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# THE FALSE ALARM

by Samuel Johnson

1770

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One of the chief advantages derived by the present generation from the improvement and diffusion of philosophy, is deliverance from unnecessary terrors, and exemption from false alarms. The unusual appearances, whether regular or accidental, which once spread consternation over ages of ignorance, are now the recreations of inquisitive security. The sun is no more lamented than when it is eclipsed, than when it sets; and meteors play their coruscations without prognostick or prediction.

The advancement of political knowledge may be expected to produce, in time, the like effects. Causeless discontent, and seditious violence, will grow less frequent and less formidable, as the science of government is better ascertained, by a diligent study of the theory of man.

It is not, indeed, to be expected, that physical and political truth should meet with equal acceptance, or gain ground upon the world with equal facility. The notions of the naturalist find mankind in a state of neutrality, or, at worst, having nothing to encounter but prejudice and vanity; prejudice without malignity, and vanity without interest. But the politician's improvements are opposed by every passion that can exclude conviction or suppress it; by ambition, by avarice, by hope, and by terror, by publick faction, and private animosity.

It is evident, whatever be the cause, that this nation, with all its renown for speculation and for learning, has yet made little proficiency in civil wisdom. We are still so much unacquainted with our own state, and so unskilful in the pursuit of happiness, that we shudder without danger, complain without grievances, and suffer our quiet to be disturbed, and our commerce to be interrupted, by an opposition to the government, raised only by interest, and supported only by clamour, which yet has so far prevailed upon ignorance and timidity, that many favour it, as reasonable, and many dread it, as powerful.

What is urged by those who have been so industrious to spread suspicion, and incite fury, from one end of the kingdom to the other, may be known, by perusing the papers which have been, at once, presented as petitions to the king, and exhibited in print as remonstrances to the people. It may, therefore, not be improper to lay before the publick the reflections of a man, who cannot favour the opposition, for he thinks it wicked, and cannot fear it, for he thinks it weak.

The grievance which has produced all this tempest of outrage, the oppression in which all other oppressions are included, the invasion which has left us no property, the alarm that suffers no patriot to sleep in quiet, is comprised in a vote of the house of commons, by which the freeholders of Middlesex are deprived of a Briton's birthright—representation in parliament.

They have, indeed, received the usual writ of election; but that writ, alas! was malicious mockery: they were insulted with the form, but denied the reality, for there was one man excepted from their choice:

"Non de vi, neque cæde, nec veneno,  
Sed lis est mihi de tribus capellis."

The character of the man, thus fatally excepted, I have no purpose to delineate. Lampoon itself would disdain to speak ill of him, of whom no man speaks well. It is sufficient, that he is expelled the house of commons, and confined in gaol, as being legally convicted of sedition and impiety.

That this man cannot be appointed one of the guardians and counsellors of the church and state, is a grievance not to be endured. Every lover of liberty stands doubtful of the fate of posterity, because the chief county in England cannot take its representative from a gaol.

Whence Middlesex should obtain the right of being denominated the chief county cannot easily be discovered; it is, indeed, the county where the chief city happens to stand, but, how that city treated the favourite of Middlesex, is not yet forgotten. The county, as distinguished from the city, has no claim to particular consideration.

That a man was in gaol for sedition and impiety, would, I believe, have been, within memory, a sufficient reason why he should not come out of gaol a legislator. This reason, notwithstanding the mutability of fashion, happens still to operate on the house of commons. Their notions, however strange, may be justified by a common observation, that few are mended by imprisonment, and that he, whose crimes have made confinement necessary, seldom makes any other use of his enlargement, than to do, with greater cunning, what he did before with less.

But the people have been told, with great confidence, that the house cannot control the right of constituting representatives; that he who can persuade lawful electors to choose him, whatever be his character, is lawfully chosen, and has a claim to a seat in parliament, from which no human authority can depose him.

Here, however, the patrons of opposition are in some perplexity. They are forced to confess, that, by a train of precedents, sufficient to establish a custom of parliament, the house of commons has jurisdiction over its own members; that the whole has power over individuals; and that this power has been exercised sometimes in imprisonment, and often in expulsion.

That such power should reside in the house of commons, in some cases, is inevitably necessary; since it is required, by every polity, that where there is a possibility of offence, there should be a possibility of punishment. A member of the house cannot be cited for his conduct in parliament before any other court; and, therefore, if the house cannot punish him, he may attack, with impunity, the rights of the people, and the title of the king.

