

A

WORD IN SEASON

TO THE

TRADERS AND MANUFACTURERS

OF

GREAT BRITAIN.

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THE HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN

IN THREE VOLUMES

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WORD IN SEASON, &c.

BEFORE I enter upon the subject, the consideration of which has, for some time, employed all my thoughts, it may be proper to inform you, that my life has been passed among yourselves, in the midst of a flourishing, manufacturing country. I was born to competence, which I owe to the successful industry of my father. In this situation I have marked, with a very vigilant attention, the most material events which have arisen since I was of an age to consider them. My education gave me a taste for literature, and from the tenor of my life, I have had much time for reflection;—and the result both of my reading and reflection is an increasing confirmation of the reverence and attachment I had, at a very early period, conceived for the British Constitution. My surprize, therefore, that any attempts should be made to produce discontents among the trading, commercial, and manufacturing part of my countrymen, to whom tranquillity and good order are so essentially requisite, can only yield to the astonishment I shall feel, if such attempts should find the least success among them.

The leisure of my present life qualifies me to consider, with attention, the means employed to sow discontents among you, as well as the character and views of the persons who are so busy in employing them; and, for your information, as well as, I hope, for your conviction and advantage, I have undertaken to offer my opinion of them,

and their probable mischievous consequences, to your most serious consideration.

The persons who compose the societies, and who have established them, as they announce the matter, for constitutional reformation, are men, I am not afraid to say, of weak heads, of bad hearts, or desperate fortunes. The first class are certainly the best—who, with good intentions, are persuaded and deceived by artful and wicked men of superior understandings, into a co-operation with them in promoting designs, which, were they to succeed, would give a very deep wound to the happiness of this country.

The second class—consists of persons of considerable talents, who, under the influence of a factious spirit, are engaged in attempts to promote public confusion, in order to realize the dreams of their unprincipled ambition. For, believe me, if these men, or men with the same pernicious dispositions, were, by any violent convulsion of public affairs, to get into power, you would find a woeful difference between these upstart rulers, and your present mild government.

The third class—is composed of the most abandoned characters; who having dissipated their fortunes in every species of vicious excess, would rejoice in a national disturbance, on the same principle that thieves and pickpockets rejoice at a fire, as it gives them an opportunity of alleviating their distresses by rapine and plunder.

The means which these societies, and the individuals who take the lead in them, employ to promote their wicked and incendiary purposes, though directed ultimately to the same object, vary their course to the attainment of it:—some, with a daring outrage of all decency, with an audacity that seems to tempt the cognizance of the law, hold forth to you a conduct, which would involve you in persecution, and end in punishment;—while others, in the form of sober reasoning and dispassionate inquiry, artfully endeavour to undermine and weaken those principles of due submission to Government, which are the great support and security of national happiness.—I shall consider them both in their order.

The first do not hesitate to tell you, that under your present Government, you have no constitution, and that the Revolution at the close of the last century, (by which
you

you have hitherto been so ignorant as to believe, that what you thought an admirable constitution, was restored and confirmed, and from which period you and your ancestors have felt yourselves free and happy,) was an artful and tyrannic contrivance to delude the people out of their rights, in order to gratify the ambition of those men, who projected and brought it to a conclusion. They will tell you that all kings must be tyrants; and therefore, a scourge to all free governments:—that your House of Lords is the servile and abject support of regal tyranny, and should, therefore, be annihilated; and that your House of Commons does not contain an adequate representation of the people; and that, if it did, the Members of it are so corrupt, that it cannot represent you as it ought; and that, such being the present state of the government of this country, the people ought to arise as one man, to pull the King from his throne, degrade the nobles from their rank, dissolve the representative body of the nation, and form a government for themselves:—and, to add to the insult they thus offer to your understandings as reasonable beings, they hold forth the Revolution of France as an example for your imitation.

Extreme wickedness, very fortunately for mankind, is generally observed to outwit itself. Thus the men, who broach these pernicious doctrines, are so blinded by their passions, as to give their mischief a shape, that perverts the end for which it was projected.

As for the blessings which the people of England would derive from following the example of France, let us for a moment consider, by way of recommendation, the actual blessings which the French themselves enjoy, in consequence of their boasted Revolution.

