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THOUGHTS

ON THE PRESENT

S C A R C I T Y

O F

PROVISIONS.



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MDCCLXXIII.





THOUGHTS, &c.

M ANY excellent things have been lately published, concerning the *present Scarcity of Provisions*. And many Causes have been assigned for it, by Men of Experience and Reflection. But may it not be observed, there is something wanting still, in most of those Publications? One Writer assigns and insists on one Cause; another on one or two more. But who assigns all the Causes that manifestly concur, to produce this melancholy Effect? At the same time pointing
B out

out, how each particular Cause affects the Price of each particular Sort of Provision?

I would willingly offer to candid and benevolent Men, a few Hints on this important Subject: Proposing a few Questions, and subjoining to each what seems to be the plain and direct Answer.

I. 1. I ask, first, Why are thousands of people starving, perishing for Want, in every part of the Nation? The Fact I know: I have seen it with my eyes, in every corner of the Land. I have known those who could only afford to eat a little coarse Food once every other Day. I have known one in *London*, (and one that a few Years before had all the Conveniencies of Life) picking up from a *Dunghill stinking Sprats*, and carrying them home for herself and her Children.

I

I have known another gathering the Bones which the Dogs had left in the Streets, and making Broth of them, to prolong a wretched Life! I have heard a third artlessly declare, “ Indeed I was very faint, and so weak I could hardly walk, ’till my Dog, finding nothing at home, went out, and brought in a *good sort of Bone*; which *I took out of his Mouth, and made a pure Dinner!* ” Such is the case at this Day of multitudes of People, in a Land flowing, as it were, with Milk and Honey! Abounding with all the Necessaries, the Conveniencies, the Superfluities of Life!

Now why is this? Why have all these nothing to eat? Because they have nothing to do. The plain reason, why they have no Meat, is because they have no Work.

2. But why have they no Work?

B 2

Why

Why are so many thousand People, in *London*, in *Bristol*, in *Norwich*, in every County, from one End of *England* to the other, utterly destitute of Employment?

Because the Persons that used to employ them cannot afford to do it any longer. Many that employed fifty Men, now scarce employ ten: Those that employed twenty, now employ one, or none at all. They cannot, as they have no Vent for their Goods: Food being so dear, that the generality of People are hardly able to buy any Thing else.

3. But why is *Food* so dear? To come to particulars: Why does *Bread-corn* bear so high a Price? To set aside partial Causes, (which indeed, all put together, are little more than the Fly upon the Chariot-Wheel) the grand Cause is, Because such immense Quantities of Corn are continually

continually consumed by *Distilling*. Indeed an eminent Distiller, near *London*, hearing this, warmly replied, "Nay, my Partner and I generally distil *but a thousand Quarters a Week*." Perhaps so. And suppose five and twenty Distillers in and near the Town, consume each *only the same Quantity*: Here are five and twenty thousand Quarters a Week, that is above twelve hundred and fifty thousand a Year, consumed in and about *London*! Add the Distillers throughout *England*, and have we not reason to believe, that (not a thirtieth, or a twentieth Part only, but) little less than half the Wheat produced in the Kingdom, is every Year consumed, not by so harmless a way as throwing it into the Sea, but by converting it into deadly Poison: Poison that naturally destroys not only the Strength and Life, but also the Morals of our Countrymen?

It

It may be objected, " This cannot be. We know how much Corn is distilled by the Duty that is paid. And hereby it appears, that scarce three hundred thousand Quarters a Year are distilled throughout the Kingdom. " Do we know, certainly, How much Corn is distilled, by the Duty that is paid? Is it indisputable, that the full Duty is paid, for all the Corn that is distilled? Not to insist upon the multitude of *private Stills*, which pay no Duty at all. I have myself heard the Servant of an eminent Distiller occasionally aver, That for every Gallon he distilled, which paid Duty, he distilled six, which paid none. Yea, I have heard Distillers themselves affirm, " We *must* do this, or we cannot live. " It plainly follows, we cannot judge from the Duty that is paid, of the Quantity of Corn that is distilled.

