



Quare the Plans of our delighful Peace, Unwarp'd by Party Rage to livelike Brothers.

Mr. PITT'S Administration.

The following Speech of Sir Francis Burdett, lately delivered in the British House of Commons, on the motion for an enquiry into the conduct of Mr. Pitt's administration, is so spirited, and contains so full a display of the abuses of the British government, and consequently evinces so strongly the necessity of a reform, that we suppose it will prove acceptable to our readers.

SIR F. BURDETT rose to bring forward his promised motion to enquire into the conduct of the late administration, and spoke in substance nearly as follows:

The time is at length arrived, when, laying aside conjectures and uncertainty, we may be enabled to form a just estimate of the professions, principles, and conduct of the men who have for many years past exercised the powers of government in this country. Now, I suppose we may be permitted to make the national accounts of blood and treasure, and shew to the nation at large what has been received by this country, in return for the dreadful expenditure of both. It is now our duty to take a retrospect of the conduct of ministers, and of the various and varying objects pretended by them for engaging us in the late war, and afterwards for continuing the contest. But above all, it is our duty to fix our attention on the many material and mischievous alterations, which, by their suggestions and influence, have been made in our laws, and on the manifold and monstrous acts of aggression of these ministers on the free constitution of the country; and on the palpable and open war which they have carried on against the rights, the property, the peace, the domestic security of the people.

In taking this retrospect, which I shall propose, the origin of the war, so repeatedly discussed within these walls, and agitated without, will naturally present itself first to our enquiry; and although it has been in other parliaments decided by ministers and their corrupt adherents, that the war was just and unavoidable in its commencement, and necessary in its prosecution, yet we may now be allowed to appeal from decisions obtained by falsehood and delusion, to the sober judgement of this house. Now, that the issue of all is before us, and the gross frauds, falsehoods, and artifices of the minister, made manifest to the whole world.

Sir, these false and arrogant assertions and predictions, uniformly contradicted by experience, which have brought this country into its present perilous condition; though they were not, in my opinion, at that time sufficient grounds for confidence in these men, are yet undoubtedly now, good parliamentary grounds of enquiry into the conduct of these false prophets and impostors.

As the minister deluded former parliaments into supporting him in the war, by pretending objects, all of which have been yielded by the peace; and as he now contends, for the honour and safety of the country, so did he no less strangely delude them by corrupt means, to support him in subverting the constitution, under the pretence of resisting innovation and change.

The fundamental laws of the land have been altered, every constitutional landmark removed, all has been taken away, except abuses and corruptions, which have been shamefully augmented, in the midst of general and national distress.

tracy, the militia, the bank, the city of London, the East-Indies, the West-Indies, Scotland, Ireland, the condition of the people at large; all has been totally changed, under the pretence of resisting innovation and change.

To effect this change was the real and ultimate object of the war. "My founding steps" thought he, "will not be heard amidst the din of war." It was against the liberties and property, the laws and constitution, manners, customs, habits, and characters of Englishmen, that ministers contended. To reduce them to the condition of Russian serfs, was their design. And in this war, it must be confessed, their success has been as complete as their failure and disappointment abroad.

The detail of their foreign failures and defeats I omit, because they are notorious to the whole world, and because I wish to fix the attention of this house, and of this country, upon their infinitely more important and more calamitous victories and triumphs.

The liberty of the press has been violated by laying printers and publishers under new and unconstitutional restraints, placing them entirely at the mercy of government. He must be a bold man who will venture to put pen to paper, especially since the punishment of libel has been altered, and a second conviction made transportation to Botany Bay.

Libel is the easiest of all charges to be brought against any man. A man deaf and dumb, who can neither read nor write, may be guilty of a libel. A sign-post is a libel; a scarecrow set up in a garden is a libel; the motions of our fingers and hands are libels.

The judges have been made dependent on the crown for salaries upon retiring from office.

Star-chamber sentences have been pronounced for the most trifling political offences.

Men convicted of libel have had sentences suspended over their heads for years, and let fall to crush them when they became obnoxious to ministers.

The judges have been in the habit of remanding to prison convicted persons, to be brought up for trial at a distant day.

A new trial has been granted for the first time, in a criminal case.

The freedom of speech has been violated; and above fifty persons forbid to meet to discuss political grievances, under penalty of death by military execution.

Trial by jury has, in multiplied instances, been taken away; in almost all where taxes are concerned, and where the dispute being for property between the subject and the crown, there is most need of its protection; and the arbitrary jurisdiction of commissioners and justices substituted in its stead.

The income tax created an inquisitorial power of the most partial, offensive, and cruel nature; the whole transactions of a life may be enquired into, family secrets laid open, and an Englishman summoned like a culprit, to attend commissioners, compelled to wait like a lacquey in their antichamber, from day to day, until they are ready to institute their inquiry into his property; put to his oath; after all perhaps disbelieved, insulted, surcharged, and stigmatized as perjurer, without any redress from, or appeal to a jury of his country.