This exemption from the authority of other courts was, I think, first established in favour of the five members in the long parliament. It is not to be considered as an usurpation, for it is implied in the principles of government. If legislative powers are not coordinate, they cease, in part, to be legislative; and if they be coordinate, they are unaccountable; for to whom must that power account, which has no superiour?

The house of commons is, indeed, dissoluble by the king, as the nation has, of late, been very clamorously told; but while it subsists it is coordinate with the other powers, and this coordination ceases only, when the house, by dissolution, ceases to subsist.

As the particular representatives of the people are, in their publick character, above the control of the courts of law, they must be subject to the jurisdiction of the house; and as the house, in the exercise of its authority, can be neither directed nor restrained, its own resolutions must be its laws, at least, if there is no antecedent decision of the whole legislature.

This privilege, not confirmed by any written law or positive compact, but by the resistless power of political necessity, they have exercised, probably, from their first institution, but certainly, as their records inform us, from the 23rd of Elizabeth, when they expelled a member for derogating from their privileges.

It may, perhaps, be doubted, whether it was originally necessary, that this right of control and punishment should extend beyond offences in the exercise of parliamentary duty, since all other crimes are cognizable by other courts. But they who are the only judges of their own rights, have exerted the power of expulsion on other occasions, and when wickedness arrived at a certain magnitude, have considered an offence against society, as an offence against the house.

They have, therefore, divested notorious delinquents of their legislative character, and delivered them up to shame or punishment, naked and unprotected, that they might not contaminate the dignity of parliament.

It is allowed, that a man attainted of felony cannot sit in parliament, and the commons probably judged, that, not being bound to forms of law, they might treat these as felons, whose crimes were, in their opinion, equivalent to felony; and that, as a known felon could not be chosen, a man, so like a felon that he could not easily be distinguished, ought to be expelled.

The first laws had no law to enforce them; the first authority was constituted by itself. The power exercised by the house of commons is of this kind; a power rooted in the principles of government, and branched out by occasional practice; a power which necessity made just, and precedents have made legal.

It will occur, that authority thus uncontrollable may, in times of heat and contest, be oppressively and injuriously exerted, and that he who suffers injustice is without redress, however innocent, however miserable.

The position is true, but the argument is useless. The commons must be controlled, or be exempt from control. If they are exempt, they may do injury which cannot be redressed, if they are controlled, they are no longer legislative.

If the possibility of abuse be an argument against authority, no authority ever can be established: if the actual abuse destroys its legality, there is no legal government now in the world.

This power, which the commons have so long exercised, they ventured to use once more against Mr. Wilkes, and, on the 3rd of February, 1769, expelled him the house, "for having printed and published a seditious libel, and three obscene and impious libels."

If these imputations were just, the expulsion was, surely, seasonable; and that they were just, the house had reason to determine, as he had confessed himself, at the bar, the author of the libel which they term seditious, and was convicted, in the King's Bench, of both the publications.

But the freeholders of Middlesex were of another opinion. They either thought him innocent, or were not offended by his guilt. When a writ was issued for the election of a knight for Middlesex, in the room of John Wilkes, esq. expelled the house, his friends, on the sixteenth of February, chose him again.

On the 17th, it was resolved, "that John Wilkes, esq. having been, in this session of parliament, expelled the house, was, and is, incapable of being elected a member to serve in this present parliament."

As there was no other candidate, it was resolved, at the same time, that the election of the sixteenth was a void election.

The freeholders still continued to think, that no other man was fit to represent them, and, on the sixteenth of March, elected him once more. Their resolution was now so well known, that no opponent ventured to appear.

The commons began to find, that power, without materials for operation, can produce no effect. They might make the election void for ever, but if no other candidate could be found, their determination could only be made negative. They, however, made void the last election, and ordered a new writ.

On the 13th of April was a new election, at which Mr. Lutterel, and others, offered themselves candidates. Every method of intimidation was used, and some acts of violence were done, to hinder Mr. Lutterel from appearing. He was not deterred, and the poll was taken, which exhibited, for

Mr. Wilkes	1143
Mr. Lutterel	296

The sheriff returned Mr. Wilkes; but the house, on April the fifteenth, determined that Mr. Lutterel was lawfully elected.

From this day began the clamour, which has continued till now. Those who had undertaken to oppose the ministry, having no grievance of greater magnitude, endeavoured to swell this decision into bulk, and distort it into deformity, and then held it out to terrify the nation.

