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F U L L R E P O R T

O F T H E

S P E E C H

O F T H E

Rt. Hon. HENRY GRATTAN,

I N T H E

H O U S E O F C O M M O N S .

O F I R E L A N D ,

O N T H U R S D A Y T H E 14<sup>th</sup> O F F E B R U A R Y , 1788.

I N T H E

D E B A T E O N T I T H E S .

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F U L L R E P O R T

OF THE

S P E E C H

OF THE

Rt. Hon. HENRY GRATTAN.

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**M**R. GRATTAN said it was not his intention to surprize the House at the present, by introducing so important a subject as that of tithes; he would prefer submitting the grievances complained of by the peasantry, to a Committee, who would examine if they really existed or not. That such mode of proceeding would meet with the approbation of the House he had no doubt; as the Committee, by considering the magical error in its true form, would see the necessity of a commutation of tithes; a commutation that was he to propose, in the first instance, without

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convincing the House that the peasantry were really distressed, might bring on an opposition that he would wish, if possible, to see avoided on the present momentous subject. It is, continued he, a position in politics as well as physics, that for the purpose of removing the complaint it is necessary for the physician to know the nature of the disorder. For this purpose there were many respectable witnesses ready to attend to prove their allegations, which he was convinced would shew the necessity of a reformation being made in this mode of provision for the clergy. He said he declined at present separating the question; he understood that tithes of a particular nature, unfashioned by law, were levied on the poor in the southern parts of the country; he lamented their inability to pay them, and reproached, in terms of ardent indignation, that spirit of speculation and rapine that brought down misery and wretchedness on so useful a body of men. Tithe of turf had been levied by the clergy, and paid by the poor; a hearth-money tax of two shillings a hearth, in lieu of the tithe of turf, which was unknown to the laws, had been also levied; and where opposition was offered to these illegal demands, litigation ensued, and often the pastor, the tithe proctor, and tithe farmer, with every mischief in their train, united to bring on the lowest and most useful of the community,

munity, accumulated ruin. Those charges, he was well convinced, could be sufficiently established; with numberless others equally grievous, and which he would reserve for another more favourable opportunity—For which purpose he moved,

*“ That a Committee be appointed to inquire if there  
 “ is any just cause of discontent in the province of  
 “ Munster, and also to inquire if the late excesses  
 “ committed in the province of Munster, and coun-  
 “ ties of Kilkenny and Carlow, were on account of  
 “ tithes, or on account of the collection of them; and  
 “ also what redress should be afforded them; and to  
 “ report their opinion thereon.”*

In this Committee, said he, I shall state and bring evidence of the grievances under which the wretched people labour. In this Committee I shall also submit what occurs to me as the proper mode of remedy. I do not wish in the first instance to usher these matters to the House, because, as I said before, I am unwilling to risk the interest of the clergy, the cause of the poor, and the happiness of the country, upon my opinion. Let me then beseech an inquiry, from which much good and no mischief whatever can possibly result.

With respect to the payment of the clergy, whose incomes I would rather augment than diminish, three plans have occurred to me :

The first is,

“ To pay the clergy the full amount of what,  
 “ on a fair average, they have received for several  
 “ years prior to the disturbances complained  
 “ of, which amount should be raised by applotment  
 “ in the manner of other country charges.”

The second is,

“ To institute a general modus in lieu of  
 “ tithes.”

The third is,

“ A combination of modus of commutation,  
 “ by a general survey of every county ; a certain  
 “ sum to be allowed for every acre under tillage,  
 “ and the whole county at large to be the security  
 “ of the clergyman.”

This I assert to be not only practicable, but easy of accomplishing, for similar surveys are every year made in almost every county in Ireland. Gentlemen must observe that there is a vast difference between a fair inquiry, which is the sole subject of my motion, and a positive agreement, which may bind down Parliament to  
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a specific plan. I do not wish them to be pledged to any system, but first to examine whether any system at all is necessary, and then to determine upon the nature of it themselves. But if the business shall be suffered to go into a Committee, I flatter myself such proofs will be adduced, such substantial allegations attested upon oath at the bar of the House, as will convince them that the voice of complaint has not been raised without just, and even more than sufficient cause. And these proofs shall not come from White-Boys, or from persons supposed favourable to their proceedings, but from men of irreproachable characters; men who have been goaded to outrage by tithe-proctors, but who have patiently submitted to reiterated imposition, and become the mediators of peace, and the instruments of tranquillity. Those evidences are ready to be produced at the bar of your House; and when you go into Committee, gentlemen will have an opportunity of assenting to, or disapproving, the proposed plans of reformation.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL said, I differ altogether with the Right Honourable Gentleman as to the mode of taking up the subject. I cannot think it right, that, with the concurrence of this House, the idea of redress should be set afloat; thus to heat the imaginations of the people, without

out any positive remedy in view to allay them. I will not therefore consent to the Committee of Inquiry proposed by him, for I am sure that a more effectual means to increase the disturbances that exist, and to disturb the public tranquillity, could not be taken. My Right Hon. Friend has admitted it to be a matter of such difficulty, as to call for the greatest efforts of the wisest heads to determine it with prudence, and yet he wants the House to enter instantly into a Committee, in order to ascertain whether any just cause of discontent exists in the province of Munster, or in the counties of Kildare or Carlow, on account of tithe, or the collection of tithe; and if any, to report the same, with their opinion thereon. If his abilities, confessedly so great, have not been able to devise any plan which he can vouch for, and positively recommend, I think it would be madness to agitate the subject at all. But if he is in possession of any system, in God's name, let him propose it. He well knows that the House will listen with partiality to any proposal coming from him. If it shall appear to be such as I can approve, I shall certainly support it; if not, I must only vote against it.

Lord KINGSBOROUGH rose to second Mr. Grattan's motion. I cannot, said his Lordship, forbear mentioning the oppressions and distresses  
under

under which the poor in the south of Ireland labour. I reside in that part of the kingdom, and therefore cannot be ignorant of them. The people who cultivate the poor lands in the county of Cork are utterly unable to pay tithe of any kind, and yet tithe of every kind is most rigorously demanded from them. Many demands made by the clergy are illegal. I have myself been cited to an ecclesiastical court for payment of an illegal demand, and which, illegal and exorbitant as it was, I should have been obliged to comply with, without ever having joined issue, were I a poor man. If a Committee is appointed, gentlemen will have an opportunity of entering into the merits of the business.

Mr. BROWNE, (of the College) said he felt much difficulty in opposing the Right Honourable Gentleman, whose romantic success and splendid abilities had long insured his triumph. He could not however at present submit to his motion, it being in his mind replete with an inconsistency that did not usually mark his measures. The honourable member, continued he, has established our constitutional rights on a solid foundation, but would he now shake it by suffering an innovation on our ecclesiastical system? It would, said he, be a task replete with difficulty and  
danger

danger to attempt altering so ancient a system; and the absurdity of such a measure being adopted, having no colour of reason why it should, was so evident, that any remark on it would appear superfluous to the House. Mr. Browne next adverted to the compensation bill which had been introduced. This, he trusted, would effectually answer every purpose to restore order and tranquillity in the south. He asked the Right Honourable Gentleman, who authorised him to become the arbiter between the clergy and their flock? Who had appointed him to regulate their property? I am warranted, continued he, in declaring the clergy have made no such request; and on the part of the people I can safely say the same, as no petitions appear to give weight to his assertions.

