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John Millar, ***Letters of Sidney, on Inequality of Property. To which is added, a Treatise of the Effects of War on Commercial Prosperity*** [1796]

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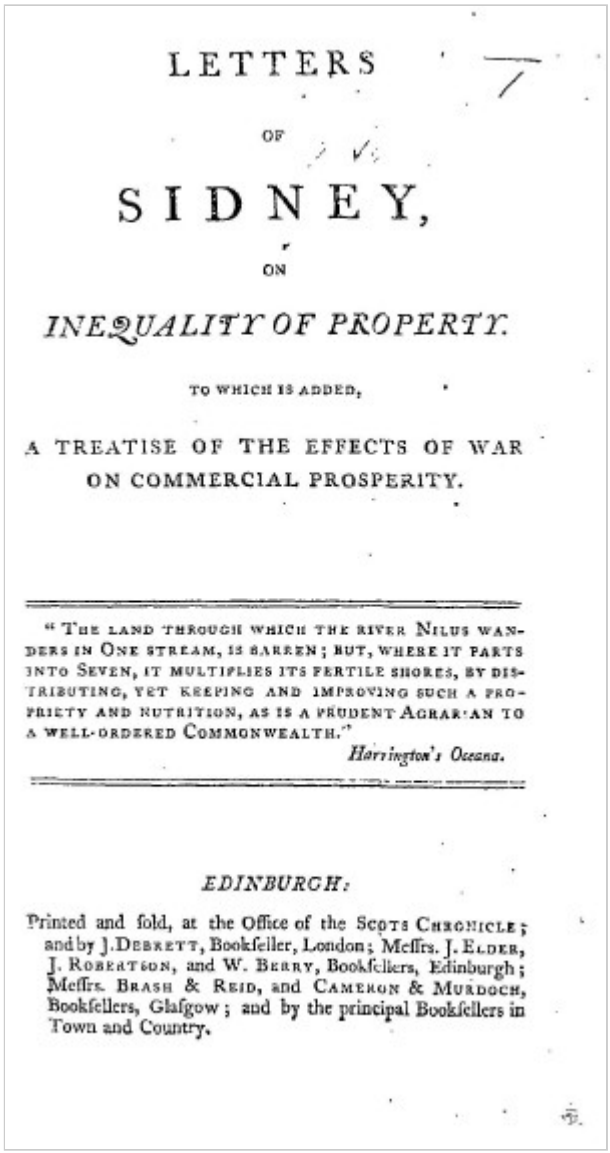

LETTERS

OF

SIDNEY,

ON

INEQUALITY OF PROPERTY.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A TREATISE OF THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON COMMERCIAL PROSPERITY.

"THE LAND THROUGH WHICH THE RIVER NILUS WANDERS IN ONE STREAM, IS BARREN; BUT, WHERE IT PARTS INTO SEVEN, IT MULTIPLIES ITS FERTILE SHORES, BY DISTRIBUTING, YET KEEPING AND IMPROVING SUCH A PROPRIETY AND NUTRITION, AS IS A PRUDENT AGRARIAN TO A WELL-ORDERED COMMONWEALTH."

Harrington's Oceana.

EDINBURGH:

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Millar continues his critique of the war against France with letters to the Earl of Lauderdale.

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LETTERS OF SIDNEY.

ON

INEQUALITY OF PROPERTY.

LETTER I.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR, August 5. 1796.

THERE is perhaps no circumſtance which can ſo materially affect the morals, government, and general welfare of a nation, as the ſtate of property. The influence which it poſſeſſes over men's manners, opinions, and actions, is highly important; and, although we ſhould not be diſpoſed to admit ſuperior riches among the juſt grounds of inequality of political power, we muſt confeſs that opulence is attended with ſuch weight and authority, as will always render complete equality unattainable. But though the ſtate of property is ſo very intereſting, all parties at preſent ſeem to have ſhrunk from any inquiry concerning the regula-

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE ***THE EARL OF LAUDERDALE.***

My Lord,

I take the liberty of calling your attention to a subject of the highest national importance, the State of Property; in the persuasion that, should your Lordship approve of the opinions contained in the following Letters, you will neither be prevented by unreasonable clamour, nor deterred by the danger of unprincipled and systematic misrepresentation, from vindicating, on the first favourable occasion, the Rights of Humanity.

It is with peculiar propriety, that I, at the same time, address to your Lordship's consideration, the Treatise signed 'A Merchant;' your excellent Speech, in the last Session of Parliament, having, with the greatest success, refuted, by an accurate investigation of particular facts and circumstances, those fallacious statements of Ministry, to which this Treatise was intended as a general answer. I have the honour to be

Your LORDSHIP'S
Most Obedient Humble Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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LETTERS OF SIDNEY. ON INEQUALITY OF PROPERTY.

LETTER I.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

August 5. 1796.

There is perhaps no circumstance which can so materially affect the morals, government, and general welfare of a nation, as the state of property. The influence which it possesses over men's manners, opinions, and actions, is highly important; and, although we should not be disposed to admit superior riches among the just grounds of inequality of political power, we must confess that opulence is attended with such weight and authority, as will always render complete equality unattainable. But though the state of property is so very interesting, all parties at present seem to have shrunk from any inquiry concerning the regulations on this subject most conducive to the public welfare. One party have affected to treat all their opponents as enthusiastic levellers, and by misrepresenting the meaning of the word equality, which, except by themselves, was never understood as extending beyond equality of rights, they have, unfortunately for the community to which they belong, succeeded in raising an alarm in the minds of the rich, and in propping their own corrupt power by means which threaten ruin to their country. The opposite party, sensible that their expressions may be misrepresented, and afraid of increasing that alarm which has already produced such disastrous consequences, have stood aloof from the subject. It appears to me, however, that their caution is unnecessary, that a full discussion of the subject may defy the utmost malignity of misinterpretation, and that, by fairly unfolding what are probably the farthest views entertained by any persons of this country, it may be possible even to diminish the exaggerated fears of the rich.

If, Sir, you join in this opinion, I intend to communicate to the Public, through the medium of your very useful Paper, those observations which have occurred to me respecting the State of Property. I mean to consider the disadvantages which are necessarily attached to excessive inequality of fortunes, to point out the still greater evils which would result from a system of complete levelling, and to conclude, by suggesting some regulations, equally just and simple, by which it appears to me that the present inequality might be greatly diminished.

Great inequality of property is one of the most striking features of the present state of society. In the same nation, in the same town, even in the same street, part of the inhabitants riot in an abundance, with which the most resined luxury can scarcely keep pace; while their brethren, oppressed with want, worn down by labour, diseased and wretched, can scarcely procure enough to satisfy the most urgent demands of

nature. The hovel of the beggar adjoins to the palace of the prince; and we are presented, in the same picture, with the extremes of want, and of profusion. Does it require argument to convince us that this state of property, from whatever circumstances it may have arisen, is destructive and unjust? One might reasonably expect that the slightest view of such inequality, the mere proof of its existence, would be sufficient to excite the most universal and unqualified reprobation; but all appeals to the sentiments of humanity, on such a subject, are now treated as idle declamation, and therefore I shall proceed, in my next letter, to point out the numerous evils which this state of property inevitably occasions. The chief difficulty, in this part of my subject, arises from the multiplicity of matter; to whatever side we turn, whether we consider the condition of the rich, the sufferings of the poor, the general state of morals and government, the effects on commerce or on population, arguments start up in such numbers, that it will be no easy task to condense my thoughts. But on a subject of such importance and extent, I trust in the candour and indulgence of your readers, should some of the views, which it will be necessary to present, appear either deficient in that novelty which commands attention, or of a nature so abstruse as might require a length of investigation unsuitable to the limits of your Paper.

I Am, Sir,
Your'S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER II.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

August 12. 1796.

If the rich and luxurious were to take a reasonable view of their own situation, they would be convinced that they have no interest in supporting excessive inequality of property. A man born to opulence, may be said to be predestined to misery. From his cradle, he is surrounded by sycophants, who watch every rising desire, and satisfy it, before it has time to unfold itself. All real enjoyment is effectually precluded; he is denied the pleasure of the pursuit, which usually far exceeds that of the attainment; he is ignorant of that transport with which we welcome happiness which we had nearly despaired of obtaining, with which we seize an enjoyment which has alternately excited our expectations and our fears. To him, Pleasure is a word to which none of his ideas correspond: Although all his demands are immediately satisfied, all his caprices flattered and encouraged, he feels a want in his own breast, which the assiduities of his sycophants can never remove.

But though the attention of those around him can procure him few real enjoyments, they can remove many real inconveniencies and vexations. He is unacquainted with contradiction, unused to disappointment; he learns no kind of self-command, but becomes the slave of his passions. His temper is ruffled by the slightest accidents, his mind totally unprepared for those misfortunes from which riches cannot always protect him. In the day of disappointment or adversity, he sinks in unavailing despondency, or unjustly seeks relief by tormenting those around him. His mind is unnerved; the virtues of patience, temperance, and fortitude, are strangers to his breast.

While his mind is thus weakened, and his morals vitiated by habitual indulgence, his understanding suffers from total neglect. Having always considered his rank in life, and even his amusements, as secured to him independently of his own exertions, he has never had any vigorous motive to cultivate his reason or his taste. If he has studied any thing useful, it must have been merely as a task; and few preceptors will be willing to risk their expectations of future preferment, by a rigid attention to a painful duty. His understanding will therefore be as uncultivated, as his morals are vicious, and his mind imbecile* .

In such a state, he can relish none of those studies and recreations which improve while they delight; he is debarred from all simple, rational, heartfelt enjoyments; and his life is devoted to tumultuous pleasures, which are followed by repentance and disgust. The novelty of these pleasures soon passes away; in vain does he attempt, by a thousand inventions, to give an apparent variety to enjoyments with which he is

sated; the same apathy, the same ennui for ever pursue him. Surrounded by all imaginable gratifications, he sinks into a tedious lethargy, except at moments, when he is roused by a galling reflection on his own insignificance and vice. If he be possessed of a spark of sensibility, he feels degraded in his own estimation; his existence becomes a burden to him, and it is only by the supine indolence and effeminacy in which he is sunk, that he is prevented from terminating this, the worst of human miseries, by self-murder. Is this the happiness of the rich? This the condition so much envied by their inferiors? It is a state of mind equally hostile to moral and intellectual improvement, and must inevitably lead to discontent, profligacy, misery, and contempt. The Author of our nature hath, wisely and mercifully, rendered virtue and virtuous exertion the only means of securing our happiness, even in the present life; while he hath invariably attached misery to indolence, dissipation, and weakness of mind.

These observations have been so often repeated, that they may, in some degree, be trite and common; but this frequency of repetition is itself an argument of their truth. There is no country in which they have not been too fatally illustrated; and I am afraid that, without mentioning the profligacy of the noblesse of France or Italy, sufficient proofs might easily be found at home. Yet the nature of our government, the dependence which each man hath on his own exertions for attaining that rank in the state to which he may aspire, affords some opportunity to the Great of escaping that frivolity and languor which are incident to their situation. We accordingly find some men of rank and fortune, whose talents are an honour to their country; but we must regret that the same circumstances which prompt this exertion, too seldom guard them from that dissipation and profligacy, to which, from their situation in life, they are so fatally exposed. I am, Sir,

Your’S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER III.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

August 19. 1796.

The rich, in each country, are but a handful; and I have perhaps occupied too much of your Paper in showing, that great inequality of property is disadvantageous to them. Each rich man requires multitudes to minister to his various luxuries, vanities, and caprices; and accordingly, in every country of Europe, the poor, those who depend for their maintenance on their daily labour, form a great majority of the nation. In examining their condition, let us always recollect, that it is the condition of the greater number, and that the happiness of each individual of this class is, in justice, equally important, both to himself and to the community, with that of a prince.

Shall we begin our iniquiry with the Education of the Poor? Alas, Sir! the poor are deprived of every thing which can bear the name of education. Their parents are continually employed in providing the mere necessaries of life, and are themselves most deplorably ignorant; they have neither time, inclination, nor abilities, to inculcate morals into their children. They allow them to run about without controul, till they attain that degree of strength which enables them to add a small pittance to the family income; and the moment this period arrives, they consign them to ignorance and hard labour for ever. Of all grievances, this total ignorance is the greatest; it degrades the mind, it smothers the lurking seeds of genius, it is a fertile source of all the vices. A certain degree of labour is good for man; but that degree which prevents him from informing himself of his interests, of his rights, and of his duties, is the most intolerable and destructive of all calamities.

Whatever inducements there may be to constant labour, nature, with irresistible authority, demands occasional relaxations. When we have degraded the mind, when we have destroyed the very idea of any pleasures but those of sense, when we have effectually precluded all intellectual and moral improvement, when we have changed the man almost into a brute; to what relaxations must he have recourse? To riot, to debauchery, to indulgences fatal to himself, and ruinous to his family. The greatest possible industry, temperance, and frugality, are requisite to enable a workman to maintain and educate his children; and it seems the height of folly to expect a regular and unremitting attention to these difficult virtues, from the most ignorant and most neglected part of the community. Yet the smallest deviation from these duties, even a casual sickness, or a temporary stagnation of trade, are sufficient to reduce whole families to misery and despair; to put them into such a situation, that they must make their choice, between sufferings, which even the philosopher could not easily support, and dishonesty. I believe I should not exceed the truth, in saying, that the families of two thirds of our workmen have, at some time, suffered the extremity of want. Shall I

be told that this arises from their profligacy and extravagance? I grant it often does; but I must contend that this profligacy ought to be ascribed to their ignorance; this extravagance to the want of almost any motive to economy: both have their source in that state of degradation to which excessive inequality has reduced them. What is that degree of virtue which you require from the poor, as the price of the bare necessaries of life? It is a continued and most difficult exertion of self-command: And how do you propose to enable them to attain this high pitch of virtue? By ignorance, oppression, and contempt.

Hardships, if possible, still more distressing, fill up the measure of misery to the poor. While by their utmost efforts they are scarcely able to continue their existence, they continually witness the splendour and profusion of others. They see immense sums daily lavished on show and folly, on entertainments and equipages, dress, servants, dogs, and horses; and it is impossible for them to avoid the reflection, that a small portion of this superfluity would remove all their pressures, would render their families cheerful and happy. They do not see the price which is paid for this splendour; they cannot perceive the cares, the disgust, the remorse which are covered by smiles; they connect the situation of the rich with ease, admiration, and pleasure; and finding nothing in the characters of the Great to entitle them to such distinction and happiness, their peace of mind is ruined by envy, while their exentions are damped by the hoplessness of their situation. How can they ever expect to escape from their present difficulties? The small pittance which a workman can, at any one time, save from his wages, can have no perceptible effect on his future welfare. The motive to parsimony is too weak to regulate his conduct; its advantages are so distant, and seem so precarious, that nothing is left to counterbalance the strong temptation of present enjoyment. If he is married, all prospects of raising his condition are at an end; he may be considered as fortunate, while, by his labour, he can maintain his family, and he looks forward to public charity as his only resource in sickness, and in age: Man in this situation soon loses all ambition; he becomes discontented with the present, and careless of the future; he squanders whatever trifle he may procure beyond the necessaries of life; he gradually contracts a fondness for improper indulgences; habits of dissipation grow upon him; his labour at last becomes irksome; he seeks to drown reflection in riotous debauchery; and that he may procure the means of idleness and dissipation, he is at first guilty of slight transgressions, till, by degrees, becoming hardened in iniquity, he no longer shrinks from the most attrocious crimes. What man of understanding or humanity can contemplate such a picture, and repeat the absurd expression, that all at present is well? No, Sir, all is not well; it is neither just nor expedient that, to swell the pomp of a few, the majority of the people should be condemned to the most brutish ignorance, to envy, to want, to debauchery, to the most flagitious crimes. No, Sir, all is not well, although the rich and luxurious, careless of the anguish of their fellow men, may have the effrontery to assert it. I am, Sir,

Your’S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER IV.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

August 26. 1796.