And it is worth remarking, that a little before the introduction of this unparalleled scheme of plunder, the law of perjury was altered, and the punishment made transportation to Botany Bay.

Sir, the repeal of this tax is not a sufficient remedy for its infamy; its principle must be stigmatized and branded.

Landed property has been confiscated to an immense amount, under the specious name of a sale of the land tax? But what is the meaning of selling a tax? What is a tax? A tax is no property; what has man purchased by it? Nothing, but the probability of an additional tax. Having purchased this, a new tax will be sold, which in its turn may be sold, as they call it, that is the landed proprietor may be called on to advance sixteen, or seventeen

or eighteen years taxes a once, and if he refuses to be so base, deluded, and perjured, as to purchase his own property, the government puts in a co-proprietor with him, having a prior claim upon his estate. A new land tax will then be sold; this may again be sold, and new proprietors put upon him, to take in a course of years, by the simple operation of what is called the sale of the land tax, a gentleman of landed property may find himself in possession of nothing of his own estate, but the title deeds.

Add to this the innumerable, wanton, harassing, and disproportionate penalties to enforce this overgrown system of taxation, converting England into an excise office, and one part of the people to fies and informers to prey upon the other.

The whole practice relating to custom has been changed, about which the wise and humane spirit of the old law of England was so scrupulously nice; because upon that chiefly depends all the protection we can afford to those, at best, ill-protected and unfortunate creatures, prisoners; who, even with all that precaution, must inevitably be left too much to the discretion of gaolers. Now, however, all protection is withdrawn, close custody and the despotic practice of changing from one custody to another, and of sending men to be imprisoned in distant places (one of the heaviest grievances complained of under the Stuarts) are reintroduced, contrary to the most sacred fundamental laws of the constitution.

The treason laws too have been altered, because the old law of Edward III. was too clear and distinct. They were hanging traitors, who could not avoid the operation of a law so well understood. Therefore they made new laws to enlarge and entrap men's lives, and introducing the horrible, atrocious doctrine of construction and complicated treason. Meetings for parliamentary reform may be construed treason; Under the old law they tried it without effect; it was too plain, and former wicked attempts had been worn out by adjudication. Therefore, said Ministers, we must have laws, under which there have been no decisions, where the judge may range with discretion, wide as his conscience will permit; where there are no legal landmarks, no boundaries to restrict or control; then we shall see who will dare to complain of any grievances; or even hint at a reform. And whilst they make new laws, introducing these doctrines of constructive treason, they also make judges who are to construe them, dependent upon the crown for large salaries when they retire from office.

It was an accusation brought against Calveley, that he wrote his laws so small, and hung them up so high, that he people could not read them. But our ministers go much farther; they make laws which every one can read, but no man can understand.

They have erected battles, and have chosen their military posts, and encircled the land with barracks.

They have upon all occasions called in the military force, and neglected and degraded the civil power in the hands of citizens.

They have organized a system of spies undermining the morality, corrupting the integrity of the nation; poisoning every source of social happiness, destroying all confidence between man and man, and thus have they triumphed over the manners, habits, customs, and character of Englishmen.

They have contrived to destroy all sense of shame and honour amongst public men, so that the people can no longer place any dependence upon professions ever so public; for the time man who is loud in professions of patriotism and reform to day, shall have no longer the slightest difficulty to recant tomorrow, leaving his most solemn pledges to the public, and his pawned honour unredeemed, with only modestly confessing, that a day be a grown wiser than he was yesterday. So that all the ties of honest fellowship are dissolved, private

honour, private friendship, public principle, all borne away by the overwhelming tide of corruption, which sets full in for despotism at home, which must assuredly produce final destruction from abroad.

But our ministers have not only taken away the old laws of the land and substituted new ones, in violation of every principle of the constitution, but have transgressed even these, and acted, to use their own expression, with a vigour beyond the law. They have new modelled the police, upon the plan of the old despotism of France. They have created a lieutenant de police, with an immense salary, under the title of third secretary of state. They have selected the lowest and the meanest creatures for the sacred authority of the magistrary, needy men, depending upon persons for bread; and having extended the power of these men beyond all former bounds, they have placed their secret dungeons under the direction and management of these pensioned justices.

They have, without even the form of the previous consent of parliament, bringing thereby this house into contempt and degradation, sent the money of the people out, and brought German mercenaries into the kingdom, rightly judging them finer instruments than English for their designs.

Year after year have they suspended the habeas corpus act, and thus armed, they have issued general warrants, arrested indiscriminately, and then selected such persons, not as they had information against, but as they suspected they should be able to extort information from. Knowing what they deserved, they could not but believe all men were conspiring against them.