Here Mr. Browne took an opportunity of recurring to the late contested election in the county of Cork. The conflict between the ruling powers in that county incited a spirit of opposition in the lower order of people; this spirit was encouraged, because it met no resistance from their superiors, and it therefore grew into an opposition against the clergy, that is neither warranted by law or justice. On the part of the clergy he could with truth say, that they were a body of men by no means hostile to humanity, as has  
 been

been falsely alledged; their meekness would not permit them, nor their benevolence suffer them, to crush those misguided people who had resisted the laws, and deprived them of their property. That the clergy had laboured under many oppressions, was a fact universally known, yet, he would take upon him to say, they wished for no alteration in a system founded on the pure basis of religion; its simplicity endeared it to them, and their reverence for the ancient constitution made them prefer it to any new regulation, rather wishing to suffer those ills they have, than fly to others that they know not of. He concluded by observing that in respect to the complaint of the Right Honourable Gentleman, of a tithe of turf being levied, he was assured if any such tithe had been taken by the clergy, it was in lieu of something withheld from the pastor; and that the laity were no sufferers by such regulation. He therefore could not, consistently with his principles, give his approbation to the motion made by the Right Honourable Member.

Mr. GRATTAN.—Mr. Speaker, I am called on by an Honourable Member to support what I have alledged respecting the oppressions experienced by the southern peasantry. Though

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well I am convinced the matter would come with much more propriety before a Committee, yet, as it is not likely I will have an opportunity of introducing it before the House in that shape, I must now request your indulgence, while I justify myself, and vindicate my assertions.

I had indeed flattered myself I would not have occasion to trouble the House on the subject of tithes, and therefore I reserved myself to meet the question in Committee.

If I can judge from appearances, there seems to be a determined opposition to this measure. My predicament must of course be a singular one, as I am censured by one Honourable Gentleman for *not* producing a plan, and by another for *producing* one which has been emphatically declared to threaten injury to the state. Thus, by the same species of sophistry, I am charged with being an arbiter between the clergy and their flock without any authority, and of course a fomenter of commotion, and a promoter of disturbance. If it is criminal to wish to heal the breach subsisting between the clergy and the laity; if it is fomenting disturbance to wish to conciliate all parties, then I have materially erred; if to deny me the opportunity of doing  
this

this is meritorious, the people of Ireland must be soon convinced to whom they are obliged.

Are not the commotions that disturbed the peace of the country too notorious to be denied? Is it not the usage of the parliaments of both kingdoms, in similar cases, to investigate the cause, and strike at the root of the evil; and not, by adopting temporary expedients to remove the effects, suffer the primary error to exist? If this has been the case, then, Sir, I tread on firm, on constitutional grounds, and will not hesitate to say, that an inquiry ought to be made, and if it should appear that the subject is oppressed, redress should follow. If you deny this, you deny the existence of the constitution.

Sir, there are men ready to appear at your bar, respectable men, who are enabled and willing to prove on their oaths, that the commo-  
nalty in the southern counties are monstrously aggrieved. Call these men to your bar, humanity demands it, and their oppressions require it; and if they cannot clearly support their allegations, it will be to me a subject of pleasure, and to the House a matter of triumph. If it appears to me that no grievance does exist, then I

will unite in supporting a system now apparently obnoxious.

I applaud the modest worth of my honourable friend [Mr. Brown] whose integrity of principles, and benevolence of heart, I have long admired; and though I widely differ with him on the present question, our coincidence of sentiments on others, is a reflection that must ever afford me pleasure. It is, Sir, painful to me to reflect that so much oppression exists, that this oppression falls chiefly on that most useful body, our husbandmen. To convince the House that oppression and exaction really exist, I request the attention of the House while I read a few extracts from letters and papers now in my hand, the substance of which can be verified on oath. The charges contained in these papers, Sir, are of such a heinous nature, and exhibit such a scene of iniquity and melancholy imposition practised on the southern peasantry, as must raise indignation in the breast of every man that hears them.

It has been asserted on the part of the clergy, or rather of their proctors, that though their charges sometimes carried the feature of extortion, still the full tenth was seldom taken from  
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the parishioner; and they even dared the oppressed to shew one instance where any part of the laity's property had been illegally tithed. The last assertion I am warranted to say is a glaring violation of truth, for I can shew, to the full satisfaction of this House, that turf has been tithed—illegally tithed.

I have also the best authority for asserting that where men have been refractory, and would not submit to what they knew was a gross imposition, they have been dragged before an ecclesiastical court; that the decision of these disgraceful courts made the defendants enter into security for the illegal payment of tithe of turf, and not being able to accomplish that payment, wretches who had scarcely a rag to protect them from the inclemency of the elements, were cast into a loathsome prison—martyrs to extortion, and victims to violated justice.—Sir, it is obvious and degrading to the constitution, to see extortion assume the power of legislation, and commuting its own exaction by laying a tax of two shillings on each hearth of poor creatures, many of whom had not a turf to burn, or a coal to kindle. Is not such rapacity contrary to justice, and repugnant to law? for the law particularly exempts creatures of poor condition from a hearth tax; which, under the name of  
 smoke-

smoke-money, is seized on by the rigorous and relentless tithe factor.

I will now ask the House, is it prepared to deny these charges, or is it prepared to justify them? It cannot—it will not—I have the opinion of an upright and learned lawyer, whose talents and virtues are an ornament to human nature, and who has been lately translated to the seat of justice, to say that the parson, the proctor, or tithe farmer, who presumes to exact a tithe of turf, or the tax of smoke-money, and the ecclesiastical judge who acquiesces with them, all act contrary to law, and are deserving of, and liable to, exemplary punishment. [*A cry of bear, bear.*] A tithe of furze has also been claimed and obtained, though they were not cut for sale, but spent or consumed on the premises; nay, the most trifling article of the wretched parishioner falls a sacrifice to the impious grasp of avarice and rapacity. I now ask gentlemen, is it possible for exaction to invent a more cruel and severe tax than these I submit for consideration? Than the first charge nothing can be more exorbitant, except the charge of the proctor, which amounts to the enormous sum of two shillings in the pound, for collecting his own exaction, a tax that may as justly be levied for the support of the clergyman's domestics.—After this fair and plain state-  
ment

ment of facts, can it be said that there has been neither oppression or extortion in Munster? No surely, since every thing paid tithe in that province, that paid tithe any where else, and potatoes, flax, and turf were also tithed there, that were tithed *no where* else. Thus much for the province of Munster, with the additional charge of proctorage.

Having now clearly shewn, Sir, that the southern counties have been particularly aggrieved, I shall proceed to state the tithable prices charged for the different productions of the earth, particularly in those parishes recently disturbed; which are according to the following statement:

*Wheat from 12s. to 20s. per acre.*

*Potatoes from 8s. to 19s. do.*

*Barley from 9s. to 13s. do.*

*Oats from 6s. to 10s. do.*

*Meadow from 4s. to 7s. do.*

*Flax from 11s. to 15s. do.*

Besides,

*For a little garden 19s.*

In the county of Cork, the ratages are:

*Potatoes 16s. per acre.*

*Wheat 16s. do.*

*Barley*

<i>Barley</i>	9s. 9d.	<i>do.</i>
<i>Oats</i>	8s.	<i>do.</i>
<i>Meadowing</i>	6s.	<i>do.</i>

Exclusive of this general statement, Sir, I shall produce other instances of uncommon extortion, where wheat, potatoes, flax, &c. are charged by the stone; rape also, which the legislature thought it wisdom to cultivate, has not escaped the eye of the proctor, but has been taxed enormously.