Every artifice of sedition has since been practised to awaken discontent and inflame indignation. The papers of every day have been filled with exhortations and menaces of faction. The madness has spread through all the ranks, and through both sexes; women and children have clamoured for Mr. Wilkes; honest simplicity has been cheated into fury, and only the wise have escaped infection.

The greater part may justly be suspected of not believing their own position, and with them it is not necessary to dispute. They cannot be convinced who are convinced already, and it is well known that they will not be ashamed.

The decision, however, by which the smaller number of votes was preferred to the greater, has perplexed the minds of some, whose opinions it were indecent to despise, and who, by their integrity, well deserve to have their doubts appeased.

Every diffuse and complicated question may be examined by different methods, upon different principles; and that truth, which is easily found by one investigator, may be missed by another, equally honest and equally diligent.

Those who enquire, whether a smaller number of legal votes can elect a representative in opposition to a greater, must receive, from every tongue, the same answer.

The question, therefore, must be, whether a smaller number of legal votes shall not prevail against a greater number of votes not legal.

It must be considered, that those votes only are legal which are legally given, and that those only are legally given, which are given for a legal candidate.

It remains, then, to be discussed, whether a man expelled can be so disqualified by a vote of the house, as that he shall be no longer eligible by lawful electors.

Here we must again recur, not to positive institutions, but to the unwritten law of social nature, to the great and pregnant principle of political necessity. All government supposes subjects; all authority implies obedience: to suppose in one the right to command what another has the right to refuse, is absurd and contradictory; a state, so constituted, must rest for ever in motionless equipoise, with equal attractions of contrary tendency, with equal weights of power balancing each other.

Laws which cannot be enforced can neither prevent nor rectify disorders. A sentence which cannot be executed can have no power to warn or to reform. If the commons have only the power of dismissing, for a few days, the man whom his constituents can immediately send back; if they can expel, but cannot exclude, they have nothing more than nominal authority, to which, perhaps, obedience never may be paid.

The representatives of our ancestors had an opinion very different: they fined and imprisoned their members; on great provocation, they disabled them for ever; and this power of pronouncing perpetual disability is maintained by Selden himself.

These claims seem to have been made and allowed, when the constitution of our government had not yet been sufficiently studied. Such powers are not legal, because they are not necessary; and of that power which only necessity justifies, no more is to be admitted than necessity obtrudes.

The commons cannot make laws; they can only pass resolutions, which, like all resolutions, are of force only to those that make them, and to those, only while they are willing to observe them.

The vote of the house of commons has, therefore, only so far the force of a law, as that force is necessary to preserve the vote from losing its efficacy; it must begin by operating upon themselves, and extend its influence to others, only by consequences arising from the first intention. He that starts the game on his own manor, may pursue it into another.

They can properly make laws only for themselves: a member, while he keeps his seat, is subject to these laws; but when he is expelled, the jurisdiction ceases, for he is now no longer within their dominion.

The disability, which a vote can superinduce to expulsion, is no more than was included in expulsion itself; it is only a declaration of the commons, that they will permit no longer him, whom they thus censure, to sit with them in parliament; a declaration made by that right, which they necessarily possess, of regulating their own house, and of inflicting punishment on their own delinquents.

They have, therefore, no other way to enforce the sentence of incapacity, than that of adhering to it. They cannot otherwise punish the candidate so disqualified for offering himself, nor the electors for accepting him. But if he has any competitor, that competitor must prevail, and if he has none, his election will be void; for the right of the house to reject annihilates, with regard to the man so rejected, the right of electing.

It has been urged, that the power of the house terminates with their session; since a prisoner, committed by the speaker's warrant, cannot be detained during the recess. That power, indeed, ceases with the session, which must operate by the agency of others; because, when they do not sit, they can employ no agent, having no longer any legal existence; but that which is exercised on themselves revives at their meeting, when the subject of that power still subsists: they can, in the next session, refuse to readmit him, whom, in the former session, they expelled.

That expulsion inferred exclusion, in the present case, must be, I think, easily admitted. The expulsion, and the writ issued for a new election were in the same session, and, since the house is, by the rule of parliament, bound for the session by a vote once passed, the expelled member cannot be admitted. He that cannot be admitted, cannot be elected; and the votes given to a man ineligible being given in vain, the highest number for an eligible candidate becomes a majority.