Their King is dethroned and a miserable captive—in what is called a land of liberty.

The National Convention is a mob.

Their arrets, their decrees, and their laws are changed every hour, as the caprice of the moment or the violence of the populace directs.

Their revenue is so inadequate to their expenditure, as to demand the ruinous expedient of millions of paper money, which is already 40 per cent. beneath its original value; while their new coin vanishes in its passage to circulation,

ulation, because every one hoards up what he can get of it, in a time of such universal distrust.

Their ancient nobility is degraded—their clergy pillaged—their commerce almost annihilated—and their colonies in a rapid progress to ruin.

Property, personal security, liberty, and life, are equally endangered; for neither their laws nor their magistrates have sufficient strength or power, to punish theft, robbery or murder.

The empire, at large, is convulsed and torn to pieces by contending factions, and daily stained with blood, from riots, insurrections, and massacres.

To supply the deficiency of taxes, the church has been robbed of its possessions, and the very altars pillaged of their ornaments.

Religion, which is formed to support us amidst the sorrows of time, and to qualify us for the happiness of eternity;—Religion, that sublime principle, which more immediately connects man with his Maker, is now subdued in France by the influence of an infidel philosophy, under the name of universal toleration, while perjury is the only road to ecclesiastical preferment, and conscience and piety the certain conductors to poverty, to derision, and to contempt.

But these, it is said, are only petty evils when compared with the blessings which accompany them, and that, after all, the subjects of France are a free people.

Yes,—the gentlemen of landed property may call himself free,—but, at the very moment he is boasting of his freedom, his castle may be seized by the banditti of his neighbourhood, and the walls of it stained with his blood.

The merchant may boast of the fulness of liberty, but his warehouses are empty; his correspondents are silent, his capital is lost, and his credit is gone.

The tradesman may sit in his shop, and delight himself with the idea that he is a free man—but he sells nothing.

The artist may exclaim—liberty is the friend of genius, the encourager of the arts—but, alas! it has not left him a single patron.

The manufacturer may be elated that his country is blessed with freedom;—but the fire blazes no more on

his forge, and the useless loom is occupied by the spider's web.

The pious man is grateful for the enjoyment of liberty—but he scarce knows where to find an altar, before which he can offer his thanksgiving according to the religion of his fathers.

It is true, indeed, that a great part of the National Convention may justly say, this liberty is an inestimable blessing, for we were poor, and it has made us rich—we were almost without bread, and it has given us sumptuous tables—we were forced to obey laws which the authority of government had made for us, and we are now empowered to disobey those laws which we make for others—we were compelled to submit to every officer of the state, we now make them obedient to our commands, and tread upon the necks of kings.

The members of the popular clubs—those men, for they are of the same texture as those we have at home, of weak heads, bad hearts, and desperate fortunes, may also lift up their voices in praise of liberty; for it gives the one a shadowy importance, which satisfies their ideot vanity; it qualifies the others to gratify their malicious ambition in the contemplation and the spoil of superior ruin, and it lifts the rest, from the service of brothels and gaming tables, to the intrigues of a disjointed and falling state.

Such are the comforts of a revolution, which Mr. Paine and his adherents recommend to your imitation—A revolution, which, while it has plunged France into every distress that can befall a nation, gives a few uncertain, ruinous, and short-lived privileges, to a small band of the most worthless people in it.—These are the consequences of a revolution brought on by mad, tumultuous, unreflecting, popular insurrections, excited and fomented by factious clubs and societies; and who alone, of twenty-five millions of people, are in any degree the gainers, if gainers they can, with truth, be called, by this general calamity.

If any thing were wanting to enforce these considerations, it would be the contrast formed by your own condition. You cannot open your eyes but you must see it; you cannot listen but you must hear it; you cannot reflect a moment but you must feel it. Equally free from

the opposite extremes of misery which France has successively experienced, you neither groan under the oppression of arbitrary power, nor tremble at the madness and fury of popular confusion. Your King is neither himself in chains, nor does he hold his subjects in bondage. With dignity sufficient to command respect, with power sufficient to enforce obedience, his authority is limited by the law, which is equally binding upon him and upon the meanest of his subjects.

