

Br

Pam

1432

SPECIAL
COLLECTIONS
DOUGLAS
LIBRARY



QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
AT KINGSTON

KINGSTON ONTARIO CANADA

14-

100-2713

REFLEXIONS
ON THE
EXPEDIENCY
OF
INCREASING
THE
PRESENT NUMBER
OF THE
REPRESENTATIVES
OF
THE PEOPLE.

BY

JOHN SINCLAIR, Esq. M. P.

“ Nous ressemblons à ceux qui habitent des maisons qui leur sont
“ échues en heritage, et qui, au risque d'en être écrasés, n'y
“ veulent rien changer, pour ne pas toucher a l'ouvrage de leur
“ peres, comme si c'étoit manquer a la veneration qui leur est
“ dûe, que de rétablir ou de perfectionner ce qu'ils ont fait.
“ Il est certain en effet que l'edifice de notre republique s'af-
“ faise par son propre poids; & rien peut-être ne fera compa-
“ rable un jours à ses malheurs, s'il est vrai qu'il n'est rien de
“ pire, que la corruption de ce qui est excellent.” Dans la
Preface de La Voix libre du Citoyen : ou, Observations sur le
Gouvernement de Pologne. Par STANISLAS, Roi de Pologne.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand.

M. DCC. LXXXII.

[Price ONE SHILLING.]

AC 911.1782.5554

1917

1918

1919

1920

1921

1922

1923

1924

1925

1926

1927

1928

1929

1930

1931

1932

1933

1934

1935

1936

1937

1938

1939

1940

ADVERTISEMENT,

D*URING* the last session of parliament, the author of this tract took the liberty of stating to the public a plan of parliamentary reform, in a work entitled "Lucubrations during a short Recess". Though the principles which it contained appeared to him just in themselves, analogous to the British constitution, and not difficult to execute, he found, with regret, that many worthy and able men were of opinion that it went too far; and soon afterwards it appeared (when a committee was proposed for inquiring into the present state of the representation of the people) that the house was not ripe for an alteration of such extent and importance. The necessity of some constitutional reform is, however, generally acknowledged. It only remains, therefore, to discover what plan is the best entitled to receive the sanction of both houses of parliament, the approbation of the crown, and the concurrence of the people. With a view of contributing to so desirable a discovery, the following Reflexions were composed.

The

The author's principal object is, to support an idea originally attributed to the late Earl of Chatham, of adding a certain number of representatives to the different counties, leaving the other parts of the constitution subject only to such partial alterations as took place in respect to Shoreham and to Cricklade. He is still inclined to think, that the constitution of Great Britain ought to resemble the sacred galley of Athens, into which new beams were occasionally inserted, and the old and rotten ones taken away. But if wiser and abler men are of opinion that the vessel ought to be still more cautiously handled; and that from years it has been reduced to a state too feeble to undergo a thorough repair, or to suffer even a single plank to be removed; for one, he is willing to submit his judgment to greater experience and abilities, trusting, at the same time, that something will be done, sufficient to preserve so dear a PALLADIUM from running to total ruin and decay.

REFLEXIONS, &c.

NO question has divided legislators and statesmen more, than how far it is expedient to permit any material alteration in the government of a state.

Against innovations, it has been generally urged, that when once a nation is accustomed to alter its political regulations, even on grounds apparently sufficient, that it is impossible to say how far the desire of change may be carried; and that it may be gradually led from step to step, until it has totally lost sight of every vestige of its ancient constitution. The most dangerous laws, it has been said, may be proposed, under the most specious pretences; nor can the ablest statesman foresee the remote consequences of the most minute alteration. However plausible such arguments may at first sight appear, yet they evidently prove too much, and must be rejected when brought as sufficient grounds to establish every possible spe-

cies of abuse, which may creep into the constitution of a country.

It may be granted, that alterations in government ought to be very cautiously admitted, when any legislator has been appointed to form a new constitution, and has composed one whole, in which each part is so intimately connected with the other, that by injuring the smallest wheel, the whole fabric may be destroyed. Such was the case at Sparta, and in other ancient republics; but it will be difficult to prove, that we ever had a Solon or a Lycurgus in this island, to whose sole wisdom, penetration and experience we are indebted, for the government which we possess.

It may also be granted, that if any alterations which have crept into a state, are only an extension of the first principles of its original constitution, and have not tended to sap the foundation of any of those pillars on which it was originally built, that a constitution thus formed ought likewise to be accounted a hallowed fane, never in future to be subjected to rash and wanton violation.

But

But surely no one can pretend to say, that the alterations which have taken place in the government of this island (at least with respect to extending the right of sending representatives to parliament) have been an extension of the original principles on which that council was founded. Parliaments were established as a check upon the power of the crown, and with a view of preventing the executive branch of the government from becoming despotic and tyrannical. Whereas almost every partial augmentation of the number of representatives, since the reign of Edward the First, was calculated for a very different purpose. The additions to the number of members, when Wales was incorporated with England, and when the union with Scotland took place, were necessary. New citizens must have new representatives in every free state. But what advantage could be gained, except increasing the influence of the crown, by the number of paltry boroughs which, since the reign of that monarch, were invested with parliamentary privileges?

