respectable quarters, that good faith towards the lenders, since 1792, requires the one per cent. to be left untouched. But for preserving the other six millions and a quarter, no pretext can be urged, especially after the inroads already made upon the fund during war, which have destroyed all idea of its inviolability, in the minds of those who held it sacred. The prospect of the vast benefits which might be conferred on the country by such an arrangement, is so dazzling that I am afraid to trust myself with painting it. Only let the Committee reflect for a moment upon the taxes which might be instantly repealed, supposing always that our expenses have been by retrenchment brought within our present revenue. The taxes that press most upon agriculture—those on leather, husbandry-horses, and malt, might at once be done away. The most oppressive of the assessed taxes might also be repealed. The bad gains of the lottery, by which money is raised directly at the expense of public morals, might be abandoned. In short, we should have the pleasing task, during the remainder of this session, of inquiring what taxes pressed most severely upon the people, or were most pernicious in their effects, and of lightening the burthen to the extent of between six and seven millions. As the remaining part of the Sinking Fund increased, further relief might, from time to time, be afforded; for surely it never could be in the contemplation of any one who understood the public economy of the country, in its trading as well as financial concerns, that the whole amount of the taxes required by the existing debt should be repealed at once, and the transition made suddenly from a levy of forty-two millions a-year to no levy at all. Nor could any friend to the stability of the Constitution wish to see the executive government for any period, how short soever, possessed of that enormous income unappropriated to any service. But they who tell us that the Sinking Fund is sacred or rather that it has since 1813, become sacred—who will not hear of any proposition for gradually reducing it—whom nothing will satisfy but a rise of stocks in a few months to par, the repayment of L.100 for every L.50 or L.55 that we have borrowed, and the continuance of all our heavy burthens until the moment when they may all cease together—those persons must surely be prepared either to show that the taxes now paying for the benefit of their posterity, are un-
connected with the distresses of the present age, or to produce some other means of relieving their country. The question is now at issue between the stock-holder and all the rest of the community, and it is for the Committee to say whether they will, at all hazards and costs take his part, or listen to the only imaginable means of effectually remediing the most crying of the evils we are labouring under.

Before I sit down, Sir, I must advert to the great importance of keeping a most watchful eye over the mercantile and manufacturing interests of the kingdom. It is an inexusable ignorance or thoughtlessness alone, which can ever overlook the intimate connexion between our trading and our agricultural concerns; nor can any thing be more preposterous than the clamour frequently raised on the one or the other side, as if those two great branches of public industry could have interests incompatible with each other. The sufferings of the merchants and manufacturers are hardly less severe in these times, than the distresses which immediately occupy our attention in this Committee. It well becomes us to see that they do not increase under the pressure of foreign competition, since the restoration of peace on the Continent. Whatever measures may tend to open new markets to our industry, the government is most imperiously called upon to entertain. A more effectual relief can hardly be given to agriculture than such a support extended to the other parts of the community. Let me in this light, entertain the attention of the Committee, and more especially of His Majesty's ministers, to the trade with South America. Connected as we are with the governments of Portugal and Spain, by every tie that can give one power a claim to favour from another, surely we may hope to see some arrangements made which shall facilitate our intercourse with the rich markets of Mexico, Brazil, and Peru. At present, if I am rightly informed, a considerable traffic is driven with those fertile countries, but under trammels that render it irksome and precarious. It is known that no consuls or residents, either commercial or political, are established in Spanish America; and, indeed, the whole trade is little better than a contraband carried on under a certain degree of connivance. Yet it is difficult to imagine any thing more beneficial to our merchantile interests, than the establishment of a regular and authorized connexion with those parts of the world. The subject is not free from delicacy, in consequence of the efforts making by the Spanish colonies to shake off the yoke of the mother country—efforts, for the success of which every enlightened, indeed, every honest
man, must devoutly pray. But wherever the authority of
the Spanish and Portuguese governments extends, it may be
hoped that some footing will be obtained for our merchants
by negotiation, while, with respect to the revolted colonies,
I trust his Majesty’s ministers will beware how they carry
their delicacy towards the mother country too far, and allow
their nations to pre-occupy the ground which our own coun-
try-men ought to have their share of. The Americans are
in the neighbourhood; we know their indefatigable activity
and vast commercial resources; let us take care, not that
we press forward to exclude them from the markets in que-
sion—that is impossible; but that we obtain access to those
marts for ourselves. It is a subject of vast extent and im-
portance; I abstain from entering further into it; but this
I will venture to assert, that the minister who shall signalize
his official life by establishing, whether in the old or the
new world, such a system as may open to his country the
commerce of South America, will render a greater service to
the state, and leave to posterity a more enviable fame, than
it is in the power of conquest to bestow.

Sir, I have to thank the Committee for the patient atten-
tion with which they have honoured me. I am conscious
that I owe it to the singular importance of the subjects
I have been handling; and that, too, is the only apology I
can offer for having so long trespassed upon your indulgence.
SPEECH
ON
MANUFACTURING DISTRESS,
DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
MARCH 13, 1817.

SIR,—When I consider that the period of the session is well nigh passed, in which it has been the custom of this House, at periods of great public distress, to inquire into the state of the nation, and yet that nothing has been done to bring the subject before us, or to testify, on our part, a becoming anxiety concerning the sufferings of the people; I feel myself supported by this reflection under the magnitude of the vast question which I have presumed to handle. We have, in truth, allowed the accustomed season of investigation to elapse, without doing any thing except what, with all possible respect for the proceedings of Parliament, I conceive to have been beginning at the wrong end. Mistaking the symptom for the malady, we have attempted to stifle the cries of the people in their extreme distress, instead of seeking the cause of their sufferings, and endeavouring to apply a cure. I am, indeed, aware that there are many who differ with me upon this subject, who deemed the late measures of legislation salutary and wise. But whatever variety of opinion might exist upon their merits, I may now appeal to all who hear me, to those who joined me in depreciating and resisting the suspension of the Constitution, and to those who viewed this frightful step as justified by the necessities of the times, and call upon all parties alike to say, whether the moment is not at length come, when it behoves us to mount from the effect to the cause of the mischief; and, having done so much to preserve the public peace, whether it is not our duty to search for the means of alleviating the general misery by which alone that peace has been endangered. My very sincere anxiety to give the Parliament an opportunity of discharging this duty, has made me bold to bring forward the present question; too late, I admit, for attaining all the
objects that might once have been within our reach, but ear-
ly enough, I would fain hope, to effect some good purposes.

I am aware that there is nothing so injudicious as to be-
gin a discussion like this, by hazard ing any large and san-
guine predictions of its probable result. Nevertheless, I will
venture to say, that whatever difference of opinion may exist
upon particular topics, a considerable majority of the House
will agree in holding, that the period is now arrived when,
the war being closed, and prodigious changes have taken
place almost all over the world, it becomes absolutely neces-
sary to enter upon a careful but fearless revision of our
whole commercial system, that we may be enabled safely,
yet promptly, to eradicate those vices which the lapse of
time has occasioned or displayed; to retrace our steps, where
we shall find that they have deviated from the line of true
policy; to adjust and accommodate our laws to the alteration
of circumstances; to abandon many prejudices, alike anti-
quated and senseless, unsuited to the advanced age in which
we live, and unworthy of the sound judgment of the nation.

I shall begin, Sir, by entering upon the fundamental
branch of the inquiry, which I am solicitous the House
should institute—I mean the present aspect of our affairs.
Every one is aware that there exists in the country a great
and universal distress—a distress wholly without parallel in
any former period of its history. This, indeed, is unhappily
matter of so much notoriety, that I should hardly think it
required any particular proof or illustration, were it not that,
according to my view of the subject, the extent to which
the evil has spread, and the peculiar shapes which it has
assumed, must be examined, before we can probe its sources
or find a remedy. The House will speedily perceive in what
way this examination of the fact conduces to the object we
all have in view, and will, I am persuaded, give me credit in
the meantime, for not leading them into superfluous details.

To demonstrate the general proposition, indeed, I might
bid you cast your eyes upon the petitions that load the
table, from all parts of the empire, from every description
of its inhabitants, from numbers infinitely exceeding those
that ever before approached us in the language of complaint.
It is in vain to remind us of the manner in which some of
them have been prepared for signature. Does any man be-
lieve, that a treasury manufactory of petitions, distributing
the article through the country with all the influence of go-
vernment, could procure one column of names to a state-
ment of national prosperity, or a prayer for liberal taxation?
Nor does the ineptness of the remedies which many of the
petitioners suggest, impeach the correctness of their tale of distress: they may be very incapable of devising the means of relief—they are abundantly qualified to give evidence of the grievance.

I might next appeal to the returns from the Custom-House, to shew the declension of trade. I am aware that these documents give no information respecting the internal commerce of the country, by far its most important branch; and that even with respect to foreign traffic, nothing can be more fallacious than arguments wholly drawn from such sources. When taken, however, in conjunction with other evidence, they are not altogether to be disregarded. Now, it is shewn by a comparison of the years 1815 and 1816, that there was a falling off, in the shipping employed during the latter year, of 826,000 tons, or nearly 5000 vessels. This fact is the more remarkable, that we were at war during a quarter of 1815, whereas 1816 was the first whole year of peace. These returns speak of the tonnage outwards and inwards; but they tell nothing of the difference between the exports and imports of either year. I will venture to assert, that a much more considerable defalcation will be found in the importation of last year than the mere falling off in the tonnage indicates. I am well aware, that many millions of goods have been sent abroad, for which no returns have been received, and which never will produce sixpence to the exporters. Upon this point no Custom-House papers can give any information. They cannot shew what proportion of the cargoes shipped have found a market—what parts have been sold under prime cost—what parts remain upon hand unsaleable at any price—and what parts of the goods imported are in a similar situation.