" However,

“ However, what is paid brings in a large Revenue to the King. ”--- Is this an Equivalent for the Lives of his Subjects? Would his Majesty sell an hundred thousand of his Subjects yearly to *Algiers*, for four hundred thousand Pounds? Surely no. Will he then sell them for that Sum, to be butchered by their own Countrymen?---“ But otherwise the Swine for the Navy cannot be fed. ” Not unless they are fed with human Flesh! Not unless they are fatted with human Blood! O tell it not in *Constantinople*, That the *English* raise the Royal Revenue, by selling the Flesh and Blood of their Countrymen!

4. But why are *Oats* so dear?--- Because there are four times as many Horses kept (to speak within compass) for Coaches and Chaises in particular, as were a few Years ago.

Unless

Unless therefore four times the Oats grew now, that grew then, they cannot be at the same Price. - If only twice as much is produced, (which perhaps, is near the truth) the Price will naturally be double to what it was.

And as the Dearness of Grain of one kind, will always raise the Price of another, so whatever causes the Dearness of Wheat and Oats, must raise the Price of *Barley* too. To account therefore for the Dearness of this, we need only remember what has been observed above: Altho' some particular causes may concur, in producing the same effect.

5. Why are *Beef* and *Mutton* so dear? Because many considerable *Farmers*, particularly in the Northern Counties, who used to breed large

large Numbers of Sheep, or horned Cattle, and very frequently both; now breed none at all: They no longer trouble themselves with either Sheep, or Cows, or Oxen: As they can turn their Land to far better Account, by breeding Horses alone.--- Such is the Demand not only for Coach and Chaise Horses, which are bought and destroy'd in incredible numbers; but much more for bred Horses, which are yearly exported, by hundreds, yea thousands, to *France*.

6. But why are *Pork, Poultry* and *Eggs* so dear? Because of the *monopolizing* of Farms: Perhaps as mischievous a Monopoly, as was ever introduced into these Kingdoms. The Land which was some Years ago divided, between ten or twenty little Farmers, and enabled them comfortably to provide for their Families,
is

is now generally engrossed by one great Farmer. One farms an Estate of a thousand a Year, which formerly maintained ten or twenty.--- Every one of these little Farmers kept a few Swine, with some Quantity of Poultry: And having little Money: was glad to send his Bacon, or Pork, or Fowls and Eggs to Market continually. Hence the Markets were plentifully served: And Plenty created Cheapness. But at present, the great, the Gentlemen-Farmers, are above attending to these little Things. They breed no Poultry or Swine; unless for their own Use: consequently they send none to Market. Hence it is not strange, if two or three of these, living near a Market Town, occasion such a Scarcity of these things, by preventing the former Supply, that the Price of them is double or treble to what it was before. Hence (to instance

instance in a small Article) in the same Town, wherein within my memory, Eggs were sold six or eight a penny, they are now sold six or eight a groat.

Another Cause, (the most terrible one of all, and the most destructive both of personal and social Happiness) why not only Beef, Mutton, and Pork, but all kinds of Victuals are so dear, is *Luxury*. What can stand against this? Will it not waste and destroy all that Nature and Art can produce? If a Person of Quality will boil down three dozen of Neat's Tongues, to make two or three Quarts of Soup, (and so proportionably in other things) what wonder that Provisions fail?— Only look into the Kitchens of the Great, the Nobility and Gentry, almost without exception, (considering withal, that “the Toe of the
C Peasant

Peasant treads upon the Heel of the Courtier : ”). And when you have observed the amazing Waste which is made there, you will no longer wonder at the Scarcity, and consequently Dearness, of the Things which they use so much Art to destroy.

7. But Why is *Land* so dear?

Because on all these Accounts, Gentlemen cannot live as they have been accustomed to do, without increasing their Income; which most of them cannot do, but by raising their Rents. And then the Farmer paying an higher Rent for the Land, must have an higher Price for the Produce of it. This again tends to raise the Price of Land: And so the Wheel runs round.

8. But Why is it, that not only Provisions and Land, but well nigh every Thing else is so dear?

Because

Because of the enormous *Taxes*, which are laid on almost every Thing that can be named. Not only abundant Taxes are raised, from Earth, and Fire, and Water: But in *England*, the ingenious Statesmen have found a way, to lay a Tax upon the very Light! Yet one Element remains: And surely some Man of Honour will find a way to tax this also. For how long shall the saucy Air, strike a Gentleman on the Face, nay a Lord, without paying for it?