I am also ready to confess, that if this nation had every reason to be satisfied with its present situation; if it were happy at home, and respected abroad; if its neighbours courted its friendship, and if its enemies trembled at its wrath; in that case, that the systems of political projectors ought to be very cautiously listened to. But is that our case at present? Have we any reason to be afraid, that any constitutional alteration can reduce us from splendor to misery, or from greatness to contempt? On the contrary, the only prospect we have of enabling our posterity to rival the power and fortune of our ancestors, is to leave them in legacy a similar constitution to that which these ancestors gloried to enjoy.

There would also be some reason to object to any material alteration, were it not evident, that all our public misfortunes may be ascribed to the dangerous abuses, which have been suffered to take root in the government of this country. The conduct of ministers, and of those they employed, both in the commencement and prosecution of

the American war, had become so unpopular, long before it was given up, that there is great reason to doubt, whether it could have been at all commenced, much less so long persevered in, had not a parliament stood between the crown and the people, to deaden the opposition of the one, and to countenance the unfortunate system which the other had adopted. Whereas had the wishes of the people for conciliatory measures with America sooner taken place, we should not at this time have been abjectly supplicating for peace at the hands, if not at the feet of our enemies.

If our government, therefore, was not established at once, but has been subject to almost perpetual fluctuation; if any partial alterations which have taken place, have been contrary to those principles, on which parliamentary councils were originally founded; if the nation is reduced to a state, which gives it little reason to be afraid of the possible dangers which may arise from material innovations; and if the present constitution of parliament has proved inimical to the public prosperity; where is the
the

the harm of proposing, or of carrying into execution, such systems of reform, as seem to be essentially necessary for the future happiness of the state?

There are three circumstances in the nature and constitution of parliament, to which it is necessary at this time to advert, as from all of them the influence of the crown has been considerably increased; namely, *the places* which have acquired a right of sending representatives; *the manner* in which those representatives have been elected; and *the number* of which they do at present consist, when assembled together.

It is universally acknowledged, that from the partiality of particular monarchs, and from other circumstances, which it is by no means necessary to dwell upon, a number of *places* in the kingdom have acquired the right of sending representatives to parliament; and consequently have obtained a weight in the legislature, to which they are not in any respect entitled, except *merely in consequence of possession*: And it is certain, that the original idea of parliament would
be

be restored, were the rights and franchises of a certain number of these places transferred from them to some of the more important districts in the kingdom. But as every plan of that nature would remove, it is said, some old constitutional landmarks, it has not met with so general an approbation as perhaps it was entitled to expect.

The manner in which the members of the different boroughs in the kingdom were elected, by permitting every one to vote, however dependent they were on the executive branch of the legislature, enabled the crown also to acquire an influence in parliament, which undoubtedly was not originally intended. Some late regulations, however, prohibiting the votes of the revenue officers, &c. have tended materially to remove the consequences of this evil. But every one must perceive, that though such alterations are beneficial, yet they are of too partial a nature to prove an effectual means of enabling the real friends of the people, efficaciously to oppose any pernicious system which the crown in future may adopt.

It only remains, therefore, to be considered, how far it is possible, by increasing *the present number* of the representatives of the people, to disable the crown, by means of any revenue or influence which it is likely to possess, ever to gain a subservient majority in the lower assembly; and whether, in consequence of such an addition, the wishes of the people might not always be certain of obtaining so formidable a support in parliament, against any improper measures of government, as to give them, on every such occasion, a certainty of success.

It is well known, that the members of the English house of commons were not always so numerous as they are at present. In the year 1446, they did not exceed 274, of which 200 represented the different cities and boroughs in the kingdom.

But the crown having assumed to itself the power of creating boroughs *ad libitum*, and finding every day that it became more and more necessary to have the support and countenance of parliament in the govern-
ment

ment of the state, made use of its creative prerogative, in granting to a number of insignificant villages, parliamentary privileges, in hopes, by such means, of always having a considerable share of the members of the legislature devoted to it. From hence originated the undue influence of the crown among the representatives of the people; and thence it has become necessary, if no other means of reform can be adopted, that such an addition should be made to the present members of the house of commons, as may counterbalance the weight that has been thrown into the scale of the crown. An addition of 50 representatives to the most important districts in England, in the opinion of the ablest statesmen of modern times, has been supposed necessary to form a sufficient counterpoise. By such an increase, with 5 for Scotland, the number it is entitled to expect*, the house would amount to 613 members; 100 more than it had prior to the union.

* Scotland, by the articles of the union, is entitled to one twelfth part of the whole representation in parliament, which, without entering into fractions, 50 is of 613, as 45 is of 558, the number of which the house at present consists.

The first objection that might be adduced against such a plan is, that the house is already sufficiently numerous, and that so large an addition would render it unfit for the purposes of deliberation and debate. This is an objection which appeared, on a former occasion, sufficiently plausible to the author of this tract, until having had an opportunity of examining it more fully, he has found sufficient grounds to alter his opinion: for it is singular, that both in ancient and in modern times, SIX HUNDRED seems to have been considered as the proper number of which the senate of an extensive society ought to be composed.

At Heraclia, we are informed by Aristotle that the powers of government, instead of being in the hands of a few, was vested in 600*.