The supreme legislative power he holds only in conjunction with the two Houses of Parliament, and each of the three branches of our government forms an useful and salutary check on the other.

The House of Lords is composed either of an ancient nobility, qualified by rank, education, and property, and inheriting from their ancestors an attachment to the constitution;—or of those selected from time to time, from the orders of the church and the law, from the professions of the navy and the army, or from the rest of the laity, and advanced by the Crown for their piety, their learning, their valour, or their services.

The House of Commons is chosen by the great bulk of the freeholders in counties, and by different cities and boroughs in the kingdom, according to the several forms which charters or ancient custom has established. It, therefore, not only represents the great mass of landed property, but it has an immediate connection with property of every description. It consists of a mixture of persons chosen by the monied and mercantile interests—by the manufacturer and mechanic—of those whose fortunes have been originally acquired, or are still embarked in trade. From the manner in which the right of election is distributed, an opening is offered to every man, who rises to eminence in his own line, whose situation makes him respectable, or whose talents render him useful to the public. Hence it is, that even the places which have no immediate and separate representative, can never be at a loss to find those who have a common interest with themselves.—No part of the country, no corner of the kingdom, feels itself neglected or forgotten;—a communication is established through all the classes of society, and not only every description of men, but every individual

in this country, who feels himself aggrieved, may find his way to parliament, and is sure of an advocate and a friend. In questions of general concern, not only the interest of the people is consulted, but their prevailing wishes and sentiments have a due weight, when tempered and corrected by calm and sober reflection. Parliament will be guided, as it ought, by the steady current of public opinion, but it will neither yield to the cry of a misguided populace, nor shift and turn with every gust of varied passions of the day. This it is which distinguishes the gravity, the consistency, the wisdom of deliberative bodies, from the levity and inconsistency of republican assemblies. This forms the great excellence of our constitution, and establishes the difference between the confusion and anarchy of wild and turbulent democracies, and the settled course and order of a free but well-regulated government.

If we proceed to examine the details of our situation, we trace every where the natural effects of a steady and regular system.

Look first at the means of national defence, one of the primary ends of all political society. Our navy, the natural bulwark of a commercial country, and to which we chiefly owe our pre-eminence among the nations of Europe, was never in so flourishing or formidable a condition; our military establishment, small in time of peace, contains, nevertheless, the foundation of a force sufficient, in case of emergency, to repel and resent the attacks of our enemies: our officers and soldiers are equally distinguished for their valour, their fidelity, and their discipline; they have a common interest with ourselves, and feel no attachment but to their sovereign and the laws. Consider the state of the established church, and you will find it to be maintained and supported on principles of moderation: power and rust are confined, as they must necessarily be, to those who join in the national religion; but at the same time, a free toleration is granted to every different sect of Christians, and the rights of private opinion and liberty of conscience are held as sacred and inviolate. Observe the progress of national wealth; the load of public debt, by a wise and æconomical system, is continually decreasing; the revenue is augmented, not by new taxes, but by the effects of general prosperity; some of the heaviest
burdens,

burthens, which irresistible necessity had imposed upon us, are already diminished, and every year of tranquillity will afford us an increasing relief; even at present, how little have the public taxes interfered with industry or trade: within a few years our commerce is nearly doubled, and is still rapidly increasing; while our ships convey the produce of our united skill and labour to every part of the globe, where the winds can waft and the waves can bear them. The confirmed and advancing state of our credit, the increasing facility of circulation, the extent, the variety, and the perfection of our manufactures, are the astonishment, the admiration, and the envy of the world.

In this happy situation, the mild system of our laws, and the impartial administration of justice, secure to every man, according to the station he occupies, his full share in the general prosperity, and equally protect the rights, the fortunes, and the interests of the highest and lowest among us.