The bad effects of great inequality of property are not confined to the very rich and the very poor, to those who may be considered as at the opposite terminations of the great chain of civilized society; they extend through every connecting link, contaminating the morals of the whole nation.

When the two extremes of opulence and want are continually before our eyes, it is natural that we should consider the one as including every thing we desire; the other, as connected with every thing we would wish to shun. Riches become associated in our imaginations with independence, splendour, happiness, and admiration; poverty, with servility, misery, and contempt. We transfer these qualities to the persons of those who compose the two opposite classes, and pay an involuntary respect to the opulent, while the indigent too often are treated with unmerited contempt* . A man is no longer valued according to his real worth, his intellectual and moral attainments, but according to his apparent wealth and splendour. Hence, the vice of avarice prevails; not that laudable desire of independence and comfort, which prompts to honest industry, but an insatiable thirst of gain, which roots out all the vitues, which produces envy, servility, hatred, and all manner of dishonesty.

Poverty becomes so disgusting to us, that we studiously avoid all communication with it, and avert our eyes from the miseries of our brethren. The first emotion which the appearance of the wretched excites in our minds, is a kind of repulsion; we hear the story of the poor with reluctance, and our sympathy with their distresses is impaired. Hence selfishness, uncharitableness, or that wretched substitute for kindness, which proceeds from ostentation. Meantime, we find a ready excuse in that general profligacy of the poor, which also originates from excessive inequality; we meet with so many instances of fraud and deceit in their stories, that unless we are unusually indulgent, we learn to consider all petitioners in the same point of view; and, that we may not be imposed upon by falsehood, we shut up every avenue to our hearts. I may be told, that immense sums are annually expended on the poor; I admit it; but still I am very far from praising the charity of the present age. Much is done from ostentation; much, though often very injudiciously, by public institution; something to escape importunity, but little, I fear, from feelings of true compassion. It is impossible that we can sympathise with those, whose situation inspires disgust, whose sufferings we are unwilling to investigate, whose characters, occupations, pleasures, and pains, are so different from our own.

Avarice and profusion, though opposite vices, are equally generated by excessive inequality. The dislike of poverty acts in different directions in people of opposite characters. While some are actuated by the fear of want, others are terrified at the contempt which follows it; in order to be reputed rich, they launch into expences which they can ill afford; and these expences soon bring on that poverty of which they so much dread the imputation.

To this source of profusion may be added another still more powerful, Imitation. The ostentatious pleasures of the rich create desires in their inferiors, who foolishly attempt to imitate their stile of living and expensive amusements; an emulation which has been aptly compared to a race between the different conditions and members of each particular rank, universally pervades society; and, although it is alternately the subject of regret and of ridicule, it will continue to prevail, while overgrown fortunes dazzle mankind by their extravagant brilliancy. The consequences are most destructive to morals and to happiness; and we may truly say, that, while we see avarice on the one hand, and profusion on the other, a reasonable economy can no where be found. No man, whatever be his rank of life, can live in the manner practised by his equals, and at the same time make a proper provision for his family. He is so beset with temptations, so goaded on by this foolish emulation, that, unless he is possessed of very considerable self-command, his expences will equal, if not exceed, his income. So notorious is this circumstance, that the man who marries before he has amassed a considerable fortune, is universally deemed highly imprudent: It is justly concluded, that it will afterwards be impossible for him to save, from his annual income, what may be sufficient to enable his children to maintain the rank in which they have been educated. Hence the frequency of celibacy, particularly in large towns, where emulation in expence is most prevalent. This prodigality is not confined to one rank or condition; it reaches, by a most destructive contagion, from the prince to the beggar; whatever a man’s property may be, we rarely find it equal to his wants; and in this view, all may be said to be equally poor.

Nothing can be more fatal to public spirit than this private extravagance. He who has ruined his fortune, or can make no proper provision for his family, has a powerful temptation constantly acting on his mind. He is sensible that his real situation will at last be known, and he anticipates the privation of habitual indulgences, the coldness of his former friends, the contempt of the world, and all the miseries of indigence. Poverty appears before him clad in all her horrors, and his virtue too often yields to so formidable an assailant. If he is in the lower ranks of life, he is led by degrees to the most flagitious enormities; if he is in a more elevated situation, he finds that one detectable crime may of itself retrieve his fortune, and he sells his conscience and his country. The same inequality of property which, by occasioning his extravagance, has led him into this humiliating situation, enables another to make the infamous purchase, and the influence of corruption spreads wide through the nation.

In those who carry on the infamous traffic of venality, all public principle must soon be annihilated: and their number is so great, their rank so imposing, that they may almost glory in their shame* . Meantime, the rest of the community, observing this open venality, and grossly deceived by many of those who still pretend to patriotism, become complete sceptics in politics. They see nothing around them but a factious

contest for private emolument, a scramble for places; and they rashly conclude, that Public Spirit is a word destitute of meaning, used merely to impose on the credulity of mankind. To point out the destructive effects of this total disregard, and even disbelief, of patriotism, both on morals and politics, would surely be superfluous; to be convinced that it already prevails, we have only to look around us. Inequality of Property has produced two classes, the opulent who purchase, and the indigent who sell, the interests of their country; and this infamous traffic is not carried on secretly, but in open day, and with the most perfect publicity. Patriotism is scarcely pretended to by any person, except during a general election, and a serious belief in its existence is universally ridiculed. Can any man deny the truth of these assertions? Is any man so blind as not to perceive that the necessary consequences are, the most destructive corruption, the loss of every advantage which might be derived from free government, and the most deplorable degradation of human nature* . “Sitot,” says Rousseau, “que quelq’un dit des affaires de l’Etat, que m’importe? on doit compter que l’Etat est perdu.” Alas, for England! I am, Sir,

Your’S, &C.

Sydney.

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LETTER V.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

August 30. 1796.

The disadvantages of inequality of property, considered in a commercial view, are certainly less important than its effects on morals and politics; yet to those, whose opinions are guided merely by considerations of profit and loss, they may perhaps not prove uninteresting. The extent and variety of disquisition to which this might lead, would however be altogether unsuitable to this mode of publication, and therefore I shall confine myself to a few topics, and to a very short illustration.

The whole of the annual produce, it must be evident, arises from the land and labour; and from the savings from this produce, the whole accumulated riches of a nation, as has been demonstrated by the ingenious author of the Wealth of Nations* , must be derived. We may accordingly consider this subject in two different views; we may enquire, whether inequality diminishes the total produce of the land and labour? and whether it prevents a part of that produce from being annually saved and added to the national capital? To both questions, Sir, I apprehend our answer must be in the affirmative.

To those who have paid even a slight attention to the state of agriculture, few proofs of the mischiefs attending the accumulation of great landed estates, will be necessary. The fact is indisputable, that these estates are, almost in every case, worse cultivated than the surrounding country. All the habits of the proprietor are directly opposite to the care, attention, and perseverance, requisite to the improver. He therefore appoints a factor, who must pay a decent attention, but who has seldom any direct interest in the quantity of produce obtained. But the profusion consequent on inequality, produces effects still more detrimental than the indolence of the proprietor; it consumes all those funds which would otherwise have been employed in extensive and beneficial improvement. A man may be sensible that his income might soon be doubled, by a judicious outlay of a small sum of money; but while his expences equal or exceed his revenue, this is altogether out of his power. If he improves, he must do it by borrowing; he will feel the regular payment of the interest from his annual income a very great hardship; and being unaccustomed to any foresight or calculation, he will be too apt to neglect making provision for the repayment of the principal. He will increase his expences as he raises his rents, and will at last be forced to sell the estate to pay the charges of improvement. Experience has shown to landed proprietors the risks which, by this mode of proceeding, they must incur, and usually prefer the alternative of allowing their lands to remain uncultivated. Nor is this all; the same profusion induces them to raise their rents to their utmost pitch, and to grasp at immediate profit, even when attended by future loss. They prefer the tenant who

offers the highest rent, without considering that, in order to reimburse himself, he must wear out the land, that, although their income may for a few years be increased, the farm will be nearly ruined at the end of the lease. Nay, to such a degree does the proprietor sometimes carry his folly, as to exact a fine at the beginning of the lease; thus diminishing the little capital of the farmer, which ought to have been employed in stocking his farm; thus precluding that complete cultivation which might have enabled the tenant to maintain his family in comfort, and to pay his rent with chearfulness, while he improved the estate. These circumstances fully account for the wretched condition of most of the great estates; and it must be evident, that they diminish, in a most important degree, the annual produce of the land that is in culture. At the same time, where excessive inequality prevails, large tracts of country are employed as parks, shrubberies, and pleasure-grounds, and thus almost wholly lost to production.

It must be still more obvious that great inequality of property diminishes the amount of the labour of a nation. It must strike even the most careless observer, that the rich, with their numerous train of servants and dependants, the indolent, and the profligate in all ranks of life, add nothing to the annual produce. When we consider the numbers which are thus rendered idle from inequality, we cannot hesitate in asserting that it is extremely hurtful to commercial prosperity. It may be objected, that those who do labour, work more constantly than they could be expected to do under a system of greater equality. This is undoubtedly true; under such a system, none would be oppressed and worn down with labour, but all would be prompted to such reasonable exertions, as would procure them comfort in their age, and secure the education, welfare, and independence of their children. Setting aside the happiness which would result from such an order of things, we may safely assert, that it would greatly increase the aggregate of the produce of labour. The number of those who at present are idle, is beyond computation. Vice prevents many of the middling ranks, and a prejudice against the useful professions prevents still more from exercising a proper industry. It is considered as the characteristic of a gentleman to do no kind of work; he values himself on his frivolity and uselessness. All who wish to rank with gentlemen, although in the most narrow circumstances, must imitate this lazy pride; and, in order to support what they reckon the honourable character of idleness, they submit to the most irksome and degrading of all employments, that of being sycophants to the great. This prejudice against the useful professions has appeared to the greatest of modern philosophers† sufficient, of itself, to account for the declension of commerce under despotical governments. It seems to me to arise, partly from inequality of rights, partly from inequality of property; it is not unknown in England, and, on the Continent, it has prevailed in the most destructive degree.

The ignorance of the labouring people is also very detrimental. In many branches of manufacture, there is room for great improvement by the ingenuity of the workmen; and in every business, the sobriety, attention, and enlargement of mind, consequent on knowledge, would be highly advantageous. Accordingly, in despotic countries, where all enquiry is anxiously forbidden; in Spain and Italy, even the most common and necessary manufactures are still in their infancy, and they are altogether supplied with the finer commodities by their more intelligent neighbours. This might lead to a very interesting speculation; but I shall only remark, in honour of my countrymen, that the

number of Scotsmen who, every where, raise themselves in the world, by their ingenuity and industry, is a striking illustration of my opinion. In Scotland, almost every person learns to read and write, and this, as far as I know, is not the case in any other country of Europe. The minds of the people are therefore enlarged, their habits of attention and reasoning are strengthened, and they acquire a shrewdness which, whatever employment they may engage in, gives them a decided superiority over their ignorant competitors. I am, Sir,

Your'S, &C.

Sydney.

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LETTER VI.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

September 6. 1796.

The whole capital of a nation is composed of what is saved from the produce of the land and labour. It is that part of the produce which, not having been consumed by individuals, is reserved for the purposes of advancing maintenance to useful labourers, and supplying machinery, from which their exertions are aided and rendered more productive. Each man may either spend his income, or lay it up for future use. If he spends it, he is no richer than before; if he lays it up, he can employ more workmen or better machinery than formerly; and next year he wil enjoy a more plentiful income. What is usually called the national riches, is merely the aggregate of the riches of the inhabitants. Whatever, therefore, diminishes the annual produce of the land and labour of the country, diminishes the funds from which the capital must be derived. In my former letter, I endeavoured to show, that inequality of property produced this effect; that it was detrimental to agriculture; that it maintained a great number of the inhabitants in idleness, and that it prevented the exertions of the rest from being so beneficial as they might otherwise become. Even if we should allow, that the increase of capital is always in proportion to the funds from which it is saved, still we must conclude, that inequality, by diminishing these funds, greatly retards the advancement of riches. But accumulation bears a much greater proportion to the annual income in rich, than in poor, countries. In the latter, the state of the inhabitants is stationary, or improving by almost imperceptible gradations; in countries already opulent and cultivated, riches advance with rapid and gigantic strides.

The profusion which we have traced to inequality can alone retard the natural progress of opulence. By inducing many of the inhabitants to expend the whole of their incomes, it effectually precludes the accumulation of riches; for no argument can be necessary to prove, that what is spent and consumed can form no part of the annual accumulation. It may be urged, that the extravagance of some is balanced by an equal avarice in others; but this counteraction of one vice by means of another, is surely a wretched substitute for the virtues of moderation, industry, and economy in all. The general amount of the savings will never be so great, nor will these immense, overgrown fortunes be so beneficially employed. Part of them serve to accumulate extensive landed estates; and thus, instead of being useful, are perhaps destructive. Some of them are employed in great commercial speculations, which, while by bearing down all smaller adventurers, they destroy that competition which is the soul of commerce, are seldom conducted with the same care and attention that we see bestowed on less extensive undertakings. Under a more equal division, the whole stock of the society would be branched out into smaller ramifications, and the produce would be more abundant. Trade would be carried on in a more regular manner: it

would be considered as a sure means, when joined to economy, of rising to ease and opulence. Those great speculations, which are the bane of industry, would be abandoned; for no man would risk the competency he already enjoyed, in pursuit of sudden affluence: Commerce would no longer be a lottery, in which one adventurer is enriched by the ruin of others, but would lead gradually and certainly to the comfort of all.

Great inequality of property, then, in so far as it accumulates enormous landed estates, as it supports multitudes who do not labour, as it raises prejudices against the useful professions, and condemns the people to vice and ignorance, diminishes the produce of the land and labour of the country. This diminution of produce, and the extravagance introduced into all ranks of life, retard the general accumulation of riches; and the unequal distribution of that capital which is accumulated, prevents it from producing its most beneficial effects.

That this inequality is also hurtful to population, is a direct corollary from the preceding observations. It is certainly unnecessary now to prove, that the population of a country is proportioned to the means of subsistence, and that the produce of the land, capital, and labour, is the measure of the means of subsistence, or rather is that revenue, on which all the inhabitants must subsist: It must, consequently, be admitted, that whatever diminishes this produce, exactly in the same degree circumscribes and confines the population. But, if we proceed further, if we attend to the waste occasioned by the rich and luxurious, it is impossible that we should entertain any doubts on this part of the subject. How much is expended on entertainments, without furnishing nourishment to any person whatever? How much is swallowed to feed disease, instead of contributing to health? How much is destroyed and thrown away? How much of the food of man is consumed by useless dogs and horses? How much employed in the insignificant articles of starch and hair powder? Thus, is luxury doubly destructive to population; not only diminishing the means of subsistence, but also wasting, destroying, and misapplying, those provisions which are procured.