At Athens, though its senate originally consisted of only 400 members, yet 200 were afterwards added, when its empire came to be increased †.

* Polit. lib. v. cap. 6.

† Bodin de Repub. lib. iii.

The oldest of the nobility were senators for life in the republic of Carthage, without any restriction*; but it is conjectured that 600 was the usual number to which it amounted.

The senate of Rome increased with the greatness of its empire, and from 100 was augmented to above 1000 by Cæsar the Dictator †. So great a multitude, however, having been found inconvenient, the senate was again reduced by Augustus to 600 (which seems indeed to have been the number of which it consisted, during the most flourishing period of the republic): And hence, in the words of Sueton, that emperor restored it “admodum pristinum et splendorem” ‡.

The ancient republic of Marseilles was particularly famous for a wise and well-constituted government; and among other

* Alex. ab. Alex. vol. i. p. 1009.

† Chapman on the Roman Senate.

‡ Suet. Octav. c. xxxv.

particulars handed down to us respecting that state, we are informed that it also boasted of having 600 senators *.

At Venice also, the sons of the nobility, since the year 1289, are nobles, and form what is called there the Great Council. The number of those capacitated by age to be the members of it, in general amounted to 12 or 1300; but as one half of them reside in other places, that council also is usually composed of about 600 members †.

At Genoa also, from 6 to 700 public councillors are entrusted with the government of the state ‡.

But if, in other free and well-governed states, such a number as 600 senators was not considered to be too numerous a body

* Alex. ab. Alexan. vol. i. p. 1009.

† See Addison's Travels, p. 63, 64. Miffon's Travels, vol. ii. p. 476 & 477.

‡ Miffon's Travels, vol. iii. p. 270 & 375.

At Cretona there were 1000 senators. See Bayle's Dict. vol. ili. p. 614. Note G. article Pythagoras.

for the purposes of serious investigation, far less is there any reason to consider that as an objection in this country; the commons of Great Britain not being composed of the citizens of one particular town, but of individuals sent from every district of an extensive kingdom, however distant and remote. Their attendance, therefore, cannot be so regular, nor consequently their number so inconvenient, as if they were constant inhabitants of that town in which the council assembled; more especially as the house has ever consisted of persons engaged in a variety of different professions, who are often busied about their own private affairs, and are not very urgently or frequently compelled to attendance in parliament.

Before the question of number is dismissed, it may be proper to remark, that when, with a view of putting an end to the troubles in America, it was proposed to admit the inhabitants of that country to a share in the parliament of Great Britain, that the idea was countenanced by that able statesman Mr. Grenville, who was no friend to
rash

rash and dangerous innovations *. It is certain, that a considerable number of American representatives must have been admitted into the house of commons; and as no objection was urged at that time on the ground of number, no reason can be given why it should be made a handle of on the present occasion.

In the second place, it may be objected, that such an addition would not sufficiently reduce the influence of the crown in parliament, which undoubtedly at this time is the great object of all constitutional innovations. But before it is attempted to remove this objection, it will be necessary to explain the specific nature of the alterations that are proposed.

The representatives of the people in parliament, are either sent by the different

* See particularly the Present State of the Nation, either written by him, or under his immediate direction, 2d edit. p. 80, &c. where, among other things, this respectable senator observes, that the number of electors has become too small in proportion to the whole people.

towns and boroughs, or by the different counties in the kingdom; and though, for many reasons, the representatives of the landed property in the kingdom (which the county members only can properly be accounted) ought to have at least an equal share in the third branch of the legislature, and actually had about one third in the reign of Henry the Sixth, yet now 128 out of 558 members is the whole number they can boast of, including the counties in Wales and Scotland, and the members for the two universities. If, therefore, any increase is to be made to the present number of representatives, they ought surely to be distributed among the different shires in the kingdom, and the two cities of London and Westminster, whose population and wealth seem to entitle them to an addition of two members each.

It has been urged by some, if any alteration were to take place, that it would be necessary to attend very particularly to the interest of the great manufacturing towns of Manchester, Birmingham, &c. From whatever the author has seen of parliament, he is
 inclined

inclined to be of a very different opinion. He has uniformly observed almost every member of the house willing to support any reasonable plan that could be suggested, for the advantage of our commercial or manufacturing interests ; and in every question in which the towns of Manchester and of Birmingham were concerned, the members for the counties of Lancaster and of Warwick, were as eager and zealous in the matter, as if their only constituents had been in those towns. The interference of county members must always have more weight with the house, than the representatives of any town, however respectable : and as the members for the county would not consider themselves under any great obligation to attend to the interest of a place that had others more particularly connected with it, it is probable that the towns in question would rather lose than gain by the alteration ; nor could it be of any advantage to them to have their industry even occasionally disturbed, by the tumults of an election.

If the addition that is proposed were not confined to the counties and to the capital,

it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to determine with propriety, among the different pretensions of those towns, which would put in their claim for a share in the legislature; some pleading their having no representatives; others, that they had not their proportion; some arguing from their wealth, others from their population, and perhaps some from their antiquity. Whereas, in fact, as the wealthiest citizens of all great towns are possessed of votes in the neighbouring counties, with the increase of county representatives, the influence of those towns in parliament must necessarily be augmented.