Having chosen their victims, they commenced their inquisitions; the proceeds of which was varied, according to the supposed temper and disposition of the prisoner. Some were loaded with irons, and plunged at once into all the horrors of the Cold Bath-fields. Others underwent a different treatment; they were sent to Messinger's houses, where they were indulged with food and fire, and comfortably lodged; the messengers's business being to pump his prisoner, and perpetually to present to them the terrors of Cold Bath-fields and Governor Aris, hoping, good naturedly, that he might escape them by giving information, as they termed it, *ginging out*. In this state of preparation the prisoner was brought up to be examined, when the first question asked by the dignified magistrate who presided at these inquisitorial proceedings, was in the cant phrase of a thief-taker, whether the prisoner would *ging out* or not? Most of these unfortunate men having no long gratifying to the ear of the worthy magistrate, and preferring cold and hunger to giving half information, were then sent to Cold Bath-fields, and recommended to the care of Governor Aris. This perhaps may serve to explain to the public the mystery of that invincible shield which hangs over this dungeon, this chamber of affliction, silent and cruel as the cells of the inquisition, where the ingenuity of tortments is deliberately exercised, all of which have only led, as I am informed, to an augmentation of his salary, of an additional hundred a year. But these enormities are too great to be treated of here incidentally, or be made part of any other question: they shall again be brought before this house and the public, by themselves.

Thrust then into a solitary cell in this prison, where thirst and hunger, and every species of cruelty is practiced and endured, unpitied and unseen, exposed even to personal violence, and having suffered it in several instances from the brutal ferocity of Aris, cut off from every consolation which the most inhuman have seldom denied their victims, even wives and children excluded—in this glole, cruel, illegal custody, have ministers kept men without charge, without knowing their accusers, without daring to bring a man to trial. At length, some at the end of two, some at the end of three, one has been imprisoned the greatest part of seven years, with ruined fortunes, broken health, broken hearts almost, are they per-

mitted to rejoin, witness and partake the misery of their starving families. To crown all, ministers have prevailed upon this house to reject the petitions of men they have thus treated, and to pass a bill of indemnity for these ministers and gaolers. A plain proof which of the two broke through, the accused or accusers.

This indemnity bill is the fatal measure which has yet been adopted; it is the final blow; holds up the constitution to contempt and scorn, makes the much-talked-of responsibility of ministers a thing rather to be laughed at than feared. Another bill of indemnity, and the ministers may wish us to go on, passing indemnity upon indemnity for every species of atrocity, till at length we have brought ourselves into such general abhorrence, that the people of England, like the people of Ireland, shall be glad to get rid of us, at all events, to be rid of the burthen of the parliament—we may then be ordered, like the Irish parliament, to do one act of suicidal justice upon ourselves, and to terminate our own existence.

But, Sir, this is not merely a bill of indemnity; had it been so, it would have been sufficient to have secured ministers after a strict inquiry into their conduct, against the legal damages that might have been awarded. So the law would have kept its course. But this would by no means have answered the purpose, which was not so much to indemnify ministers as to prevent the tale from being told; therefore it was necessary to reject petitions, stating the horrid facts of which themselves were ashamed; therefore it was necessary to clear your gallery when these petitions were read; therefore it was necessary to bar up the doors of the courts of justice, in order to prevent any well authenticated account of their conduct from coming before the public.

Before I quit the subject, I beg leave once more to repeat the case of these men, of whose treatment I complain; and let no man be so weak, so childish, as to imagine his life can be for a moment safe, or depends upon any better security than the discretion of the executive, if corruption has attained such a height, that ministers can come forward with impunity. If such acts were committed in the representation, that the house of commons, which according to the constitution should be the jealous observer and controller of the acts of the executive, the protector and guardian of the people and the laws, can be prevailed upon to indemnify ministers, without any inquiry into, or explanation of such conduct. Here are men taken up, kept in abhorrent custody, without charge, without accusers, without trial, bankrupt in fortune, and health, their petitions rejected, the course of justice turned aside, and all this flagrant violation of the laws, constitution, common sense, and common humanity, to cover and conceal the misdeeds of ministers. Upon this I might fairly rest my claim for an inquiry. That they broken the law is not a mere opinion or doubt; here is a plain confession of their guilt, is the breach of law no guilt in who are entrusted with the discharge of the laws? And they be protected in the situation, while the people are tortured upon suspicion?

I own, Sir, I did not think that all the haughtiness we have witnessed, that disdain they pretended of shrinking from responsibility, volunteering one for another more than an equal share, who the day of inquiry should arrive; I did not think it would all have ended in a full confession of their guilt, and pleading a pardon in court. I expected them boldly to rely, for their defence, upon the necessity of the case; that they would have proved to us the reality of all those deep laid plots and conspiracies which they shewed us existed, tho' at the time they demanded confidence, because it was unsafe to unfold us their knowledge upon the subject. Sir, I have right to expect at this time the contents of those green boxes and green bags, entrusted before to their own care,