I shall now, Sir, conclude this part of the subject. I trust I have shown, that excessive inequality of property occasions misery both to the rich and to the poor; that it is subversive of morality, is the bane of patriotism, the prolific mother of the most flagitious crimes; that it is extremely hurtful to agriculture, commerce, and population. It seems altogether impossible for the mind of man to conceive more numerous or more destructive evils proceeding from one source. I am, Sir,

Your’S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER VII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

September 13, 1796.

When the evils of excessive inequality are presented to our view, it seems natural to wish at once to remove them, by taking from the rich what is really hurtful to themselves, and bestowing it on the poor, whose miseries it would relieve. Accordingly, it is the fear of this measure being adopted, which has united almost all men possessed of property against even the just claims of the lower people, which has reared up an alarm so general, as to produce an acquiescence in all the abuses which have crept into our Government, and to support the present ministry in a war unparalleled for disaster. The alarmists, if there are any such among your readers, will no doubt be surprised to learn, that their fears proceed altogether from their ignorance, and that an equal division of property has never been attempted in any age or country.

In Sparta, there undoubtedly existed more equality of property than in any other country with which we are at all acquainted; and this equality has usually been, in part, ascribed to an equal division of lands said to have been made by Lycurgus. With respect, however, to the institutions of this legislator, our information is extremely inaccurate. Every part of his history is involved in obscurity, and it is even uncertain at what time he lived, and in what country he died. The laws of Sparta were handed down by tradition, and there being about 300 years between the æra of Lycurgus and the earliest historian, it is obviously impossible to separate and distinguish his institutions, from those customs which were gradually introduced by the state of society and manners.

The Spartans seem to have passed rapidly from the savage to the agricultural state, without having either continued in the condition of shepherds a sufficient length of time to have procured extensive riches in cattle, or having made such conquests as might have enabled them, like the Gothic invaders of the Roman empire, to have at once assigned large tracts of country to individuals. When they first began to appropriate land, the different tribes and families, of which the nation was composed, would consist of numbers almost equal, and of people possessed of nearly the same degree of industry: Each family would therefore cultivate and appropriate nearly the same quantity of land; and, for a long time, there being neither inducements to extravagance, nor opportunities of amassing riches, this equality would naturally continue, and alienations would be almost unknown. We accordingly find, in the early law of all nations, that the transference of lands by sale has excited aversion, and has either been clogged with restrictions, or altogether prohibited. The Spartans, having never engaged in commerce, continued longer in this state of simplicity than any other people; and the dislike of alienation, being confirmed by long custom, became a

striking feature in the national character; and this, in conjunction with the rudeness and simplicity of manners, proceeding from a state of almost constant warfare, and a total want of intercourse with foreign nations, seems fully to account for the long continuance of equality of landed possessions. At so early a period as that of Lycurgus, appropriation of lands had scarcely been introduced, and it seems impossible that such inequalities could have arisen as would have induced any legislator to apply a remedy so unjust in itself, and so contrary to the interests of all the leading men in the state. Accordingly, Xenophon, an enthusiastic admirer of the Spartans, makes no mention whatever of this pretended division of lands among the other institutions of Lycurgus, and those authors, on whose authority it is admitted, differ widely from each other, respecting the number of lots into which it was distributed* . Upon the whole, then, it appears to me, that we may justly conclude, that this regulation can, by no means, be placed among those facts ascertained by well authenticated history.

In the latter times of Sparta, an attempt was undoubtedly made, by Agis, to revive what were conceived to be the ancient laws of the commonwealth; but though that young patriot was one of the kings, though he was the most opulent man in the state, and joined to these advantages the influence of genius, and of morals bordering on austerity, though he had filled all the offices of the state with his own relations and dependents, and sought to introduce a regulation associated in the minds of the people, with the former glory and prosperity of their country; yet he was unable to prevail, or even to defend his life against the power of his exasperated enemies.

At the time of Solon, about 250 years after that of Lycurgus, very considerable inequality, the consequence of an extended commerce, prevailed at Athens; and the people, oppressed with debts which they were unable to pay, exposed to the unrelenting severity of their creditors, and contrasting their own situation with the equality of Sparta, demanded an equal partition of the lands. This claim, however, arose entirely from the oppressions to which they had been subjected: Almost as soon as Solon had cancelled the debts then owing, by a law similar to those acts of insolvency which have been so often passed in England, and had thus rescued many of the citizens from slavery and banishment, the people became satisfied; and the Agrarian Law, although very great inequality of property afterwards prevailed, and the people had the whole power of the state in their hands, was never again agitated.

Early in the Roman history we find great inequality of property, introduced by the conquest and seizure of the neighbouring lands; we find the people reduced to despair by the severities of their creditors, in consequence of debts contracted during the wars, while fortunes were accumulated by other individuals, so immense as to endanger the liberties of their country. This evil continued to increase, till, towards the end of the republic, it had arisen to a pitch far beyond what it has yet reached in modern times. During the whole of this period, the supreme power was possessed by the people, yet no law was promulgated which can justly be considered as an infringement of property. The Agrarian Law, however, which was so often proposed, has been sometimes represented as an attempt at equalization, and therefore it may be useful to inquire, shortly, into its origin and history.

After the expulsion of the kings, the patrician families acquired an almost uncontrolled authority in Rome, and were thence enabled to appropriate to their own use those lands which were conquered by the state. Accordingly, in the year of Rome 267, only 24 years after the establishment of the republic, this evil had proceeded so far as to attract the attention of the people, and to give rise to the demand of an Agrarian Law. Nothing could be more just; the demand extended no further than to a division of those lands which, though they had been lately acquired by the labour and blood of the citizens, had been most iniquitously monopolized by the patricians† . But when these estates had been long appropriated, the present proprietors seemed to hold them by a kind of prescriptive right, and the Agrarian Law was merely held out as a means of frightening the patricians into other just and reasonable concessions. At last, however, the lands in the vicinity of Rome were altogether engrossed by a few proprietors; who cultivating their estates by means of slaves, filled Italy with foreigners, and prevented the increase of the free citizens, on whose valour the safety and prosperity of the state depended. To remedy these evils, in the year of Rome 385, the Licinian Law was passed, prohibiting any individual from possessing more than 500 jugera, about 350 acres, in Italy, under the penalty of a fine, and ordaining the confiscation of all beyond the legal quantity. This law was extremely different from a division of property; it did not affect land in the provinces, nor any kind of moveable property; it did not restrict the acquisition of riches, but merely introduced a regulation, founded on general utility, respecting the way in which these riches should be employed; if the present proprietors were indemnified, which seems probable from confiscation being the punishment denounced against future infractions of the law, it was in no respect different in principle from the regulations respecting property and the forced sale of lands authorised by the road and canal bills of modern times.

This law was easily evaded, by holding lands under fictitious names; but, even in the time of Cato the Censor, it was considered as still in force‡ . By degrees the same accumulation of lands had again taken place, and Tiberius Gracchus seems to have judged wisely, in concluding that the Licinian Law was highly expedient in a warlike Republic, though perhaps he under-valued too much the obstacles which opposed its revival. The law which he first proposed was mild almost beyond example; it remitted all the fines incurred by the violation of the Licinian Law, and indemnified the present proprietors for the lands of which they were to be deprived§ . This moderate proposal being violently opposed by the patricians, the clause of indemnification was struck out, and the law, after a most obstinate struggle, was enacted. Although those who had violated the Licinian Law might still consider themselves as mercifully dealt with, yet such was their rancour against Tiberius Gracchus, that, soon after, this accomplished patriot, was, on the most frivolous pretences, murdered by the patricians. By this flagitious crime, the Agrarian Law was eluded, till, about ten years afterwards, it was again brought forward by Caius Gracchus, who added a clause, fixing a tribute to be paid to the state from the sequestrated lands? . The patricians having now experienced the advantages of murder, the fate of Caius Gracchus was similar to that of his brother; and from this time no further attempts were made to revive or enforce the Licinian Law. Such, Sir, is a short history of the famous Agrarian Law of Rome; and I may say with confidence, that it never had the least tendency to levelling or equalisation, but merely to restrict the monopoly of the lands in the immediate vicinity of Rome; that it was such a regulation of property, as it is competent for every

state to enact; and that, by maintaining a large body of citizens untainted by the vices of the town, and sufficiently near to influence public measures, it might have had some effect in retarding the corruptions of the Government, and the downfal of the Republic. I am, Sir,

Your'S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER VIII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

September 23. 1796.

It will be at least as difficult to find any traces of a levelling spirit in modern as in ancient times. The Feudal System introduced opinions highly favourable to the gentry, to those who were born to opulence, and who could boast a descent from a line of renowned ancestors. In a few countries of Europe, these prejudices are now in some measure exploded; but they lent, and still continue to lend, a powerful support to inequality, both of property and of rights. The people have always been satisfied, if they were in some degree screened from the oppressions of their superiors; and, so far from demanding an unjust equalisation of property, have never, till very lately, asserted their undoubted rights. Modern Europe exhibits a disgusting picture, not of the turbulence of the lower people, but of the oppressions exercised by the rich.

Switzerland was the first of the modern nations, that, spurning all authority but that of reason, dared to be free. Roused by the most insolent oppression, trusting to her mountains and the valour of her sons, she threw off all foreign yoke, and defeated the numerous armies of her enemies. But even during this violent struggle, when the minds of men were exasperated to the utmost, no scheme of levelling was ever proposed. Six of the Cantons are now pure Republics, in which the whole citizens assemble to deliberate on public affairs* ; the others have some mixture of aristocracy, but having established a general militia, without keeping in pay any regular forces, must be essentially free; yet in the whole history of Switzerland, no attempt at equalisation of property can be discovered. There does not indeed exist either so much luxury or so much misery, as in many other countries of Europe; but sufficient inequality prevails to induce the poor, who have the power in their hands, to attack the possessions of the rich, if they were not restrained by those obvious rules of morality which teach them, that such measures would be criminal, and by that degree of reflection, which shows them, that they would be ruinous.

The same remark applies to the Revolution in Holland. The subversion of all established authority, the long war against the power of Spain, and the difficulties and distresses to which the people were often reduced, afforded opportunities for executing a scheme of levelling, had it not been repugnant to the common feelings of mankind. The government afterwards established in Holland, was no doubt aristocratical; but the people have at several times overawed the administration, and even changed the form of government, without showing the smallest tendency towards those measures, which we are now told, with an effrontery only to be equalled by its absurdity, are inseparable from popular rule.

During the civil wars in England, a few enthusiasts, as has happened occasionally in other countries, and even lately in Scotland* , misinterpreting texts of scripture, pretended that a community of goods was ordered by the Christian religion. Even if this opinion had become much more general than it really was, it could form the ground of no just inference respecting the danger of any future prevalence of levelling principles. It arose altogether from religious fanaticism, not from political speculation, nor even from self-interested motives. It can with no greater justice be charged to republican government, than the fires of Smithfield to monarchical: the one arose under the commonwealth, the other during the monarchy, but neither had its origin in the forms of government then established. Those, however, who preached, or believed in the propriety of using goods in common, were extremely few. The tenet was never admitted by the great body of the Independents, who had possessed themselves of the whole powers of the state, nor even by that faction who have been denominated Levellers. When the Independents first aspired to the chief direction of public affairs, they found it necessary to overbalance the influence that the Presbyterians had acquired in Parliament, by the terrors which an army, attached to their principles, might inspire. They accordingly instituted a council of war, consisting of deputies, called Agitators, chosen by the common soldiers* . But after they had succeeded in overawing the Parliament, the Independents themselves became afraid of those councils which they had formed, and sought to terminate their deliberations† . The soldiers, on the other hand, sensible of their own strength, claimed an equal power with their generals in regulating the government; and from insisting on a perfect equality of political privileges, contrary to the established distinctions of rank, acquired the name of Levellers‡ . So far from there being the least attempt made by this party to equalise property, they, in all their petitions, confined their demands to the establishment of a just and free government; and, in one of the publications by Lilbourne, a leading man in the party, intituled, “An Agreement of the free People of England,” it was expressly declared, that it should not be in the power of the representative to level men’s estates, destroy property, or make all things common* . This accusation of levelling, in the meaning now attached to the word, probably originated after they had yielded to the superior courage and ability of Cromwell; and, although it has been repeated both by Rapin and Hume, yet we may oppose to them the superior authority of Harrington† , who, writing only six or seven years after the Levellers were quelled, asserts, that it is impossible for the people ever to wish to equalise property, and takes no notice whatever of this attempt, which, had it really taken place, must have been fresh in the memories of all his readers. Even, however, if we were to allow that the Levellers entertained the views ascribed to them; we may contend, without any danger of being contradicted, that they met with no extensive support either from the army or the nation, and that they were quickly and easily suppressed.

I shall pass over the American Revolution, because, indigence being almost unknown in that happy country, the people had no inducement to attack the possessions of the rich; but it may be necessary, Sir, to submit to you a few observations respecting the Revolution in France. The declarations of the Rights of Man, prefixed to the different constitutions which have been adopted in France, prove, beyond the possibility of contradiction, that the word *equality* merely related to *political power* and *civil rights,* and that it never was in the contemplation of those who formed these constitutions, to

extend it to *property*. “Property being a right inviolable and sacred,” says the Constitution 1791* , “no person can be deprived of it, except when the public necessity, legally ascertained, shall evidently require it, and on condition of a just indemnification.” The Constitution 1795 is not less explicit† ; “No man can be deprived of his property without his own consent, unless when public necessity, legally proved, requires it, and upon condition of a just indemnification.” It seems impossible to conceive that these repeated declarations would have been made, if the French nation had ever entertained the idea of equalising property. That, during the revolution, a few individuals, heated by desire of innovation, and inexperienced in political discussion, should have avowed this opinion, is no way surprising; but that we should, on that account, be told that it was the principle of the revolution, and the ultimate end of all political innovation, must equally excite our astonishment and contempt. As well might these reasonings gravely assert, that, because Sir Thomas More published his Eutopia during the reign of Henry VIII. that jealous tyrant intended to institute a community of goods. The inference drawn from the injustice of that faction, which for some time oppressed the nation, is equally weak. Robespierre undoubtedly paid little attention to the rules of justice and morality; he often plundered individuals, and not unfrequently put them to death in order to seize their possessions. These enormities, however, were committed under the colour of other pretences; he never asserted any right to equalise property; but, on he contrary, involved the supposed abettors of such doctrines in instant destruction* . His injustice proceeded from no theories, from no principles subversive of the right of property; it was the result of the public necessities, and of his private ambition. His uniform object was to support his own authority by the popularity attached to success; the expences incurred in defence of the country were enormous, and he preferred those means of raising the public supplies, which, though altogether unjust, were by far the most expeditious, and the most certain. His mode of proceeding was similar to that of the robber who presents a pistol to the breast of the traveller; he was actuated by no motive, but the desire of plunder. To ascribe views of levelling to Robespierre, is as absurd as it would be to infer that the Grand Signior, when he strangles a Bashaw, and seizes his possessions, is actuated by a sense of the evils attending inequality of property.

The view, Sir, which I have now taken of the different popular revolutions and governments, both of ancient and modern times, may assist in allaying that chimerical fear of levelling, which has already produced so much mischief in this country. It may show that the danger is much less than has been apprehended; that there are principles in the human breast which have at all times formed a sure defence against the factious views of individuals; and that property has always been safe, under the protection of the good sense and the upright intentions of the people. I am, Sir,

Yours, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER IX.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

September 30. 1796.