In Ulster, Sir, the farmer pays but sixpence for his flax, be the quantity great or small. Through the whole nation the rate of tithing is, on an average, but one third of what is charged in Munster; the consequence of which has been, that while livings in other parts of the kingdom have improved in honest gradation as the country improved in wealth, in Munster they have exceeded all bounds.

Is not this, Sir, an encroachment, and such a one as fully accounts for the discontent of the people? for it is not merely that a living has grown from sixty pounds to three hundred pounds, but the proctor and tithe-farmer's gains, or perhaps the gains of two or three intermediate relays of tithe proctors and tithe-farmers,

farmers, extracted from the peasant, full twice as much as went into the pocket of the parson.

In corroboration of further monstrous extortion, I shall read the deposition of a respectable farmer.

No. I. states that he was charged 16s. an acre tithe for oats.

No. IV. states that he was obliged to pay 24s. for two English acres of wheat, and for bull potatoes, 17s. an acre.

No. VI. states that he was charged 40s. an acre for potatoes, which he refused to pay; and having been cast in a suit he commenced in consequence of this exaction, a decree was obtained against him, which amounted to sixteen pounds costs!

No. XVI. shews that deponent paid 15s. an acre for wheat.

And No. XVIII. asserts that he paid fourteen pounds to the clergyman, having been charged at the rate of one pound two shillings per acre tithe for potatoes. These facts, Sir, are supported by the oath of a creditable gentleman, and

there can be no doubt of their authenticity ; such, I lament to say, are the exactions practised on the Irish peasantry—such are the crimes that bear the mild name of oppression—such are the iniquitous extortions that call loudly and justly for reformation.

Now I ask, will gentlemen admit these ratages to be founded in fact, and say that no substantial cause of grievance exists ? I request they will not pass my question in silence. [*A pause.*] If they do, I shall conceive that it is a question which they cannot, or are afraid to answer.

Sir, the litigation excited by this degrading mode of provision for the clergy, is an evil that shakes the foundation of industry, that draws down on the miserable peasant accumulated ruin, that stems the torrent of justice, and is the source of oppression. I am concerned to find that tithes of turf, potatoes, and smoke-money, are with impunity levied contrary to law. The peasant who resists this cruel violation of justice, and flies for protection to a petty court, soon, to his destruction, discovers that which should have been his asylum receives him as a devoted victim ; that by the collusion of the court, or the imbecility of the judge, he falls a sacrifice to his temerity, and a decree is obtained

tained which involves him and his family in eternal ruin.

This picture of calamity, Sir, may appear over-charged ; for the honour of human nature I wish it was ; but from the proctor's bills and receipts, which I hold in my hand, I am convinced of the existence of unexampled oppression : and as to the iniquity and collusion of ecclesiastical courts, it is so flagrant a matter, and so universally known and admitted, that to dwell on the subject any longer for the purpose of impressing the idea, would be a waste of words, and an insult offered to the honourable members that surround me.

I shall now advert, Sir, to what has been advanced, that the court would afford redress to the complainants, and relieve them from such heavy oppressions.

But, Sir, it is well known that the Vicars Court is like a Polish Diet, distinguished for nothing but injustice, ignorance and party ; the Judge is always one of the body, or else his appointment proceeds from it ; and though in some cases the flagrant justice of the individual might controul the partial umpire, yet the constitution of the court is such, that none

but a partial judge has ever been known to pre-  
side there.

That the ecclesiastical court is a most expen-  
sive and grievous judicature, I presume no man  
of candour will deny. It is well known to the  
House that the costs and expences of a suit in the  
Vicars Court are seldom less than one pound six  
shillings and eight-pence, though the sum liti-  
gated may not be more than five shillings. In  
addition to this grievance, the incompetency of  
a witness is of no avail to set aside his evidence ;  
the most contemptible and suspicious wretch is  
embraced with a holy zeal, and on the merits of  
his testimony this upright court, without hesita-  
tion, decrees :—nay, though he were the proc-  
tor, or servant of the party, and his bias and  
corruption were evident, still his evidence is ad-  
missible ; notwithstanding he viewed the crop in  
the infancy of vegetation, or the ground at the  
time was red, when it was impossible, with any  
degree of certainty, to anticipate its value, or to  
ascertain its produce. And it is well known,  
Sir, that he frequently guesSES at the quantum  
of land, produce, and value, without survey,  
weight, or measure.

The uncharitable and excessive ratages in the  
south, Sir, must rouse the indignation of the  
House.

House. In the year 1786, I can prove from indisputable evidence, the tithes of many farms amounted to the rack rent of the landholder; and I am assured from reputable authority, that it is a practice to charge the innocent and unsuspecting husbandman for more acres than he really possesses; this is a charge incontrovertible, as I have a survey, sworn to, that not only proves this, and the infamous exaction of the proctor, but plainly shews that, in many instances, not only the tenth, but the fourth is extorted from the unprotected peasant.

Surely, Sir, it will not be asked after what I have stated, is there not a remedy for such egregious imposition? That question has been already answered by what I advanced respecting the impotency of inferior courts, where the expence attending the failure of the parishioner's suit must be attended by certain destruction.--- This, Sir, causes a fear that operates to the advantage of the tithes-proctor, canter, &c. and prevents the object of their plunder from seeking redress in a summary way. I lament, Sir, that the clergy are so very tenacious, that they will not suffer or give their approbation to any alteration in a system that has time immemorial given rise to persecutions and prosecutions in this kingdom. The mild spirit of the Gospel does  
not

not say, that oppression is of divine right—that the elemental tithe of fire shall roast the tithe-pig of the parson, or that it is just to receive tithe of a wretched cottier, which amounts almost to the rack rent he pays for his farm.

Sir, the progress of a suit in the *Irish ecclesiastical courts*, is attended with double the expence of a suit carried on in the ecclesiastical courts of England, and is at best a penal remnant of barbarity, that requires immediate annihilation.

I shall now, Sir, recur to the enormities practised in the levying of tithes, and for the purpose of convincing the House of the truth of my allegations, I shall, with permission of the House, read an extract from a letter written to me by a gentleman in Cathel, for whose veracity I can vouch.

[*Read a letter which took a view of the progress of tithing from the year 1774 to 1783; which Mr. Grattan, after furnishing the House with, proceeded in the following manner to comment on.*]

Sir, it appears that in the year 1783, a year of famine, for two hundred and sixty-five barrels of wheat one pound an acre has been charged, according to the average produce of preceding  
years,

years, uncommonly productive. The Vicar's Court in the diocese of Cashel, appears from incontestible evidence, to be a most iniquitous one. [*Copies of decrees taken from the rule book of this court, Mr. Grattan now read.*]

Thus, Sir, it plainly appears that the court calculated the number of barrels, which the acre of potatoes, wheat, or oats might produce, either on the superficial and partial view of the farm, or the most extraordinary or partial estimate of their proctors, valuers and dependants.