We have known former times of great national suffering—most of us are old enough to remember more than one period of severe public calamity—but no man can find an example of any thing like the present. In 1800 there was a scarcity much greater than is now felt, but no distress ensued beyond the reach of private charity, and the affliction ended with the bad season; for, though provisions were dear, work was abundant, and the bulk of the poor were enabled to sustain the pressure of the evil. In 1812 there was a much greater distress—the dearth was less, indeed, but the rate of wages was far lower. The House well remembers the painful inquiries in which it was then my fortune to bear a considerable part. We were accustomed to describe the circumstances in which we found the manufacturing population of the country as wretched beyond
all former example; and the expression was strictly justified by the fact. Yet, compared with the wide-spread misery under which the same classes now labour, the year 1812 rises into a period of actual prosperity. It will be necessary for me, and I hope the House will grant me their indulgence, to go shortly into some particulars touching the great staple manufactures of the kingdom, in order to shew how unparalleled in its amount, and how various in its kinds, the distress is, which now every where prevails.

I shall begin with the clothing, a branch of trade which, from accidental circumstances, is not so depressed as our other great staples; and for this, among other reasons, that the foreign markets do not happen to be overstocked with this manufacture, while some considerable foreign government contracts have given great assistance to several of the clothing districts. I hold in my hand the result of statements which I have received from the principal clothing countries of Yorkshire—Leeds, Huddersfield, Wakefield, and Halifax. Taking the number of men engaged in the branch which suffers most, the cloth dressing, at 3,360 in August last, there were then 927 in full, 1385 in partial employment, and 1048 wholly out of work. Calculating upon the same number, there are now only 757 in full, and 1439 in partial work, while 1164 are entirely idle; that is to say, a third of the whole are idle, and of those who have any work, only one-third, that is, two-ninths of the whole, or two men in nine, have full employment. The distress of the other clothiers in this county is far from being so considerable; but in the West of England, I am informed by the most unexceptionable evidence, that it exceeds any thing which can easily be conceived.

If we now carry our view towards the iron trade, a most gloomy picture is presented; and I may take the state of Birmingham as a fair symptom of this commerce in general, intimately connected as that great town is with the neighbouring counties in all the branches of their industry and commerce. In a population of 84,000 souls, about 27,500 receive parish relief. Of the work people, one-third are wholly out of employ, and the rest are at half work. The poor-rates have risen to between fifty and sixty thousand pounds a-year, a sum exceeding, as I am informed, what the inhabitants paid to the income-tax. In 1812, when the House was so greatly touched by the state of this place, only a ninth part of the population were paupers, and the rates did not exceed £27,000, yet we then thought the public distresses had reached their utmost pitch.
The people engaged in the iron trade may be divided into four great classes, with reference to my present purpose—the miners and others employed in obtaining the raw material—the persons employed in manufacturing arms—the nailers—and the common artificers. The first of these classes, who in 1810 received from 18s. upwards, as far as two guineas a-week, get now from 10s. to 18s.—the second, who received still higher, I might say even exorbitant wages, from the demand occasioned by the war, now get only 7s. 6d. when they are employed at all—the nailers, who are better off than most classes, yet earn no more than 8s. or 9s., instead of 12s. or 15s.—while the common artificers are working at a shilling a-day. But in all these classes the women and children, who used to earn so much as nearly to double the gains of the able workmen, are now wholly unemployed. Sir, I do not wish to mingle any allusions of a political nature with the description of these sad scenes; but I feel it due to the character and the sufferings of those unhappy persons, to assert (and I do so upon the authority of men who differ with me in political sentiments) that a more loyal, peaceful, tranquil set of people are not to be found within the limits of his Majesty's dominions.

It is truly painful to think, that, severe as the distress is in those parts of the country which I have been describing, a yet more melancholy picture presents itself when we turn to the great staple of the country, the cotton manufacture. This, as the House is well aware, consists of two branches, the spinning and weaving; but, from the introduction of machinery, the numbers employed in weaving are beyond all comparison greater than those employed in spinning. In Lancashire alone, and the borders of the adjoining counties, there are above half a million of persons who derive their support from the former. Taking the average gains of a thousand weavers, of all ages and classes, their rate of wages was 13s. 3d. a-week in May 1800. In 1802 the same persons received the still higher sum of 13s. 10d. In 1806 it had fallen to 10s. 6d.; and in 1808, after it had pleased the wisdom of government to "retaliative" as they phrased it, "upon the enemy the evils of his own injustice," and to inflict upon ourselves (as the event proved to such as had not the sense to perceive it) the evils of our own impolicy—when we had succeeded in quarrelling with our best customers—those wages fell as low as 6s. 7d. In 1812, when the whole virtues of our system had been called into action, and had bestowed the full measures of its beneficence upon our trade, the wages fell to 6s. 4d. In 1816, the third year of
MANUFACTURING DISTRESS.

peace, and while we were slowly moving through that transition of which we have heard (though it seems something of rather a permanent than a passing nature) wages were as low as 5s. 2d. This was in the month of May; and in January last, they had reached the fearful point of depression at which they now stand, of 4s. 3½d.; from which, when the usual expenses paid by the work people for the loom are deducted, there remains no more than 3s. 3d. to support human life for seven days. By another calculation it appears, that 437 persons have to provide for themselves and as many more out of 5s. a-week; making, for the whole subsistence and expenditure of each individual, less than 4½d. a-day.

When I paused over this scene of misery, unequalled in the history of civilized times, I felt naturally impelled to demand, how it was possible to sustain existence in such circumstances, and whether it were not practicable to administer charitable aid? To the first question I received for answer the painful intelligence, that those miserable beings could barely purchase, with their hard and scanty earnings, half a pound of oatmeal daily, which, mixed with a little salt and water, constituted their whole food. My other inquiry had been anticipated by that well-known spirit of kindness, not more humane than politic, by which the demeanour of the master manufacturers in this country has ever been regulated towards their workmen in the seasons of their common distress. Projects for affording them relief had been canvassed; but it was found, that to distribute only a slender increase of nourishment, an addition of a little milk, or beer, or a morsel of meat, to the oatmeal and water, no less a sum than L.2,000 a-week was required, and at a time when the masters were hardly receiving any profits from their trade. To talk of charity, then, is entirely out of the question; the case lies far beyond the reach of private beneficence; and, if it admits of a remedy at all, must look to other sources of relief.

Now, what is the consequence of all this, and whither does it inevitably lead? These wretched creatures are compelled first to part for their sustenance with all their trifling property, piecemeal, from the little furniture of their cottages to the very bedding and clothes that used to cover them from the weather. They struggle on with hunger, and go to sleep at night, upon the calculation, that, if they worked an hour or two later, they might indeed earn three-halfpence more, one of which must be paid for a candle, but then the clear gain of a penny would be too dearly bought, and leave
them less able to work the next day. To such a frightful
nicety of reckoning are human beings reduced, treating them-
selves like mere machines, and balancing the produce against
the tear and wear, so as to obtain the maximum that their
physical powers can be made to yield! At length, however,
they must succumb; the workhouse closes their dismal pro-
spect; or, with a reluctance that makes their lot a thousand
times more piteous, they submit to take parish relief; and,
to sustain life, part with the independent spirit, the best
birthright of an English peasant.

If from these details we ascend to considerations of a more
general nature, and observe certain symptoms, which, though
less striking in themselves, are perhaps the safest guides in
such an inquiry, we shall find, that nothing is happening
around us on any side, which is not indicated by these signs
of the times. The first of the symptoms to which I shall re-
fer is the great diminution that has taken place in the con-
sumption of luxuries all over the country. This is attested
by the undeniable fact, that there has been a material and
increasing defalcation in the produce of the Customs and
Excise, especially of the latter, during the last twelve months.
It is well known, too, that those districts suffered first, and
most severely, which depended upon the manufacture of
luxurious articles. Every one is familiar with the case of
Spitalfields. The poor of that neighbourhood, after having
exhausted the whole rates, have received from voluntary
contributions, reflecting the highest honour upon the chari-
table and liberal character of the metropolis at large, sums,
which, added to the rates, exceed the whole income of the
parish at rack rent. In like manner the levies of Coventry
and its neighbourhood have increased beyond all former ex-
ample. It appeared, when the petition from thence was
presented, that one estate of 200 acres paid £400 in rates.
A singular instance, illustrative of the same position, with
respect to the country generally, was stated by my honour-
able friend the member for that city,* and, through his
courtesy, I have this evening seen a more minute account of
it than he then gave. A person belonging to the place has
been accustomed for many years to travel over a great part
of England, selling watches. He visits, in his circuits, 283
cities and towns, and he used commonly to dispose of about
600 watches. Last year, making precisely the same round
as usual, he only found purchasers for forty-three. Perhaps,
when we consider the variety of classes who use watches,
and the extent of the space over which this diminution ope-

* Mr. P. Moore.
rated, it would be difficult to imagine a stronger symptom of decrease in demand for luxuries. The watch trade in London has suffered in an equal degree. The statements recently published show, that there are 3,000 journeymen out of employment; that those who are in work have been earning for the last three months one-fourth of their usual gains; and during the last month only one-sixth; while their property has been pledged to the amount of L.1,600, in three-quarters of a year. If I am not misinformed, other trades in the metropolis suffer in a like proportion. It is said that 2,000 of the 18,000 journeymen tailors in Westminster are wholly destitute of work.