When we perceive all nations, under whatever form of government, and in whatever circumstances they may be placed, even in the midst of revolutions which unhinge the opinions of men, and eradicate long-established prejudices; when we perceive the people, both of ancient and modern times, uniformly respecting property, and rejecting every idea of levelling, we may be assured that their conduct is influenced by principles that are sufficiently obvious, without any difficult investigation, by feelings that are natural and universal. General reasonings, respecting expediency, may, undoubtedly, direct the opinions of those who have leisure and ability to trace the operation of causes in their most remote effects, and obvious utility will, in some degree, influence the decisions of all; but a consent of mankind so universal, as we find taking place on this subject, must be produced by a sentiment inseparable from human nature, which can neither be silenced by partial views of self-interest, nor misled by sophistry. It is the more necessary, Sir, to investigate these principles, as the First Minister of State has thought proper lately to declare* , that the right of property is altogether the creature of civil society† ; from which opinion, it would incontestibly follow, that a *vote* is the only criterion of justice, and that the *majority,* whenever they are so disposed, have a full right to equalise property, or to institute a community of goods. I hope, on the contrary, to be able to show, that a majority possesses no such rights; that property is defended by the natural feelings of mankind; and that all levelling, whether supported by many or by few, must occasion the greatest injustice.

The simplest view we can take of this subject, is to consider the feelings which would naturally arise in the breast of a spectator, while one man endeavoured to dispossess another of any external object already under his natural power. To him, the interests of the two individuals would be equally important; and, as he could have no sympathy with the preference which the aggressor evidently gave to his own happiness over that of the other, he would disapprove of it as improper. By being in possession of the subject in dispute, one of the parties had formed a natural and reasonable expectation of enjoying it; and the attempt of the other threatened to disappoint this just expectation; to render his situation in some respects worse than it was before; to diminish his enjoyment, and to do him a positive injury. The spectator would readily sympathise with the resentment which such conduct was fitted to excite, and would readily assist him in recovering that subject, of which he had been unjustly bereaved. The other person, besides being actuated by a self-preference, which none could approve, could suffer no real loss by the refusal of the object he desired; his situation would be exactly the same as before he made the demand; he would neither be deprived of any enjoyment, nor of any reasonable expectation of enjoyment; and any

resentment, which, in such circumstances, he might express, would appear to others highly absurd. Where the difference of sympathetic feelings was so strong, the spectators would never hesitate with respect to the propriety of their interference; and, thus, an idea of property would arise from the mere circumstance of actual possession. Accordingly, occupancy, the mere laying hold of a subject, has, by all writers on natural law, been accounted the chief mode of beginning a right of property; and, in many rude nations, this right is conceived to subsist no longer than the actual possession continues.

Various circumstances concur in strengthening and confirming this right. Few acquisitions are made without the employment of some labour or ingenuity, and no association can be stronger than between a man and the produce of his own labour. His exertion is altogether voluntary; and, while it marks, in the strongest manner, his desire of possessing the subject, it often adds greatly to its value, and sometimes is the sole cause of its being in a situation capable of being used. A man, by building a house, evinces his intention of possessing it; and by his labour puts materials, formerly of little value, into such a form as may afford him conveniency and comfort; should another person, who had given no assistance to the work, endeavour to dispossess him, the difference between their rights would be obvious to the most careless observer* . Even when this, the strongest of all claims, does not exist, even when the property has descended from ancestors or other relations, still there are various associations, which I shall, in a future letter, have occasion to point out, that add weight to the other moral feelings, and confirm the right arising from possession.

These sentiments are prior to civil society, and would be experienced whenever one man attempted, in the presence of spectators, to seize the property of another. But, as much injustice might be committed unseen, the occasional interference of accidental spectators would soon be felt to be a very insufficient security; and those, living in the neighbourhood of each other, would be naturally led to associate for their mutual protection. So far, then, from the Right of Property being the creature of civil society, we may truly assert that the defence of this right was one of the original ends of the social combination; and the ingenious writer, who has said that the whole apparatus of our Government is merely intended to support the twelve judges, has only erred by going a little too far* .

When society has improved, general rules in favour of property are established by habit and experience. Each individual, having decided a great number of separate cases from his natural feelings, forms general rules, which he afterwards applies in similar circumstances, without recurring to the sentiments by which his early judgment had been guided. These rules are strengthened by a longer experience, and at last become so powerful as to regulate his opinions, even when his pity, his friendships, or his aversions, would seduce his sympathies, and lead him to commit injustice. At the same time, he becomes sensible that a rigid adherence to rules can alone give that certainty of possession which prompts to activity, to ingenuity, to economy; he perceives that the whole fabric of civil society depends on the strict observance of the rules of justice, and thus he is actuated by those general rules of utility, which many authors have erroneously conceived to be the sole foundation of morals, and the only principles of decision* .

All schemes of levelling are evidently destructive of the Right of Property: they disappoint the reasonable expectations of the present proprietors; they reduce men educated in affluence to a comparative indigence; they deprive many of the fruits of their own labour, ingenuity, and economy; they are in direct opposition to those rules and principles of morality which have been confirmed by the unanimous assent of mankind, and which are absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of security, order, and happiness. Such an equalization differs, in no respect, from robbery, except in being the act of a greater number of criminals, in causing greater immediate misery, and in producing more destructive effects. Nor can any Government, or any majority of a nation, have any right to produce such equality, to attack that property and those rights which society was instituted to defend. If such an attempt should be made, it would amount to a dissolution of the social combination; the Government would no longer possess any claim to obedience; and the *Minority* would be justified in defending, by force, those rights which the Majority had attacked. But all dangers of this sort, I trust, are entirely chimerical; a system of levelling being as repugnant to the feelings of the human breast, and to all the rules of morality and justice which regulate the conduct of mankind, as it is contrary to the experience of all ages and nations. I am, Sir,

Your'S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER X.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

October 28. 1796.

It is happy for man, that what is unjust is never really useful; that crimes, so far from being of advantage to their perpetrators, are always attended by natural punishments. Views of utility, thus, give stability to the rules of morality, and even self-interest pleads the cause of virtue. There are few subjects which exemplify this connection between justice and expediency, more clearly, than that which we are now confidering; for, as nothing could be more unjust than an equalization of property, so nothing could be more destructive of the prosperity and happiness of mankind.

The first effect of carrying a system of levelling into execution, would be a complete suspension of labour. The education and habits of the rich unfit them for productive labour; accustomed to a life of ease and effeminacy, they are destitute of the requisite patience, strengh, and address; and would have a long apprenticeship to serve, before their utmost exertions could be beneficial to themselves or the community. Nor could we expect the poor to continue their present industry and frugality. It is a natural consequence of their present situation, that they should look upon labour as the greatest evil, ease and indolence as the supreme good. When they were for some time enabled to live in idleness; when they found themselves possessed of a property, trifling indeed compared to the wants which would immediately beset them, but great, compared to their former indigence; when the pressure of the moment, the only motive to exertion to which they have been accustomed, was removed: In such new circumstances, the poor, indulging in comforts formerly unknown, would totally remit thoir labours; all the vices which spring from idleness and dissipation would be multiplied; and the whole people being occupied, not in productive labour, but in consuming those riches which already exist, universal poverty would immediately ensue. The habits of idleness and debauchery produced, or rather extended, by this division of property, would soon impel those who had squandered their portions, to seize on the property of their neighbours. All other means of retrieving their affairs, or maintaining their families, would be effectually precluded: the capital of the country would be annihilated; there would no longer be any funds destined for the support of labourers and mechanics, nor would any inhabitant be sufficiently rich to purchase the produce of the siner manufactures. Part of the people might be employed in agriculture and in manufactures of immediate necessity; but the rest, unless they emigrated to a more happy country, would be forced either to rob for their subsistence, or to perish miserably from want. The nation would quickly be reduced to the most extreme and immediate poverty and despair.

The ruinous consequences of a division of property would never cease, until the principle, from which it proceeded, was completely abandoned. No scheme has yet been formed for rendering men equal in industry, frugality, and good fortune; and, till this is done, the duration of any forced equality of property must necessarily be very short. In the course of a week, it would be infringed; before the termination of a year, no vestige of it would remain. Unless we had recourse to a second division, any advantages expected from the first would be lost. We should have overturned the foundation of the right of property; we should have committed the grossest injustice; we should have caused the most cruel reverses of fortune; we should have corrupted the morals of the nation; we should have at once annihilated industry, and the whole of that capital which makes industry productive;—we should have done all this, without, in any degree, approaching to our object. Among those perishing from want, would be found many whose fortunes had been shared among their poorer neighbours; and it would be the most aggravated injustice to refuse to apply that principle to their present relief, which had formerly been used to operate their ruin. A constant succession of divisions would therefore be indispensible; and surely, of all inventions for bringing misery on mankind, this would be the most effectual. Each man would hasten to enjoy and consume his property, while it was yet in his power. Who would labour, when the fruits of his industry were to be gathered by the indolent? Who would be temperate, when he knew that his economy was destined to feed the insatiable appetites of the profligate? Industry, temperance, frugality, would completely disappear, and mankind would exhibit an uniform and disgusting picture of sloth, extravagance, debauchery, and crimes. The miseries arising from inequality of property, and from the worst of tyrannies which the world has witnessed, would be happiness, compared to such a condition.

How then ought we to proceed? Having found the evils arising from inequality, though serious indeed, far overbalanced by those which would spring from a new division of property, ought we to stop here and acquiesce in the smaller evil? Certainly not. We ought, on the contrary, to use our utmost endeavours to regulate what we cannot altogether prevent. Although we cannot abolish inequality, we may discourage excessive accumulation; although we cannot extract the poison, we may, by judicious application, diminish its virulence* . In attempting this, however, we ought to pay the most scrupulous attention to rigid justice, and to distrust all schemes, howsoever promising, which are, in the smallest degree, contrary to the rights of man, of which property is one of the most important.

The proposals, Sir, which I am to submit to the consideration of your readers, consist of three distinct parts;—to make alterations on the rules of legal succession;—to restrict the power of making testaments;—and to relieve the poor and middling ranks from the weight of taxes, by throwing the burden chiefly on the rich. I trust I shall be able to show, in the following Letters, that these regulations are recommended to us both by important considerations of expediency and of justice. I am, Sir,

Your’S &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XI.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 4. 1796.

When a man dies, his natural right of property seems to be completely at an end; and if it did not instantly devolve on another, his possessions would be considered as unappropriated, and consequently as belonging to the first occupant. In no country, however, with which we are at all acquainted, does this take place; the extinction of the right in one person, is always the commencement of the right in another, who is, by custom or law, pointed out as the proper successor. Many authors have considered this right of succession, as arising altogether from the positive regulations of society, and have consequently asserted, that whatever rules are established, are perfectly just, having been enacted by that legislative power which must, in all cases, decide on what is most expedient for the public* . This opinion is undoubtedly favourable to new regulations respecting succession; for what has been established may certainly be altered, whenever that power, which had the right to enact the law, becomes convinced, that it is contrary to the general good, which it was intended to promote. But the rules of succession, however in other respects they may vary from each other in different countries, all agree in this, that the effects of the deceased pass to those with whom he was most intimately connected while alive. Such a coincidence can scarcely arise from investigations and inferences respecting utility, but will, probably, be found to proceed from more obvious considerations; from those principles of natural law which are imprinted on the human heart, which may be obscured, but are never altogether obliterated, by the passions, prejudices, and follies of men.

† In rude ages, property is held in common by all the members of the family, and the father is nothing more than the administrator. When the father dies, the eldest of the family succeeds to the administration of the common good, but the property is, as formerly, vested in the whole. At this time, there is not properly any transference of possessions by death; the former rights are continued, but no new right is begun. Accordingly, in the early law of many nations, we find that children, who have left their father's house, and whose use of the common property has been terminated, have no part of the succession; while strangers, when adopted, and, by that means, brought into the family, succeed along with the other members. In civilized countries, however, where alienation, and various other acts of uncontrouled power over property, are daily practised, the idea of common possession is lost; and the father, being considered as the sole proprietor, each succession is the beginning, not the continuation, of a right. But this change is brought about very gradually, and the rule of members of a family, that is, in ordinary cases, nearest relations, inheriting, is continued as an old established custom.

The rule, thus introduced, is supported from other natural feelings. In most instances, the nearest relations have been partly supported from the funds of the deceased, and would be greatly impoverished by his death, if his property were to pass to strangers. Their situation is different from that of others; by their succeeding, no person can be reduced to poverty, or forced to alter his way of life; but if they were cut off from the inheritance, they would be in a worse situation than formerly, and they would be at once deprived of their fortune and their friend. They have also been much connected with the deceased; they have interchanged offices of kindness with him, and they are associated with him in the minds of the neighbours, so much, that the transfer of the property to them seems a more natural, and a less violent change, than if it were to devolve on strangers. To this we may add, that, being usually around his deathbed, they have it in their power to begin their possession immediately after his death, even before that event can be known to such other persons as might wish to acquire the inheritance.

When, from these considerations, it has become customary for relations to succeed, we are naturally led, by habit, to consider it as a just rule, and without attending to the particular sympathies and associations from which the early decisions proceeded, to apply it to all cases which afterwards occur. The same rules are farther supported, in civilized nations, by those considerations of public utility from which some authors have deduced their origin. Nothing could be so inconvenient, or could cause such disorders in society, as laying open successions to the first occupant; and it is perhaps impossible to devise a rule of more general and certain application, than that founded on consanguinity, which is already in force, and which is recommended to mankind by so many natural feelings, and by immemorial custom.

The principles, then, of legal succession, seem very similar to those on which the right of property itself is founded; and we ought to be cautious in admitting exceptions to principles so strongly recommended to our attention. Particular circumstances, however, have introduced many irregularities, which appear to me neither just nor expedient. In my next letter, I propose to examine the most important of these deviations, and to endeavour to show that they ought all to be abandoned, and that legal succession should again be brought back to its great original principle, the equal participation of the property of the deceased among his nearest relations.—I am,

Sir,
Your’S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 8. 1796.

The law of primogeniture forms the most important exception, of which we have any experience, to the natural rules of succession according to consanguinity. It naturally takes place in that rude disorderly state of society, when each tribe, being engaged in constant hostilities with some of its neighbours, requires a military chief to conduct the public affairs, and to lead his relations and dependants to war; when each proprietor may be considered as an independent prince, and the division of the estate might expose the whole family to the malice or rapacious injustice of their enemies. So far the introduction of the law of primogeniture may be satisfactorily accounted for; and lawyers, when they can show from what circumstances a rule originated, are too apt to think that they have proved it to be just; forgetting, that, when these circumstances no longer exist, it must be defended on other principles, or adapted to the new situation of the country* . That the eldest son should inherit the whole estate, is now as unnecessary for the purposes of defence, as it is unjust and hurtful.