To these conclusions, as to most moral, and to all political positions, many objections may be made. The perpetual subject of political disquisition is not absolute, but comparative good. Of two systems of government, or two laws relating to the same subject, neither will ever be such as theoretical nicety would desire, and, therefore, neither can easily force its way against prejudice and obstinacy; each will have its excellencies and defects; and every man, with a little help from pride, may think his own the best.

It seems to be the opinions of many, that expulsion is only a dismissal of the representative to his constituents, with such a testimony against him, as his sentence may comprise; and that, if his constituents, notwithstanding the censure of the house, thinking his case hard, his fault trifling, or his excellencies such as overbalance it, should again choose him, as still worthy of their trust, the house cannot refuse him, for his punishment has purged his fault, and the right of the electors must not be violated.

This is plausible, but not cogent. It is a scheme of representation, which would make a specious appearance in a political romance, but cannot be brought into practice among us, who see every day the towering head of speculation bow down unwillingly to groveling experience.

Governments formed by chance, and gradually improved by such expedients, as the successive discovery of their defects happened to suggest, are never to be tried by a regular theory. They are fabricks of dissimilar materials, raised by different architects, upon different plans. We must be content with them, as they are; should we attempt to mend their disproportions, we might easily demolish, and difficultly rebuild them.

Laws are now made, and customs are established; these are our rules, and by them we must be guided.

It is uncontrovertibly certain, that the commons never intended to leave electors the liberty of returning them an expelled member; for they always require one to be chosen

in the room of him that is expelled, and I see not with what propriety a man can be rechosen in his own room.

Expulsion, if this were its whole effect, might very often be desirable. Sedition, or obscenity, might be no greater crimes in the opinion of other electors, than in that of the freeholders of Middlesex; and many a wretch, whom his colleagues should expel, might come back persecuted into fame, and provoke, with harder front, a second expulsion.

Many of the representatives of the people can hardly be said to have been chosen at all. Some, by inheriting a borough, inherit a seat; and some sit by the favour of others, whom, perhaps, they may gratify by the act which provoked the expulsion. Some are safe by their popularity, and some by their alliances. None would dread expulsion, if this doctrine were received, but those who bought their elections, and who would be obliged to buy them again at a higher price.

But as uncertainties are to be determined by things certain, and customs to be explained, where it is possible, by written law, the patriots have triumphed with a quotation from an act of the fourth and fifth of Anne, which permits those to be rechosen, whose seats are vacated by the acceptance of a place of profit. This they wisely consider as an expulsion, and from the permission, in this case, of a reelection, infer, that every other expulsion leaves the delinquent entitled to the same indulgence. This is the paragraph:

"If any person, being chosen a member of the house of commons, shall accept of any office from the crown, during such time as he shall continue a member, his election shall be, and is hereby declared to be void; and a new writ shall issue for a new election, as if such person, so accepting, was naturally dead. Nevertheless such person shall be capable of being again elected, as if his place had not become void as aforesaid."

How this favours the doctrine of readmission, by a second choice, I am not able to discover. The statute of the thirtieth of Charles the second had enacted, that "he who would sit in the house of commons, without taking the oaths, and subscribing the test, should be disabled to sit in the house during that parliament, and a writ should issue for the election of a new member, in place of the member so disabled, as if such a member had naturally died."

This last clause is, apparently, copied in the act of Anne, but with the common fate of imitators. In the act of Charles, the political death continued during the parliament; in that of Anne it was hardly worth the while to kill the man whom the next breath was to revive. It is, however, apparent, that in the opinion of the parliament, the dead-doing lines would have kept him motionless, if he had not been recovered by a kind exception. A seat vacated could not be regained, without express permission of the same statute.

The right of being chosen again to a seat thus vacated, is not enjoyed by any general right, but required a special clause and solicitous provision.

But what resemblance can imagination conceive between one man vacating his seat by a mark of favour from the crown, and another driven from it for sedition and obscenity? The acceptance of a place contaminates no character; the crown that gives it, intends to give with it always dignity, sometimes authority. The commons, it is well known, think not worse of themselves, or others, for their offices of profit; yet profit implies temptation, and may expose a representative to the suspicion of his

constituents; though, if they still think him worthy of their confidence, they may again elect him.

Such is the consequence. When a man is dismissed by law to his constituents, with new trust and new dignity, they may, if they think him incorruptible, restore him to his seat; what can follow, therefore, but that, when the house drives out a varlet, with publick infamy, he goes away with the like permission to return?

If infatuation be, as the proverb tells us, the forerunner of destruction, how near must be the ruin of a nation that can be incited against its governours by sophistry like this! I may be excused, if I catch the panick, and join my groans, at this alarming crisis, with the general lamentation of the weeping patriots.