I condemn exceedingly, the uncertainty of such grounds for the decision of property; the minute division in barrels and stones, is an ingenious but exceptionable device to accumulate exaction on the poor. This mode of proceeding is like an apothecary or taylor's bill—crowded with little dirty *items* to swell an exorbitant account—[*A laugh.*]

Such abominable extortion, I am sorry to observe, is peculiar to this country, and extremely injurious to its commercial interests; a tax on grain dissipates the spirit of industry, by driving the peasant from the plough to less valuable pursuits; a bold and robust peasantry is the strength of the empire, and the sinews of commerce;

they

they should be cherished by the legislature with a parental affection ; I therefore call upon Government to alleviate their wrongs, which it will completely do, by regulating that system which is no less a degradation to the clerical character, than it is repugnant to the precepts of Christianity.

Sir, from the decrees I have read, it is obvious, that the parson and proctors claim and receive market prices for tithes ; whereas in justice, in equity, and in law, field prices can only be demanded ; to insist on market price is a monstrous exaction, it is claiming a tithe of labour, as well as of property, as no allowances are made for digging and drawing, nor no recompense given for the trouble or labour of the peasant.

From the decrees I have read, Sir, it appears that in the year 1774, which was a year of scarcity, that for

350 barrels of beer, 40 barrels had been exacted for tithe.

130 barrels of oats were charged proportionably.

4256 stones of potatoes were charged 425 stones for tithe.

Hay had been charged 10s. a ton.

47 acres of wheat charged 1*l.* 2*s.* 9*d.* an acre ;  
and meadow was charged 12*s.* an acre.

Thus it is plainly proved, by these decrees, that the ratages are exorbitant ; but even these extortions will appear trivial, when compared to the rapaciousness of 1783, which was a year of famine ! During this year potatoes had been rated, according to the decree, one guinea an acre—an equitable famine price !—flax above one guinea an acre, another equitable famine price !—hay 10*s.* a ton, a very equitable famine price !—to which is tacked 1*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* cost—all, all equitable famine ratages !

Will any honourable member controvert what I have alledged ; there is no man can, I am convinced : sorry then am I to find, that the poverty and accumulated wrongs of the poor of this country are only equal to the rapine and peculation of their merciless plunderers.

From this statement, nothing is more obvious than that the clergy and their proctors had set forth a plenty produce, and thereto annexed a famine price, availing themselves of famine, which was unchristian and uncharitable, and making plenty itself the scourge of the farmer.

That this had been done appeared evident from the decrees in cases of poor people, who, to a good Christian, should have been objects of succour in a year of scarcity, and not the devoted objects of extortion and exaction.

These decrees, and the cause that excites them, are extremely prejudicial to the poor, and destructive to husbandry. Surely, it is very impolitic to load with a tithable tax the rudiments of our manufactures. The regulation of tithing should ever keep in consideration the interest of the manufacturer; I am assured, from the best authority, that 14*s.* an acre have been paid for an acre of flax, and 16*l.* have been exacted as tithe for four acres of rape; the first elements of our manufactures should be tithe-free, and though flax is our staple, yet it pays a greater tithe in this kingdom than in Great Britain, as there the tithe of flax and hemp does not exceed 5*s.* the acre.

Sir, in the north, and the province of Connaught, tithe of turf and potatoes are unknown; to smoke-money the peasant is equally a stranger; which demonstrates, that the exactions practised on the southern poor, are much more enormous than those experienced by the northern husbandmen.

In Kildare the ratage of

*Wheat is, per acre, 6s.*

*Meadowing, do. 3s. 6d.*

In the county of Dublin the ratage is about,  
for

*Wheat, per acre, 6s.*

*Oats, Barley, Meadowing, and all other articles subject to tithes, are in the same proportion.*

In the King's County the ratages upon

*Wheat, Barley, and all other tithable articles, are equally reasonable.*

In Connaught the ratage is, for

*Wheat, per acre, about 6s.*

*Potatoes, nothing.*

And upon the whole there is no demand whatever made of proctorage-fees for trouble in the collection of tithe.

In the county of Antrim no tithe is demanded for potatoes ; all the other tithe-rates are equally reasonable with those I have before stated.

In many other counties which I could mention, but the detail of which would be rather

tedious, no demand is made of tithe for potatoes, and some few are exempted from tithe of flax.

I now, Sir, call upon the gentlemen of the law, and ask them if they can produce legal authority in support of the extortions I have stated. If they cannot, I call on them to assist me in framing a bill that will remove these enormities, and give comfort to the peasant, and an honourable support to the parson.

Sir, in respect to potatoes, the tithe ought in justice to be estimated, not according to the quantum of produce, but consonant to the poor condition of the peasant; and the person who values them should ever have under consideration the low price of labour in this country. The reverse is the fact: in the province of Munster the exactions are uncommonly high, though the price of labour is so low that it scarcely affords the means of sustenance to the wretched peasant and his hapless family.

When a minister of the Gospel visits a parishioner so circumstanced, and claims twelve or fifteen, or sometimes twenty shillings, for an acre of tillage, he demands a CHILD'S SHARE; he extracts alms from a beggar, he adds famine to poverty, he infringes the holy Gospel, he grinds

grinds the face of the poor, and sacrifices that humanity and benevolence, which should distinguish the clerical character, to the mammon of unrighteousness. When such a man produces the proctor's valuation, the peasant might produce the Gōspel, and in point of divinity, though not of law, the peasant would have the advantage of the parson. The peasant would state the pastor's *spiritual* profession against his reverence's exaction, and may admonish him with his own religion, which triumphs over every other division of Christianity, by the excess of piety and contempt of riches.

Sir, I cannot avoid combating the prevalent opinion, that gentlemen should support the clergy in upholding a system, that has neither equity or justice to recommend it; this indeed would be a criminal partiality.

Is it because the burden is removed from the shoulders of the rich to those of the poor? Is it because the estated gentry send from their parks, their palaces, and delightful improvements, the ominous tithe-proctor to levy contributions on the potatoe garden of the cottager? Is it under such narrow and confined considerations you mock the complaints of the peasantry, and refuse your aid to remove their oppression? No, surely;

surely ; this would be a gross libel on the generosity of Irishmen !

Besides the accumulated distresses tithes bring on the miserable tenantry, I do insist that no system has ever been adopted in this country which more effectually involves its interest. Tithes, as operating against agriculture, excite depopulation, and are inconsistent with industry ; there is a kindred alliance between tillage and manufactures, and what one suffers by exaction the other eventually experiences by depopulation.

I cannot avoid expressing my abhorrence at clergymen interfering in sanguinary punishments ; those who should shew the moral examples of humanity and meekness, degrade the ecclesiastical character by pursuing, with vindictiveness and persecution, the objects of their vengeance. Of the truth and piety of many worthy ecclesiastics, I am willing to bear honourable testimony ; their temperance and humanity are deserving of applause. The wish nearest my heart, is to unite all parties, and the only mode of accomplishing this is, to provide amply for the ministers of the Gospel, by a mode that would facilitate the payment of the church revenues,

venues, and ease the oppressions of the wretched peasantry.