No possible reason can be assigned why the firstborn should succeed to a greater portion than his brothers, far less why he should altogether exclude them from the inheritance. The relation which all the members of a family bear to their father, and the support which they have derived from his property, are exactly the same; and the circumstance of one of them having been brought into the world a year sooner than the others, can make no difference whatever on their just claims. There is not a single natural sentiment on which any preference can be supported. But family pride is more powerful than reason or justice: the consequence of a family would be annihilated by the partition of the estate, and even younger brothers are taught to feel more for the dignity of their representative than for their own comforts, or the welfare of their children. This effect of the law of primogeniture, to encourage and perpetuate inequality of property, is, however, the strongest argument for its instant abolition. It may justly be charged with many of those evils which excessive inequality inevitably produces: while it puts one member of a family into a situation unfavourable for happiness, and destructive of all energy and activity, it accumulates immense estates, which, being uncultivated, are lost to production; it deprives the younger children of that capital which is requisite in all commercial undertakings; it gives them a taste for expences which soon reduce them to beggary; and, by instilling into them early prejudices against the useful professions, it almost precludes the means of their afterwards becoming respectable members of society. “It tends not,” says a judicious author* , “to the improvement of merchandise, that there be some who have no need of their trading, and others who are not able to follow it.”

Nor are these the only evils of the law of primogeniture; it loosens all the bands of family attachment; and, in place of the sentiment of brotherly affection, which, to exist, must be equal and reciprocal, it substitutes haughty protection on the one part, and slavish dependance on the other. If the younger children have too much spirit to brook this condition, they are obliged to live in a stile so inferior to that of their brother; their acquaintances, associates, and friends are so different, that their intercourse with him is gradually reduced to formal and ceremonious visits; and a complete estrangement too often ensues. Thus, are the best feelings of the heart sacrificed to a false show, a contemptible vanity.

The preference of *agnati,* or relations by the father, to *cognati,* or relations by the mother, is objectionable, precisely on the same grounds with the law of primogeniture. Being founded on no natural feelings, it is essentially unjust; and having a direct tendency to prevent that diffusion of property, which, at the death of the rich, would often take place, it is highly impolitic. Were all relations, in the same degree of consanguinity, to succeed equally, every large estate would be divided at the death of the person who had acquired it, and there would scarcely be an individual in the nation who would not inherit property, which might enable him to educate his children, and, by showing him a possibility of laying up a decent provision for his age, prompt him to industry and economy.

The total exclusion of ascendants, of those who have given us birth, who have reared us in infancy, who have educated us in youth, who have laid the foundations of our future welfare, is so palpably unjust, that it is unnecessary to expose its absurdity. It is admirably defended by lawyers from the analogy, equally obvious and convincing, between the laws of succession and those of gravitation. “Property descends,” say those profound reasoners, “like a heavy body, which falls downwards in a right line, and never reascends* .”

Here then, Sir, is a way, equally simple and effectual, of remedying an inequality, not founded in nature, but arising from positive institution; an inequality attended with the most flagrant injustice, and productive of peculiar misery to a great portion of the people. This proposal can neither be deemed rash nor inflamatory; it deprives no man of his possessions, it can be the source neither of hardship nor oppression; it merely corrects irregularities which disfigure our civil code, and assimilates our laws to the eternal rules of justice.—I am, Sir,

Yours, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XIII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 11. 1796.

The right of making a testament, and of devising property after death, seems scarcely to have any foundation in the natural principles of justice. When a man is dead, his dominion over external objects must be completely at an end. He can no longer exercise any of these powers and rights which, from their very nature, must now be exinguished. But the true operations of a testament are to continue the rights of a proprietor after he has ceased to exist, to allow him to alienate after he is obviously incapable to perform any action whatever; and to postpone those rights which are immediately vested in his natural heirs, and which are founded on the natural principles of equity, to some supposed right still attached to the deceased proprietor. It would appear, however, that when all connection between a person and the things of this world is dissolved, the rights founded on this connection can no longer subsist.

But, although the right of property cannot exist after death, it remains entire till that period. When a man feels his approaching dissolution, he has it in his power to give the possession of his whole property to any person whom he may wish to favour, and he may stipulate with that person, that, in case of his recovery, it shall be again restored to him. Even if this condition were not so formally announced as to create a strictly legal obligation, a refusal to re-deliver the property, would appear one of the most criminal instances of ingratitude; and mankind would feel an inclination to explain the circumstances of the transaction, in such a manner as to prevent the kindness which the one party had expressed to the other from turning out to his own detriment. It is to such donations, in the contemplation of death, that we must look for the origin of that power, now recognized by the laws of the greater part of modern Europe, of leaving property by will. In examining, however, the institutions of different nations respecting this power, we do not find the same universal agreement as in the rules of natural succession; the differences which may be remarked are fundamental, testaments being supported in some countries, and altogether unknown in others.

By the Gentoo laws, so far from any testament being permitted, no man is allowed, even during his life, to divide his property unequally among his sons, unless in cases particularly specified* .

In many parts of Greece, testaments were totally discountenanced. They were first introduced at Athens by the laws of Solon; being permitted, however, only to such as had no children† , and who adopted those strangers whom they called to their inheritance‡ .

In Rome, previously to the laws of the Twelve Tables, testaments could be made only in two ways, either by adoption, which, by bringing a stranger into the family, entitled him to all the privileges of a son,—or by procuring a law of the people for each particular case. Afterwards, to avoid the trouble attending this form, they made use of a fictitious sale, in presence of five persons representing the principal tribes; and this, called *Testamentum per æs et libram,* was the only mode permitted, except in extraordinary cases, during the continuance of the Republic? .

Among the northern nations that invaded the Roman Empire, testaments were totally unknown§ ; and some traces of the mode in which wills were introduced, although, in this respect, they were undoubtedly much influenced by an imitation of the Roman jurisprudence, are discernible in the institutions of their descendants.

In Scotland, land cannot, at this moment, be devised by will, although the same effect is produced by a pretended alienation *intervivos,* reserving to the former possessor a liferent and a power of recal* : nor has a testator a complete power even over his moveable property, unless he dies without leaving either a wife or children† .

The ancient law of England was similar to that of Scotland. “No will was permitted of lands till the reign of Henry VIII; and then only for a certain portion. For it was not till after the Restoration, that the power of devising real property became so universal as at present‡ .” The power of devising moveables was also restricted, as in Scotland, to a third part; the portions of the wife and children being called their “reasonable parts.” This continued the common law of England in the reign of Charles I.; but having been gradually infringed, it subsisted, at the time of the Revolution, only in the province of York, the principality of Wales, and the city of London. It was finally abolished, and the power of making testaments rendered universal, by statutes of William and Mary, and of George I.§ .

“This variety, then,” to use the words of a celebrated lawyer, “may serve to evince, that the right of making wills, and disposing of property after death, is merely a creature of the civil state, which has permitted it in some countries, and denied it in others* .”

Having thus, Sir, shown, that testaments are not supported from the natural feelings of justice and equity, I shall proceed to enquire, whether they are conducive to the general good? The remark which first presents itself, and which, perhaps, ought to be decisive of this question, is, that they are among the most frequent and most powerful causes of inequality of property. When a man has amassed a great fortune, he often becomes defirous of being the founder of a great and opulent family. In pursuance of this desire, he singles out one of his children, one of his relations, or one of his friends, and, leaving to him the whole wealth which he has accumulated, cuts off all his other heirs from his inheritance. His vanity is flattered by considering himself as the source of future splendour, the fountain from which the stream of future grandeur is destined to slow; he enjoys, by anticipation, the respect and gratitude which he foolishly imagines his successors will pay to his memory; he even associates to himself that admiration which attends magnificence, but which the slightest view of human nature might convince him is never extended beyond the person of the actual

possessor. It is to such childish vanities, that he often sacrifices his paternal tenderness, his attachment to his other relations, the interests even of those whom he loves.

Some men are induced to disappoint the expectations of their natural heirs, not by this family pride, but by a fond attachment to particular individuals. It will, however, I believe, be seldom found, that testaments are made in favour of the most needy or most deserving of the testator's relations or friends. Such partialities usually arise from accident, or from unreasonable prejudices, and are nourished by pliancy of temper, or by unworthy dissimulation; not unfrequently, they are the fruits of slight attentions received from the great and powerful. The notice of the rich is more flattering, and too often makes a greater impression on the heart, than even the kind attachment of the poor. The occasional gratification of vanity and pride, in the minds of a great part of mankind, outweighs years of important services and of unremitted attention. And thus testaments often add to those enormous fortunes, which, for the good of mankind, ought in every way, not inconsistent with justice, to be diminished. In as far as inequality of property is contrary to the well-being of society, in so far ought we to condemn testaments, by which, with scarcely a pretence of equity, this inequality is directly promoted. In Holland, where, although testaments are permitted, unequal divisions of property at death are more unusual than in any other country; industry, sobriety, and comfort, are more generally diffused than in any other part of Europe. And this may in a great measure, be accounted for from the right of primogeniture being totally unknown, and from the right of making unequal divisions of property by testament being very seldom exercised. In Switzerland, the same circumstances occur, and the same effects are observable on the morals and happiness, of the people* . I am, Sir,

Your'S, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XIV.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 15. 1796.

It is frequently asserted, that a desire of establishing a great family, operates as an additional spur to industry and frugality; but, I apprehend, a little attention may convince us, that this is rarely, if ever, the case. A man, entering into life, exerts his industry in order to procure the objects of his immediate wants; he afterwards practises economy, that he may be secured against the vicissitudes of fortune; having attained this object, he is actuated by the desire of that distinction which is attached to riches; and in his old age, he is too frequently rendered avaricious by the almost irresistible effects of long continued habits of the strictest parsimony. The vanity of raising a family is the effect, not the cause, of accumulation, and is often resorted to, merely as a self-deception, to hide the deformity of an avarice which has no end in view but to amass useless wealth. It is seldom the man born to moderate opulence, who, from his outset in life, might have perceived a probability of enriching his posterity, that becomes the founder of a family; it is, on the contrary, he who has struggled with hardships in his youth, who has been long accustomed to the most rigid economy, and who, after having amassed riches, can no longer discard those habits which arose from his original poverty. Should the person whom he has destined for his heir die before him, he will continue his former penurious life, and will at last allow the law to dispose of his property, or perhaps endow an hospital. His conduct is influenced, not by vanity, but by avarice.

No relaxation of industry could follow from the abolition of testaments: there would still be sufficient motives to prompt us to exertion; the desire of insuring to ourselves the enjoyment of the necessaries and comforts of life; the wish of arriving at that notice and respect which are the concomitants of riches; that affection for our friends which incites us to do them good; the habits arising from a long continued economy. These motives might, indeed, in a very few cases, be less powerful than family pride; but such instances of inordinate vanity are extremely rare, and that degree of avarice, which such a feeling is fitted to produce, is perhaps the most degrading of all the vices.

Testaments have been more successfully defended, as the best means of rewarding kindness and of punishing neglect. Every man must be sensible of great difference in the treatment he receives from his different relations; and, while it is a virtuous gratification to him, to leave some token of his gratitude to those from whom he has received kindness, the power of disinheriting may procure him a certain decent attention, even from those who would otherwise be inclined to treat him with disrespect. This argument appears to me perfectly just; but I hope, Sir, we may grant

all that it fairly proves, without admitting an unlimited power of devising property by will.

The proper return for kindness is not of a pecuniary nature, but consists in gratitude and a return, if in our power, of reciprocal kindness and friendship. If attentions are shown to us from the expectation of their being repaid in money, they deserve no recompence beyond a just indemnification for the time and labour employed; but if they have proceeded from better motives, whatever shows a grateful sense of obligation will be an ample reward. If then we allow the power of making testaments to a certain degree; if we permit one fourth of his effects to be disposed of by a man who has no children, and one sixth by him who leaves descendants, we shall have fully provided for this exercise of gratitude* .

But, with respect to the punishment of neglect or bad usage, greater powers must be allowed. It is not sufficient that a testator should mark his disapprobation of such conduct; he should also be enabled effectually to punish it. For this purpose, it would be requisite to permit him to exclude any of his natural heirs by name, and, at his pleasure, to diminish their portions; but, in order to prevent abuses, it ought to be provided, that whatever was so forfeited should go to the nearest relations beyond the line of immediate succession. By this restriction of testaments, property would be gradually diffused, while the testator would be enabled to evince his gratitude for kindness and attention, and to punish all neglect or ill treatment he had received.

A farther extension of the power of making testaments has been introduced, in modern Europe, by means of entails. Not satisfied with directing the disposal of land after their decease, some have aimed at perpetuating their power, by preventing their successors from alienating the estate, or from changing a long line of succession which they chose to appoint. Nothing can be more absurd; a dead man cannot for ever retain the right of property, which, from its own nature, must be as fully vested in the present possessor, as it was in those who preceded him. The rights of the present generation cannot be cut off by those who now sleep with their fathers; they had the free disposal of the things of this world while they were here, and we are now entitled to the same privilege: each proprietor has therefore as good a title to abrogate an entail, as his ancestor had to establish it. But on this subject I believe it is unnecessary to detain you, by any lengthened arguments. An entail infringes the right of property in the living; it prevents the proprietor from punishing or rewarding the conduct of his children; it precludes cultivation, by rendering the possessor merely a liferenter, by preventing him from disposing of part that he may improve the rest, and by inducing him to extort, under the name of fine or grassum, that capital which ought to remain with the farmer; it prevents a father from giving such portions to his younger children as might enable them to engage, with prospects of success, in commerce or manufactures; it is a fertile source of frauds and bankruptcies; and, to sum up all, it is a potent engine for supporting inequality of property* .—I am, Sir,

Yours, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XV.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 18. 1796.

Having shown the evils inseparable from great inequality of property to be no less destructive of private happiness than of public prosperity, I might perhaps be justified in concluding, that the State has a right to interfere, and, by taxation, or other regulations, to endeavour to check so dangerous an abuse. It is, however, unnecessary for me to rest on the principle of expediency, for it will be easy to prove, that, unless the proportion, which the taxes bear to the property of each contributor, increases progressively, according to the amount of his property, our system of taxation is essentially unjust.

"Entails are founded upon the most absurd of all suppositions, the supposition, that every successive generation of men have not an equal right to the earth, and to all that it possesses; but that the property of the present generation should be restrained and regulated according to the fancy of those who died perhaps five hundred years ago. Entails, however, are still respected through the greater part of Europe, in those countries particularly in which noble birth is a necessary qualification for the enjoyment either of civil or military honours. Entails are thought necessary for maintaining this exclusive privilege of the nobility to the great offices and honours of their country; *and that Order having usurped one unjust advantage over the rest of their fellow-citizens, lest their poverty should render it ridiculous, it is thought reasonable, that they should have another.*"

Wealth of Nations, Book III. Chap. II.

The taxes which each inhabitant pays to the state, consist of the quantity of enjoyment, of which he deprives himself, for the good of the community. The exertions of government secure to him all his enjoyments, and enable him to follow out in quiet such measures as he thinks may increase his comforts. In return for these advantages, it is requisite that he should yield part of his enjoyments to the public exigencies; and it seems reasonable, that the part so yielded by individuals, should correspond to the advantages they respectively enjoy. Society may be viewed as a great commercial concern, in which the input stock ought to be proportioned to the share of profits to be afterwards drawn by each individual. The gold or silver paid into the treasury, is merely a way of estimating the quantity of enjoyments yielded to the state by each individual; and if, in the different conditions of life, the same quantity of the precious metals represents very different quantities of enjoyment, this ought to be attended to in apportioning the public burdens. If we disregard so material a consideration, our taxes may be nominally equal, but they will be in reality unjust:

One man will receive the greatest benefits from society, without being subjected to any real burden, while another, in attaining advantages comparatively trifling, will be obliged to submit to very considerable privations. Thus, if a man of 100l. a-year pays 10l. to the state, he deprives himself of a much greater part of his comforts, than a man possessed of 1000l. a-year, who pays 100l., and still more than the possessor of 20,000l. of revenue, who contributes 2000l. The first will perceive a very effential diminution of the enjoyments he can command; the second will experience some inconveniency from the tax; to the third, the difference will be altogether imperceptible. While the one has been subjected to considerable hardships, in order to secure his 100l. from the injustice of mankind; the other is protected in the enjoyment of a revenue of twenty times the amount, without being forced to abandon even his most capricious indulgences. Even on a cursory view, the injustice of such a partition of the public burdens is indisputable; but it will appear still more clearly, if we consider the causes of that inequality which so evidently results from applying the same rule of contribution to the rich and to the poor.