Another objection is, that the commons, by pronouncing the sentence of disqualification, make a law, and take upon themselves the power of the whole legislature. Many quotations are then produced to prove, that the house of commons can make no laws.

Three acts have been cited, disabling members, for different terms, on different occasions; and it is profoundly remarked, that if the commons could, by their own privilege, have made a disqualification, their jealousy of their privileges would never have admitted the concurrent sanction of the other powers.

I must forever remind those puny controvertists, that those acts are laws of permanent obligation; that two of them are now in force, and that the other expired only when it had fulfilled its end. Such laws the commons cannot make; they could, perhaps, have determined for themselves, that they would expel all who should not take the test, but they could leave no authority behind them, that should oblige the next parliament to expel them. They could refuse the South sea directors, but they could not entail the refusal. They can disqualify by vote, but not by law; they cannot know that the sentence of disqualification pronounced to-day may not become void to-morrow, by the dissolution of their own house. Yet, while the same parliament sits, the disqualification continues, unless the vote be rescinded; and, while it so continues, makes the votes, which freeholders may give to the interdicted candidate, useless and dead, since there cannot exist, with respect to the same subject, at the same time, an absolute power to reject.

In 1614, the attorney general was voted incapable of a seat in the house of commons; and the nation is triumphantly told, that though the vote was never revoked, the attorney general is now a member. He, certainly, may now be a member, without revocation of the vote. A law is of perpetual obligation; but a vote is nothing, when the voters are gone. A law is a compact reciprocally made by the legislative powers, and, therefore, not to be abrogated but by all the parties. A vote is simply a resolution, which binds only him that is willing to be bound.

I have thus punctiliously and minutely pursued this disquisition, because I suspect, that these reasoners, whose business is to deceive others, have sometimes deceived themselves, and I am willing to free them from their embarrassment, though I do not expect much gratitude for my kindness.

Other objections are yet remaining, for of political objections there cannot easily be an end. It has been observed, that vice is no proper cause of expulsion; for if the worst man in the house were always to be expelled, in time none would be left; but no man is

expelled for being worst, he is expelled for being enormously bad; his conduct is compared, not with that of others, but with the rule of action.

The punishment of expulsion, being in its own nature uncertain, may be too great or too little for the fault.

This must be the case of many punishments. Forfeiture of chattels is nothing to him that has no possessions. Exile itself may be accidentally a good; and, indeed, any punishment, less than death, is very different to different men.

But, if this precedent be admitted and established, no man can, hereafter, be sure that he shall be represented by him whom he would choose. One half of the house may meet early in the morning, and snatch an opportunity to expel the other, and the greater part of the nation may, by this stratagem, be without its lawful representatives.

He that sees all this, sees very far. But I can tell him of greater evils yet behind. There is one possibility of wickedness, which, at this alarming crisis, has not yet been mentioned. Every one knows the malice, the subtlety, the industry, the vigilance, and the greediness of the Scots. The Scotch members are about the number sufficient to make a house. I propose it to the consideration of the supporters of the bill of rights, whether there is not reason to suspect that these hungry intruders from the north are now contriving to expel all the English. We may then curse the hour in which it was determined, that expulsion and exclusion are the same; for who can guess what may be done, when the Scots have the whole house to themselves?

Thus agreeable to custom and reason, notwithstanding all objections, real or imaginary, thus consistent with the practice of former times, and thus consequential to the original principles of government, is that decision, by which so much violence of discontent has been excited, which has been so dolorously bewailed, and so outrageously resented.

Let us, however, not be seduced to put too much confidence in justice or in truth: they have often been found inactive in their own defence, and give more confidence than help to their friends and their advocates. It may, perhaps, be prudent to make one momentary concession to falsehood, by supposing the vote in Mr. Lutterel's favour to be wrong.

All wrong ought to be rectified. If Mr. Wilkes is deprived of a lawful seat, both he and his electors have a reason to complain; but it will not be easily found, why, among the innumerable wrongs of which a great part of mankind are hourly complaining, the whole care of the publick should be transferred to Mr. Wilkes and the freeholders of Middlesex, who might all sink into nonexistence, without any other effect, than that there would be room made for a new rabble, and a new retailer of sedition and obscenity. The cause of our country would suffer little; the rabble, whencesoever they come, will always be patriots, and always supporters of the bill of rights.