The wealth and number of inhabitants in the two counties of Yorkshire and Middlesex, seem to entitle them to two additional representatives each, as well as London and Westminster. The remaining 42 members might be given at the rate of one each to those counties in England and Wales, by whom the land tax is paid in the greatest proportion. Some difference undoubtedly there is between various counties in respect to size, opulence and population. But it is impossible to enter minutely into such di-

D

stinctions,

stinctions, nor can it be of material consequence to the public, or indeed to any particular county, whether it sends its exact proportion to parliament. The great object being that an addition should be made to the present representatives of the people, consisting of a description of men, who would not probably come into parliament with views meerly of ambition, or of personal advantage.

The following sketch will at one glance explain to the reader to what counties it is proper that an addition of one representative should be given; and if it should be the opinion of the house that Essex, Kent, Norfolk, &c. should have two members, what counties must be cut off in consequence of such an alteration.

Counties.			Land Tax.
Essex	—	—	£.89,390
Kent	—	—	86,553
Norfolk	—	—	84,306
Devonshire	-	—	82,583
Suffolk	—	—	73,506
Lincolnshire	-	—	71,907
			Somer-

Counties.		Land Tax.
Somerſetſhire	- —	70,473
Surrey	— —	66,132
Suffex	— —	60,091
Wiltſhire	- —	51,657
Southamptonſhire	— —	49,359
Northamptonſhire	— —	47,660
Bucks	— —	47,142
Glouceſterſhire	— —	45,942
Hertfordſhire	— —	42,371
Berks	- —	40,843
Warwickſhire	— —	39,789
Oxfordſhire	- —	35,651
Leiceſterſhire	— —	34,685
Worceſterſhire	— —	33,582
Dorſetſhire	- —	33,071
Cambridgeſhire	— —	32,732
Cornwall	- —	31,943
Shropſhire	- —	29,056
Cheshire	- —	28,598
Bedfordſhire	- —	28,554
Nottinghamſhire	— —	27,276
Staffordſhire	- —	27,120
Derbyſhire	- —	24,993
Lancashire	- —	20,989
Herefordſhire	- —	20,409
Huntingdonſhire	— —	15,497
	D 2	Northum-

Counties.		Land Tax.
Northumberland	—	14,548
Durham	— —	10,597
Monmouthshire	—	9,812
Glamorganshire	—	7,906
Denbigh	— —	6,800
Montgomery	—	5,852
Rutland	— —	5,525
Cumberland	—	3,713
Pembroke	- —	3,172
Westmoreland	—	3,045

It has been already stated, that if fifty were to be added to the different representatives in England, that an addition of 5 must be given to the northern part of the island, of which 3 would indisputably fall to the share of certain counties in that part of the kingdom who, contrary to every principle of this constitution, are only represented every second parliament. The city of Glasgow, the magnitude of whose trade is well known, and which, unlike Birmingham and Manchester, at present goes through all the forms of election, (in consequence of the privilege which it enjoys in connection with three other boroughs of sending

fending a member to parliament) is well entitled to a representative for itself, and no one probably will object to the Universities of Scotland having one representative in the great council of the nation *.

Having thus explained the particulars of the proposed plan, it may be observed, that any one who candidly considers the history of parliament for some years past must be sensible, that if such a body had been added to the representatives of the people some years ago, in all probability a great share of the misfortunes which this country has experienced would have been prevented: for it cannot be supposed that a parliament so

* It may not be improper to take this opportunity of remarking, that very unreasonable prejudices are entertained in England respecting the share which Scotland enjoys in the legislature. It is said that Scotland ought to have members and peers in parliament in proportion only to the land tax which it pays, as if men were not every bit as necessary for a state as money, and as if it were of no advantage to England to have its sister kingdom a friend and not a foe. The proper reply to such reasoning is, look to Holland, and there you will see that Overijssel has an equal share with the province of Holland in the general assembly of the States, though the first contributes at the rate of 35,711, whilst the other pays no less a sum than 583,090 guilders. See Williams's North. Gov. Vol. i. p. 61, 63.

constituted

constituted would have suffered the fatal inactivity of the late ministers at the commencement of the American dispute, or the series of accumulated blunders, by which the prosecution of it was distinguished. Had such an alteration also taken place, the contest between the two political parties would have been much sooner brought to a decision. It is well known that the late administration was nearly overturned in consequence of the success which attended the memorable motion made on the 5th of April, 1779, respecting the influence of the crown: And if one can judge how additional representatives for counties would have voted from the manner in which those who were sent actually did vote, that motion must have been carried by a still greater majority. Nay, there is reason to imagine, that the change in his majesty's councils would have taken place much sooner even in this parliament, had the plan in question existed some time ago. On Sir James Lowther's motion, on the 12th of December, 1781, there were present 68 members, to whose places of representation the 50 additional members in England would probably be given.

given. Of these 54 voted for Sir James Lowther's motion, and only 14 against it: to reason, therefore, from analogy, it may be said, that of the 50 that would have been added, in all probability, one-fifth would have voted against the motion, and the remaining four-fifths for it. The addition of 40 members to the one side, and of only 10 to the other, would undoubtedly have ended the contest before the Christmas holidays*. Without entering at all into any comparison between the two parties, either in respect of ability or of zeal for the public service, it will probably be allowed, that since a change was to take place in his majesty's councils, it has proved unfortunate in the event that it was not sooner effected, whilst the principles of conciliation which one party professed had some chance of being successful, and before the feeble and irritating exertions of the other had totally estranged America

* Far less would the same addition have prevented the success of General Conway's motion on the 27th of Feb. 1782. There were present then 78 members in the predicament above stated, of which 68 voted for the motion, and only 12 against it: by the same mode of reasoning, therefore, the motion would have been carried by a still greater majority than it actually was.

from us, and incorporated her with our neighbours. At any rate, it would be difficult to prove, had such a plan been established, that our present situation could have been worse.