All our enjoyments may be divided into necessaries, comforts, and superfluities. These classes, undoubtedly, melt into each other, like different shades of colours; but, though it is often difficult to ascertain the exact line of demarcation, there are certain fixed and specific differences, by which, in general, they may be distinguished.

Under necessaries, may be included, whatever is requisite to the existence and full developement of the powers of man; whatever conduces to the growth and proper nourishment of the body; whatever is necessary to the due expansion of the powers of the mind; whatever, if withheld, would prevent the animal from reaching his full maturity, and continuing his species. Every tax, which diminishes the funds allotted to this class of expences, must occasion real misery; it may often put a period to existence, and it will always cramp the powers and energies of man.

The second class, comprehends all conveniences, comforts, and real luxuries; whatever is requisite or useful, not to the being, but to the well-being of man; whatever is fitted, by its own qualities, to give pleasure to his senses, or to bring delight to his mind. This is a most extensive class of enjoyments, reaching from the simplest pleasures, to the most refined delicacies contrived by human ingenuity, or collected, from the most distant countries, by the indefatigable labours of man. To be deprived of any of these is an evil, for they all contribute, in some degree, to happiness; but they are not all of equal importance. The privation of any of our indulgences will be more or less severely felt, according as it approaches to, or recedes from, the class of necessaries, according as it contributes to our real well-being, or merely administers to a capricious desire.

Under the head of superfluities, may be ranked, whatever is valued merely as a proof of riches; such things as are of themselves fitted to produce neither pleasure nor happiness; such as delight none of the senses, as neither improve, adorn, nor even occupy the mind; such as are often, in their own nature, troublesome or disgusting; but, being unattainable by men of moderate fortune, serve to distinguish the opulent, and to draw towards us the stupid stare of both the great and little vulgar. To be deprived of these superfluities, is merely to lose the admiration which they procured,

and that high rank in life of which they are the most ready testimonies. But all ranks are relative to those on the same level with ourselves, or at least to those nearly on that level. Although we ourselves remain stationary, we feel degraded if those formerly our equals become our superiors, and elevated if they become our inferiors. Were we to retain the same rank relatively to all around us, we should neither be affected by the increase nor by the diminution of our superfluities. To part with superfluities, is, therefore, very different from the loss of comforts or of luxuries, however trifling these last may be; it is a relative, not an absolute privation. If those of our own rank, and our immediate superiors and inferiors, are equally reduced, we find ourselves exactly in our former situation, and can scarcely feel the slightest uneasiness.

The whole, or nearly the whole, of the incomes of workmen and of small tradesmen and farmers, is expended on what are strictly the necessaries of life. They find it sufficiently difficult to maintain their families, to provide that sustenance without which their children would perish; they have little or no surplus for the gratification of less urgent demands; and if they are taxed, they are made to pay an enormous price for the very small degree of protection they require from society. The sum, however, requisite to procure the absolute necessaries of life, is not very large; and, when a man's revenue exceeds this amount, he expends what remains in procuring its conveniences and comforts; but having little to spare from his necessaries, he endeavours to procure, with that little, all the gratification it can afford. He is therefore careful to spend no part of it, except on such articles of food, habitation, and clothing, as will contribute much to his well-being* . As his income increases, he indulges himself in other enjoyments, which contribute in some degree, though not so materially, to his ease or pleasure. As he advances, all real enjoyments are at last exhausted, and he betakes himself to capricious desires, to refined, and often imaginary gratifications. In this progress, the advantages he derives from government are always increasing, and the price he pays for these advantages is always diminishing. When he is forced to abandon real and essential enjoyments, he is subjected to a serious hardship; but when he merely relinquishes pleasures which are the vain progeny of caprice, he is protected in the enjoyment of all the necessaries, and even most of the comforts and luxuries of life, in return for the sacrifice of trifles which could add little to his happiness. But there is a point at which the most refined indulgences must end; and those superfluities, which serve merely for show, dignity, and rank, must absorb the rest of every splendid revenue. It may be difficult to point out the boundary, for many of our real enjoyments are enhanced by a similar pride and vanity; but the distinction is not, on that account, less real. A few servants may be kept, partly for conveniency, partly for show; but a large establishment brings nothing but vexation, and can be endured only as the means of attracting the regards and admiration of the world. When a man is forced merely to part with such superfluities, he procures the security of all the necessaries, all the comforts, all the luxuries of life, in return for the relinquishment of follies which vex him, and which, as all his acquaintances are equally brought down, are no longer necessary to his rank and dignity. While the man of moderate fortune, who enjoys comparatively little from the protection of society, is fensibly affected by the weight of taxes, he, contrary to every principle of justice, derives every possible advantage from the social combination, without being subjected to any, even the most trifling privation.

Although then, Sir, I should admit, what I hope in my next letter to prove totally unfounded, that the public expences are, in no degree, increased in consequence of inequality of property, still I might justly contend, that the proportion of taxes, to the fortune of each individual, ought to advance in a quick progression, according to his wealth.—I am, Sir,

Yours, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XVI.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 22. 1796.

Among the various sources of public expenditure, war, and the preparations for war, are perhaps the most important. Not only is the state occasionally put to an enormous expence during the continuation of hostilities, but, even during peace, armies must be disciplined, fortifications erected, navies repaired, and ambassadors sent to every nation in Europe, to give instant information of whatever occurrence may threaten to disturb the general tranquillity. Part of those expences would, indeed, be unavoidable, in whatever way the property was distributed among the inhabitants of the state, but part also arises from excessive inequality.

Although an opulent nation might hold out an equal temptation to the avarice of her neighbours, whether her riches were in the hands of many or of few, yet her condition for defence, which, by counteracting this temptation, might secure her from attack, is, in the two cases, widely different. When the property is engrossed by a few, then are but a few interested deeply in the national defence; the rest, having little to lose by being conquered, have in reality no stake in the country. Many of the people are sunk by ignorance, and its inseparable vices, to that degree of depravity, which extinguishes every generous feeling, and almost justifies the contempt with which they are treated; while the more virtuous, sensible that their utmost exertions are requisite to support and educate their families, apply to some simple and uniform branch of manual labour, with a constancy and regularity, which enervate their bodies, and too often debase their minds. Men, reduced to this condition, are unwilling to change their accustomed habits, or to expose themseves to unusual fatigues and dangers, in defence of a country to which they have few motives of strong attachment; and, even if they were willing, they are incapable of that bodily exertion, that patience under hardships, that endurance of fatigue, which are necessary in war. Such a nation becomes an easy and tempting prey to her more warlike neighbours, unless she trusts her defence to mercenary forces, which must be supported at an enormous expence even during the most profound peace, and too often are made use of to overturn that freedom which was the origin of her prosperity and wealth.

Of all causes of war, however, mercantile disputes are now the most frequent. People are convinced, by fatal experience, that no acquisition of territory will ever repay the charges of conquest; but there is reason to fear that the jarring of commercial interests, and the illiberal monopolising spirit of merchants, may continue, for some time longer, to drench Europe in blood* . But the frequency of such commercial disputes arises altogether from inequality of property. If riches, instead of being

consined to a few, were more equally diffused, no individual could either have any interest in establishing a monopoly against foreign nations, or possess sufficient influence to make his private emolument be confounded with the advantage of the state. The competitions of different nations in branches of trade, which, from the moderate stocks with which they can be carried on, are accessible to all the inhabitants of each state, seldom occasion any very serious disputes. The merchant, whose stock is moderate, will find the derangement of his trade, during the war, a certain hardship, which it is not likely that his future profits will repay. Even if his nation is successful, even if a monopoly is established, he is fully sensible that the stock of other merchants will be allured from less lucrative employments, and that his profits will soon be reduced, by this competition, to their former level. So far from advancing contentious or unjust pretentions, his interest will lead him, by reasonable and candid concessions, to endeavour to prevent the miseries of war. But it is otherwise with the great capitalist: He can afford to live a few years on the interest of his stock, or even to consume part of his stock itself, when he has reason to expect that his present loss will be more than compensated by the enhancement of his future profits. However great those profits may be, if they are drawn from distant speculations, in which large capitals are necessary, they will not, at least for a considerable time, be reduced, by a competition with those small capitals which might be drawn from other employments. He is completely secured from competition at home, and has only to guard, by a monopoly in favour of his own nation, against that to which he is exposed from the great capitalists abroad. He is, therefore, tenacious of all the unjust preferences which his nation at present enjoys, and indefatigable in his attempts to establish new monopolies no less iniquitous. His supposed knowledge of trade gives weight and currency to his opinions; he succeeds in representing his private interests as those of the state; he takes advantage of national prejudices and dislikes; he employs all his influence with the government; he endeavours to rouse a false sense of national honour; and, by clamour, deception, and intrigue, he plunges his country into war. Unmindful of the miseries he occasions, he follows his own interests with an eagerness unchecked by the feelings of humanity, with a constancy too often successful.

Wars at the same time, independently of their objects, are, by inequality of property, rendered desirable to many classes of the inhabitants. All the younger sons are disinherited, to support the fancied consequence and lazy pride of one of their brothers; from their education, they have imbibed the most unconquerable prejudices against the useful professions; and the army is almost their only resource against that idleness, poverty, dependence, and contempt, to which, by the injustice of the law, they seem irrevocably doomed. All who, having once been opulent, have been led, by the vain folly of emulating the expences of others, to squander their fortunes, are in a situation still more deplorable. Too proud to be industrious, too old to learn any useful occupation, too luxurious to live in contented poverty, they have before them a long prospect of misery, embittered by the reflection, that it arises from their own misconduct. To such men, war is an occupation which may relieve their troubled thoughts; it gives them opportunities of still attracting the regards of mankind, perhaps of acquiring glory; it even flatters them with prospects, distant indeed, but not altogether visionary, of re-establishing their bankrupt fortunes.

To the great capitalists, war furnishes many opportunities of increasing their opulence. The loans, which are necessary to the state, yield a large and almost certain profit; while the fluctuations in the public funds may be considered as establishing an immense lottery, in which the most valuable prizes are drawn by the fortunate, the intelligent, and the artful. Another numerous class of capitalists, employed as contractors, agents, and commissaries, partly by a species of monopoly which they enjoy, not unfrequently by expedients which in other transactions would stamp their characters with infamy, succeed in raising immense riches, on the foundation of national distress.

These different classes, younger brothers and bankrupts; capitalists, stock jobbers, and contractors, with all their train of dependants, relations, and friends, from a very large body of the people, who have a direct interest in war, who languish during the prosperity of their country, and fatten on the miseries of mankind. It would require the utmost exertions of pure and disinterested patriotism, to counteract so formidable a combination; but the corruption, which inevitably arises from great inequality of property, not only roots up all public spirit from the minds of public men, but destroys, in the great body of the people, the very belief of its existence. The friends of peace are disjoined, disheartened, and suspicious of each other. No effectual opposition can thus be made; and, while contention is essential to the interests of so many, and such powerful individuals, can we wonder, that pretences are easily discovered, and that nearly as many years behold the cruel ravages of war, as smile upon the quiet and blissful arts of peace? I am Sir,

Yours &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XVII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 25, 1796.

After having already shown that inequality of fortune generates all kinds of crimes, it will surely be unnecessary to enter into any discussion, to prove, that it increases the expences attendant on criminal justice. While the careless profusion of the rich opens a thousand doors to cheats, frauds and pilferings, the poor are tempted, by the desire of vicious indulgences, which they cannot otherwise attain, or, driven by real distress and imperious necessity, to the commission of slight acts of dishonesty, which gradually corrupt their moral feelings, and prepare them for the most flagitious crimes. Hence the necessity of further guards to property, of greater expence both in detecting and punishing offenders; hence, the increase of law and police officers, the houses of detension and punishment, which must be erected in every corner of the country, and the frequency of trials for petty offences, which, by ruining the characters of the delinquents, lay the foundation of more atrocious crimes.

The decay of public spirit, and the corruption which univerially prevails, occasion further expences to the state. No minister can now hope to remain in office, or to be permitted to execute even the most beneficial measures, unless, as it has been emphatically expressed, he greases the wheels of the political machine. For this purpose, pensions are bestowed, sinecure places are instituted; offices, of which the duty in done by a deputy, are multiplied without end; and, that corruption may be still further extended, the ingenious mode has been invented of burdening these office-bearers with annuities to others. When these measures are taken, the machine of government, meeting with no further interruption, goes on smoothly and quietly, even through the roughest roads, and and what appear the most imperviable morasses; but it cannot be denied, by the boldest advocate for this system, and all this oiling and greasing is with the blood and substance of the people. It is still in our recollection, that the sense of this truth was once so strong, as, during the calamitous period of the American war, to force a declaration from an unwilling House of Commons, that “the influence of the Crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished,” and although no steps were taken in cousequence of this resolution, except a paltry reform, of which the chief merit, as we are told by its author, was, that it prevented more essential reforms* ; yet so notorious is the truth which it contains, that it is still allowed to remain on the minutes, an irrefragable proof of the indolence or corruption of our representatives, without any minister having yet had the boldness to move that it be rescinded.

Thus inequality of property swells the amount of the national expenditure; rendering wars both more frequent and of longer duration; destroying the patriotism and energy

of the people, the only “cheap defence of nations,” and thence demanding a greater military establishment during peace; occasioning greater difficulty in the suppression of crimes; and giving birth, to a wide, extended system of corruption. These additional expences should surely be defrayed by those overgrown fortunes by which they are rendered necessary. It is reasonable that the middling ranks of the community should bear a proportion of such burdens as are requisite for the general protection of property; but there is no justice whatever in their being made to contribute to those additional expences which arise from the immense wealth and pre-eminence of others.

I have now, Sir, considered this subject in several points of view; I have shown the expediency, I had almost said the necessity, of discouraging excessive inequality; I have proved, that taxes are much more severely felt by the poor, and those of small property, than by the rich; and I have shown, that a great part of the public expenditure is wholly to be attributed to the unavoidable consequences of inequality: I am, surely, fully warranted in drawing the inference, that the proportion which the taxes bear to the property of each contributor, ought to increase according to his opulence. I am sensible that difficulties will occur in carrying this principle into execution; but a legislator, who kept justice steadily in view, would approximate to, if he could not always keep accurately in the exact path, which she pointed out. To show how far our present system of taxation recedes from this line, would require a long, and, I fear, in the opinion many of your readers, a tedious investigation; on which account, I shall confine myself to one or two very general observations.