The house of commons decides the disputes arising from elections. Was it ever supposed, that in all cases their decisions were right? Every man, whose lawful election is defeated, is equally wronged with Mr. Wilkes, and his constituents feel their disappointment, with no less anguish than the freeholders of Middlesex. These decisions have often been apparently partial, and, sometimes, tyrannically oppressive. A majority has been given to a favourite candidate, by expunging votes which had always been allowed, and which, therefore, had the authority by which all votes are given, that of custom uninterrupted. When the commons determine who shall be constituents, they may, with some propriety, be said to make law, because those determinations have,

hitherto, for the sake of quiet, been adopted by succeeding parliaments. A vote, therefore, of the house, when it operates as a law, is to individuals a law only temporary, but to communities perpetual.

Yet, though all this has been done, and though, at every parliament, much of this is expected to be done again, it has never produced, in any former time, such an alarming crisis. We have found, by experience, that though a squire has given ale and venison in vain, and a borough has been compelled to see its dearest interest in the hands of him whom it did not trust, yet the general state of the nation has continued the same. The sun has risen, and the corn has grown, and, whatever talk has been of the danger of property, yet he that ploughed the field commonly reaped it; and he that built a house was master of the door; the vexation excited by injustice suffered, or supposed to be suffered, by any private man, or single community, was local and temporary, it neither spread far, nor lasted long.

The nation looked on with little care, because there did not seem to be much danger. The consequence of small irregularities was not felt, and we had not yet learned to be terrified by very distant enemies.

But quiet and security are now at an end. Our vigilance is quickened, and our comprehension is enlarged. We not only see events in their causes, but before their causes; we hear the thunder while the sky is clear, and see the mine sprung before it is dug. Political wisdom has, by the force of English genius, been improved, at last, not only to political intuition, but to political prescience.

But it cannot, I am afraid, be said, that as we are grown wise, we are made happy. It is said of those who have the wonderful power called second sight, that they seldom see any thing but evil: political second sight has the same effect; we hear of nothing but an alarming crisis, of violated rights, and expiring liberties. The morning rises upon new wrongs, and the dreamer passes the night in imaginary shackles.

The sphere of anxiety is now enlarged; he that hitherto cared only for himself, now cares for the publick; for he has learned, that the happiness of individuals is comprised in the prosperity of the whole; and that his country never suffers, but he who suffers with it, however it happens that he feels no pain.

Fired with this fever of epidemick patriotism, the tailor slips his thimble, the draper drops his yard, and the blacksmith lays down his hammer; they meet at an honest alehouse, consider the state of the nation, read or hear the last petition, lament the miseries of the time, are alarmed at the dreadful crisis, and subscribe to the support of the bill of rights.

It sometimes, indeed, happens, that an intruder, of more benevolence than prudence, attempts to disperse their cloud of dejection, and ease their hearts by seasonable consolation. He tells them, that though the government cannot be too diligently watched, it may be too hastily accused; and that, though private judgment is every man's right, yet we cannot judge of what we do not know; that we feel at present no evils which government can alleviate, and that the publick business is committed to men, who have as much right to confidence as their adversaries; that the freeholders of Middlesex, if they could not choose Mr. Wilkes, might have chosen any other man, and that "he trusts we have fallen within the realm, five hundred as good as he;" that even this, which has happened to Middlesex, had happened to every other county, that one man should be made incapable of being elected, it could produce no great change in the parliament, nor much contract the power of election; that, what has been done is, probably, right; and that if it be wrong, it is of little consequence, since a like case

cannot easily occur; that expulsions are very rare, and if they should, by unbounded insolence of faction, become more frequent, the electors may easily provide a second choice.

All this he may say, but not half of this will be heard; his opponents will stun him and themselves with a confused sound of pensions and places, venality and corruption, oppression and invasion, slavery and ruin.

Outcries, like these, uttered by malignity, and echoed by folly; general accusations of indeterminate wickedness; and obscure hints of impossible designs, dispersed among those that do not know their meaning, by those that know them to be false, have disposed part of the nation, though but a small part, to pester the court with ridiculous petitions.

The progress of a petition is well known. An ejected placeman goes down to his county or his borough, tells his friends of his inability to serve them, and his constituents of the corruption of the government. His friends readily understand that he who can get nothing, will have nothing to give. They agree to proclaim a meeting; meat and drink are plentifully provided; a crowd is easily brought together, and those who think that they know the reason of their meeting, undertake to tell those who know it not; ale and clamour unite their powers; the crowd, condensed and heated, begins to ferment with the leaven of sedition: all see a thousand evils, though they cannot show them; and grow impatient for a remedy, though they know not what.

