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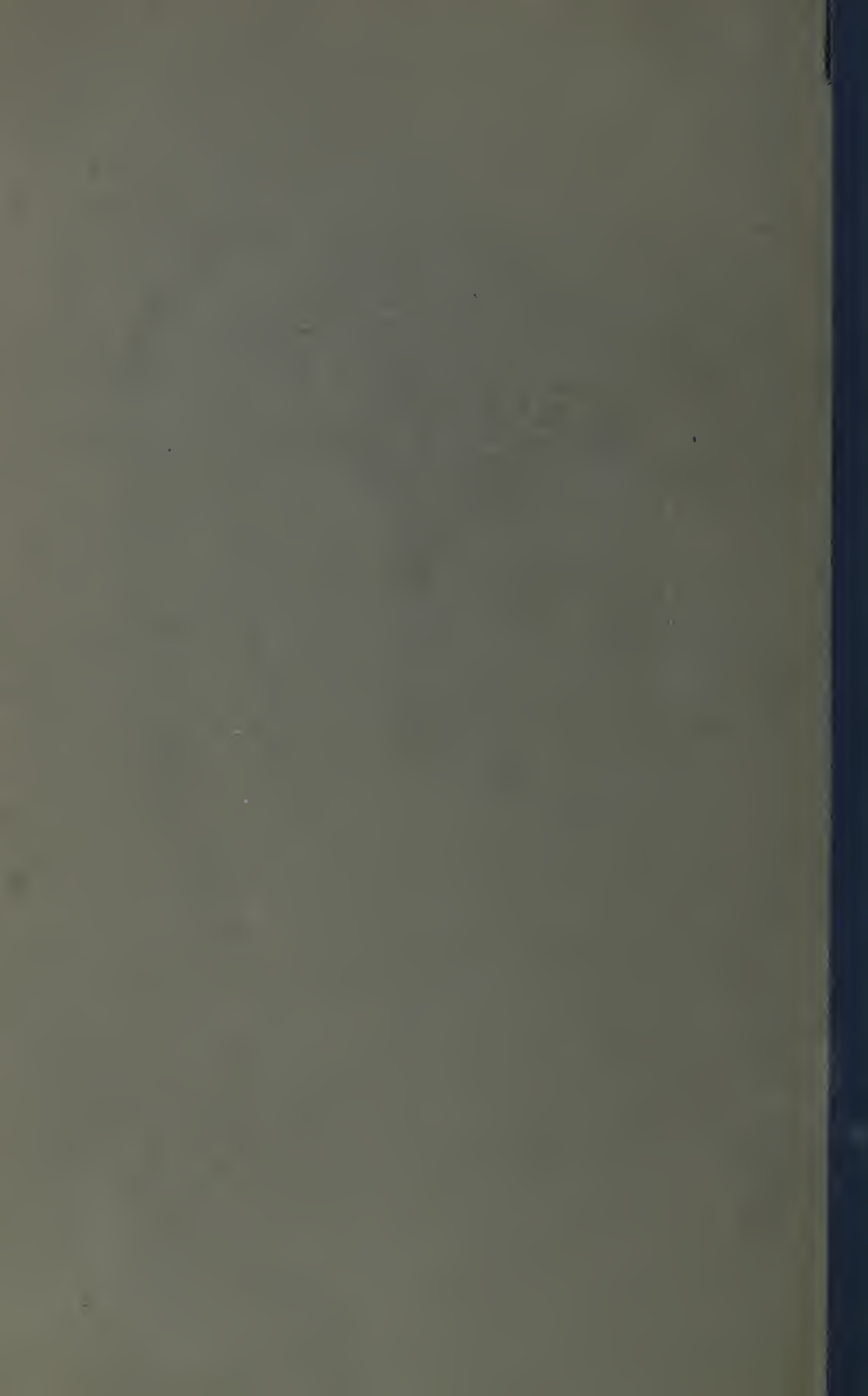


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[Wilson, Effingham]

On the taxes on knowledge.



On Taxes on Knowledge

1831



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From the West. Review, N. 29. for

July 1. 1831.

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[Wilson, Effingham] (1783-1868)



ON THE
TAXES ON KNOWLEDGE.

FROM THE
WESTMINSTER REVIEW, No. XXIX.

FOR

July 1, 1831.

by Effingham Wilson

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ON THE

TAXES ON KNOWLEDGE.

ART. XVII.—1. *The Moral and Political evils of the Taxes on Knowledge, expounded in the Speeches delivered at the City of London Literary and Scientific Institution, on the subject of a Petition to Parliament against the continuance of the Stamp Duty on Newspapers, the Duties on Advertisements, and on Printing-paper.* Effingham Wilson. 1831.

2.—*Letter to a Minister of State, respecting the Taxes on Knowledge.* 1831.

3. *The Real Incendiaries and Promoters of Crime. (From the Examiner of February 20.)* 1831.