There being therefore ample grounds to imagine that such an addition would be a sufficient check upon any inordinate influence of the crown, it is also probable that it would be attended with this advantage, namely, that of preventing unreasonable, dangerous or interested factions in the state : a violent spirit of party, which is too apt to degenerate into faction, would be not a little checked by the superintendance of 55 additional senators, who, in all probability, would not enlist under the banners of either the minister or of his opponents. Indeed, with the uncertainty what part they would take, it would be in vain to think of acquiring consequence by forming a party of 50 or even 100 members, when the whole assembly consisted of 600 ; many of whom would not constantly attend their place in parliament, and consequently, whose tempers and dispositions could not possibly be known ;

known: Whereas, if any system apparently dangerous was pursued, which it was necessary for the nation at large to check and to controul, it would scarcely be possible, by any arts or influence, to secure a majority of so large an assembly so admirably constituted.

Another material advantage attending such an addition to the number of members is, that a seat in parliament would not become, in an interested view, of such consequence to any individual; and that the house would probably for the future consist of only two descriptions of men; one of which would be determined never to accept of any office under the crown; and the other anxious, by a painful and laborious attention to public affairs, to qualify themselves for public employments: not to omit mentioning, that until the efficacy of this remedy was fairly tried, the warmest friends to annual or triennial parliaments would not think it necessary to propose again to have recourse to such dangerous experiments.

The more that county members also are increased, the greater reason will there be to expect, that a general spirit of improvement will prevail in the country at large. Those who are possessed of considerable landed estates, are every day residing more and more in the capital, or in little villas in its neighbourhood; and the country would be almost totally deserted by individuals of that description, were it not that many are desirous of preserving the interest of their respective families, in the different districts they are connected with. The more that county members, therefore, are increased, the greater inducement will there be for a number of wealthy and opulent people to reside, at least occasionally, in the country, to spend a larger proportion of their income there, and to pay greater attention to the cultivation and the improvement of their estates; and of whatever importance commerce and manufactures are deservedly esteemed, yet agriculture ought to be accounted the real basis of public prosperity.

I know that many urge it as an objection to any increase of county representatives,
that

that it will tend to augment the power of the peerage in the house of commons, which they imagine is already too great. Of all the objections to such a measure, this seems to have the least foundation. It is well known, that during the late contest, a large majority of the house of peers were attached to Lord North's administration; and yet, on General Conway's motion on the 27th of February last, of 78 county members who voted on that occasion, only 12 are supposed to have given their voice in favour of the minister. Aristocratical influence may possibly prevail in some particular counties, but the evil is far from being general; nor indeed would there be great reason to lament, that the *opinion* of any respectable individual, who wisely and liberally expended his annual income in a manner which entitled him to the esteem and confidence of his neighbours, should have some weight in the district where he resides.

Lastly, though such an addition will naturally diminish the importance of each individual in parliament, yet at the same time it will not only render the house itself a

more respectable assembly, but will also enable it to judge more fully regarding the wishes of its constituents, and the interests of the public. We are told of the Roman senate, that Sylla, finding its influence had become inconsiderable, in consequence of the smallness of its number, reduced by proscriptions and civil wars, found it necessary to make an addition of 300 senators at once* ; and if the number was not found inconvenient, we have reason to believe, from the opinion which Aristotle has given, as well as from higher authority, that a multitude of councillors is not inconsistent with the safety of a state. As the able statesman and philosopher alluded to well observes, since public suppers exceed those which are given at one person's private expence, so many, when joined together, are better qualified for supreme power than a few ; for though not one of the multitude assembled together may be fit for power himself, yet every individual of which it is composed, brings in his share of wisdom and ability †.

* See Chapman on the Roman Senate.

† Polit. lib. iii. c. 11.

If, in consequence of these, and of other reasons which will naturally occur to the reader, the addition above proposed to the present representatives of the people, should be thought a desirable measure, the proper mode of discovering the sense of parliament respecting it, would be, to move a resolution in the house of commons, to the following purport.

“ RESOLVED, That it is the opinion of
 “ this house, that an addition to the present
 “ number of the representatives of the peo-
 “ ple, not exceeding fifty for that part of
 “ Great Britain called England (including
 “ the principality of Wales), and of five for
 “ that part of Great Britain called Scotland,
 “ is a measure expedient in itself, and ne-
 “ cessary to be adopted at this time, as a
 “ means of rendering the representation of
 “ the people more complete, and of enabling
 “ parliament more fully to know the sense
 “ and wishes of its constituents.”