A speech is then made by the *Cicero* of the day; he says much, and suppresses more; and credit is equally given to what he tells, and what he conceals. The petition is read, and universally approved. Those who are sober enough to write, add their names, and the rest would sign it, if they could.

Every man goes home and tells his neighbour of the glories of the day; how he was consulted, and what he advised; how he was invited into the great room, where his lordship called him by his name; how he was caressed by sir Francis, sir Joseph, or sir George; how he eat turtle and venison, and drank unanimity to the three brothers.

The poor loiterer, whose shop had confined him, or whose wife had locked him up, hears the tale of luxury with envy, and, at last, inquires what was their petition. Of the petition nothing is remembered by the narrator, but that it spoke much of fears and apprehensions, and something very alarming, and that he is sure it is against the government; the other is convinced that it must be right, and wishes he had been there, for he loves wine and venison, and is resolved, as long as he lives, to be against the government.

The petition is then handed from town to town, and from house to house; and, wherever it comes, the inhabitants flock together, that they may see that which must be sent to the king. Names are easily collected. One man signs, because he hates the papists; another, because he has vowed destruction to the turnpikes; one, because it will vex the parson; another, because he owes his landlord nothing; one, because he is rich; another, because he is poor; one, to show that he is not afraid; and another, to show that he can write.

The passage, however, is not always smooth. Those who collect contributions to sedition, sometimes apply to a man of higher rank and more enlightened mind, who, instead of lending them his name, calmly reproves them for being seducers of the people.

You, who are here, says he, complaining of venality, are yourself the agents of those who having estimated themselves at too high a price, are only angry that they are not bought. You are appealing from the parliament to the rabble, and inviting those who, scarcely, in the most common affairs, distinguish right from wrong, to judge of a question complicated with law written and unwritten, with the general principles of government, and the particular customs of the house of commons; you are showing them a grievance, so distant that they cannot see it, and so light that they cannot feel it; for how, but by unnecessary intelligence and artificial provocation, should the farmers and shopkeepers of Yorkshire and Cumberland know or care how Middlesex is represented? Instead of wandering thus round the county to exasperate the rage of party, and darken the suspicions of ignorance, it is the duty of men like you, who have leisure for inquiry, to lead back the people to their honest labour; to tell them, that submission is the duty of the ignorant, and content the virtue of the poor; that they have no skill in the art of government, nor any interest in the dissensions of the great; and when you meet with any, as some there are, whose understandings are capable of conviction, it will become you to allay this foaming ebullition, by showing them, that they have as much happiness as the condition of life will easily receive; and that a government, of which an erroneous or unjust representation of Middlesex is the greatest crime that interest can discover, or malice can upbraid, is government approaching nearer to perfection, than any that experience has known, or history related.

The drudges of sedition wish to change their ground; they hear him with sullen silence, feel conviction without repentance, and are confounded, but not abashed; they go forward to another door, and find a kinder reception from a man enraged against the government, because he has just been paying the tax upon his windows.

That a petition for a dissolution of the parliament will, at all times, have its favourers, may be easily imagined. The people, indeed, do not expect that one house of commons will be much honester or much wiser than another; they do not suppose that the taxes will be lightened; or, though they have been so often taught to hope it, that soap and candles will be cheaper; they expect no redress of grievances, for of no grievances, but taxes, do they complain; they wish not the extension of liberty, for they do not feel any restraint; about the security of privilege or property they are totally careless, for they see no property invaded, nor know, till they are told, that any privilege has suffered violation.

Least of all do they expect, that any future parliament will lessen its own powers, or communicate to the people that authority which it has once obtained.

Yet a new parliament is sufficiently desirable. The year of election is a year of jollity; and, what is still more delightful, a year of equality: the glutton now eats the delicacies for which he longed when he could not purchase them, and the drunkard has the pleasure of wine, without the cost: the drone lives awhile without work, and the shopkeeper, in the flow of money, raises his price: the mechanick, that trembled at the presence of sir Joseph, now bids him come again for an answer: and the poacher, whose gun has been seized, now finds an opportunity to reclaim it. Even the honest man is not displeased to see himself important, and willingly resumes, in two years, that power which he had resigned for seven. Few love their friends so well as not to desire superiority by unexpensive benefaction.

