AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

ELECTORS

OF

Great Britain.

LONDON:

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FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN,

BY the diſſolution of the laſt Parliament, you are called upon to exerciſe a truſt, and to diſcharge a duty, of the higheſt importance to the community, to yourſelves, and to your poſterity; to elect the members of a new Parliament, at a period extremely critical, and which calls for the moſt active exertions of every ſincere friend to the freedom and to the felicity of our country. The ſtate of repreſentation in Great Britain is not now what it ought to be; but the ſmaller the number of the pre-

ſent electors, of the more conſequence it is, that thoſe, in whom the right of ſuffrage is veſted, ſhould diſcharge that important truſt with integrity and with diſcernment.

In the choice of members of Parliament, the great object of the electors, in every diſtrict, ſhould be, to fix on men of integrity, and poſſeſſed of ſufficient abilities to diſcharge the truſt with reputation to themſelves, and with advantage to their country. No private conſiderations, no perſonal partialities, ſhould induce you to vote for an improper or an incapable repreſentative. The man who, from ſelfiſh or intereſted views, votes for an improper, or incompetent perſon, to repreſent him in parliament, is guilty of a greater crime againſt his country, than is comprehended in many of thoſe actions, which are deemed criminal by the law, and for which death is inflicted.

It is extremely common, for applications to be made to perſons, to vote againſt their conſciences, from motives of private intereſt; but, on ſuch occaſions, every honeſt man ſhould reject the propoſal with diſdain. He ſhould anſwer, with firmneſs, in terms ſomewhat ſimilar to theſe: "If you, ſir, have

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" rendered me ſervices, or may have it in your
" power to render me ſervices, that will not juſtify
" me for violating my conſcience, by voting for an
" improper perſon to be a member of the great
" council of the nation. I owe a duty to my
" country, and I ſhall ceaſe to be an honeſt man,
" if I do not diſcharge that duty. Whatever
" ſervices I may have received from any man, or
" whatever expectations I may have of receiving
" ſervices, I will diſcharge my duty to my country,
" by voting for that man as my repreſentative in
" parliament, whom I conceive to be the moſt vir-
" tuous, and the beſt qualified to diſcharge the duties
" of his office."

It is, perhaps, more eaſy to ſtate, who are improper perſons to be elected repreſentatives of the people, than it is to point out fit and proper perſons, and ſuch as are well qualified for the duties of the office. It may at once be determined, that all placemen, penſioners, men who hold commiſſions or offices under the crown, all military and naval officers, are, from their very ſituation, improper perſons to be returned to parliament. One great deſign of the houſe of commons was to be a check, and a controul,

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upon the crown, and the crown officers. It is, therefore, manifeſtly abſurd, that the ſervants of the crown ſhould be elected repreſentatives of the people.

By the preſent Qualification laws, your choice is in ſome degree limited. No talents, and no virtues, are thought ſufficient to qualify a man for the office of an Engliſh ſenator, without the poſſeſſion of a certain degree of property. If poſſeſſed of that property, though deſtitute of common honeſty, and with an underſtanding very little removed above that of an idiot, he may be returned to parliament. As the Qualification laws now ſtand, if Andrew Marvell were living, he could not be elected a repreſentative of the meaneſt borough. His knowledge, his eloquence, his integrity, would not be thought proper or ſufficient qualifications, without the poſſeſſion of that degree of fortune which the preſent laws have preſcribed, and which he undoubtedly did not poſſeſs. Any wealthy knave, or blockhead, in his neighbourhood, who ſhould think proper to offer himſelf, muſt, by law, be elected in preference to him.

But notwithſtanding the limitation of the preſent Qualification laws, it appears reaſonable to ſuppoſe,

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that, in large diſtricts, ſome perſons might be found, poſſeſſed of the property which the preſent laws require, men of fair characters, and not wholly deſtitute of knowledge and ability. It ſeems extraordinary, that, in ſo large a place as London, four men cannot be found to repreſent it in parliament, who are poſſeſſed of ſufficient property, and at the ſame time men of integrity, and of reſpectable intellectual endowments. But I need not inform any intelligent citizen of London, that the repreſentatives of that city are not always of this character.