By moving a specific proposition, the greater part of those objections which were made to the appointment of a committee

for inquiring into the present state of the representation of the people, would be done away: and surely if any plan, entitled to meet with the approbation of the house, could at once be proposed, it would be better than entering into that *mare magnum*, which a certain learned lord so ably and vehemently opposed.

But probably this measure would not of itself be sufficient to satisfy the wishes of the people. To make the constitution sufficiently perfect, it would be necessary gradually to alter the strange and absurd manner in which the representatives of the different boroughs in the kingdom are generally chosen, and occasionally to increase the number of voters in such places, as has been done in the cases of Shoreham and of Cricklade. As such alterations, however, ought to be gradually effected; at least, as some objections might be made to infringe upon established franchises, without proof of their being improperly made use of; it might be sufficient to have the following order added to the standing orders of the house.

“ ORDERED, That such committees as
 “ are appointed to consider petitions respect-
 “ ing any controverted borough election,
 “ shall in future inquire into the mode of
 “ election in the place to which the petition
 “ relates ; and shall report the same, with
 “ their opinions thereupon, to the house.”

No member of the house, who has ever sat on such a committee, will object to this important point being fully ascertained by the express orders of the house.

Such is the plan of reform, which the author of this tract ventures to recommend to the attention of parliament, and of the public. It is unnecessary, however, for him to come to any resolution with regard to making the motions above-mentioned, until it is known what steps are intended to be taken by administration in general ; and in particular, by that respectable senator, who has taken the lead in questions of this nature. The first motion respecting an increase of members, seems to belong to that right honourable person almost by hereditary right ; and no man can be less desirous of prevent-

preventing such an important undertaking from being continued in the hands of one, so peculiarly well qualified for carrying it through with success.

Various reasons, however, may be assigned, why no time should be lost in taking the sense of parliament respecting such a reform; and why the present ought to be accounted the happy moment, that is likely to be crowned with the greatest blessing that this country can desire.

The character of the sovereign now upon the throne, and the certainty that no just and reasonable plan, for the purpose of improving the constitution, will receive any obstruction or discountenance from him, is a circumstance which, were it at all necessary, the author could dwell upon with pleasure. Indeed a monarch possessed of his experience and good sense must be sensible, that any improper influence of the crown in parliament, can never be truly advantageous to the person who possesses that dignity: for no enterprize worthy a great king can be successfully attempted, however much sanc-
tioned

tioned by parliament, if it is undertaken in opposition to the general sense and wishes of the people.

Such a plan also is certain of every assistance that can be required, from the members of the present administration. They have pledged themselves to support some measure of that nature, with all their talents and authority; and their weight in parliament, though great from the magnitude of the first, cannot be diminished by the possession of the latter.

The present temper of the members of the house of commons, affords much reason to imagine, that the plan above proposed would meet with the general approbation of that assembly. Their minds seem to be at last open to the necessity of such a step; and as it is a matter in which that house alone is concerned, it is rather improbable that it could possibly meet with any successful opposition in the upper house of parliament.

As to the people at large, if the plan above stated were to succeed, all parties
 F among

among them, whatever their opinions might be respecting constitutional reforms, would probably be satisfied. The friends to innovation would be happy that they have gained so much; its foes, that they have lost so little.

The author cannot conclude, without earnestly entreating those whose business it is more peculiarly to watch over the safety and interest of the public, not to consider this as a matter which may be trifled with, or laid aside. The general principles of civil liberty are at present well known in almost every corner of the kingdom. The necessity of adopting some constitutional reform, is an idea prevalent throughout the nation; and, in particular, pervades the best and most industrious part of the community. Our ministers and others, therefore, may be assured, that if something is not done to satisfy the people that their ancient government is restored, no penal statutes will be sufficient to retain them within the circle of this island: they will migrate; America will open, with expanded arms, an asylum for

for their reception; and the peace that must soon take place, will prove more destructive to the wealth, the industry, and the population of Great Britain, than the fatal war, the existence of which we had such ample grounds to mourn over, and to lament.

A P P E N D I X.

A VERY ingenious author having done me the honour of writing an answer to the plan of reform formerly submitted to the public, in a tract which he has entitled “ A Letter to the Author of the Lucubrations during a short Recess,” it would be extremely improper to publish any other performance upon the same subject, without paying attention to the observations which he has made; particularly as he has fallen into some mistakes, respecting the principles which he ascribes to me; and as there are certain points, in which I must still take the liberty of differing from him.

He begins with an observation (Letter, p. 5) and indeed is perpetually recurring to it, that the principle on which the plan alluded to is founded, was that of equal representation. Nay we are told (p. 6) that it is obvious “ that the principle of equal representation *is the only one* applied to “ that reform:” whereas such an idea never
 entered

entered into the author's thoughts. He was indeed desirous of seeing a plan of representation MORE COMPLETE than it is at present; but he was far from carrying his ideas to that summit of theoretical purity, for which other writers are more entitled to be attacked, if they are to blame, to whom indeed the greater part of the reasoning contained in this Letter more particularly applies.