What are called the assessed taxes, such as those on land, houses, window lights, men servants, and saddle horses, can easily be accommodated to the principles of justice, because the proportion of the tax is obviously susceptible of a gradual increase. Thus, if a tax of a guinea is paid for one man servant, two guineas each should be paid for two, three guineas each for three, and so on in gradual progression. By this means, while a man, possessed of four or five hundred pounds a year, paid one guinea, the proprietor of a revenue of 10,000l a year, who would probably keep about a dozen of servants, would contribute 144 guineas to the expences of the state. The application of the same rule to the other assessed taxes is so easy as to require no further illustration.

It is more difficult to lay taxes on consumable commodities, in such a manner as to fall in due proportion on the rich; and this, among other reasons, induces me to give a decided preference to assessed taxes, which, if regulated as I have proposed, might, I believe, be fully sufficient to answer for all the necessary expences of the state. If, however, taxes on commodities are requisite, they should, undoubtedly, be laid on luxuries and superfluities; proper care being taken, that the tax, on no particular article, should be so high as to check its consumption, or give encouragement to the destructive practice of smuggling. This principle is so obvious, that it has been always admitted by our ministers in theory, though, I believe, the book of rates would distinctly show, that it has not been sufficiently attended to in practice. I am, I Sir,

Yours, &C.

Sidney.

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LETTER XVIII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SCOTS CHRONICLE.

SIR,

November 29. 1796.

Before taking leave of this subject, it may be proper to recapitulate the proposals which I have now submitted to the consideration of your readers; and this I shall do in a few general propositions.

1. The law of primogeniture, and all other unjust preferences being abolished, all persons of the same degree of consanguinity ought to inherit equally.

2. Descendants ought to succeed, in exclusion of all other relations; the right of representation, that is of grandchildren inheriting in right of their deceased parents being admitted.

3. Ascendants ought to be next in succession.

4. In the succession of collaterals, there ought to be no distinction between *agnati* and *cognati;* and the right of representation ought to be admitted.

5. A testator, if without children, ought to be allowed to devise, by will, only one fourth part of his property; if he leaves descendants, only one sixth part.

6. A testator ought to be permitted to disinherit, partially or totally, any of his natural heirs; but the portion, so forfeited, ought to go to the nearest class of relations, who would not otherwise have succeeded.

7. Taxes ought to be levied in such a manner, as to bear a greater proportion to the property of the rich, than of the poor or middling ranks of the community.

These regulations, are all demanded by the obvious dictates of natural justice; and, while they would be slow in their operation, occasioning no reverse of fortune, no perceptible hardship to any individual, they would be attended with the most important, and most beneficial consequences to the community. Opulence would be gradually diffused; overgrown estates would, at the death of the present proprietors, be subdivided; and the great body of the people, relieved from the pressure of taxes, and acquiring some little property by succession, would be enabled to educate their children, and might view an independant and comfortable provision in their old age, as easily attainable by industry and economy, increasing and husbanding those little fortunes which they had inherited from their relations. Each man, from the laudable desire of increasing his enjoyments, of securing himself against the fickleness of

fortune, of establishing his family in a rank equal, or superior to his own, would have sufficient motives to exertion; but while none would be worn down by incessant labour, or depressed by the misery and hopelessness of their situation, few would be led by long continued habits of extreme penury and care, to that sordid avarice which roots out all the virtues. The rich would be less exposed to that indolence and vice, which are too frequently the concomitants of their splendour; there would no longer be so general and destructive an emulation in extravagance and expence, wealth would no longer be the only title to respect. The accumulation of riches would proceed in quiet, but regular progression; and while the diffusion of knowledge would increase the productive powers of our workmen, the capital of the nation, divided into innumerable vivifying rills, each superintended and directed with most anxious care, would adorn, enrich, and fertilise the country.

The effects of this equalization on literature and the fine arts, also deserve our serious attention. It seems undeniable, that the more general liberal education became, there would be the greater probability of the discovery of genius; and the more universally a taste for literature was diffused, the greater would be that applause which is the best incitement to exertion, and the only true reward of excellence. The studies most immediately useful to the welfare or enjoyments of man, would no doubt command the most universal attention; and it is fit they should; but many individuals, following the direction of their genius and their taste, would still cultivate the abstract sciences; and, tho' they could not make their speculations interesting, or even intelligible to the people at large, they would find an ample recompence for their labours, in the improvement of their own minds, and the approbation of the learned and discerning. Others would endeavour to spread some part of their sublime discoveries among the people; a more familiar stile in treating abstract subjects would gradually be introduced; all learned jargon, all opinions respectable only from their antiquity, all affected and pedantic obscurity, would soon become contemptible: We should no longer find an author profound in words and shallow in ideas; and this simplicity would greatly conduce to the interests of science. The effects on the arts which embellish life, would not be less salutary. There might be less sumptuousness in the gardens, and palaces of individuals; but a moderate degree of riches being more generally possessed, a greater number of the inhabitants would dedicate part of their time to the cultivation of a just and discerning taste. The nation, becoming more opulent, would be enabled to execute greater public works; the wonders of art, no longer shut up in private repositories, to which few can procure admittance, would exist for the instruction and amusement of the people; discernment, feeling, and taste, would be more generally diffused, and genius would find a full and noble recompence in universal, just, and merited admiration.

But, Sir, I have indulged, perhaps, too long, in this seducing speculation, and it is now time to quit these fair and enchanting fields of probable conjecture. If, by these letters, I have contributed to diffuse just and reasonable views on a subject so important as the state of property; if I have quieted the fears of some well meaning, but ill informed, alarmists; if I have even afforded to your readers part of that amusement which I myself have derived from this investigation; my object is accomplished, and I shall never regret having withdrawn a few hours from my private concerns, and

dedicated them to the entertainment, perhaps to the instruction, of some of my countrymen. I am, Sir,

Your'S, &C.

Sidney.

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THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON *COMMERCIAL PROSPERITY.*

It appears, on a cursory view, one of the most extraordinary circumstances attending on wars, that, notwithstanding the expence which they occasion to the state, and the distress which they bring on individuals, they seem to produce little diminution of the exports and imports of a commercial country. At the beginning of a war, a diminution of both is sensibly felt; but, in a short time, foreign trade seems to accommodate itself to the new circumstances of the country, and to rise vigorous from its temporary depression. Thus, towards the end of the two last wars, our exports and imports were very large* ; and in the year 1795, it is insisted, and probably with truth, that they equalled, or rather surpassed, those of 1792, one of the most flourishing periods of our commerce. Hence it has been inferred, that war is in no great degree, if at all, inconsistent with national prosperity. That it may for a time give a check to our advances, but that the spring of our commerce, by its inherent elasticity, will soon rebound* . It may be useful to inquire, Whether these assertions are well founded?—how far the consequences of war are, in a commercial view, detrimental to the state?—and whether the amount of our exports and imports is a sure indication of our prosperity? In examining these questions, I shall not controvert the authority of the custom-house books, although it seems agreed that they furnish very vague and uncertain data.

The whole annual produce must arise from the land, the capital, and the labour† . It seems impossible that there should be any other source; and even of these, the first is nearly unproductive, unless supported and invigorated by the others. Land, if uncultivated, will yield hardly any crop; if ill cultivated, a very sparing; if fully cultivated, a very rich produce: and the cultivation is altogether carried on by means of capital and labour. We may, therefore, without any dangerous inaccuracy, withdraw our attention from the land, and consider the annual produce as depending on the capital and labour employed. Without population, riches would find no profitable employment; without riches to maintain the workman till his commodity is prepared for market, to supply him with tools and machinery, to effectuate the division of labour, and to transport his manufacture to places in which it is in demand, labour would be scarcely productive; from these two mutually assisting and supporting each other, the annual produce, that is, the national riches, altogether arise. Whatever, therefore, diminishes the capital or labour of a country, must also diminish the aggregate of the annual produce, and consequently tend to national impoverishment.

1st, It seems hardly possible to doubt that war reduces the number of workmen: A few of those who enter into the sea and land services are indeed so idle and profligate* , that their enlisting occasions little or no diminution of industry; but the great majority are tradesmen who are tempted by high bounties, or prevailed upon during a casual fit of intoxication, to enlist. At the beginning of the present war, there were also a great number of sober and industrious men forced into the public service, by the pressure arising from the almost total stagnation of every branch of trade. When we consider that to the ordinary causes of mortality, are added fatigue, battle, and often pestilence

and famine, we can have little doubt that, during wars, population must greatly decrease.

Including the navy, the army, the militia, and fencibles, I apprehend I am much under the truth in stating the number of men already enlisted, in Britain, since the commencement of the present war, at 300,000. Of these let us suppose that 20,000 would have died in the common course of nature, and that 30,000 were so idle and dissolute, as to live altogether without labouring. These allowances are surely sufficiently large; and it will follow, that the other 250,000 men have been all withdrawn from industry. If we reckon nine shillings per week the ordinary rate of wages, and in 1792 it was considerably higher, we shall find that the loss of produce to the country exceeds five millions and a half each year.

Nor does this loss terminate with the war, from which it arises. At peace, few of our soldiers and sailors will resume their former occupations: Those who have been maimed or killed are completely lost to the country; and the rest return, some with worn-out constitutions, all with habits destructive of industry. It must require many years to fill up the measure of population from the rising generation; and till this is effected, the quantity of productive labour in the country will continue at a level below that at which it would otherwise have stood. The effect of war, then, is to diminish the produce of the national industry, not only during its continuance, but for a considerable time after its termination; and this effect would follow, even on the supposition that the funds which support labour were to remain untouched. In this case it must be evident, that a rise in the demand for workmen, and a consequent enhancement of the rate of wages, would immediately result from the decrease of population: but, as our commodities are already sold at the highest price they can bring in the market, this rise of wages would occasion a proportionate reduction of manufacturing and agricultural profits. Stock would be instantly withdrawn from these employments, in which it no longer yielded its ordinary returns, and, being placed in foreign speculations, would again produce its former profits, but would no longer support the industry, nor increase, to the same degree, the amount of the aggregate produce of this country. But,

2dly, Every unusual national expence must cause a diminution of national capital. The whole property belonging to individuals is engaged in agriculture, commerce, or manufactures: If the proprietor does not choose to vest it in these speculations at his own risk, he lends it to others who pay him interest for the loan; that is, share with him the profits which they draw from its employment. The whole stock of the nation is thus engaged in trade; there are no unemployed funds from which the extraordinary expences can be defrayed, and therefore they must altogether fall on productive capital. If the amount of these expences were levied within the year, each person would find it necessary to give up to the state part of that capital which he formerly employed in a lucrative manner; for it would be obviously impossible for him to save his quota from his ordinary private expences.

All supplies, however, are now raised by loans furnished to government by monied people, or capitalists: Taxes are levied to pay the interest of these loans; and such taxes are, in general, paid by individuals, not from their capitals, but from savings

from their expenditure. But the property thus advanced to the state was not formerly idle; it was either employed by the capitalists themselves, or lent by them to other traders. In either case, before it can be lent to the public, it must be withdrawn from its former employments: It cannot serve two purposes; it cannot be expended on wars without ceasing to support the industry of the country. Loans are merely wholesale bargains, transacted by the government, between the capitalists and the rest of the nation: They prevent the necessity of each individual withdrawing a portion of his funds from trade; but they do this, merely by making it the interest of one class to dedicate a larger part of their property to the public service. In place of 100 persons withdrawing 100l. each from their different trades, one man undertakes to advance the whole, on receiving from the others such a compensation, by annual payments, as may be agreed upon. But this man, that the others may continue their ordinary business, must withdraw the whole 10,000l., either from his own trade, or from those persons to whom he had formerly lent that sum, and who had employed it in trade. There is no other source from which the 10,000l. can be procured, unless we suppose, what is evidently absurd, that it was formerly locked up in a strong box, idle and unproductive. Should this money of the capitalist be already invested in the public funds, the case would be no way different. It can supply the new loan only by being withdrawn from the old; and there is but one mode of withdrawing it, which is by sale. Some other person, therefore, must purchase the stock which this capitalist formerly held, and he can do this no otherwse, than by means of property which was formerly employed in a profitable manner either by himself or others. In either case, the capital of the nation, those funds which formerly supported industry, and yielded an annual increase, are diminished. To the lender, indeed, there may be no loss; and, in the hour of public distress, there will probably be great gain: but part of the productive capital of the nation is consumed, and consequently the aggregate of the annual produce, which constitutes the riches of a state, must decline.

It would therefore appear, that the national capital ought to decrease *exactly* according to the expences of war; but there are particular circumstances which, in some measure, alleviate this evil.

The most universal of these circumstances, is the economy of individuals. Most people are induced, at all times, from a desire of raising themselves in the world, and of providing for their families, to live within their incomes. Whatever is thus saved in one year, is employed in next year's trade, and becomes part of the productive capital. It has been shown, by the very ingenious author of the Wealth of Nations* , that these savings, from expence, are, in reality, the immediate sources of all the increase of capital; and, as this accumulation proceeds in time of war in a similar, though less rapid, manner than in time of peace, it must, in some measure, replace the waste occasioned by public profusion. The *actual* diminution of national capital, is, therefore, only the excess of the public expences over the sums saved by individual economy. There is, however, a *comparative* decrease of capital, which, though not so severely felt by individuals, tends equally to national impoverishment. The amount of the savings of individuals, from their incomes, is, from the reluctance which every person feels in changing his mode of life, as taxes increase, much less considerable during war; and the whole of that accumulation which would have taken place, if peace had continued, may fairly be considered as lost to the nation.

The Funding System, among its many disadvantages, possesses this conveniency, that, by holding out advantageous terms to the rich of all nations, it induces foreigners to vest money in our funds; and thus, in some measure, prevents the decrease of our capital, by attracting part of that which was formerly employed in other countries. In so far as this acts, the property, which formerly supported foreign industry, is consumed by our expences; for, as the capital which is remitted for this purpose, did not formerly exist here, it could give no support to our labour, and the turning it to unproductive employments does not diminish our annual produce. We must, indeed, pay interest for this money from our taxes; but we are enabled to save great part of these taxes annually from our incomes, and the productive capital of the country suffers no diminution. During the present war, there has also been a great influx of wealth, belonging to French, Flemish, and Dutch emigrants; and though it is probable, that, on the return of peace, a great part of this property will be again withdrawn from the country, yet this circumstance has afforded, at least, a temporary support to the national capital.

The expences of the present war have already amounted to above 50 millions Sterling, more than two years rents of all the lands in the kingdom* . The national capital ought to have declined in the same proportion; but, in as far as the expences of individuals have fallen short of their incomes, in as far as property has been brought over by emigrants, and as other foreigners have vested money in our funds, so far has this alarming evil been mitigated. In whatever degree, however, the national capital may have actually declined since 1792, this seems certain, that under a wise neutrality, it might, at the present moment, have been at least one hundred millions more than it really is. The savings from the incomes of individuals would have been incomparably greater, and, in the present convulsed state of Europe, as much, perhaps more, property would have flowed in from other nations. The national riches, therefore, though they have not been actually diminished in so great a degree, have been depressed at least one hundred millions below the level to which they would naturally have risen.