IN what country could any government have enforced a law, by which it was enacted, "that no man shall be permitted to relate any thing to his neighbour, for the purpose of instructing or amusing him; informing him of the laws which he is bound to obey, and of the conduct of the agents by whom those laws are made, unless he, the relator, give heavy securities first, that he will answer for any libels he may utter; that is to say, (according to the best definition of libel, from numerous cases thereon decided), for, anything he may utter, which any body, at any time may be pleased to dislike for any reason, and for anything he may utter, which may tend to bring any agent into hatred and contempt, how untrustworthy, how consummate a scoundrel soever such agent may be. And next, that he, the relator, also give securities that he will for our use, exact from the person informed, a tax for every act of information?" The most ignorant of the community would perceive, and revolt against the moral and political evils of obstructions to communication by means of speech, such as are occasioned by the actual obstructions imposed upon communication by means of print; but by concealing the government familiar behind the vendor, or agent for the distribution of the printed communication, and by disguising the tax under an extra charge for the commodity,

the people have been hitherto blinded to the mischievous operation of such imposts. The only essential difference which we can perceive between the two modes of communication is, the more extensive operation of print, and its greater exactness, fixedness, and security against falsehood. Let us further illustrate the nature of these imposts, even in those cases where political considerations can have no direct influence; namely, on the means of communication by advertisements, which are usually deemed legitimate subjects for taxation. The town-crier was the ancient medium for advertisements of occurrences, announcements of the arrival of goods, and whatever it was requisite to have promptly made known to the public. We will suppose that this functionary is employed to proclaim the occurrence of a calamity and call upon the charitable to meet and devise the means of relief; or, that he is employed by a distracted mother, to make known the loss of her child. He has assembled the people of the neighbourhood, and is proceeding according to his formula to advertise the matter, when forth steps an official personage, and interrupts the proceeding, saying, "At the peril of a suit in the Exchequer, and a fine of not less than twenty pounds, I command you in the king's name to stay until you pay to me three and sixpence as his advertisement duty."* The effect of this interposition would be, even with those who tolerate the exciseman, to bring down upon the commissioner a shower of stones, and it would be the active exertions of his heels, or of a company of soldiers that could save him from exemplary punishment. But innumerable extortions of this nature are daily perpetrated by the operation of the advertisement duty. All applications, by means of advertisements, to the public for relief, whether from the effects of calamities, of famine, fire or flood, all are made to pay. Several thousand pounds were unavoidably spent in advertising the first subscriptions for the relief of the sufferers by famine in Ireland, and the duty on advertisements must have absorbed a grievous amount of the money subscribed for the relief of the sufferers, by the floods in Morayshire. A direct tax on all verbal announcements, in the nature of advertisements by tradesmen, would be equally intolerable, yet they are essentially of the same nature as printed advertisements, for since a shop-keeper cannot bring all the inhabitants of a district to his shop, to view any commodity, by means of an advertisement, he places a description of the commodity before all the inhabitants. By advertisements in a newspaper the property for sale in a district is made known to the

* See 55 Geo. 3. c. 185.

inhabitants, as the goods for sale in a shop are made known to the passenger by means of the shop-window.

In some cases these imposts operate as obstacles to interchange, and checks to production; in others, as taxes upon literature, and checks to the liberal arts; in some cases they operate as taxes on calamity,* in others they intercept relief from those who would give relief were the need made known to them; in some cases they prohibit the use of the means of obtaining relief, for every tax operates as a prohibition,—as a prohibition applying to all who cannot find wherewithal to pay it. The generic designation of the whole has been correctly assigned as Taxes on Knowledge.

We trust that the present House of Commons will feel convinced that the means of obtaining political information should be extended and improved concurrently with the extension of the franchise. We shall now offer some facts for the consideration of those who have hitherto been enemies to the diffusion of political knowledge among the people; and to those who rarely trouble themselves with the moral consequences of fiscal imposts, and are governed solely by financial considerations, we shall shew that the full extension called for may be effected, not only without injury to the revenue, but with strong probability that it would be improved.

The first effects of the taxes on knowledge are:—

By rendering the public journals dear, to place them out of the habitual use of a large proportion of the middle classes, and almost the whole of the labouring classes of the community.

By restricting the field for the circulation of the public journals, and by rendering it impracticable to obtain remuneration for any journal of original information, which has not a considerable sale, to allow room only in the metropolis for the existence of a few large journals; hence a *quasi* monopoly is created.

Of the moral and political effects of these two consequences of the Taxes on Knowledge we shall speak immediately.

According to the parliamentary returns, it appears, that there were in the year 1826 the following numbers of sheets of newspapers stamped for circulation:—

England	..	..	..	..	25,684,003
Ireland	..	..	..	..	3,473,014
Scotland	..	..	..	..	1,296,549
Total	..	..	..	..	<u>30,453,566</u>

* As an illustration of the extent of this prohibition, we may state, that by one calculation recently laid before a public assembly, it appeared that advertisements which in America cost 7s. 7d., in England cost 3l. 18s.; and where a matter was advertised in America at the rate of 6l. 8s. a year, in this country it cost 200l. 16s.