But it may be asked, If you do not proceed on the principles of equal representation, how comes it to pass that you propose to annihilate in part, or in whole, those boroughs only which elect their members by the fewest number of voters?

The principal reason which led the author to pursue that line, was this, that no borough could suffer amputation, without some violence being done to the rights, the franchises, and the interests of the electors in the borough; consequently, the fewer voters there were in any disfranchised borough, on the rights of fewer citizens any infringement would be made: and as compensation was proposed to be given them,

for the privileges of which they were deprived, it was much easier to divide such compensation among a small, than among a numerous body. Besides, the real or supposed number of voters is far from being the only principle of the plan contained in the *Lucubrations*: for in p. 35 it is observed, that either total non-existence (by which is meant, almost a complete want of electors) or the county in which any borough is situated having an undue proportion in the legislature; are the only two just grounds for cutting off the entire franchises of a borough; and p. 34, that those boroughs only are proposed to be annihilated, which are either the most insignificant in themselves, or have been the most recently invested with parliamentary privileges. Nay Winchester, Salisbury, Andover, &c. though their representatives are elected by very few voters, are expressly excepted, in consequence of their being towns of considerable size; and consequently entitled, from their wealth, population, &c. to a share in the legislature. The principle of equal representation, therefore, in the plan contained in the *Lucubrations*, was so combined and interwoven with others so capable of correcting

recting its defects, that it cannot justly be accounted the single pillar on which that fabric was reared.

It may not be improper to take this opportunity of remarking, that the writer in question seems to entertain an erroneous opinion, when he asserts (p. 6) “ that the
 “ privilege of sending members to parlia-
 “ ment, conferred at different times upon
 “ cities and boroughs, can never be confi-
 “ dered but as local privileges, upon the
 “ same footing with other privileges and
 “ immunities, which were varied in their
 “ circumstances, at the good pleasure of the
 “ prince who granted them”. That the sovereign did assume the right of granting parliamentary privileges to particular places, is too well known to be denied : but there is a clause in an act of parliament, in the reign of that arbitrary monarch Henry the Eighth, which is worth reciting ; not only as it proves that the king was not entitled to make any innovation in the rights of boroughs, in virtue of his own prerogative (as is commonly imagined) or indeed legally to grant new privileges of that nature ; but also as it forms a very singular and impor-
 tant

tant precedent of parliament disfranchising boroughs, when substantial reasons occurred for taking such a measure. The clause alluded to is to the following purport.

“ Provided always, and be it enacted by
 “ the authority aforesaid, that forasmuch as
 “ there be divers and many small boroughs
 “ and towns corporate within the said do-
 “ minion of Wales, whereof many have
 “ their commencement by grants from the
 “ lords marchers, and some by other means,
 “ our said sovereign lord shall from henceforth,
 “ *by virtue of his act*, have full power and
 “ authority, by his letters patent, to be en-
 “ rolled in his grace’s high court of chan-
 “ cery, at any time within seven years here-
 “ after next ensuing, to the end of this pre-
 “ sent parliament, *to repel, annihilate and*
 “ *dissolve* such and as many of the said bo-
 “ roughs and towns corporate, and all liber-
 “ ties and customs of the same, as to his
 “ highness shall be thought expedient, to
 “ the intent his majesty, at his grace’s plea-
 “ sure, may duly erect, ordain, and make
 “ such and as many other boroughs and
 “ towns corporate within the said dominion,
 “ being more apt and convenient for that
 “ purpose,

“ purpose, and to endue them with such
 “ liberties and franchises as to his most ex-
 “ cellent wisdom shall be thought necessary
 “ for the wealth of the said country *.”

The well-known cases also of the counties of Chester and Monmouth, and of the different shires in the principality of Wales, fully proves that in the reign of Henry VIII. this principle was sufficiently understood, namely, that each district had a right to send, if not a precise and accurate proportion of representatives to parliament, yet undoubtedly a share nearly equal to what it could reasonably expect †. From these instances

* Thirty-fourth of Henry VIII. c. 26, § 27. Thus it appears that it was only *in virtue of this act* that the crown was entitled to grant borough franchises and liberties in Wales.

† It will appear from the following state in what manner the different counties in England were represented in the reign of Edward I. and the additions which have been since made.

	Original number.	Added since.	Total.
Bedfordshire	4	—	4
Berks	6	3	9
Bucks	4	10	14
Cambridge	4	2	6
	G		Cornwall

stances also it appears, whatever powers the crown might assume, that it was reckoned the

	Original number.	Added since.	Total.
Cornwall	14	30	44
Cumberland	4	2	6
Derby	4	—	4
Devonshire	12	14	26
Dorsetshire	12	8	20
Essex	4	4	8
Gloucester	4	4	8
Hereford	6	2	8
Hertford	2	4	6
Huntingdon	4	—	4
Kent	6	12	18
Lancashire	2	12	14
Leicestershire	4	—	4
Lincoln	6	6	12
Middlesex	6	2	8
Norfolk	8	4	12
Northamptonshire	4	5	9
Northumberland	4	4	8
Nottinghamshire	4	4	8
Oxford	4	5	9
Rutland	2	—	2
Shropshire	6	6	12
Somerfetshire	12	6	18
Southamptonshire	8	18	26
Staffordshire	4	6	10
Suffolk	6	10	16
Surrey	10	4	14
Suffex	16	12	28
Warwick	4	2	6
Westmoreland	4	—	4

Wiltshire

the safest line to apply to the legislature in general for the grant of parliamentary privileges.