It seems, then, undeniable, that both the capital and labour, and consequently the annual produce of the capital and labour, must be materially injured by war. Meantime, the merchant may find a demand for his commodities, and the rate of wages may even advance. The decrease of capital, other things being equal, will of itself occasion a comparative increase of demand for our commodities, and a consequent enhancement of profit* . The same business is to be transacted by a smaller stock than formerly, and therefore, that stock will more easily find employment. In the same manner, if half the merchants in any country were to become bankrupt, the other half would have a brisker trade, although the aggregate produce would certainly be diminished. The decrease of the number of workmen, will at the same time account for the high wages of labour. Wages are fixed by the competition of masters on one hand, and of workmen on the other* . If the population, and the capital which employs labour, decline proportionally, the competition will be the same as formerly, and wages will be stationary. If capital declines faster, they will fall; if slower, they will rise. The only inference, therefore, which can justly be drawn from the fact, that wages are at present as high as in 1792, is, that capital and population have declined nearly in equal proportions.

If what has now been stated is the truth; if wars reduce the sum of national riches; the observation that our foreign trade continues to flourish, can be little calculated to afford us consolation. There must be a deficiency somewhere; if it is not in our exports and imports, it must be found in our home trade: if the aggregate is reduced, and one branch continues flourishing, the other branches must have declined the more. But Dr. Smith has shown, in the most convincing manner† , that the home trade is far more advantageous to the country; that it gives a greater degree of support to our industry, and is a much surer foundation of national prosperity than any foreign trade whatever. What then is the force of this argument drawn from our exports and imports? Nothing more than this; that the baneful effects of war fall heaviest on those branches of our trade which are most requisite to the prosperity of the state.

If, however, we inquire more particularly into the causes of our large exports and imports, during war, we shall find that, while they hold out the semblance of an advantageous foreign trade, they are altogether fallacious; that they arise partly from national profusion, and partly from national calamity.

1st, The captures made by the enemy swell the amount of our exports. When a vessel is taken on her voyage to a port where British goods are in demand, a new cargo will be commissioned to supply that demand. As soon as it is known that a vessel carrying out British goods to the West Indies has been captured, another cargo will be dispatched to supply those merchants who would otherwise be disappointed; for it is altogether impossible that the delay can render the demand less urgent. The captured cargoes are usually carried to markets for which they are not naturally fitted, and to which they would not otherwise have gone. If a cargo designed for the West Indies is carried into France, the goods must be sold for what they will bring; but, unless for this accident, no part of these commodities would have gone to that country, and therefore this consumption is altogether an addition to the usual and natural demand. Some cargoes indeed are carried into ports to which similar goods would of themselves have forced their way; but which the greater part may be considered as disposed of in a market to which they could not otherwise have had access.

In so far as exports are increased, from this cause, nothing can be more preposterous than to consider them as indications of national prosperity; they are, on the contrary, direct proofs of national loss. Our cargoes, if insured, are always insured at home; and whether the loss falls upon the merchant, or upon the underwriter, who indemnifies himself by the premiums on such cargoes as arrive safe, it is equally a loss to the nation. This part of our trade resembles that of a merchant, who should sell without receiving the price of his commodity; it is a trade which leads, not to opulence, but to ruin. In the mean time, we boast of those exports which are caused by the capture of our own property, not observing, that the more numerous these captures become, the greater will be the amount of our exports, and the greater also the national impoverishment.

2dly, Part of our exports is occasioned by our war expences* . When we are engaged in war, our troops on foreign service must be paid, magazines must be formed, and foreign princes must be subsidised. For these purposes, money must be remitted; or bills, for which money may be got in foreign countries, must be procured.

It is obviously impossible to send abroad any considerable part of the circulating money of this country. Scarcely any part of it could be spared, without the greatest inconveniency, from its usual employment, and even the whole would supply, for but a short time, the enormous waste of a modern campaign. The quantity of bullion in England is usually very inconsiderable; whatever more is requisite for the expences of war, must be purchased; and the price paid for it, must consist in the produce of the land and labour of the country. The demand for gold increases in England, and our merchants endeavour to sell their commodities abroad for that which they find bears a high price at home. Our manufactures are therefore exported to countries from which returns can be got in bullion, and this bullion is afterwards sold to government agents and contractors.

The same thing takes place respecting bills of exchange. If the demand for bills on any particular country is suddenly increased, a premium will be given for such bills. They will consequently be sought after by our merchants; and there are only two ways in which they can be procured, either by exporting goods directly to that country, and drawing for the amount, or by sending goods to such other countries as have these bills to dispose of. In both cases, a quantity of our produce is exported, and the returns consist in bills of exchange, which are afterwards sold by our merchants to government agents and contractors.

Whether our foreign expences are defrayed by gold or by bills of exchange, a quantity of our manufactures must be exported to purchase the necessary gold or bills; and for this part of our produce, no other return whatever is received. But the demand for foreign articles of consumption, although in some degree diminished, is by no means annihilated; and these foreign articles can be got in no other way than as returns for home articles exported, or for bills purchased by home articles. No actual decrease of our exports will therefore take place, unless the war expences and our consumption of foreign articles, are, together, to a smaller amount than our consumption during peace. Unless this is the case, the quantity of our manufactured produce exported, must soon rise to as high an amount as before the commencement of the war; and whenever our war expences overbalance the diminution of the consumption of foreign commodities by individuals, it will even rise higher. In the mean time, the premium on foreign bills acts as a bounty on exportation; and, by enabling our merchants to send their commodities cheaper to foreign markets, encourages the consumption abroad; and thus, though we may be deprived of part of our customers, those that remain will increase their demands for our manufactures* .

It appears, then, that part of our exports, during war, are occasioned solely by our expences; and such trade can surely add nothing to national riches. It may swell the declamation of a Minister; it may amuse the people with fancied prosperity; it may even enrich many individuals; but, were it doubled, we should be so much the poorer; were it increased threefold, we should probably be ruined. Many branches of our commerce and manufactures might flourish, but the whole price of the commodities thus exported, would be finally paid by the nation. Our prosperity would resemble that of a merchant who should sell his commodities in order immediately to consume the price; he might for some time have a brisk trade, but it would inevitably lead to ruin.

3dly, Part, of our imports also arises from our war expences. Timber, hemp, pitch, iron, and indeed almost every article of naval and military stores, must be brought, at least in their rude state, from foreign countries; and they swell, very materially, the general amount of our imports. This, however, in place of proving that we enjoy a lucrative trade, merely shows that we are expending a large revenue. It is a proof of our consumption, but not of our prosperity; for no man, surely, can grow rich by purchasing commodities which he immediately consumes; and, in this respect, there is no difference whatever between the expences of individuals and of states.

These additional imports occasion additional exports. Foreign nations will not give us their commodities for nothing; they must receive, in return, either our produce, or money, or bills which have been purchased by our produce; and thus, not only those war expences, which must be defrayed in the countries in which our troops are acting, but also such as arise from the purchase of naval and military stores, increase the amount of our foreign trade.

4thly, The suppression of smuggling, occasions larger entries in the custom-house books, from which the estimates of our imports are taken: During war, smuggling must always decrease. It becomes much more difficult to escape the numerous frigates that cover the sea; and many of the smugglers are induced, many forced, to enter into the public service. What may be considered as the premium for smuggling, the amount of the duties to be evaded, remains nearly as before; and the risks attending the traffic are greatly increased: It is accordingly given up as a losing trade; and those formerly engaged in it, are induced, by want of employment, and the high bounties offered to volunteers, to enlist. Others, who might still be inclined to continue a contraband trade, being seafaring people, being detected in smuggling, or having no visible means of livelihood, are pressed into the service. The goods, which formerly were brought into the country in a clandestine manner, are now regularly entered, and support the general produce of the customs, and the apparent amount of the imports. In order, however, to compare, in a fair manner, the imports during war, with those in time of peace, we ought to deduct, from the former, the whole amount of the smuggling trade, which is greatly decreased, if not altogether suppressed; for, although the mode of entering goods is altered, by the suppression of the contraband trade, it by no means follows, that the quantity of commodities imported, has increased.

5thly, War does not, in so great a degree as we should at first sight imagine, diminish the consumption of foreign luxuries. The common people, using few or none of these luxuries, the absence of the troops occasions a diminution of consumption equal only to that of the officers. Nor do the additional taxes produce that economy which might be expected. When a man’s nett income is reduced, it requires some effort for him to make a proportionate reduction in his usual expences: he is apt to live as formerly, till the accumulation of taxes makes him feel the absolute necessity of retrenching. He continues, year after year, to flatter himself, that the war will be of short duration, and that the return of peace will enable him to support his former stile of living. He is unwilling to appear with less splendour in the eyes of his acquaintances and of the world, and he prefers suspending, as he thinks, for a short time, his usual accumulation. But the increase of national riches, has no other source than the savings

of individuals: and the continuance of a great importation of foreign luxuries, can merely prove, that, while the public expences are reducing the commercial capital of the country, while new and heavy burthens are laid on the people, private economy, which alone could alleviate those evils, is too apt to be neglected.

These seem to me to be the chief causes of the exports and imports of a commercial country being little affected by wars. The expence of military stores, and the thoughtless profusion of individuals, support both. Our exports are kept up by the captures of our own vessels, and by the expences of our own armies abroad; and our imports are apparently, but illusively, increased by the suppression of smuggling. Of such a trade, national loss, not national prosperity, must be the certain consequence. The suppression of smuggling, indeed, brings with it some advantages; but all the other circumstances arise from national or individual profusion, and tend to impoverishment.

In whatever way, then, we reason, whether generally from the diminution of the capital and labour, and consequently of the annual produce of the nation, or more particularly from the causes which support a semblance of foreign trade, it will appear, that, in a commercial country, the effects of war are highly destructive; and, it is hoped, that this view of the subject may have some influence on those who treat all arguments from humanity as unmeaning declamation, who have not hearts to feel for the miseries of mankind.

May. 12. 1796

a merchant.

[*]The character and accomplishments of the Rich are painted in strong but true colours by Dr. Adam Smith, in his Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part I. sect. III. chap. 2.

[*]See Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part I. Sec. 3.

[*]See Lord Melcombe’s Diary, which contains the most honest confession of political depravity that ever was written.

[*]“As soon as any citizen says, What are public affairs to me? we may consider the state as undone.”

[*]Book II. Chap. III.

[†]Hume’s Essays, Part I. Essay XII.

[*]Plutarch’s Life of Lycurgus.

[†]Rollin—Hooke.

[‡]Hooke’s Roman Hist. Book VI. Chap. VII.

[§]Plutarch's Life of Tiberius Gracchus.

[?]Plutarch's Life of Caius Gracchus.

[*]Viz. Uri, Switz, Underwald, Zug, Glaris, and Appenzell.

[*]Among the Buchanites.

[*]Rapin, Book XXI.

[†]Ibid.

[‡]Macaulay, Smollett, Harris.

[*]See Macaulay's Hist. particularly a Note in Vol. V. Chap. I.

[†]Prerogative of Popular Government, Book I. Chap 8. "By levelling," says the same author, "those who use the word seem to understand, when a people rising invades the lands and estates of the richer sort, and divides them equally among themselves; as for example—no where in the world; this being that, both in the way and in the end, which I have already demonstrated to be impossible." Ib. Chap. 11.

[*]Article 17th.

[†]Article 16th.

[*]The faction of Hebert and Chaumette are said, I know not with what justice, to have entertained levelling principles.

[*]In the debate on the Succession Tax.

[†]Mr. Pitt has borrowed this opinion, without acknowledgement, from Rousseau—Du Contrat Social, Liv. I. Chap. IX.

[*]See Locke on Civil Government, Book II. Chap. V.

[*]Hume's Essays, Part I. Essay V.

[*]These observations on the Right of Property are merely a very slight sketch of the admirable discussion, respecting the origin and history of Property, introduced by Professor Millar, of Glasgow, in his Lectures on Civil Law. It is almost unnecessary to add, that the opinions are founded on Dr. Smith's just and elegant Theory of Moral Sentiments.

[*]"C'est précifemént parce que la force des choses rend toujours á detruire l'egalité, que la force de la lêgislation doit toujours tendre a la maintenir."—Rousseau du Contrat Social, Liv. II. Chap. XI.

[*]Blackstone's Commentaries, Book II. chap. 1.

[†]I must again repeat my acknowledgements to Professor Millar's lectures.

[*]The discussion concerning legal succession, in Blackstone's Commentaries, Book II. Chap. xiv. is a very curious example of the reasoning of a lawyer.

[*]Harrington's Oceana.

[*]"Descendit itaque jus, quasi ponderosum quid cadens deorsum recta linea, et nunquam reascendit."

Bracton and Coke, as quoted by Blackstone, who not approving of the argument, substitute others not more convincing.

[*]Code of Gentoo laws, chap. ii. sect. 10. & 11.

[†]Plut. Life of Solon.

[‡]Petit Leg. Att.

[?]Hein. Inst. lib. II. tit. 10. Esprit de Loix. chap. xxvii.

[§]Blackst. Com. book II. chap. xxxii.

[*]Erskine, book III. tit. ix. sect. 15.

[†]— book III. tit. viii. sect. 20.

[‡]Blackst. Com. book II. chap. i.

[§]— book II. chap. xxxii.

[*]Blackst. Com. book II. chap. xxxii.

[*]I have been informed that the late king of Prussia prohibited testaments in his dominions, and that the effects are already discernible in the diffusion of property, and in the amelioration of the condition of the people.

[*]The new law of testaments in France is founded on this principle, but I have not seen the specific regulations.

[*]Perhaps your readers may wish to know Dr. Smith's opinion upon this subject; it is as follows:—

"Entails are founded upon the most absurd of all suppositions, the supposition, that every successive generation of men have not an equal right to the earth, and to all that it possesses; but that the property of the present generation should be restrained and regulated according to the fancy of those who died perhaps five hundred years ago. Entails, however, are still respected through the greater part of Europe, in those countries particularly in which noble birth is a necessary qualification for the

enjoyment either of civil or military honours. Entails are thought necessary for maintaining this exclusive privilege of the nobility to the great offices and honours of their country; *and that Order having usurped one unjust advantage over the rest of their fellow-citizens, lest their poverty should render it ridiculous, it is thought reasonable, that they should have another.*"

Wealth of Nations, Book III. Chap. II.

[*]What I am tracing is the natural progress of expenditure; the observations, unfortunately for mankind, will not apply to those whose morals are corrupted by inequality of property.

[*]The present war is, no doubt, a pious crusade, in desence of religion and peace; but unless the landholders had been alarmed by wonderful stories of dividing property, and the merchants seduced by the flattering hopes of acquiring a monopoly of West India commodities, I doubt much whether the nation would have been casily persuaded to have taken the cross, and to have engaged in this *holy warfare.*

[*]The Contractor's Bill, though a good measure, is scarcely entitled to be stated as a second exception.

[*]Chalmers's Estimate.

[*]Chalmers's Estimate.

[†]Smith's Wealth of Nations, Book I. chap. 6.

[*]Mr. Chalmers likewise considers disappointed lovers as unproductive.

[*]Book II. chap. 3.

[*]The amount of the loans is as follows:—

In 1793,	£4,500,000
1794,	11,000,000
Ditto, to the Emperor,	4,500,000
1795,	18,000,000
In spring 1796,	7,000,000
Unfunded debt, and what must be expended after peace is concluded, before the war establishment can be reduced, supposed	6,000,000
	£51,000,000

[*]Wealth of Nations, Book I. chap. 9.

[*]Wealth of Nations, Book I. chap. 8.

[†]Wealth of Nations, Book II. chap. 5.

[*]Wealth of Nations, Book IV. chap. 1.

[*]In the present war, the demand for British goods has also increased, from the total stop put to French manufactures; but this being a particular, not a general concomitant of war, has been omitted.