Yet, notwithstanding all these motives to compliance, the promoters of petitions have not been successful. Few could be persuaded to lament evils which they did not suffer, or to solicit for redress which they did not want. The petition has been, in some places,

rejected; and, perhaps, in all but one, signed only by the meanest and grossest of the people.

Since this expedient, now invented or revived, to distress the government, and equally practicable, at all times, by all who shall be excluded from power and from profit, has produced so little effect, let us consider the opposition as no longer formidable. The great engine has recoiled upon them. They thought, that *the terms*, they *sent*, were *terms of weight*, which would have *amazed all and stumbled many*; but the consternation is now over, and their foes *stand upright*, as before.

With great propriety and dignity the king has, in his speech, neglected or forgotten them. He might easily know, that what was presented, as the sense of the people, is the sense only of the profligate and dissolute; and, that whatever parliament should be convened, the same petitioners would be ready, for the same reason, to request its dissolution.

As we once had a rebellion of the clowns, we have now an opposition of the pedlers. The quiet of the nation has been, for years, disturbed by a faction, against which all factions ought to conspire; for its original principle is the desire of leveling; it is only animated, under the name of zeal, by the natural malignity of the mean against the great.

When, in the confusion which the English invasions produced in France, the villains, imagining that they had found the golden hour of emancipation, took arms in their hands, the knights of both nations considered the cause as common, and suspending the general hostility, united to chastise them.

The whole conduct of this despicable faction is distinguished by plebeian grossness, and savage indecency. To misrepresent the actions and the principles of their enemies is common to all parties; but the insolence of invective, and brutality of reproach, which have lately prevailed, are peculiar to this.

An infallible characteristick of meanness is cruelty. This is the only faction, that has shouted at the condemnation of a criminal, and that, when his innocence procured his pardon, has clamoured for his blood.

All other parties, however enraged at each other, have agreed to treat the throne with decency; but these low-born railers have attacked not only the authority, but the character of their sovereign, and have endeavoured, surely without effect, to alienate the affections of the people from the only king, who, for almost a century, has much appeared to desire, or much endeavoured to deserve them. They have insulted him with rudeness, and with menaces, which were never excited by the gloomy sullenness of William, even when half the nation denied him their allegiance; nor by the dangerous bigotry of James, unless, when he was finally driven from his palace; and with which scarcely the open hostilities of rebellion ventured to vilify the unhappy Charles, even in the remarks on the cabinet of Naseby.

It is surely not unreasonable to hope, that the nation will consult its dignity, if not its safety, and disdain to be protected or enslaved by the declaimers, or the plotters of a city tavern. Had Rome fallen by the Catilinarian conspiracy, she might have consoled her fate by the greatness of her destroyers; but what would have alleviated the disgrace of England, had her government been changed by Tiler or by Ket?

One part of the nation has never before contended with the other, but for some weighty and apparent interest. If the means were violent, the end was great. The civil

war was fought for what each army called, and believed, the best religion and the best government. The struggle in the reign of Anne, was to exclude or restore an exile king. We are now disputing, with almost equal animosity, whether Middlesex shall be represented, or not, by a criminal from a gaol.

The only comfort left, in such degeneracy, is, that a lower state can be no longer possible.

In this contemptuous censure, I mean not to include every single man. In all lead, says the chymist, there is silver; and in all copper there is gold. But mingled masses are justly denominated by the greater quantity, and when the precious particles are not worth extraction, a faction and a pig must be melted down together to the forms and offices that chance allots them:

'Fiunt urceoli, pelves, sartago, patellæ'

A few weeks will now show, whether the government can be shaken by empty noise, and whether the faction, which depends upon its influence, has not deceived, alike, the publick and itself. That it should have continued till now, is sufficiently shameful. None can, indeed, wonder that it has been supported by the sectaries, the natural fomenters of sedition, and confederates of the rabble, of whose religion little now remains but hatred of establishments, and who are angry to find separation now only tolerated, which was once rewarded; but every honest man must lament, that it has been regarded with frigid neutrality by the tories, who, being long accustomed to signalize their principles by opposition to the court, do not yet consider, that they have, at last, a king, who knows not the name of party, and who wishes to be the common father of all his people.

As a man inebriated only by vapours soon recovers in the open air; a nation discontented to madness, without any adequate cause, will return to its wits and its allegiance, when a little pause has cooled its reflection. Nothing, therefore, is necessary, at this alarming crisis, but to consider the alarm as false. To make concessions is to encourage encroachment. Let the court despise the faction, and the disappointed people will soon deride it.

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