I take the great discontent excited throughout the country by the introduction of new machinery to be another symptom and a most unerring one, of the present distress. Formerly when the invention of any piece of mechanism for abridging manual labour occasioned an alarm among the working people, it was partial and transient. Those who were thrown out of employment speedily found other channels of profitable occupation, the population disengaged by the new machine were absorbed, with their industry; and in a short time the traces of the change disappeared, except that its beneficial effects upon the capital of the country soon created a greater demand for labour than existed before the invention. But now the case is widely different. The petitions, which night after night are presented to us by thousands and tens of thousands, complaining of machinery, testify, that when workmen are flung out of one employment they can no longer find others ready to receive them; and that the capital saved by the abridgment of labour can no longer produce its healing effect. When Sir R. Arkright invented the apparatus which has proved of such benefit to this country, though it deprived many thousands of their livelihood for the moment, yet no particular discontent was excited. I have obtained from two of the greatest cotton spinners, in both parts of this island, an estimate of the saving in manual labour effected by that machinery; and as both concurred in stating unknown to each other, that by means of it one man could do the work of a hundred, I may assume the calculation as pretty near the truth. So considerable a shock to the labouring population produced scarcely any discontent. The case is so different now, when the smallest improvement is made in the means of economising human power, that I hardly know whether to rejoice or be sorry at any such change. There has of late been a considerable accession of mechanical power in the weaving trade; and
though it cannot operate like the spinning mills, yet it bids fair to throw numbers, out of work, and destroy even the scanty pittance at present gained by a great number of those wretched individuals, whose hardships I have been describing to-night—I allude to what is called the Power Loom by which one child is enabled to do the work of two or three men. But the House will hear with surprise and vexation that mechanical improvement has, as it were, reached its limit; an unexpected impediment has started up to check its farther progress. It is now found, for the first time in the history of mankind, so low are wages fallen, so great is the pressure of distress, that manual labour is making reprisals on machinery, standing a successful competition with it, beating it out of the market, and precluding the use of an engine, far from costly in itself, which saves three labourers in four. The farther introduction of the power loom is actually stopped by the low rate of weaver’s wages! There are, however, other branches of industry, as the printing and lace trades, which have been lately threatened, if I may so speak, with the competition of new mechanism, and of such powers as not even the miserable wages of the day can be expected to resist.

The last symptom of distress which I shall mention, is the state of the money market. I am aware that there are some who view this subject in a very different light. I know not if the Right Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer concurs in the opinion recently delivered from high authority in another place, no less than that of the First Minister of the country, and the person at the head of its finances. That noble lord is reported to have drawn the most favourable augury from the late rise of the funds which he ascribed, by some process of reasoning not very easily followed, to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus act. However injurious this measure may prove to the Constitution, it seems we are to regard it as highly favourable to trade. Now, suppose I were minded to turn the tables upon the noble lord, and bid him look at the still greater rise of the stocks after the report of the committee appointed to examine the contents of the Green Bag. That famous document first unfolded the existence of the Spencean plan, and was calculated directly to bear upon the funds; because, according to the true faith of that great sect, though the landholder is bad and fit to be despoiled, the fundholder is “a monster, and must be hunted down.” So says the report, yet the funds rose upon its appearance; from whence I might argue, if I chose to adopt the ground of the First Minister of finance, that the fund-
holders one and all disbelieved in the existence of the plot. I will not, however, take this advantage of the noble lord, by following his own example. I am satisfied with drawing, from the state of the stocks and the money market generally, inferences more naturally connected with the subject, and in favour of the view I have already taken of public affairs. It is well known, that there exists at present a facility of obtaining discounts at 4 and 4½ per cent. on bills of short dates, which even a year ago were not to be procured at a much higher premium. Stocks, too, have risen; they are 10 per cent. higher on the nominal capital than they were a few months since. Exchequer bills, after two several reductions of interest, leaving the income upon them at only 3½ per cent., still bear a premium. What does all this prove? If I saw that there was any proportionate facility in obtaining loans upon land at 5 per cent., that is upon the best security our law affords, I might be inclined to pause before I ascribed the state of the money market to a glut of unemployed capital. But hitherto none of this capital has overflowed upon the land; and the fact is unquestionable, that there is much money in the market of stocks, floating debt, and discounts, only because there is little or no employment for it in trade, and because no capitalist chooses to put his money beyond his reach for more than a few months, in the expectation that commerce will revive. The want of employment at home has a tendency to drive capital abroad; and signs of this emigration have already manifested themselves in the negotiation of loans with foreign powers. One transaction of this nature has already been concluded with France; and undoubtedly the greater part of the money to be advanced in the course of it will come from the capitalists of this country. America is said to have two speculations of a similar description going on at the present moment in the city. Respecting one of them I have heard some particulars; and it resolves itself into a stock operation, the object of which is the application of British capital to the support of the American funds. How, indeed is it to be supposed, that capital should not find its way abroad, when on the other side of the channel, it fetches in the public stocks nearly double the interest given by our funds, and much more than double the interest paid by our floating debt? The state of foreign exchanges with this country I shall at present only glance at cursorily, because I venture to assure the House, that, before I sit down, if I do not altogether fail in stating the views I entertain of another branch of the subject, I shall be able to demonstrate the necessary connexion between what
is called a favourable rate of exchange and the depression of foreign commerce. That rate is in fact only another proof of the unnatural state of our trade; it is the immediate result of forced exportations, with scarcely any importation in return. Thus it happens, that when goods have been sent to any part of the Continent, from whence nothing can be brought back, in order to remit the produce of the sales, there is a demand for bills; but there being no transactions ending in this country, and no real bills, fictitious drawing is resorted to, until the pound sterling is raised to a height above par, very favourable indeed to those who spend money abroad, but wholly useless to traders, who can buy nothing there to sell again in this country: a height, too, which it cannot retain as long as there is bullion to send over, and which, when properly understood, indicates the existence of a traffic unnatural and necessarily short-lived—exportation without imports.

Sir, when such is the unparalleled state of embarrassment under which two of the great branches of national industry, commerce and manufactures, labour, it would be in vain to expect that any material or permanent improvement should take place in that which is the ultimate source of all wealth and prosperity, and is intimately connected with every other employment—I mean our agricultural. If we hear less at the present moment of the distresses of the landed interest, it can only be because the consumption of the foreign grain, which last year oppressed the markets, and the measures adopted by the legislature to shut out this competition, have been aided by a scanty crop, and have raised the price of corn. Those districts where the harvest has been tolerable are therefore comparatively well off; whereas last year the suffering was universal; but wherever the crop has been a failing one, that is, in the greater part of the country, the high price is by no means a compensation for the deficiency and the poor-rates. I have therefore no manner of doubt, that the land is, generally speaking, worse off than before.

It is indeed a vain and idle thing to take distinctions between the different orders of the country, and to speak of the agricultural and mercantile classes as if they had opposite or even independent interests. They are all intimately and inseparably connected by the eternal nature of things; they must for ever run together the same course, whether of progress or decline. I will give you, on this matter, the words of a man who, having by his honest industry become the greatest ornament of the one order, made himself, by the fruits of his honourable gains, a distinguished member of the
other, and afterwards rose, by his sagacity and experience, to adorn also the literature of his age. "Trade and land," says Mr. Child, "are knit each to other, and must wax and wane together; so that it shall never be well with land but trade must feel it, nor ill with trade but land must fall."

The House will feel how much less difficult it is to describe the extent and intensity of the prevailing distresses, than to trace the various causes which have concurred in producing them, and to separate those portions of the evil, which arise out of temporary circumstances, from those which have gone on increasing with a slower growth, deeply rooted in the system of policy that has been established amongst us, or at the least closely interwoven with it. But I should not deal fairly with the House, if I did not thus early state my opinion as to the nature of those causes generally: it is founded upon the universal extent and the great variety of the distresses which I have been describing; and my principal reason for entering so largely into that description was, not certainly because it required any such evidence to prove the miserable condition of the country, but because, from the universality in which the pressure prevails, I deemed the inference to be unavoidable, that it springs from causes of no temporary nature. It is quite true that a transition from war to peace must always affect several branches of public wealth, some connected with foreign, but a greater proportion with domestic trade. Thus two departments of industry have suffered severely by the cessation of hostilities; the provision trade of Ireland, through it also, the cattle market of this country; and the manufacture of arms at Birmingham. The distress arising from the peace in those branches of commerce may be temporary; if all the other channels of trade unconnected with the war were open, it certainly would be temporary. But when we find the depression general in all lines of employment, as well in those uninfluenced by the war demand, as in those wholly dependent upon it; when we see that hands thrown out of work in one quarter can no longer be absorbed into the other parts of the system; when there plainly appears to be a choking up of all the channels of industry, and an equal exhaustion in all the sources of wealth—we are driven to the conclusion, that the return of peace accounts at the utmost only for a portion of the sad change we every where witness, and that even that portion may become permanent from the prevalence of the evil in quarters not liable to be affected by the termination of the war. I have shewn you, that the cotton trade, wholly unconnected with the war,
more depressed than the iron trade in general, and to the full as much depressed as the very gun manufactory at Birmingham. I am entitled to conclude, first, that the transition from war to peace has not produced all the mischief; and next, that the mischief which it has produced might have been got over, as in former times, if it had been the only one which oppressed us. Sir, we must once for all look our situation in the face, and firmly take a view of the extent of our disease. It is not of a partial description; it is of general prevalence; it is of a searching nature; there is no channel of our whole circulation into which it has not worked its way; no fibre or filament of our whole economical system that does not feel its deadening influence; not one limb has been hurt, but the whole body is impaired in the exercise of all its functions. Can we expect it all to heal and revive of itself, and in a short time? I need hardly remind you, that we are now approaching the fourth year of "transition," and still no relief, no mitigation; on the contrary, we experience an increase of our calamity; whilst every one knows, that in less than half the time, from the end of all former wars, a complete recovery was effected I shall therefore endeavour to describe what, after all the attention that I have been able to give the subject, appear to me the real causes of the unnatural state in which every man must admit the country is placed.