It muſt be highly proper for the citizens of London, at the preſent period, to conſider, whether their repreſentatives, in the laſt parliament, paid the attention which they ought to have done, in framing the late act for the London Militia, to the rights of the citizens, and to their antient privileges and immunities. If this was not the caſe, and if the Militia of London, by the late act, was rendered more dependent on the crown than formerly, thoſe repreſentatives of the metropolis, who promoted ſuch an act, or who concurred in it, muſt be unworthy of the future confidence of the citizens.

Men,

MEN, who have frequently abſented themſelves from their duty in parliament, when great and important queſtions were agitated there, ought not to be again returned. Nor ought any man to be elected, for any part of the kingdom, who voted in ſupport of the two late bills, called Mr. Pitt's and Lord Grenville's bills. Indeed, no man can have a reaſonable claim to your ſuffrages, who did not attend in his place to oppoſe thoſe bills. A deſertion of the intereſts of his conſtituents, on ſuch an occaſion, ought to be conſidered as a flagrant violation of his duty as a repreſentative.

FROM THE MOMENT THAT THOSE BILLS PASSED, ENGLAND WAS DEGRADED, AND THE INHABITANTS OF IT HAD NO LONGER ANY JUST CLAIM TO BE RANKED AMONG FREE NATIONS. To conſider any country as a free country, in which an hundred perſons cannot legally meet, to conſider whether they are aggrieved, or whether they ſhall even petition the legiſlature, without the conſent of magiſtrates appointed by the crown, is perfectly abſurd. It is certain, that MORE LIBERTY WAS ENJOYED, BY LAW, IN THE REIGN OF JAMES THE SECOND, than the people of this country have been in poſſeſſion of, ſince

the paſſing of theſe bills. If this ſtatement be true, and I will venture to affirm, that no man in the kingdom can juſtly controvert it, it becomes your repreſentatives very ſeriouſly to conſider, whether thoſe purpoſes have been anſwered, for which the Revolution was effected, and for which the princes of the houſe of Hanover have been raiſed to the throne of theſe kingdoms.

Many of the evils, under which this country now labours, have been the reſult of the negligence, or venality, of the people, in the choice of their repreſentatives. More than one half of the taxes, now paid by the people of this country, have been the reſult of impolitic and unneceſſary wars. This could not have been the caſe, if the inhabitants of Great Britain had choſen men as their repreſentatives, who underſtood the intereſt of their country, and were ſincerely deſirous of promoting it.

In your choice of repreſentatives, be particularly careful not to elect men, who will venture to do no buſineſs in the houſe of commons, till the chancellor of the exchequer makes his appearance there. Such men diſgrace themſelves, their conſtituents, and their

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country. Placemen, penſioners, contractors, and miniſterial hirelings of various orders, feel, or affect to feel, that implicit reverence for the prime miniſter for the time being; but that reverence is not felt, never was felt, and never can be felt, by any truly independant repreſentative of the people. Whenever you have an honeſt houſe of commons, there will be a total end to that arrogance in the prime miniſter, and that ſervility in the repreſentatives of the people, which were ſo ſtrikingly and ſo diſhonourably exhibited, in the laſt and in preceding parliaments.

In every diſtrict of the kingdom, my friends and countrymen, you ſhould endeavour to elect, as your repreſentatives, men of integrity, of public ſpirit, and of abilities. Whenever you can meet with ſuch men, no intereſted conſiderations ſhould lead you to give the preference to any others. And when your members are elected, you have an undoubted right to give them inſtructions reſpecting their parliamentary conduct. The right of inſtructing your repreſentatives is founded upon unqueſtionable reaſon, and the practice of your anceſtors for time immemorial. Nor was there ever a period, when it was more proper for

the people to inſtruct their repreſentatives than the preſent. The nation has been involved in the moſt extreme difficulties, from the miſconduct of the miniſtry, and the treacherous acquieſcence of the laſt parliament; and it ſeems, therefore, indiſpenſably neceſſary, that you ſhould give the moſt expreſs directions to your new repreſentatives, not to copy the diſgraceful example of their predeceſſors. For of the laſt parliament, it has been very truly and juſtly ſaid, by one of its moſt diſtinguiſhed members, that it has "added more to the burthens, and taken away "more from the rights of the ſubject, than any par-"liament recorded in the annals of our country."