9. But why are *the Taxes* so high?

Because of the *National Debt*.--- They must be so, while this continues. I have heard, that the national Expence, seventy Years ago, was in time of Peace, three Millions a Year. And now the bare Interest of the public Debt, amounts yearly

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to

above four Millions! To raise which, with the other stated Expences of Government, those Taxes are absolutely necessary.

To sum up the whole. Thousands of People throughout the Land, are perishing for want of Food. This is owing to various Causes; but above all, to *Distilling*, *Taxes*, and *Luxury*.

Here is the Evil, and the undeniable Causes of it. But where is the Remedy?

Perhaps it exceeds all the Wisdom of Man to tell: But it may not be amiss to offer a few Hints on the Subject.

II. 1. What Remedy is there for this fore Evil,---Many thousand poor People are starving?

Find

Find them Work, and you will find them Meat. They will then earn and eat their own Bread.

2. But how can the Masters give them Work, without ruining themselves ?

Procure Vent for what is wrought, and the Masters will give them as much Work as they can do. And this would be done, by sinking the Price of Provisions: For then People would have Money to buy other things too.

3. But how can the Price of Wheat and Barley be reduced ?

By prohibiting for ever, by making a full End, of that Bane of Health, that Destroyer of Strength, of Life and of Virtue, *Distilling*.---

Perhaps this alone might go a great way toward answering the whole Design. 'Tis not improbable, it would speedily sink the Price of Corn, at least one Part in three. If any thing more were required, Might not all *Starch* be made of Rice, and the Importation of this, as well as of Corn, be encouraged?

4. How can the Price of *Oats* be reduced?

By reducing the Number of Horses. And may not this be effectually done, (without affecting the Ploughman, the Waggoner, or any of those who keep Horses for common Work;) 1. By laying a Tax of ten Pounds, on every Horse exported to *France*, for which (notwithstanding an artful Paragraph in a late public Paper) there is as great

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a Demand as ever? 2. By laying an additional Tax on Gentlemen's Carriages: Not so much on every *Wheel*, (bare-faced, shameless Partiality!) but five Pounds yearly, upon every *Horse*. And would not these two Taxes alone supply near as much as is now paid for Leave to poison his Majesty's liege Subjects?

5. How can the Price of *Beef* and *Mutton* be reduced?

By increasing the Breed of Sheep and horned Cattle. And this would soon be increased seven-fold, if the Price of Horses was reduced; which it surely would be, half in half, by the Method above-mentioned.

6. How can the Price of *Pork* and *Poultry* be reduced?

Whether

Whether it ever *will*, is another Question.---But it *can* be done, 1. By letting no Farms of above an hundred Pounds a Year: 2. By repressing Luxury: Whether by Laws, by Example; or by Both.---I had almost said, By the Grace of GOD. But to mention This, has been long out of Fashion.

7. How may the Price of *Land* be reduced?

By all the Methods above-named, as each tends to lessen the Expence of House-keeping: But especially the last; by restraining Luxury, which is the grand and general Source of Want.

8. How may the *Taxes* be reduced?

1. By discharging half the National Debt, and so saving by this
single

single Means, above two Millions a Year. 2. By abolishing all useless Pensions, as fast as those who now enjoy them die. Especially those ridiculous ones, given to some hundreds of idle Men, as *Governors of Forts or Castles*: Which Forts have answered no End for above these hundred Years, unless to shelter Jackdaws and Crows.---Might not good part of a Million more, be saved in this very Article?

But will this ever be done?

I fear not: At least, We have no reason to hope for it shortly: For what Good can we expect (suppose the Scriptures are true) for such a Nation as this? Where there is no Fear of God? Where there is such a deep, avowed, thorough Contempt of *all Religion*, as I never saw, never heard
heard

heard or read of, in any other Nation, whether Christian, Mahometan or Pagan. It seems as if GOD *must* shortly arise, and maintain his own Cause. But if so, let us *fall into the Hands of GOD, and not into the Hands of Men.*

LEWISHAM, Jan. 20.

1773.



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