I must entreat the House impartially to fix their eye upon the line of policy, which for many years past has been adopted by the public councils of the country. In referring to it, I shall as much as possible avoid the more debatable grounds of the commencement and continuance of war, and keep to points upon which I believe a very little explanation will preclude the possibility of any considerable difference in opinion. It should seem that those who style themselves the practical politicians of this country (because they are the dupes of a theory as visionary as it is absurd) have long been surrounded by a class of men, who blending with what is termed true mercantile knowledge, much narrow minded, violent, national prejudice, or, as they call it, genuine British feeling, assume to themselves the style and title of the "sound statesmen," and certainly do in good earnest exert a real and practical influence over the affairs of the nation. With these sage instructors of almost every administration (and they are generally found united in place with their pupils, and knit to them by the endearing reciprocity of good offices), it is a maxim equally sacred and profound, that too much can hardly be done to discourage importations of all
kinds and from all countries. The old mercantile system has long been exploded; but these wise personages, having been born and bred up in it, seem to have caught hold of its last plank, to which they still cling with all their might, perpetually conning over its grand motto—"All trade, and no barter, all selling, and no buying; all for money, and nothing for goods." To support the remnants of a doctrine universally abandoned in every enlightened country, all means are resorted to, fair and foul; for in defence of their favourite creed, these sound advisers betray a morality far from rigid or scrupulous. The theory itself is repudiated, and its very name disowned by all who have received a liberal education. No man is to be found hardy enough, no one so careless of his reputation for common sense, as even to use its language. How long is it since, the "soundest" politician among us has ventured to speak, in public at least, the jargon of the balance of trade? Yet, marvellous to relate, the practical results of this extirped heresy are interwoven with our whole commercial policy; and, though the nonsense, and even the dialect of its tenets are rejected of all men, they are disguised in legal phraseology, embodied in efficient regulations, and may be traced in broad characters through every volume of the statute book down to the last. Year after year we have proceeded under the auspices of our wholesome, practical, sound, national statesmen, until we now find ourselves, as might naturally be expected, deprived of most of the great staples of foreign commerce.

In mentioning a few instances of our obligations to these sagacious councillors, I must say a single word upon the Corn Bill, which, strictly speaking comes within the class of measures I am alluding to. To the opinion, which I originally entertained upon that law, I still adhere. I feel now, as I did then, that its first effects are injurious, by cutting off a great article of foreign trade; but I look for an ample compensation of that injury in advantages of a higher nature; the ensuring a regular, a safe, and ultimately a cheap supply of the great necessary of life, which no change of foreign policy, no caprice of hostile governments, can impede or disturb. It may also be admitted by those who disapproved of the measure as a permanent branch of our policy, that the circumstances of the times justified its adoption as a temporary resource. At any rate, we resorted to it, not as the only prohibitory law in our commercial code, but while almost every branch of trade was struggling in the fetters of the restrictive system. We approved of it for special reasons, many of them temporary in their nature; and re-
garded it as an exception justified by those reasons, and by
the unnatural state of our whole polity. The doctors of the
mercantile school jumped at it as a part of their scheme,
and as coinciding with the numberless trammels which they
had devised for commerce in all its departments, and the
removal of which might very possibly alter our whole opinion
upon the Corn Bill. Let us only cast our eye over a few of
those regulations.

I shall first request the attention of the House to the ex-
plants of these sages in the Baltic trade. That branch of
commerce has always been deemed highly important, both
to our shipping and our mercantile interest; both with a
view to defence and to gain. Its short voyages make it an
excellent nursery for seamen; its quick returns are highly
favourable to profit. Circumstances, which I need not enu-
merate, render it a peculiarly secure and steady kind of tra-
fic. Yet, of the four great staples of the Baltic trade, two,
including the greatest of the whole, have been cut off. We
still receive hemp and tallow; but we have prohibited the
importation of iron and timber. And to what views have we
sacrificed this important market for our own goods? To
encourage ruinous speculations in this country, we imposed
a duty upon foreign iron amounting to a prohibition; while,
to force the importation of inferior timber from our North
American colonies, that is, to gratify the Canada and ship-
ning interests, always highly favoured by the school of the
practical and Right Honourable gentleman opposite,* we
excluded the greatest staple of the Baltic. Instead of leav-
ing the adventurers in mines to their fate, suffering them to
thrive if they could by their natural resources, we encouraged
them, by extraordinary stimulants, in a pursuit, which sound
policy would rather have discouraged; a precocious, gambling,
and upon the whole a losing concern to the country. Mark
the consequences of this system. We used to export
L.400,000 or L.500,000 of our manufactures annually to
Norway; that vent, I understand, has now ceased, Norway
having no other means of making payment but the iron and
the timber, which our modern practitioners of antiquated
wisdom have seen good to exclude altogether. Canada, for
whose sake the sacrifice was partly made no doubt, still re-
mains ours, in spite of all the pains we took to lose it; but
there is no part of this country at present so distressed as the
mining districts of Wales. A similar prohibition of foreign
copper has cut us off from one of the principal articles of
South American produce.

* Mr. Rose.
It is not many days since some conversation took place respecting an Act of last session, which imposed protecting duties on foreign butter and cheese. I then expressed my repugnance to any extention of that protection; and I will now mention a fact within my knowledge, both to show how dangerous this sort of legislative interference is in a vast, complicated, and delicate commercial system, and also to demonstrate how little a high rate of exchange indicates a thriving trade. The instant that those duties were imposed, as true as the pulse keeps time with the stroke of the heart, foreign exchange rose, as it is called, in our favour two or three per cent. A branch of our importation was lopped off; it became, more difficult to remit from abroad, in the first instance, and consequently must have become proportionably more difficult to send goods thither immediately after; our whole foreign trade was sensibly diminished, and by the very operation which raised the exchange, and in exact proportion to its rise. So much for the quick effects of the operations in which these sound personages delight; so much for the accuracy of the symptom which they consult as infallible in pronouncing upon the state of commerce!

The same perverse views have long regulated our commercial intercourse with France. Partly from mercantile views, partly from feelings of a political, and almost a religious nature, there are many amongst us, who have laid it down as a principle, from whence they hold it nearly impious to depart, that as little wine as possible must be taken from France. Although that fine country is our nearest market, and ought to be our best customer; although the vine is its chief produce, and its wines are allowed by all to be the best, by some considered as the only ones drinkable: yet their importation is to be avoided because France is our natural enemy, and Portugal our dear, and indeed costly friend. In the true spirit of this creed, the Chancellor of the Exchequer some time ago laid a new duty upon claret, not with any view to revenue, but, as he himself declared, in the technical language of his sect, with the hope of discouraging the use of French wines, upon principles of a political nature. It may, for any thing I know, be in the contemplation of this class of statesmen, a mark of comprehensive policy in a manufacturing country to refuse those articles which it wants the most and likes the best, and which alone enable a trade with its best customer to be kept up. But if I may be allowed to speak as a trader, availing myself of the flattering compliment bestowed upon me last night by it.
worthy Alderman,* and to proceed on the suggestions of common sense, I should regard such conduct, not as the result of sound policy, or of any policy at all, but as dictated by prejudices bordering on insanity.

But it is somewhat melancholy to think that worse blunders remain untold. The conduct pursued with regard to the linen trade very considerably surpasses all that I have mentioned; for it has been as directly in hostility to the favourite principles of the mercantile school as to the interests of the country. That school has always patronised the carrying trade in an especial manner; and I believe I may assert, that no branch of it was ever more productive than the transit of foreign linens; yet upon this we began, and never stopped until we had imposed a duty of fifteen per cent. upon all linens imported and re-exported. If I am asked to explain why we did so, I cannot; for here the wit of man would in vain search for any thing like a reason. But I can tell what the Ministers thought they were doing all the while. The fact is, that many nations prefer foreign linens to our own; and they use to buy those linens here. We saw this, and said they should not have them; so to legislate we went; resolved, that an act of Parliament should pass the two Houses, and should then receive the royal assent, as requisite to make it binding upon the taste of foreign countries, which we expected would be changed to please us the instant that the solemnities of legislation were completed, and the accustomed words from the Crown pronounced. What has been the consequence? Those nations who formerly repaired to British markets, laid in their investment of foreign linens, and at the same time completed their assortment in British goods, (the foreign linen operating as a kind of decoy, from the convenience of finding all their cargo in the same place) all at once ceased to visit our ports. They were unmannerly enough to disregard our law, although it had been passed with every one of the accustomed formalities; they took their course to Hamburgh, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen, where they could get the foreign linens somewhat cheaper than we ever sold them. This latter advantage they had always disregarded, considering the opportunity of conveniently completing their assortments of British articles as a compensation for it; but the transit duty was much greater than the trade could bear; it proved, as indeed it was meant, a prohibition; only that the contrivers of it, who did not mean to drive the purchaser to a foreign market, forgot that they had no means of keeping him

* Atkins.
in one where they would not sell him what he wanted. They forgot, too, that his departure not only destroyed the transit trade, but the trade in British goods connected with it and now transferred to foreign countries. The House, no doubt, must be prepared to hear, that this scheme of perverse and short-sighted folly is not of yesterday. It betokens so slow a state of information, so gross an ignorance of the subject, so senseless a disregard of the most obvious principles, that every one will readily conjecture its origin to be lost in antiquity. At all events, it must have been invented prior to the date of the mercantile system, itself now exploded; for nothing can more clash with the doctrine, of promoting the carrying trade. Then what will the House say, if it is less than a century and a half since this notable law passed? What if, after ages of experience, after the full knowledge imparted by the multiplicity of events and changes crowded into the last twenty years—what if this statute was deliberately passed not longer ago that the year 1810, under the auspices of the present Ministers! What if, no farther back than last year, Parliament were induced by them to decline revising this piece of nonsense, and expunging it from the book! Sir, these are indeed things, which it requires the evidence of all our senses to make us believe. But if such be the groundwork of our commercial system, there can be little difficulty in comprehending the mischiefs that must sooner or later flow from it.