How then, it may be said, do you account for the prerogative assumed by the sovereign, and acquiesced in by parliament, and by the people, of granting legislative privileges to any place which the crown thought proper.

The fact seems to have been, that the assumed prerogative of the crown in this particular having originally been exercised in a very cautious manner, could give very little offence, and therefore remained uncontrouled by the desultory parliaments that were assembled in former times; for which, among other reasons, this may be assigned, that though it was a privilege which many places were desirous of possessing, yet it was

	Original number.	Added since.	Total.
Wiltshire	22	12	34
Worcester	4	5	9
Yorkshire	6	24	30

Chester, Durham and Monmouth, had then no representatives in the English parliament. This table is drawn up to prove that in the reign of Edward I. the representation was not so unequal as it is at present, Yorkshire and Lancashire only excepted.

in fact of a burdensome nature. It was imagined, therefore, however desirous the crown might be of extending it for its own purposes, that the evil, in consequence of the expence attending it, must check itself.

It is impossible to omit observing what an ungenerous advantage is taken by those who are desirous of degrading the antiquity and the power of parliaments, of some instances which formerly occurred of boroughs having been inclined to divest themselves of their parliamentary privileges. From this circumstance it is pretended that parliaments in former times had little weight in the government of the state. Whereas those privileges were considered to be of such essential importance, that for one borough that wished to be exempted, it will be found that many were anxious to enjoy so inestimable a right, and when they were either accidentally or purposely neglected (as in the well-known case of the borough of St. Alban's) insisted legally for redress.

I must differ also from the sentiment which this writer seems to entertain respecting
ing

ing the consequences which would probably result from annihilating the parliamentary privileges of certain boroughs to the amount of one hundred representatives. In consequence of such a reform, the crown would doubtless be freed from the weight of some boroughs which have lately been employed to give consistency and firmness to the opposition which it has received. But the consequence of always having a firm and steady phalanx to resist the measures of the crown, whether right or wrong, is, that a just and reasonable opposition will find the people become every day less inclined to support it. Whereas, were oppositions never to arise without good grounds; were they never to display their banners but in cases of urgent necessity; were they founded not upon that firmness and consistency which depends solely upon parliamentary interest, but upon the confidence which the people at large have placed in great and illustrious characters, (such an opposition I mean as last war put the late Earl of Chatham at the head of our affairs) how is it possible to suppose that an opposition of this kind could ever prove unsuccessful; more especially, if the

the

the plan alluded to were to take place: for the boroughs over which the crown has an influence must always suffer more by the pruning knife of any political amputator, than those in which respectable individuals, and their families, are supposed to enjoy a permanent, or what is called a natural interest.

If such boroughs, however, are permitted to continue in their present state, is it not natural to apprehend, that in a country so prone to luxury and expence as England has become, that it will not always be a just observation in respect to them, that they give consistency and firmness to the spirit of independance. Already are they considered as a species of property, and as such have been included in the rent-roll of an estate; their value and price in the market has been exactly ascertained, and having once become a marketable commodity, why may not the crown become the purchaser as well as a subject *. In that case, we shall feel all their inconveniencies without one single ad-

* It is a point indeed pretty generally understood, that the crown has already put itself to no inconsiderable expence in purchasing a dictatorial authority over some boroughs. A plan which might very easily be extended.

vantage. Without even the consolation of such splendid talents, as they have formerly transmitted to parliament, whose lustre has cheered many a gloomy theorist, brooding over the calamities that must befall a country, one half of whose legislature can only boast of a few villagers for their constituents.

Nay, if these boroughs continue in their present state, and are preserved as a kind of hot-bed or nursery for the production of parliamentary abilities, yet it is possible that our posterity will have little reason to rejoice at the tenderness we display. If many men of genius are sent from them, is it not too probable that they will quarrel about the share which each of them ought to have in the government of the state, that they will range themselves into different parties, that each will aim by the common arts of a demagogue to acquire power and popularity to himself, and that the nation, distracted by the folly and madness of those who represent it, will not regret much the downfall of a system of government so prone to confusion. The display of great eloquence, and of great abilities, on so distinguished a theatre as the senate of a powerful nation,

may for some time entertain the people; but they must soon grow weary of an amusement, which experience has uniformly proved, the certain harbinger, of private misery, and of public disasters.

The perusal of this Letter has certainly given rise to a variety of other thoughts, with which, however, I am not inclined to trouble either the author or the public; the sentiments of both are now stated before a very impartial tribunal, though still of opinion, that such a plan of reform as is sketched out in the *Lucubrations* already alluded to, might be safely adopted, yet, like him, I am desirous, if *a still safer remedy*, that will satisfy the wishes of the people, can be carried into execution, to try how far it will be effectual. The time is certainly at last arrived, when it is necessary that *something should be done*; nor is it every slight prescription that will renovate the vigour of a constitution, sinking under the weight of the most dangerous maladies to which it can be subjected.

F I N I S,

1797

70793