If this is a true picture of our actual situation; if these are the effects of our existing constitution and form of government, supported as it is by a general love of order, a just sense of our present advantage, and an habitual submission to our established laws, what will you think of those men, who, in the form of sober reasoning, with the appearance of dispassionate enquiry, and in the language of temperate patriotism, endeavour to undermine those principles of subordination, which at once form and secure the national happiness? These men are far more dangerous than those I have before mentioned, because they make their approaches in the seducing form of public virtue; their associations are made without tumult, and their addresses to the people recommend moderation; and contain, for the purpose of disguising their intentions, some maxims of sound political doctrine, and breathe a patriotic attachment to the constitution of their country: they profess to amend, and not to destroy; to renovate, and not to injure. Their public resolutions, which are disseminated by newspapers, hand-bills, and pamphlets, through every part of the kingdom, are always formed upon certain general principles and abstract propositions, of which some may be true, and others may have a speci-

ous appearance ; but it will be discovered, on examination, that when the principles are well founded, their application is erroneous, and that the result is neither consistent with any practical notion of government, nor with the peace and order of society.

As their opinions point to the redress of evils which will arise in the best constituted governments; and those political defects which, from the incidental imperfection of all human institutions must be found in the best regulated states, they are felt by all, though understood by few ; and, therefore, by representing these evils as produced by the acquired defects of government, and not by its inevitable imperfections arising out of the general nature of human affairs, an undistinguished spirit of discontent may be raised, and, being artfully fomented, may prove a powerful engine to promote the views of these factious associations.

To the whole course of reasoning, of which I have now been speaking, I answer at once, that theory is one thing, and that practice is another ; that many things which appear excellent in theory, cannot be reduced to practice ; and that it requires a considerable share of understanding and the habits of experience, to determine between the one and the other. There is no doubt but a perfect system of laws and government may be conceived ; but to be perfect in their application and effects, they must be put in execution by beings of a superior nature to man. We are very fallible creatures, as the first and best of us know ; and the society which we compose, must partake of our imperfections : and, therefore, before we venture to become discontented with the government under which we live, because it is not absolutely pure and perfect, it would be a proof of our wisdom to consider how far we ourselves who propose to correct its errors, and improve its energies, are in possession of purity and perfection. While men are men, the institutions they form will be liable to error and perversion.

You have, no doubt, heard much of late about the Rights of Man, and are, perhaps, acquainted with the arguments promulgated, with no common art, to persuade Englishmen that they do not enjoy any of them. This doctrine of the rights of man is supported on the principle that all men are equal by nature, and that no one class

has a real claim to privileges which are not the common possession of all.

That all men are, in some respects, equal by nature, cannot be denied; they all come into the world naked and helpless; they all cling to the breast for sustenance; and, after passing through the portion of life, which the universal Parent has allotted them, they retire to the common home which Nature has prepared for all her children. But in the interval, from the cradle to the grave, social life forbids this equality. The strong and the feeble are not equal—the wise and the ignorant are not equal. The difference in corporeal strength and intellectual faculties, which are inequalities, produced by Nature herself, are as absolute exceptions to this principle, as the artificial variations which necessarily arise from a state of society. We cannot be all masters or all servants; wealth will be the lot of some, and labour and poverty of others. Those distinctions will arise from the unconquerable nature of things, which promote the union and form the security of social life. The first, and primitive relations from which those forms and establishments are derived by which society is preserved, that of parent and child, produce at once the power of command and the duty of obedience.

That a society could be formed where all rights and all privileges should be reciprocal, is not within the reach of my reason to comprehend; at least, of this I am sure, that if these preachers of the levelling doctrine of equality had the power to reduce their equalizing principles to practice, they must follow up their destruction of all the old forms of government, by proscribing, from their political system, not only the arts and sciences, but all trade, manufacture, and commerce.—Whatever promotes an exertion of the intellectual faculties, whatever encourages a spirit of enterprise, whatever tends to the acquisition of fortune or of fame, must be forbidden by their confined legislation. Those who live under such a government must be all rulers and subjects, teachers and pupils, masters and servants, judges and executioners, in their turn.