There are numberless other instances of the same policy, which I might detail to the House. I might speak of the duty upon the exportation of coal, amounting at ordinary prices, to seventy per cent.; but for which, that article might find a ready market in France, provided we agreed to take French goods in return. Here, indeed, we may be said to act consistently; for, when we refuse to receive the produce of a country, it seems natural enough, though perhaps it is superfluous, to prevent ours from going thither. We are not, however, so consistent in all the branches of this system. While we protect agriculture in some respects, we allow the importation and prohibit the export of wool. This deviation from the general rule is professedly to encourage manufactures, by denying to foreigners the use of the raw produce; yet cotton twist is allowed to go abroad, though it is in the first stage of manufacture; and one should think it full as easy for the Continent to grow long wool as to erect spinning mills. The arrangement of the silk duties affords matter of similar observation; but I abstain from leading the House into farther details. I think I may venture to assert, that, taking
all things into the account, the time is now arrived, when the circumstances of our situation imperiously demand a full and unsparing review of the whole commercial policy of this country; and not only the branch of legislation which bears a more immediate reference to trade, but the navigation law itself requires the same prompt and accurate revision.

Whether I consider that system with a view to national defence, or to commercial wealth, I feel persuaded, that no time should be lost in at least relaxing the rigour of its provisions. Many speculative writers have maintained, that it was from the first a sacrifice of wealth to security; but I am disposed to admit, that it was originally calculated to promote both these objects. I think it may fairly be allowed to have hastened, by half a century, an event which must sooner or later have happened,—the transference from the United Provinces to this country of a large portion of trade, which, though naturally belonging to us, had been attracted by the peculiar advantages which enabled the Hollanders to possess themselves of the commerce of all other nations. But whatever may have been the good policy of the navigation law, I am quite clear, that we have adhered to its strict enactments a century after the circumstances which alone justified its adoption had ceased to exist. What is now passing in the colonies affords a striking illustration of its impolicy in the present times. Whether in consequence of orders from home, or of the views entertained by the local governments, the navigation law is enforced, it seems, with unusual strictness, a stop being put to the licences granted under the intercourse act for importing provisions in foreign bottoms. What course does America pursue to meet this protecting measure? She says, as you will not suffer us to supply your settlements, in any vessels but your own, with those articles of which they stand so much in need, that they may starve for want of them; we "retaliating on your head the mischiefs of your own policy," forthwith shut our ports against all vessels coming from ports from whence you exclude ours. This is the substance of a bill lately before Congress, now passed into a law. I have in my hand a copy of it, which has just arrived; and I know that the greatest alarm has been excited by it in our West India colonies, as well as among all who are connected with our North American fisheries. Here is a striking specimen of that obstinate, perverse system, that refuses to vary with the alteration of circumstances; that will not accommodate itself to the progress of events, or follow the course of times and seasons, but clings superstitiously to what is now
inapplicable, though it may once have been important; as if time were standing still, and history were not the record of unceasing change.

Surveying, then, the derangement which pervades every branch of the public economy; seeing how your trade is cramped by the short-sighted operations of an unenlightened and senseless policy; finding what trifling relief, and that little accompanied with serious obstructions, it has derived from the prosperous condition of our foreign affairs; we may assuredly affirm, that there never was a period in the vicissitudes of our fortunes, when British commerce might, with so much truth, be said to labour for its existence. Casting our eye over every point of the compass, and scarce able to descry any from which a solitary ray of comfort or of hope breaks in, it is natural for this House, to whose hands the sum of affairs is committed—for our unfortunate brethren, suffering under distresses that baffle discretion, after bearing us, by their industry and their patience, through the late eventful struggle—for the whole population of the empire, exhausted by the drains of a protracted warfare, weighed down by the pressure of the intolerable public burthens which it has accumulated, and now cut off from the temporary relief which the unnatural monopoly of that, war afforded—it is, I will say, but natural and reasonable for us all to direct our expectations towards any untried resources, any new opening that may present itself to the industry of the community. There can be no field of enterprise so magnificent in promise, so well calculated to raise sanguine hopes, so congenial to the most generous sympathies, so consistent with the best and the highest interests of England, as the vast Continent of South America. He must indeed be more than temperate, he must be a cold reasoner, who can glance at those regions, and not grow warm. The illustrious historian* who has described the course of their rude invaders, relates, if I mistake not, that when, after unparalleled dangers, amid privations almost insupportable through a struggle with sufferings beyond endurance—weary, hungry, exhausted with the toil, scared at the perils of their march, they reached at length the lofty summits so long the object of their anxious enterprise, they stood at once motionless, in gratitude for their success, in silent amazement at the boundless ocean stretched out before them, and the immeasurable dominion spread beneath their feet, the scene of all their fond expectations.—And now the people of this country, after their long and dreary pilgrimage, after
all the dangers they have braved, the difficulties they have overcome, the hardships they have survived, in something like the same state of suffering and exhaustion, have that very prospect opened to their view! If any sense of justice towards them, any regard for the dictates of sound policy, any reverence for the real wisdom of past ages, has influence over our councils, they must be enabled and invited to approach that hemisphere, and partake in the numberless benefits which flow from such an intercourse. Upon our good pleasure it depends to command the virgin resources of that mighty expanse of territory—variegated with every species of soil—exposed to all the gradations of climate—rich from the fallow of centuries—sufficiently peopled to raise every variety of the produce we want, yet too thinly inhabited to threaten our own industry with any rivalry—watered in all directions by seas rather than rivers—studded with harbours through which to distribute its wealth over the Old World—and the native country of that wherewith the sect of practical politicians are best pleased, and their patron saint propitiated, gold and silver mines, already fruitful, but capable of yielding infinitely larger returns under the management of European skill. Such is the prospect which those vast regions unfold; a prospect sufficient to compensate every loss you have sustained; an adequate outlet for your mercantile enterprise, though Europe were once more hermetically sealed against you; though Buonaparte were restored, and his continental system (as indeed it is) revived: even though Europe itself were, for commercial purposes, blotted from the map of the world. Nor let any man suppose, that all this is the indulgence of a heated fancy; I rest my expectations upon a careful examination of facts, derived from authority altogether unquestionable. Some of these I shall state, for the guidance of the Honourable gentlemen opposite; because I well know, that some folks will listen to nothing which does not come in the shape of a detail.

The exports of Spanish America cannot amount to less than eighteen millions sterling in yearly value. Humboldt, the justly celebrated traveller, states them at thirteen and a half millions, from the custom-house returns in Old Spain; he reckons the exports of Buenos Ayres at £800,000 of that sum, whereas, on the spot, they are reckoned at £1,150,000: we may therefore assume that there is a similar deficiency in the other sums indicated by those documents, which would make the whole exportation worth eighteen millions, and one-third of it is from Mexico. It appears
from official returns, indeed, that Cadiz imported from South America, in the year 1802, to the amount of eighteen and a quarter millions, of which twelve and a quarter millions were in bullion, a trade pleasing even to the gentlemen opposite; though I must confess the remaining six millions were only composed of goods, and I therefore ought to mention this sum with considerable diffidence. Before the late troubles, the annual coinage of Spanish America was nine and a half millions sterling, and it had trebled in half a century. The population of the country is about seventeen millions, including all classes; and it is estimated, that only one person in three wears foreign manufactures. This is probably considerably above the truth; for of the seven millions who inhabit Mexico, only one is understood to wear those goods; the rest using a wretched stuff of home manufacture, only recommended by its cheapness; for, according to the remark of a native writer, England is there held to have taught them by her wars how to make their own clothes. What an opening does such a country afford for our goods! There exists no want of means to buy them, if the trade is so far facilitated as to afford them at reasonable prices; and if any proof were wanting how far the taste for using them might be introduced by opening the ports, the speculations at Buenos Ayres abundantly supplies it; for, though injurious to the projectors, that traffic has certainly had the effect of diffusing among the natives an inclination to use British manufactures. If the southern continent generally were opened, it would infallibly take, not only a larger quantity of them than has ever yet been sent thither, but a swiftly and regularly increasing quantity, which would in a short time leave the imagination behind that should try to calculate it.