Sir, how disgraceful must it appear to see the face of the southern provinces covered with an extensive army, sent for to fight the battles of the clergy and their proctors? How dreadful, how fatal had been the consequences were they led to action by a barbarian or a bigot! No, the rays of benevolence and humanity guided the footsteps of their commander, and he accomplished, by temperance and an amiable conciliation, that peace and tranquillity which marked his march, and now shews the gratitude of those creatures whom he disdained to slaughter.

On the part of the clergy it has been mentioned, that a combination existed among the parishioners, which prevented the clergyman from drawing home his tithes. To shew this charge is unfounded, I request the attention of the House, while I read a letter from a reputable gentleman, on whose veracity I can depend. It is directed to the clergyman of his diocese, and is conceived in these terms:—

“ S I R,

“ I deem it highly proper to give you early  
“ notice of my intention of laying out your tithe.

“ I re-

“ I request, if convenient, you will be so good  
 “ as to send and have it drawn away. If, how-  
 “ ever, it will be attended with any inconveni-  
 “ ence, I shall, if agreeable, draw it with my  
 “ own servants and horses.”

Friendly and candid as this is, it has been refused. I must think that the clergy lose considerably by their obstinacy in this respect. Thus the old and only remedy the parishioner had, having been withstood by the law of the land, the necessity of a new one—a firm regulation which will obviate all occasion for either, must be apparent to every man of common sense—of common discretion.

In the county of Kerry, Sir, I am well informed that merciless rapine and remorseless speculation are every where to be found; the whole body of the people of that county are against proctors and tithe-farmers; therefore the voice of justice and the grievances of the people call loudly for an act of commutation. Tithes are the body and soul of exaction and usury, that defy legislative restriction, and are only sustained by the uses of a cruel law.

Now, after having made these statements, I shall observe, that though there is no circumstance  
 adequate

adequate to create or to justify disturbance, there is no one object so likely to excite commotion as a scarcity of the necessaries of life; nothing can tend so much to cause that scarcity as the exorbitance of tithe demands. If, therefore, you wish the peace and tranquillity of the kingdom, you will take necessary measures to prevent that exorbitance, the first step to which purpose is the appointment of a Committee of Inquiry on the alledged grievances. Let each province of the kingdom be placed on a level; at present no equality exists; for while the inhabitants of the north, unannoyed by any religious exaction, proceed cheerfully on their manufactures, and various pursuits of prosperous industry, the useful peasant in the south, who follows the plough, anticipates, that the seed he sows will only ripen to be plucked by the hand of a relentless monster, and that he must remain bereft of the means of comfortable subsistence.

These are weighty grievances, and of themselves should indicate the necessity of speedy regulation. But this necessity will more strongly appear from the six allegations which I hold in my hand, and which evidence are ready to attest on oath at the bar of your House.

## A L L E G A T I O N S.

I. *That in certain parishes in the south, tithe has been demanded and paid for articles not tithable by law or custom ; and this they were ready to verify on oath at the bar of the House of Commons.*

II. *That the tithe rectory in certain parishes in the south, do ask, extort, and receive from the poor parishioner, one or two shillings in the pound under the description of rectorage, a demand oppressive and illegal ; and this they are ready to verify on oath at the bar of the House of Commons.*

III. *That in certain parishes in the south, demands for tithe had been excessive, and have not observed any equity in favour of the husbandman, the poor, or the manufacturer ; and this they are ready to verify on oath at the bar of the House of Commons.*

IV. *That in certain parishes in the south the rates for tithe have of late years greatly and rapidly increased, insomuch that certain livings in the course of a few years have increased three, four, or five fold ; and this they are ready to verify on oath at the bar of the House of Commons.*

V. *That in certain parishes in the south, the parishioners have duly and legally set out their tithe, and given due notice, but that no person has attended on the*

*the*

*the part of the proctor or minister, under the expectation, they suppose, of getting some other mode of recovery, tending to deprive the parish of its legal right of setting out the tithe; and this they are ready to verify on oath at the bar of the House of Commons.*

VI. *That the tithe-farmers in certain parishes of the south have oppressed, and do oppress his Majesty's subjects, by various ways of extortion, assuming to themselves, arbitrarily and cruelly, powers which the law do not give; and by making a barbarous use of such powers as the law has put into their hands; and this they are ready to verify on oath at the bar of the House of Commons.*

By suffering the business to go into Committee, and after examining facts, we shall, I am convinced, be able to ascertain the grievance complained of, and to discover a suitable remedy. Let us not be dissuaded by the aversion of the clergy from altering a system, which, impelling the lower classes to despair, subjects them to sanguinary punishment, and diminishes the revenue of the clergy themselves. The dæmon of unrighteousness seems to have inspired the Irish ecclesiastics with an unholy zeal; and they oppose with fury the reformation of a system, which they cannot even support by apostolic authority! The church of Ireland is degraded into a school

of contention and animosity; that harmony which should subsist between the creatures of the Omnipotent is banished from his temple, and is not even to be found amongst those who profess themselves his enemies!

I will now lay the sketch of a plan before the House, which, if adopted, will remove every difficulty, and be equally beneficial to the clergy and laity.

I would give the standard of grain, for the value of money; I would let the officer who strikes the average of grain for the county, strike it for seven years, for which space of time, this average should be a rule for regulation of tithes, to be a solemn compact between the clergy and laity; a similar estimate to be made at the expiration of the next seven years; thus to proceed in regular gradation, by which an effectual caution will be established against injury to the clergy, from a decrease in the value of specie. I think the mode of levying a tax of this nature for the support of the clergy should be by applotment, for that is a plan the common people are best acquainted with in raising public money, upon which, in my experience, I have never heard of discontent or murmuring.

By diminishing the income of rich and undeserved benefices, possessed by non-resident ecclesiastics, a fund will accrue for augmenting the salaries of the inferior clergy; men who have long toiled in the vineyard, a most worthy and meritorious body! It is not meet that a minister of the Gospel, who deserts or despises the duties of his function, should monopolize the sums allotted as a recompense for spiritual services which he never performs.—It is not proper to leave the resident pastor to pine in obscurity and want.—In a considerable tract of the county, which comprehends a large scope of ground, I can vouch, from my own knowledge, that there is but one resident clergyman for the cure of many thousand souls who dwelleth in it! and the salary of this ecclesiastic is no more than thirty pounds a year! Surely such laborious priests should be allowed to participate of the unearned wealth of their idle brethren.—But if the legislature shall not think that proper, the reduction may be explained to such purpose as may be deemed most expedient.

Consonant to this plan, I would totally exempt from all tithe-rates the food and fuel of the poor cottager—potatoes and turf in all parts of the kingdom.—I would also take such precautions as would prevent the growth of such articles as

are essential to manufactures from being retarded either by a total abolition of tithe on them, or by substituting a very light commutation. But I would make compensation to the clergy for the vote of agistment.—I would have all the grazing grounds which are now exempt, contribute an acreable allowance. This would evidently befriend agriculture, and by being collected in the manner of a parish cess, would obviate all the trouble attendant on tithe at present, such as viewing, canting, and setting.—This plan, I pledge myself, would produce a system of equality as yet unknown. The rates under it when in estimation would be,

*Wheat, per acre, 5s. 5d.*

*Barley, do. 2s. 6d.*

*Potatoes, where cultivated in any quantity,  
6d. an acre.*

*And all other ratages would be equally reasonable.*

The *divine right* of tithes has been ever set up by the clergy in opposition to the *sacrilegious* efforts of the laity to abolish them.—To anticipate this argument is no great proof of penetration; to refute it, requires no great degree of logic. If we give ourselves time to trace the origin of tithes, we shall have no great cause to exult in  
our

our imitation.—In the early days of darkness and bigotry, an ignorant people were not averse to sustain the luxuries of the church—Bigotry and a blind enthusiasm favoured the wishes of the priest, and the laity subscribed cheerfully to his support—The want of money gave the first rise to tithing; the people were bigots and barbarians, and their priests were sensualists and extortioners—The situation of the world was such in the antediluvian æra, and the scarcity of money was so prevalent, that tithes were naturally fixed upon as the most eligible provision for the clergy.