INSTRUCT your members, that the people of this country have a right to expect ſhorter parliaments, and a more general and equal repreſentation. As to the inequality of the repreſentation, it was ſtated in the petition of the ſociety, called "the Friends of the People," which was preſented to the laſt parliament, that "the number of repreſentatives, aſſigned to the different counties, is groſsly diſproportioned to their comparative extent, population, and trade;" and that "the elective franchiſe is ſo partially and unequally diſtributed, and is in ſo many inſtances com-

mitted to bodies of men of ſuch very limited numbers, that the majority of the houſe of commons is elected by leſs than fifteen thouſand electors; which, even if the male adults in the kingdom be eſtimated at ſo low a number as three millions, is not more than the two hundredth part of the people to be repreſented." It was alſo ſtated in the ſame petition, that "eighty-four individuals do, by their own immediate authority, ſend one hundred and fifty-ſeven members to parliament." Of theſe facts evidence was offered to be produced at the bar of the laſt houſe of commons; and though a committee was appointed to take the petition into conſideration, that aſſembly was too corrupt ever to enter into any ſerious inveſtigation of the ſubject.

INSTRUCT your repreſentatives, that one of their firſt objects ſhould be, to reſtore to the people thoſe rights, of which they were unjuſtly deprived, under the moſt contemptible pretences, by the laſt parliament. Remind them, that the Revolution was effected, in order to eſtabliſh the rights of the people; and that it was to eſtabliſh thoſe rights, and for no other purpoſe, that the princes of the houſe of Hanover were raiſed to the throne of Great Britain;

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and that the princes of that family have no other legitimate claim than what is founded on thoſe rights. And alſo inform your repreſentatives, that it is your opinion, that the preſervation of the lives of princes, of any family, ought not to be made a pretence for trampling on the rights of a whole nation.

Inform your repreſentatives, that, at thoſe periods when parliaments were virtuous and independent, it was not unuſual for the houſe of commons to attend to the proceedings of the courts of law, and to animadvert on the conduct of the judges, and even to proceed to impeachment, when that conduct appeared to be criminal. Inſtruct your repreſentatives, that they may inſtruct the ſervants of the crown, that it is not by new, unuſual, or barbarous ſentences, that the throne of the king will be eſtabliſhed. The conduct of Sir George Jefferies is not a very proper model for the imitation of modern judges; and you may inform ſuch of your repreſentatives, as may not be very accurately acquainted with the hiſtory of England, that the campaign of Sir George Jefferies, or his Weſtern circuit, which afforded that gracious prince ſuch high exultation, was in 1685; and that in 1688 this pious prince (for he was ſaid to be pious

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as well as gracious) was driven from the throne. You have a right to apply to your repreſentatives, that they may employ their efforts to procure real redreſs for every public grievance: and, perhaps, it is not very conformable to the ſpirit of Engliſh law, or of Engliſh liberty, if men who have been proſecuted, or brought to trial, under falſe pretences, and which has been conducted in ſuch a manner as materially to injure their health, or their fortunes, ſhould be refuſed permiſſion, in the courts in which they have been tried, or in which their trial has been evaded, to ſtate the hardſhips which they have ſuffered, and the injuries they have received.

The part which Great Britain has taken, reſpecting the revolution in France, will be recorded to its diſhonour, ſo long as any hiſtory of Europe ſhall remain. It ill became the people of England to exhauſt their blood, and their treaſures, in ſupport of German deſpots, or deſpots of any other nation. This could not have happened, if the people had been poſſeſſed of a virtuous, independent, and enlightened parliament. As to the idea which was thrown out, that the war was carried on for the preſervation of religion, and of ſocial order, this was a

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ſpecies of contemptible jargon, fit only to be addreſſed to the retainers of the court, and to perſons of the meaneſt underſtanding. Inſtruct your members, therefore, to uſe their moſt aſſiduous endeavours to reſtore the bleſſings of PEACE, and to put a final termination to a war, diſgraceful and impolitic in its commencement, and deſtructive in its conſequences.

May, 1796.

AN ENGLISHMAN.