With scenes such as these inviting our approach; with all the prepossessions of the natives in our favour; calling upon us to sacrifice no principle or propriety of conduct, but only to bless them with commerce and with the light of our superior civilization, in return for the treasures which they are ready to pour into our lap: whence comes it to pass, that, in a season of such pressure in all other quarters, this splendid theatre of exertion has been overlooked or avoided? It is the new-fangled, the execrable doctrine of legitimacy, the love of Ferdinand the Seventh, that has cut England off from her natural connexion with South America. In the hour of our greatest need we have sacrificed the certainty of relief, nay the brightest prospects of new prosperity, to the anticipated prejurious success.
colonial independence, the political caprice of making common cause with the mother country in her endeavours to extinguish the new-born liberties of settlements, now, thank God, in spite of Old Spain and of ourselves, almost severed from her tyrannical dominion. But for these humours, so senselessly gratified, our flag might have floated in every part of that immense continent. We have chosen to be supplanted by a nearer power; a power as active and skilful in speculation as ourselves, and wholly free from the incumbrance of those political attachments and antipathies, which so lamentably fetter our commercial enterprise. Only see the course into which these doctrines, or prejudices, have driven us. In 1809, we concluded what is commonly termed Admiral Apodaca's Treaty, acknowledging the dominion of Spain over the Indies, in terms which seem even to imply a guarantee of her dominion. An article was added, which bound the parties, as speedily as possible, to conclude a treaty of commerce; but nothing whatever has since been done towards the fulfilment of this stipulation. In 1814, after the conduct of Ferdinand had called forth, not certainly the applause of all enlightened minds in all countries, it pleased our Government to make a convention with him, binding this country to every thing short of guarantee, and expressive of deep anxiety for the subjugation of those whom I call the independents, but whom the treaty stigmatised as revolted subjects of our dear ally. In vain have the various provinces of South America, successively, as they threw off the yoke of Spain, courted our notice, and offered us the highest commercial advantages in return. As often as the popular party obtained the advantage in any place, the ports were thrown open to our trade, the residence of Englishmen protected, all intercourse with them cherished. If ever the patriots were unhappily defeated, if the "anxious wishes" were gratified, which the convention expresses, on the part of this country, for the restoration of the legitimate tyranny, straightway the ports were shut against us, and our countrymen could no longer trade, or remain under the dominion of our favourite ally. We were offered by the revolted, as we call them, in Venezuela and New Grenada, an exclusive trade for twenty years; and their Congress, believing (I use their own words) "that it is the characteristic disposition of Great Britain to protect and assist oppressed people, for the sake of justice and humanity," vainly fancied their cause might be favourably viewed by us. The legitimate lieutenant of the Crown, Montalvo, subdued them for a while, and instantly proclaimed what he called
"the wise and salutary regulations of the Council of the Indies," recited the services rendered by the Philippine Company to trade (of all things), and restored its exclusive monopoly, to be enforced with additional rigour. In 1816, General Bolivar made offers of the most advantageous nature, when on his way to battle for the independence of the Caraccas, which I trust in God he has before this time achieved. All such propositions were rejected—seldom honoured with an answer—always treated with contempt or aversion. We were for the party of the oppressor—we wished ill to freedom for its own sake, and out of the love we bore its enemy, notwithstanding the advantages we might reap from doing our duty, and helping its struggles. But even this bad policy has been pursued in a wavering, irresolute, and inconsistent manner. We have sent a consul to Buenos Ayres, where he did not present his credentials until the patriots had succeeded; he now resides in his public capacity, transacting business with the independent government. But no one other commercial or diplomatic agent has been sent to any part of Spanish America, and even at Buenos Ayres, the blockade imposed by the royalists of Monte Video, a few years ago, was enforced by a British man-of-war. The long-established contraband trade with the Main is still encouraged, at least protected, in Jamaica. In Trinidad every impediment is thrown in its way; the councils of the government are influenced by an assessor, who retired thither after the massacre of the independents in Caraccas, where he had been a principal adviser; proclamations are issued, prohibiting, under the highest penalties, the sending, not only of arms, but of money, to the continent; and severe measures have been adopted towards the refugees of the independent party. These measures have produced their natural effect; and I understand that the principal articles of importation from the Spanish Main have almost doubled in price.

I entreat the House farther to recollect, that the same treaty which bound our Government to prevent all succour from being given to the patriots, bound Ferdinand to abolish the Slave Trade. We have more than performed our part of the compact—he neither has taken, nor has the slightest intention of taking, any one step towards fulfilling his part. I do not contend that we ought to make war upon him for the failure; but I think we have some right to have it explained; and I am clear, that, if he persists in his departure from the stipulation, we are set free from our part of the contract. That we should ever desire to recede from it is more than I can expect; for hitherto we have done much.
more than we bargained in his behalf and against the patriots, So bigotted are we to his cause, that I have read a memorial presented to his Majesty's Government by three respectable merchants, who, having come to this country from Buenos Ayres upon commercial business, and having finished their arrangements, were ready to sail on their return homeward, when they were stopped by an order from one of the under Secretaries of State, refusing them leave to proceed, until they should also obtain the Spanish ambassador's leave! Here is one of the fruits of that blessed measure the Alien Act; and a striking proof how soundly those reasoned against it, who urged that it would be used as a political engine for gratifying the caprices of foreign courts. The treaty, you will observe, only binds us to give no assistance to the patriots in warlike stores. The Trinidad proclamation threatens with banishment, confiscation, and imprisonment, all who shall send money. The direct stipulations only engage for neutrality; the preamble expresses the warmest good wishes for the success of the tyrant, while it insults the patriots with the name of revolters. But, as if we were resolved to go beyond both the spirit and the letter of this convention, to testify, by every possible means, our hostility to the cause of the Spanish colonies, and our anxiety to extinguish their rising libertinism, the British, Minister to the United States has been charged, in Congress, with a formal interference to prevent American citizens from sending arms and ammunition to the patriots; and no denial whatever has been given to the statement. I ask the Commons of England, if they are prepared to patronise councils so repugnant at once to the character and the interests of their country as those which, having excluded our trade from the marts of the Old World, deny it a vent in the New, for fear such an intercourse might aid the cause of human freedom, and give umbrage to the contemptible tyrant of Spain?

It has often been said, and I have hitherto assumed it as unquestionable, that the excessive load of taxation is one chief cause of the depression under which our commerce now labours. The House, I am persuaded, will give me credit for entertaining no disposition to mix this question with popular clamour against burthens which must be borne. But I wish to remove some misconceptions of an opposite nature, which have too frequently influenced such discussions; and to shew in what manner relief might be given to the public without material injury to the revenue. Some persons, whose general opinions I profess to hold in great respect, have lately supported a position which I take leave to think
a mere fallacy; they have maintained, that the amount of
the imposts laid upon goods, or upon whatever, affects the
price of goods destined for the foreign market, can be no
obstacle to their sale; and they attempt to prove this strange
paradox by the consideration, that, as we are enabled to give
a proportionally higher price for those commodities which
we take in return, it comes to the same thing, whether the
foreigner buys cheap or dear of us. A single word over-
throws this reasoning at once. Admitting, for a moment,
that prices are thus regulated; the foreigner who has goods
to buy, will go to those who sell cheaper than we can do;
and the foreigner who has goods to sell will come to us, who
can give the best prices. To suppose that those who cannot
afford to sell as cheap as others, will have the power of regu-
lating the market for their own commodities, is as absurd as
to suppose, that those who can afford to buy dearer than
others, will pay higher than is necessary. There is another
fallacy, much more prevalent, as to the effects of taxation
within the country. The money thus raised, we are told,
is spent by the government; and the same consumption is
maintained as if it were expended by the individuals who
paid it. Thus, to take the principal example, it is con-
tended, that if we raise forty-four millions to pay the interest
and charges of the debt, that sum is spent in the country by
the stockholders, instead of being spent by the payers of
taxes. But first of all, it should be recollected, that those
sums are levied in one part of the system, and generally ex-
pended in another, so that the expenditure affords no relief
in the quarter where the levy of the impost was principally
felt. Thus, when the duty on sugar was raised, in the course
of a few years, from 14s. to 27s. a cwt., that sum was nei-
ther returned to the planter nor the consumer; it neither
went to create a new demand for the article enhanced, nor
to aid those who paid dearer for it; it went to support other
industry than that of the grower, and other resources than
those of the consumer. Next we must bear in mind, that
the revenue paid to the stockholder represents capital, which
has been sunk and in great part destroyed by war—capital
which has been taken away from profitable to unprofitable
employment. Nor is there any fairness in the argument,
that the community is not injured by a mere transference of
wealth, though none should disappear; for the taking from
one class to bestow upon another, injures the one more than
it benefits the other, even if we had any right to strike such
unjust balances; and how much more does this apply to the
case of taking from an existing class, to supply one which
we create, or at least augment, for the purpose of impoverishing the other! But the truth is, that all taxes go to support, either those whose labour is so much dead loss to the community, or much less productive than it might have been; whose numbers therefore ought never to exceed the lowest possible amount. The immense sums now raised, either feed those employed thus unproductively, or pay those whose capital has been spent in the same way; they are a constant drain upon the fund destined to support productive labour; they not only prevent accumulation, but create a destruction of capital; they necessarily diminish, in exact proportion to their enormous amount, the fund which creates the effective demand for all articles of consumption. The operation, too, of taxes, in driving abroad various branches of industry, is unquestionable. They give advantages to foreigners in many points of view. Take, for instance, our duties on silk. The raw pays 5s. 6d., the organized 15s. the pound; while in France there is but one duty on both, and that only 2s. 6d. The French silk weaver, then, gets the article, in the first stage of manufacture, for less than half what our's pays for the raw material, as far as duty is concerned. Sometimes foreigners are discontented by a tax beyond its mere amount; the increase of, I think, only half a crown upon the policy stamp, drove them away from Lloyd's, and created several insurance offices at Hamburgh and in America. Sometimes a branch of trade is irretrievably destroyed by an injudicious tax, or receives a shock from which, even after the repeal of the duty, it never recovers. I am informed that this has been the case with the watch trade; and the present appearances are quite consistent with this supposition.

I purpose now to illustrate what I have said of the effects which taxation produces upon consumption, by a reference to facts; and I shall, at the same time, have an opportunity of shewing that the revenue does not gain all the trade loses. On the contrary, I suspect we have been, in many instances, killing the goose that laid the golden eggs; and I greatly deceive myself if the Right Honourable gentleman opposite*, will not soon be aware, how much truth there is in Dean Swift's remark, that "in the arithmetic of the Customs two and two do not always make four."

I shall begin with the duties on sugar, one of the widest fields of modern finance. They were in a short time raised from 14s. to 27s.; and if the price reaches 40s. then to 30s.