The Jews, Sir, as having favoured the custom of tithing, seem to have laid down such a maxim for the conduct of Christians, as Christians fear to violate. When I hear of the stubborn arguments used by the ecclesiastics of the church of Ireland, in favour of divine right, it incites my indignation.—The clergy who make use of such an argument are unacquainted with the subject of tithes, else they would despise opposing it to the opposition of the laity; for the first mention we find of tithes in holy writ, is of *Abraham*, who redeemed his kinsman *Lot* with his substance—Pagans improved on the system of Jews, and the Christians of the present æra improve upon both; sorry am I to see the example of Jews and idolators

lators held so sacred among Christians.—Tithes were founded in the days of darkness, and they are continued at the present enlightened period, through wickedness and perverseness.—This House is not a synagogue of Jews; why, therefore, so tenaciously adhere to Jewish customs, except there is something rational to recommend the custom or usage?—As well may you contend for a revival of their preposterous customs, their purifications and their circumcisions, as to argue and infer, that because tithes was their mode of payment it should be adopted and continued by us.

When the gross idolatries and the vile abominations which over-run this terrestrial habitation superceded the Christian religion, were tithes continued, or is there an instance of their being demanded?—Were tithes demanded under the Christian doctrine, or under the dispensation of the Gospel? Did the primitive ministers of Christianity demand tithes? Or is there any proof that they depended on tithes for their support? If they did not, I say, the claims of the clergy for tithes are unchristian-like; it is an avaricious demand, united with avarice and extortion, which not only deprives it of all force and validity, but renders opposition to it by no means criminal.

Are

Are not the words of the great Redeemer of mankind repugnant to the exactions of the clergy of this day? What does he say?

“Beware of covetousness.”—“Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.”

When the Messiah, with his Apostles, entered into the dwelling of the Gentiles, he said “Peace be to this house.”—Not *tithes*.

Does this seem to sanction a demand of the soil's produce?

The Council of Constance, I admit, may be adduced against our interference in the system of tithes.—The Council of Lateran, and Council of Nantz, denounced vengeance, and thundered their anathemas against all those who refused to pay tithes. The sentiments of St. Augustine and St. Jerome were coincident with these; as was also Juno's, who gave Priapus, the genius of war, all the tithes of spoils that Mars gained in battle, for *learning him to dance!* *Eudemus* mentions a kind of beast in Africa, that seems thoroughly acquainted with the doctrine of tithes; these animals always eat ten parts of their prey, leaving the eleventh as a kind of first fruit. One would have thought that this fancied description

of Eudemus was a prophecy of the rapacity of our modern elergy.

As to Augustine, Sir, he was a good and a religious man : To prevent sensuality and feasting, he claimed a tithe of the persons who dined within his holy district : His demand being complied with, and the Saint following the example of other ghostly Fathers, spent in personal appropriations and revelry, a tax that was levied under the specious pretext of curbing immorality and dissipation.

The old Fathers, Sir, sometimes asserted their holy claims with temperance, and oftentimes with avidity, equal to the pious claimants of the present period. They disdained, like an India or South Sea Company, to demand them under the right of charter ; their resources or regulations of provision being unsettled, they made them ever subservient to their luxury. The bigotry of the people was such that it prevented all resistance ; which indeed was needless, for in case they did, a whole army of saints would fly to the attack, and seize with impunity on the sacred treasure.

Tithes, Sir, were not introduced into England till about the fourth century, and what gave rise  
to

to them at that time, will be no great matter of triumph to the clergy. The pious King of Mercia perpetrated a barbarous murder, and to expiate the horrid crime, and save the souls of his mother, his grandmother, and ancestors, he not only caused tithes to be rigorously exacted from his subjects, but paid them himself. A laudable instance that a system founded on so righteous a measure should not suffer by innovation! I should mention that the paying of tithes after their establishment in England, was for near a century peculiar to the kingdom of *Mercia*, but was about the year 1400 introduced throughout England by an equally pious and sanguinary Monarch.

To demonstrate that tithes have been ever subject to innovation, you have only to recur to an act made in the fifth of Henry IV. “ Where  
 “ a bill passed the Commons against the EXAC-  
 “ TIONS of tithe of quarries and tithe of flates.”

In the 31st Henry VIII. chap. 13. it was enacted that “ the King and his patentees should hold  
 “ their possession of the dissolved monastries dis-  
 “ charged and acquitted of payment of tithes, as  
 “ freely and in as large and ample a manner as  
 “ the houses of religion held them at the time of  
 “ their dissolution.”

Sir, the instances of innovations are numberless, and are as glaring as the exactions practised in levying of tithes are notorious. It may be a matter not unworthy the attention of the House, to calculate all the certain and incidental expences of cultivation; it amounts at least to a demand of one sixth, beyond dispute. But when the one tenth is demanded, if you calculate justly, you will find that with the labour, and all the certain and incidental expences of cultivation, it amounts at least to a demand of *one sixth*, that is, “*one sixth of the whole produce of the kingdom would fall to the share of eight or nine hundred individuals—while, for the remaining two millions nine hundred and above ninety-nine thousand inhabitants, would only be left to divide amongst them, the remaining five parts,*”—a grievance so monstrous as *prima facie* to speak for itself.—But it will be objected that the demand of the full tenth is not made: for that very reason a regulation is necessary. Are the clergy so distinguished for meekness, moderation, and a contempt of the goods of this world, that you can with safety or prudence suffer the prosperity of the subject to hinge upon their forbearance? What! will you suffer the prosperity of the subject to hinge upon the forbearance of the clergy, when the interest of the clergy is at stake, and when their interest is incompatible with the subject’s prosperity?

Surely

Surely this is contrary to all proportion; a weighty grievance, and of itself should indicate the necessity of speedy regulation.

I applaud that meekness and piety of the present race of clergymen, whose good works we are told entitle them to a division of the whole kingdom every sixth year; let no man then condole with an impious laity, though they suffer every extortion and oppression to insure our virtuous pastors honest competence and holy ease.

While I am speaking upon this subject, I would not have it understood that I am ignorant of the latent cause which obstructs an amicable adjustment of the tithe-business. It is the arrogant idea that the profane laity should not meddle with the sacred things of the church! It is from the impious opinion that the wealth of the church should be unbounded; as if Christ could not walk over the land without being accompanied by Mammon! It is from that presumptuous waywardness which will neither hearken to the cries of distress or the dictates of reason!—It is from the over-caution of dignified luxury! from a tenaciousness of relinquishing, even for a moment, that grasp of those revenues, which are at present firmly held; re-  
 venues

venues that bloat the dignitary in proportion as they bring down religion—religion which is declining apace, and in many parts of the kingdom is already, like the nymph Echo, dwindled to a mere sound! from that spirit of jealousy which impels the clergy on the mention of “commutation,” to attempt moving heaven, earth, and ocean, in their behalf—to invoke Jove to shake Olympus with his thunderbolts—Neptune to take the deep with his trident—while Plutus, their tutelary god, protects their coffers!