If these are the rights of man, I am ready to admit that our constitution is formed on no such basis; but I may venture to assert, what indeed, it appears to me, I have already proved, that there is no one right which a reason-
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able man would wish to enjoy that you do not possess under the existing government of your country.—You have every right, but the right of doing wrong.—I speak, always, with the reserve of human imperfection, but, appealing to the description which I have before given of your situation, and which I call on yourselves to witness ;—let me ask you, if you are not governed by wise laws—if you do not enjoy the property transmitted to you from your ancestors, or acquired by your own skill and industry, in perfect security ? Have you not the privilege of a trial by jury ? Is there any power that can rightfully oppress you ? And against which the laws do not provide an effectual remedy ? Do not you sit beneath your own vines and your own fig-trees, and enjoy yourselves and your possessions in peace ? Do you not worship God in your own way, and according to the forms which the spirit of your devotion shall prescribe ? It is, by losing sight of these blessings, and by aiming at the chimerical objects which are now held out by our wild reformers, that the French nation have brought themselves to a condition, which excites the wonder and the pity of Europe.

Such are the general rights which every British subject possesses : every man, be he a duke or a peasant, equally feels the influence of the laws and the protection of government. But society requires different degrees and classes of men, and each member of it possesses the individual right of his respective situation, and it is by a coalition of the several parts, in their various subordinations, that order and harmony is produced, which forms the happiness of the whole.

The different members of the body are made for different functions, but it is the co-operation of all, in the respective discharge of them, that gives energy, effect, and, indeed, life to the system.

It really astonishes me, who have lived all my life among manufacturers, that any thing like a levelling and equalizing spirit should have got the least footing in any of our manufacturing towns ; because I conceive it to be essential to their progress and existence, that the rich inhabitants should be few, and the labourers many ; and that the subordination of the different classes, to each other, is the life and soul of every species of manufactory,

tory. By way of example, let me suppose, for a moment, that the working manufacturers of Manchester or Birmingham should be so far inflamed by these new-fangled doctrines of the rights of man, as to say to their masters, we have toiled for you long enough, you shall now toil for us:—It is by our skill and industry, that you are become rich, we will, therefore, have our rightful share of the wealth acquired by our means. Of such an operation of the rights of man, what would be the consequence?—Ruin to all—to the rich, who would be despoiled of their property, and to the poor, who would, thereby, lose every means of future maintenance and support. Indeed, it appears to me, that, in places particularly devoted to trade, manufactures, and commerce, there can be no evil so much to be dreaded as popular commotions. A foreign enemy would repay submission with clemency:—fire may be checked in its progress—but who shall say to the mad spirit of popular tumult, thus far shalt thou go, and no farther?

Whatever, therefore, may be the prettexts used to make you dissatisfied with your condition, your own experience tells you every day, that the Constitution you live under is, in its present state, a glorious Constitution. You are now, my countrymen, the most prosperous people in the world—and it becomes you to be proud of your allotment. You must, surely, consult your reason as little as your piety, if you look, in this world, for blessings pure and unmixed. It is not in the nature of things—it is not in the order of Providence, for man to possess them. Be thankful, therefore, for the superior good you enjoy—repine not at the evils which human wisdom cannot prevent;—and be assured that those reformers, who tell you that your Government is not perfect, have, in fact, any views rather than those of making it so. Be not so weak or so ungrateful, as to suffer wicked and designing men to inflame you into discontent—and spare not your best exertions to check the spirit of it in others. Treat the busy, meddling, seditious zeal of reforming associations with the contempt they deserve;—pursue the honest and industrious occupations from which you, and your families, have derived such constant

stant advantages, and avail yourselves of the present tranquillity to improve your own and the public prosperity.

In a word—recollect the well-known story, as it is given in the Spectator, of a man, who, though he was in a state of perfect health, suffered himself to be persuaded by empirics and mountebanks, that he would be still better if he dosed himself with their nostrums—the consequence was, as might be naturally expected, that he soon ruined his health, and brought on a decline, which carried him to the grave. As an acknowledgement of his folly, and as a warning to others, he ordered the following epitaph to be inscribed on his tomb——“ I
“ was well—I endeavoured to be better—and here I
“ lie.”

That you may all of you possess the wisdom to avoid a similar conduct,—that your trade, manufactures, and commerce may continue to flourish,—that the free constitution and superior happiness of our country may remain undisturbed by foreign foes, or domestic enemies, is the ardent wish of

Your sincere friend,

A TRUE-BORN ENGLISHMAN,

(When you have read this, pray lend it to your Neighbour.)