* The Chancellor of the Exchequer.
the cwt. In three years, from 1803 to 1806, the former duties were increased about 50 per cent. Now the average produce of the old duties, for three years before that rise, was L.2,778,000. The produce of 1804, after they had been raised 20 per cent., was not L.3,330,000, as they ought to have been, had the consumption remained the same, but only L.2,537,000; and the average produce of 1806 and 1807, after the whole 50 per cent. was added, only gave L.3,133,000, instead of L.4,167,000, which they should have yielded, had the consumption not fallen off since the first rise of duty began; or L.2,805,000, which they should have yielded, had there been no falling off since 1804. Thus both trade and revenue suffered by the great increase of duty in 1803; and trade suffered severely by the subsequent augmentations while revenue gained in a very small proportion. The duties on glass were nearly doubled in ten years; the produce of those duties has not sensibly increased at all. Here then is a destruction of the glass trade, to the amount of one-half its whole bulk, without any direct gain to the revenue, and with a very certain loss to it in other branches connected with the diminished consumption. In this case two and two were not found to make four.

We have recently had before us the history of the wine trade, in a very excellent petition presented by my Honourable friend below me,* and well illustrated in the course of his remarks. The duties on wine have been trebled since 1792; the deficiency in the port of London alone was L.338,329 last year, as compared with 1815. The average consumption of three years, ending 1814, was above 3,000 pipes less than the average of three years, ending 1808. In 1804 the duty on port wine was increased one-ninth; the produce of the duty that year fell off nearly one-fourth, instead of increasing a ninth; and in 1805 it had by no means increased a ninth above its amount before the rise. Here then was a diminution of trade, an abridgment of the comforts of the people, and an injury to the revenue, first directly and afterwards indirectly.

It is not so easy to illustrate by example the converse of the proposition; for, unhappily, the instances are rare in which taxes have been taken off or diminished: yet all the cases where this policy has been pursued demonstrate the truth of the doctrines for which I contend. When Mr. Pitt, by a wise and politic measure, in the year 1784, lowered the duty on tea from 56 to 12 per cent., the revenue rose considerably. The consumption could hardly have been increased
sixfold, but smuggling was prevented to an extent which, with the increased consumption, made the revenue upon the whole a gainer. When in 1787, the duty on wine and spirits was lowered 50 per cent., the revenue was improved; the trade must therefore have doubled, the comforts of the people been materially increased, and the other sources of revenue have benefitted in the same proportion. But the progress of the duties and revenue upon coffee illustrates every part of the question in a manner peculiarly striking. In 1805 they were raised one-third, and that year their produce fell off an eighth, instead of increasing a third; in 1806 they had increased but only a sixteenth; so that the consumption had diminished above a fourth. But it was at length found, that this tax had been overdone, and it was lowered from 2s. to 7d. the cwt. Mark the immediate effects of this step. The average produce of the high duty, for the three years before it was altered, was £166,000; the average of the low duty, for three years after the alteration, was £195,000; so that, as addition has the effect sometimes of diminishing, subtraction seems to increase the sum in the arithmetic of finance. The augmentation here shewed an increase of consumption between four and fivefold; and in Scotland, I find, that it increased tenfold. It is not, then on mere speculative grounds that I recommend the finance ministers to retrace their steps, and to turn their attention from devising ways of augmenting the taxes (an object, by the by, which they may pore over as long as they please, and will never be able to accomplish) to discover the best means of lessening the public burthens. I have shewn from facts, that taxes may be repealed with positive and immediate benefit to the revenue; I think no man hardy enough to deny, that the diminution would contribute mainly towards restoring our commerce to its healthy state, and re-establishing general comfort and prosperity.

The very collection of our present enormous revenue occasions evils of a serious nature to every class of the people. All of us are acquainted with the inconveniences of ordinary occurrence; but few are aware how severely they press upon trade. To the difficulties of collecting such a revenue are principally owing the monopolies of the dock companies, by which the whole of the West Indian commerce, and several of the other great branches of trade are subjected to heavy duties, and irksome delays. Our merchants complain of much dilatory and troublesome proceeding at the custom-house; they must wait for a person who has more to do
than he can manage; they must, on every trifling difference, apply to the board; a variety of annoying steps must be gone through; bonds, with all the costs incident to them, are needlessly multiplied; and, in short, every thing begins in plague, and ends in expense. It is very true, that better arrangement might remove some portion of these hardships, but the greater part of them are essential to the system. You cannot multiply indefinitely officers and boards, in whom so large a confidence is of necessity reposed; you cannot, in a word, collect such a revenue as ours, without infinite vexation and delay, beyond the actual burthen of the impost. Such prodigious levies, with their direct effects, hamper and distress our trade in various ways which it would be impossible to estimate in money.

Sir, I have trespassed beyond all bounds, I fear, upon the patience of the House; but I cannot prevail on myself to sit down without soliciting your attention to that part of the subject which I have as yet only glanced at slightly. The House, I doubt not, have already perceived that I refer to the entire abandonment of all care for the commercial interests of the country in the administration of our foreign affairs. After a war of unexampled suffering and exertion has been crowned with success far beyond the most sanguine expectation, and lifted the name and the influence of the nation to a height without any parallel in the proudest eras of its past history, we naturally ask, how it comes to pass, that the glorious peace which our efforts have purchased comes without restoring our foreign trade; that we are still shut out from most parts of the Continent, as if war was still waged against our commerce; and that, day after day, fresh obstacles spring up to it in the quarters where it ought to meet the kindest encouragement? It is not in France merely, where we have long been accustomed to expect a return of jealousy, that our intercourse enjoys no facilities. In what corner of Europe does it possess them? Is it not plain, that with those very allies for whom we have fought and conquered—for whose cause we have been lavish of our treasure and prodigal of our best blood—from whom neither dominion nor indemnity has ever been asked in return—even with those allies we have never had influence enough to obtain the advantage or the convenience of one single custom-house regulation in our favour? Has any thing been done by these men, with all their influence over the councils of Europe? Has any thing been attempted by them? I am aware that Russia has reduced her tariff in many articles since the termination of the war; but I also
know, that, generally speaking, our commerce labours under duties so nearly amounting to a prohibition, as to throw it into the hands of contraband traders, and exclude the fair and honourable dealing of the British merchant. I know, that from Memel to the southern-most part of Poland, along the whole line of the Russian frontier, the traffic is driven by means of Jews and other smugglers, as it used to be under Buonaparte's continental system: that now, as formerly, they have their great entrepôt at Brody, and were the purchasers of almost all the bills drawn last summer for the sales of wheat exported through Odessa to the Mediterranean. Russia, however, is more favourable to our commerce than any of our other allies, and some improvement might be hoped for in that quarter, were we not, exactly in that quarter, met most adversely by the other branch of our policy, of which I have already said so much, the prohibitory scheme of our own laws, by which we are prevented from taking in exchange most of the articles of Russian produce. But Prussia, with whom we made common cause—who owes to our efforts, next to those of her gallant people, the restoration of her independence—almost directly excludes us from all intercourse with her dominions. Duties amounting to a prohibition are laid upon the importation of our goods: and for such as are carried through the territory to be sold elsewhere, there are only two ports of landing assigned, and a transit payment of 8½ per cent. imposed. How then does the matter stand in Spain—in that country which our gigantic exertions have saved—whose defence, in money alone, beside subsidies, and beside expenses incurred elsewhere, has left a sum of accounts still unaudited, amounting, as we heard the other day, to above fifty millions? Why, in return for this it appears, that with the cabinet of Madrid we possess just no interest whatsoever, either commercial or political! This is a picture of ingratitude on the one hand, and imbecility on the other, disgusting as it regards Spain—humiliating to our own government—provoking to the country.

The sense of the Spanish nation was, with more or less correctness, represented by the Cortes; while its authority continued, a free intercourse with us was studiously promoted. The Cortes was put down, freedom extinguished, and the beloved usurper restored. Instantly old monopolies were revived and enforced, and enlarged with new powers, all strictly hostile to British interests. Additional obstruction was given to our trade, notwithstanding Apodaca's treaty had, on our part, almost guaranteed the integrity of the
Spanish dominions, and, on theirs, promised a speedy commercial arrangement. Nay, after our Ministers had, in support of Ferdinand, gone farther than was lawful for the rulers of a free and honourable nation like England; after they had been guilty of the most indecent subserviency to his criminal views, abandoned the high tone they used to assume with France while fighting his battle, looked on with perfect indifference at his iniquities, stooped to become the parasites of his caprices, and pander for him the degradation of his country and the slavery of his unfortunate subjects, our own gallant companions in arms—how were they requited for those labours in the humiliation of the English name? In a "little month" after the signature of the second treaty, an edict was issued extending the monopoly of the Philippine Company, so as to exclude all British cottons; and we had hardly sent out the Order of the Garter to our ally, when, in return of the courtesy, this Decree was backed and enforced by new regulations; and the commercial privileges of Biscay, so favourable to all foreign trade, were, by an act of mere violence upon its ancient constitution, annulled! Besides the rigorous prohibition of cottons, woollens pay 26 and 43 per cent. for the two finer qualities, and as high as 130 for the second, a burthen which the fair-trader cannot bear. It thus happens, that our commerce with Spain is in a worse condition than with almost any other foreign state, and consigned, in a very great measure, to contraband traders. Not fifteen parts in the hundred of our goods consumed in that country are calculated to pay the duties imposed; the remaining seventy-five parts are smuggled; and about L200,000 are paid yearly to Portugal for duties upon the goods sent thither in order to be covertly introduced into Spain.

If we turn our attention to Austria, again we meet with nothing but prohibition. Since the peace, for which we fought side by side with her, and conquered more for her than ourselves, she has either excluded, or loaded almost to the point of exclusion, all the articles in which we can trade with her fine dominions. Our manufactures generally are forbidden; so as cotton yarns below a certain fineness; and it is not much above half a year since the duties upon all finer yarns were suddenly doubled. It should seem as if, from all our exertions to serve the Continental powers, whether looking after honour or profit, we were fated to reap nothing but loss and disgrace.