An idea has gone abroad, that it is the duty of gentlemen, at all events, to protect the clergy in their present system. This is an aspersion of their own character, because they are interested in so doing. It is right to support the clergy honourably; it should be the first object of every man. [*hear! hear! hear!*] I say so, because I think the support of Christianity the first duty.

What Luther did for us, philosophy has done for the Roman Catholics: Elizabeth and Luther dared a reformation in the church, and who will be bold enough to say we are less competent than they?

In the name of humanity, I call on you to hearken to the voice of millions ; for the honour of the ecclesiastical character, give the clergy an opportunity of refuting those heavy charges made against them.

\* *Hâc lege, in trutinâ ponetur eadem,  
Tu quid & pópulus mecum deciderat.*

Though the clergy revolt at the idea of commutation, they can give no reason for their perverseness ; perhaps they think that the Irish peasant, like the ass, becomes more useful and active in his labours, by adding to the weight of his burden. Benevolent consideration !

The proctors, you are convinced, are not only collectors of tithes, but gatherers of taxes.— They are appointed by the parson, as a shepherd appoints his dog, to watch over the flock ; but like barbarous wolves, they unmercifully devour the flock, and deceive the pastor ! Their office of tax-gatherer is procured by the courtly interest of their employers ; and so faithful are

\* The Reporter, by a recurrence to his notes, discovers that Mr. Grattan did not make use of the Latin quotation "*Nemo compellitur, sed sic placeat,*" as erroneously stated in the Morning Post, which has been since inserted in a spurious publication of Mr. Grattan's speech.

they

they to the interest of their pastors, that they often remit the tax and levy the tithe. Thus the clergy and tithe-proctors have set up a little commutation of their own, which they enjoy in privacy and peace, though they are hostile to the idea of the legislature adopting one, and invoke all the saints to arms, on bare mention of the word amongst the representatives of the people! For such taxes as are not paid, the proctor gets the note of the peasant; these notes are known in that part of the kingdom by the appellation of Kerry Bonds; and by that means, terrifying him with the picture of a prison, he gets him soul and body into his possession! Oppressing not only the subject, but defrauding the revenue!

I implore the House not to credit every idle tale that rumour has sent abroad, relative to the people of the south. The impediments said to be offered to the collection of tithe, are rarely founded in fact. In many instances they have not only offered no opposition, but have voluntarily proposed to draw them with their own cars and their own cattle, and this too, free of all gratuity.— You should rather listen to the wailings of men, born in slavery, and educated in captivity! The oppression of tithe-farmers, and tithe-canters, has long since bent their necks to the yoke of obedience,

ence, and they frequently submit to the most cruel usages of the law, to misery and famine, rather than risk a litigation with their vicious oppressors.

I can adduce instances where the parishioner has been inhumanly compelled to pay ten per cent. for the privilege of paying full tenths to the parson ! I have besides, the schedules of the proctor's demands, and which I will oppose to the idea of an undervaluation. These schedules run thus——“ so much for barley—so much for oats—so much for wheat—so much for potatoes.” Now they are all high ratages—and in addition to the parson's exorbitance is the proctor's demand of 2s. in the pound for his trouble, making a ratage of excess and uncharitableness, which rather calls for the punishment of dismissal, than the prodigious reward of one-tenth of the whole sum.

I do not condemn the proctor for making the most of his trade, which is exaction, but I condemn the laws for leaving the division of property to the discretion of a wretch who only follows his nature, when he excises upon the most wretched, and the most helpless part of the community. I know it has been asserted that the full tenth upon tillage has never been de-

manded—but if you go into an inquiry, I have the strongest reason for supposing that the assertion will be controverted to the full satisfaction of every member in the House.

Nor do the effects of the bounty which I so much applaud, ever reach the classes of men of whom I now speak. It is of essential service to the opulent landlord, but not to the industrious tenant. The hapless people of the south are husbandmen from necessity not choice. They have no other means of existence. They are obliged, in many places, to clamber mountains, rocks, and precipices, to snatch from sterility a little spot of ground, and oppose indefatigable industry to the natural stubbornness of the soil; and they are compelled to wade to cultivation through bogs and morasses; labouring thus to reclaim watery spaces and dismal voids; labouring thus to add to the productive grounds of the kingdom. And for all their exertion, what is their reward? none—but on the contrary, while it distinguishes them as the most useful members of society, it subjects them to the predatory grasp of avaricious proctors, and unfeeling tithe-farmers. In England these lands would for seven years be exempt from taxes of any description, under the sanction of the laws. In Ireland they are not only obliged to contribute their proportion

tion of taxes, but tithe of every denomination is most rigorously demanded from them. The wretched mountaineers who cultivate them are obliged for some crops to pay thirty shillings an acre tithe ; for wheat, where raised, fourteen shillings an acre ; oats, potatoes, and indeed every other article are rated upon a similar scale of cruelty and rapine. But this payment of tithe is not all. These mountaineers are obliged to submit to a poll-tax, to the charge of smoke-money, to several other ecclesiastical impositions : such as fees for oblations, fees for religious ceremonies, and a thousand other fantastical charges, grounded on the grossest superstition, and enforced with unabating severity. All these charges I understand will be proved upon oath at the bar of your House. Nay more : The ratages of tithe have risen in these identical places in a gradation of two, three, and four fold. And this too, I understand, will be verified on oath at the bar of your House.

Where can the tenantry of Ireland look for protection if you deny them assistance ? They are the pillars of the state, and if not humanity, good policy ought at least to guide you to cherish them. You complain they are intractable ; there is no animal so fierce but can be tamed, save the tyger ; yet he is in some measure to be subdued. If you wish to conciliate him, feed him well.

Try the experiment, I entreat you, with the inhabitants of the south, which you can easily do, by relieving them from the heavy exactions under which they suffer.

I know it will be said, if you ease them of their burden, in this respect, that it will afford but the momentary ease of shifting it from one shoulder to another; that rents will immediately rise. I deny it. I say it is an odious, an infamous libel on the gentry of the nation. I say it is a scandalous imputation on both houses of Parliament, who are all possessed of lands, to suppose that they would avail themselves of their own act; to suppose that they would take a base advantage of the clemency of the legislature, and shamefully fileh for their own use what was intended for the sustenance of the peasantry.

I laugh at the idea that Parliament cannot interfere in the business, because tithes are private property. I say they are public property to defray a public expence, which is the maintenance of the clergy. Besides, there is this difference to be observed: the law gives no man a private property, it only protects him in the possession of it. Now the law gives the clergy their support, and giving it, can assuredly regulate that property. I glory in the power; nay, in the omnipotence

potence of Parliament in this respect; and I hope it will be exercised in this instance to expose the fallacy of an argument which has been so industriously circulated.