I would now call the attention of the noble lord in the blue
to some things which, though within his department, it is very possible he may not be aware of; because it is quite possible, that those military gentlemen, whom he has planted as ministers and consuls in different places, how skilled soever in their own profession, may have failed to make any reports upon commercial arrangements, as things very much out of their line, if not below their notice. Does the noble lord now hear, for the first time, and if he does, I am sure it should make a deep impression on his mind, that punishment has so swiftly followed guilt? Does he for the first time hear, that the fruits have already been gathered of the two worst acts in that system of wicked policy, of which the noble lord is the advocate in the House, as he was the adviser elsewhere,—that the very persons, in whose behalf those deeds were done, have even now set themselves in direct hostility to the interests of this country. If he has not before heard this, it may prove a useful lesson to him, and, at all events, I trust it will not be thrown away upon public men generally, if I make known how those very individuals, for whose sake the noble lord sacrificed the honour of his country, and abandoned its soundest policy towards foreign states; those with whom, after pulling down the usurper, he plunged into the deepest of all the public crimes that stained his course, and gave the ground for resisting him—that they now execrate or contemn the man who makes himself the accomplice of their infamous projects. I suspect the noble lord's conscience already whispers to what I allude. I guess he is aware, that I am going to name Ragusa and Genoa—Ragusa and Genoa! where the name of England received a stain that all the victories of Lord Wellington cannot wipe away, nor the services of the longest life of the greatest minister that ever lived could atone for. I will speak of Ragusa first: it is the smaller state, and for that reason I dwell upon it the most; because, if there be such a thing as political morality, and political justice—if those words have any sense—they can only mean, that the rights and the liberties of the weaker states are to be protected by the more powerful; because, in the nature of things, public crime, the offence of one nation against another, must always consist of the strong trampling down the feeble. Therefore, if the spot in question were San Marino, instead of Ragusa, I should rather cite the example, and deem the oppression of that smaller community a still more flagrant outrage upon justice—a baser dereliction of public principle.  Ragusa had flourished for centuries under

* Lord Castlereagh.
the protection of the Ottoman Porte, and nominally, at least, under its dominion. The Porte was the ally of England. Often had we blazoned Buonaparte's attack upon Egypt as among the worst of the atrocities, because France was in amity with the Turk, and there could be no motive for the enterprise but the love of gain, or the lust of power. Nay, his sending Sebastiani to Egypt after the peace of Amiens, was one of the principal grounds alleged by us for so suddenly renewing the war. Then, I demand, were we at war with Ottoman Porte during the black transactions of Vienna? Were we not in friendship and alliance with it? Did we once consult it about the cession of Ragusa to Austria? What is more important, did we ever consult the Ragusans upon that cession? Have we not, without the least regard to the rights of a free people, parcelled out their country at our own discretion; and from the liberty they were enjoying and the independence they were proud of, delivered them over to what they deemed subjugation and tyranny? Had they, the Ragusans, the people of Ragusa, the smallest share in the deliberations of the famous Congress? They had no minister there—they had no communication to the assembled negotiators—they had received none from thence. Their existence was hardly known, except by the gallant example they had set of shaking off, without any aid, the hated empire of France. And how did we requite them for this noble effort, nay, this brilliant service in what we cantingly termed "the common cause of nations? We, who had sounded to the uttermost corners of the earth the alarum of Buonaparte's ambition—we who, in the name of freedom and independence had called on the people of the whole globè, and on the Ragusans among the rest, (and they at least had answered the summons,) to rise up against him and overthrow his usurped dominion—we requited them by handing them over, in the way of barter, as slaves, to a power of which they detested the yoke! But let the noble lord, and let this House, and let the world, mark the retribution which has followed this flagitious act. Austria, extending her commercial regulations to all her new acquisitions, has absolutely shut our trade out of that very Ragusa which we had betrayed into her hands! and thus has the noble lord received his punishment upon the spot on which he had so shamefully sacrificed the honour of his country!

Sir, if any page in the history of the late Congress be blacker than another, it is that which records the deeds of the noble lords against Genoa. When I approach this subject, and reflect on the powerful oratory, the
force of argument as well as of language, backed by the high authority of virtue, a sanction ever deeply felt in this House, once displayed in the cause of that ill-fated republic, by tongues now silent, but which used to be ever eloquent where public justice was to be asserted, or useful truth fearlessly inculcated, I feel hardly capable of going on. My lasting sorrow for the loss we have sustained is made deeper by the regret, that those lamented friends* lived not to witness the punishment of that foul conduct which they solemnly denounced. The petty tyrant to whom the noble lord delivered over that ancient and gallant people almost as soon as they had, at his call, joined the standard of national independence, has since subjected them to the most rigorous provisions of his absurd code—a code directed especially against the commerce of this country, and actually less unfavourable to France.

Thus, then, it appears, that after all, in public as well as in private—in state affair as in the concerns of the most humble individuals, the old maxim cannot safely be forgotten, that "honesty is the best policy." In vain did the noble lord flatter himself, that his subserviency to the unrighteous system of the Congress would secure him the adherence of the courts whom he made his idols. If he had abandoned that false, foreign system—if he had acted upon the principles of the nation whom he represented, and stood forward as the advocate of the rights of the people—the people would have been grateful. He preferred the interests and the wishes of the courts, and by the courts he is treated with their wonted neglect. To his crimes against the people all over Europe—to his invariable surrender of their cause—to his steady refusal of the protection which they had a right to expect, and which they did expect, from the manly and generous character of England—it is owing, that if, at this moment, you traverse the Continent in any direction whatever, you may trace the noble lord's career, in the curses of the nations whom he has betrayed, and the mockery of the courts who have inveigled him to be their dupe. It is in vain we attempt to deceive ourselves. No truth can be more evident than this, that if, instead of patronizing abuse, tyranny, and plunder, we had exhibited a noble, gallant, English spirit in behalf of popular rights and national independence—if, instead of chiming in with and aping their narrow, wretched principles, we had done our utmost to enlighten the policy of foreign courts—we should have had to treat with a number of constitutional governments, directed

* Messrs. Whitbread and Horner, in the debate upon Mr. Lambton's motion.
by sound views of policy, and disposed to adopt arrangements generally beneficial, instead of the capricious and spiteful regulations which now annoy us in every quarter.

Only compare the conduct of America towards us with that of the King of Sardinia, of the Austrian Emperor, of Ferdinand of Spain. From America we had no right to expect peculiar favour. Her struggle for independence we had treated as a rebellion. It was successful; and we never altogether forgave it, but entertained towards her, feelings approaching sometimes to contempt, sometimes to hatred. I am very far from thinking the Americans untainted by similar prejudices. They have perhaps been foolish enough to cherish a little spite in return for ours. Nor do I give their government credit for being wholly above the influence of this animosity; but experience has shewn, that, in all popular governments, the true interests of the community must in the main be consulted, and in the great bulk of cases supersede every lesser consideration. Now, we can never, as a trading nation, desire more than that all other countries should adopt the line of commercial policy best suited to the interests of the body of the people in each. The American government has, not from regard for us, but for the sake of its own subjects, pursued a course favourable to the mutual intercourse of the two states.

It is allowing the manufactories created by our absurd system gradually to decline, because industry can there be more beneficially employed in other pursuits. With a few very trifling exceptions, the market of the United States will, in a few months, again be completely restored to us, as far as the competition of the American manufacture is concerned, and it is plainly the only considerable relief which we can expect for a long time to come. In France we might have obtained something like the same advantages. There was a time when the feelings of the people ran strongly in our favour; but, instead of cultivating such dispositions, we have adopted a policy destructive of every kindly impression, and calculated to alienate the affections of all who retain the slightest regard for national honour. I may appeal to any one who has been in France since the war, I will even ask the gentlemen opposite, if they have not observed a most intimate connexion between the commercial and the political prejudices which now prevail against us? Talk to them of a commercial treaty, or generally of trade with us, and their answer is, nor can we marvel at it, "While you keep 130,000 men in arms quartered upon our territory, we will not treat with you at all. While you rule us with a rod of
iron, you shall get no gold from us by trading. While you exact tribute directly at the point of the bayonet, you must not hope to obtain it circuitously through the channels of traffic." These feelings are not peculiar to France; depend upon it, as long as the same fatal policy is pursued, British commerce will be excluded from the Continent—excluded more effectually than by Buonaparte's decrees and his armies, because now, for the first time, its ports are sealed against us by the governments, with the cordial assent of the people.

I hope and trust that this country may, before it is too late, retrace the steps which it has been taking towards destruction, under the guidance of the noble lord. I pray that we may live to see England once more holding her steady course in the direction of a liberal, a manly, an honest English policy. May the salutary change be wrought, because our honour and fame demand it; but if no higher considerations can influence our councils—if all worthier motives have lost their force—may we at the least consult our safety; adhere to that which is right, because it is shewn to be beneficial; and abandon the path of dishonour, because it is leading us to ruin. I move you, Sir, to resolve—

"1. That the Trade and Manufactures of the country are reduced to a state of such unexampled difficulty as demands the most serious attention of this House.

"2. That those difficulties are materially increased by the policy pursued with respect to our foreign commerce, and that a revision of this system ought forthwith to be undertaken by the House.

"3. That the continuance of the difficulties is in a great degree owing to the severe pressure of taxation under which the country labours, and which ought, by every practicable means, to be lightened.

"4. That the system of foreign policy pursued by his Majesty's Ministers has not been such as to obtain for the people of this country those commercial advantages which the influence of Great Britain in foreign courts fairly entitled them to expect."