What! will this honourable House continue to view with silent apathy, a system of oppression which does no honour to the legislative character? Will this honourable House say it is not competent to the task of reforming tithes, and ecclesiastical dues?—What! are you, after having restored your appellat jurisdiction—are you, who were competent to decide, as you did, on the tenantry bill—to emancipate your constitution, and to establish your independance—incompetent to alter and approve; nay, pull down a structure whose basis is exaction, and whose support is matchless oppression?

Another argument founded upon the danger of innovation may be urged; but it is equally fallacious.—The same argument might be used against any improvement.—What is the glorious constitution you possess but innovation? Innovation upon a monarchy in the hands of a despotic prince? What is the mild and amiable religion you profess, the protestant religion, but an innovation? What is it but Christianity rescued out of the hands of an ambitious, a corrupt,

rupt,

rupt, and avaricious priesthood? When bloody Herod was informed that the forerunners of the Redeemer of mankind were preaching the virtues of humility and true religion, he deemed it innovation, and he committed indiscriminate massacre to extirpate the Son of God, whom he pronounced an innovator! The revolution itself, which introduced arts, sciences, and learning, was deemed an innovation!—What was your own riot-act, your own compensation-act of last session? Innovation indeed—innovations with a vengeance!—It is an abuse of terms to call improvement innovation. Salutory alteratives which amend the debilitated constitution are justly termed restoratives; and the same will hold good applied to the state, as well as applied to the human frame.

Without renovation there had been no revelation? Hearken, I again call on you, to the complaints of the people, and do not permit the luxury of the clergy to make the altar the stepping stool to usury and abomination.

The source of your reason tells you that you should embrace every sect of religion; how then can you hope to receive sovereign mercy if you are deaf to the cries of your fellow creatures?

The doctrine of the dark conclave of bigotry, which, bursting, overwhelmed the nations of the earth, may be urged in favour of such criminal apathy; but the pangs of him who suffered a cruel crucifixion will rush from the sepulchre, to upbraid you with ingratitude and involve your future tranquillity.

Do not eviscerate the bowels of the wretches that implore your protection. The Christian church cannot exist on the ruins of barbarity; the pillars of extortion and rapaciousness but deface the noble structure, level them with the dust, and restore it to its primitive splendour.

You have resorted to the engines of coercion and penal laws, to give tranquillity to the kingdom, but you never thought of an engine which would have answered the purpose with a thousand times more efficacy, the engine of redress. 'Tis not yet too late to use it. Convince the people, I conjure you, for once, that you consider them objects of your care. Impress them with this gratifying sentiment; there is not a speck on the map of your country which is not the object of your earnest solicitude; and this you will do by suffering the business to go into Committee. I implore you to it; I implore the country gentlemen particularly, by their virtue, their  
 justice,

justice, their honour, by their feelings, their regard of humanity, their love of their country, but above all, by that latent spark which I knew to be in their composition, and which I have often seen blaze forth, and leave in eclipsed degradation the abashed servants of the Crown. We shall then have laid the foundation of an inquiry which must enforce us a happy peasantry, a venerable priesthood, and a contented people.

**THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.**—The Rt. Hon. Gentleman has given us an uncommon display of the most splendid oratory I have every heard, but I hope the delusion into which the House have been thrown, by the eloquence and the high colouring which my Right Hon. Friend has given the subject, will soon vanish, and that they will view the question divested of all glare, pomp of words, and flight of imagination, with reason, calmness, and justice. In the south of Ireland that cause of discontent did exist, no one will deny, but I deny that these discontents were owing to the clergy. I am ready to admit that these discontents might be owing to the improper and rapacious conduct of the tithe-proctors, but there are laws already in existence to take cognizance of their conduct. I am ready to agree with my Right Hon. Friend,  
that

that the decisions of ecclesiastical courts in respect to tithes, may not be altogether so very proper ; and to remedy that, if I have the concurrence of my Right Honourable Friend, I have no objection to bring in a bill, to prevent ecclesiastical courts from determining suits brought on account of tithes. If the peasantry are oppressed by the exactions of the farmers and tithe-proctors, the inheritors of the land ought to give them redress. I would ask my Right Honourable Friend, is it his wish that the ministers of the established church in this kingdom should be left destitute of a settled subsistence, and go about requesting alms ? Much has been said on the unrelenting severity of the clergy in respect to their tithes, but I am well informed, and I believe the fact is so, that in ninety-nine instances out of one hundred, the parson is the person who is really oppressed, and deprived of his just dues. In regard to the present discontents on the subject of tithes, I am assured that they originated in election party, and I must also inform my Right Honourable Friend, that the persons who now look up to him for redress, will not be satisfied with a commutation, for they wish not to pay the parson at all ; but admitting for a moment that a commutation for tithes should take place, the abolition of the hearth-money will be the next thing they will

look for, and these will be the consequences of going into a Committee. If the peasantry in general were to shake off that respect for their clergy, whom, from early habits, they have been used to look on with a kind of veneration, and if they are permitted to set the clergy a defiance, and to look upon them with contempt, you will have no possible tie over them. I am therefore decidedly of opinion, that going into a Committee would be productive of the worst consequences. I earnestly request my Right Hon. Friend to give me any one or the whole of his plans, in the shape of a bill, and if I shall understand them, I will then give my Right Hon. Friend my opinion more fully on the subject, in respect to its being practicable or not.

MR. CURRAN.—With much diffidence I rise to encroach on the patience of the House, to say a few words on a subject where such an astonishing display of eloquence has been united with so much information, that I must confess myself lost in admiration, and incapable of casting a new light on a business of such great national magnitude.

Indeed there is nothing left unsaid ; however, from the part I have taken last session, my silence may be construed into apostacy, and I may be  
said

said to recede from those sentiments I have before pronounced. Were I not indeed decided in my opinion, and firmly persuaded of the necessity of a commutation, I should be deaf to conviction, and lost to every sense of humanity.

I can say, with truth, that I am a sincere friend to the clergy, and wish to see them no longer continue in a state of uncertainty, that must be very distressing to the feelings of gentlemen, and not a little disgraceful to the laws; laws which have been made in the days of darkness and superstition, and have now nothing but their antiquity and absurdity to recommend them. The temple of the Lord is now supported by extortion and oppression, the people are alienated from the priesthood, and the face of the whole business bears so melancholy an appearance, that every gentleman is called upon for his exertions.

It is said, that in this proposed inquiry the clergy may be aspersed; that is another reason why I should vote for an investigation, for in that inquiry I hope that the discontents said to exist may be found to be exaggerated, and if there are any complaints against the clergy, I trust they will prove unfounded, and that the conduct of a few, if such there are, ought not to throw a stigma

ma on the whole of that respectable body. For the honour of Parliament I will vote for the motion. Last session the peasantry in the south were in a state of tumult and insurrection, and you opposed them with arms, and in doing this you shewed your spirit.—Their grievances and complaints were then offered to be submitted to you, but you would not hear them till they returned to an obedience of the laws, and then, and not till then, you said you would attend to their complaints; and now that they are in a state of perfect submission to the laws, you refuse to hear them: and will an administration which endeavours to gain popularity by detecting of peculation, refuse to listen to the complaints of a description of people who say they are aggrieved? You promised, and you ought to hear them. I declare my most perfect coincidence in the motion made by my Right Honourable Friend for going into a Committee.

The House divided on Mr. Grattan's motion.

For it, 49

Against it, 121







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