The population in 1821 was in round numbers, twenty millions, which gives one sheet and a half of newspapers per annum to each individual. Taking one-fourth of the population as capable of reading habitually, this would give six sheets annually for each individual. We might take one-eighth as capable of reading, and the supply would appear sufficiently inadequate. But of the total number of papers printed annually, it appears that from thirteen to fourteen millions are daily papers published in the metropolis. These are sold in quantities of three hundred sheets, to one individual, or to a small number of individuals. The remainder of the papers circulating throughout the country, consist chiefly of weekly papers, fifty-two of which are sold for the use of one individual, or for a small number of individuals; and when we take into account the number of stamps which must be consumed for papers published twice and three times a week,—making no allowance for the increase of population, and every allowance for the extent to which one paper may be read by several individuals,—the field which these vehicles pervade will be found miserably contracted. Physical wants are satisfied, and physical gratifications are sought, by the mass of mankind, before they think of the intellectual. These, however disencumbered, are always at a disadvantage as against the former. We may further estimate the force of the obstacles imposed by the Tory government on the diffusion of knowledge, if we consider that 7*d.*, the price of a newspaper, will purchase a meal for a labouring man; that the annual subscription for a daily paper will purchase a suit of clothes for a person of higher rank, or pay the wages of a servant, and is almost double the amount of the subscription to a club-house, equal to most palaces belonging to the European sovereigns. If there were only weekly papers published in England, and every eighth person were to subscribe for one, the consumption of newspapers would be one hundred and thirty millions of sheets annually, instead of thirty millions as at present.

The last numbers inadequately represent the degree to which parliament has, by fiscal imposts, limited the sphere of the immediate influence which its debates ought to exercise upon the minds of all classes of the community. It cannot be denied that the newspaper is the grand vehicle by which the ideas and modes of thinking of the more instructed classes are propagated among the more ignorant; and is far the most commodious and efficient organ of information, to which the adults of the labouring classes of the population can have access. Into whatever hands these vehicles may fall, it would scarcely be practicable to prevent sound information, elicited in the public discussions of the

larger assemblies, from exercising its fair share of influence upon the minds of all readers. Had the discussions in parliament on the truck-system been fully or fairly reported, and, by the operation of a free press, presented to the minds of all the classes concerned in them, much, if not all of the outrages and loss of life that have been occasioned by the contests on that subject, must have been prevented. In further illustration of the operation of the obstructions to discussion, we quote the following passages from the "Letter to a Minister of State," which is written by a gentleman of the best information with relation to the working classes:—

‘The constant practice of Government for the accomplishment of its purposes, in respect to the common people, has been two-fold; namely;

1. The perpetuation of their ignorance.
2. Coercion.

‘It was as commonly as absurdly believed, that unless the people were poor and ignorant, soldiers and sailors would not be found; and with this false notion every one above the degree of a common labourer concurred. It is not, therefore, surprising that our great statute-book should not contain a single statute in favour of the common people, whilst it has contained hundreds against them. Scarcely in any instance has the law recognized them as creatures capable of reasoning. It is not perhaps desirable that many or any statutes should be made in their favour; it would probably be sufficient, that none were made to oppress them. Coercion has all along been tried; and however it may have answered the purpose in former times, it cannot any longer keep the common people in the state which they who would oppress them desire; and its exercise must be abandoned, or they will right themselves with a vengeance. If the rich and great are not utterly besotted, they will as speedily as possible adopt a different mode of proceeding. * * *

‘Before the laws against combinations of workmen were repealed, both masters and men believed, that they were the means by which wages were kept down, and each regarded the other as bitter enemies. The workman saw in his employer a cruel, savage task-master, who, by the aid of unjust laws, cheated him of the reward due to him for his labour; the master saw in his journeyman an unconscionable rogue, who, but for the law, would rob him of all his profit. Plainly erroneous as these notions were to some thinking men, it was only at the end of twenty years’ discussion, and of unremitting efforts made during the six preceding years, that a committee of the House of Commons, on the motion of Mr. Hume, was obtained, and in which, by his indefatigable exertions, the inquiry was made which led to their repeal.

‘As soon as they were repealed, the workmen generally expected a rise of wages, and attempts on an extensive scale were made to obtain higher wages: these attempts failed, and the workmen as well as the

masters, with some exceptions, were convinced that the real amount of wages did not depend on the laws which had been repealed. This prejudice removed, the masters and men came into closer contact than formerly. They now met and discussed their interests each in their own way, the men were now talked to as they never before had been, and their attention was drawn to matters, to them of great importance, to which, until the laws were repealed, they would not attend. The violent destruction of power-looms in 1826, led to long and useful discussions in the local newspapers, in various meetings of workmen, which could not have been held whilst the unjust laws were in existence, and to many useful conversations between the leaders of the working people, and others of different ranks, between whom there could have been no intercourse, had the barbarous laws remained in the statute-book. And now pray do mark the consequence. Early in the last year an association was formed, of delegates sent from various places in the North of England and the South of Scotland, by whom it was agreed, that such of the working people as pleased should form societies in as many places as possible, and that the whole body should be called "The National Association for the Protection of Trade." This association has been objected to by some, whose fears are easily excited by combinations of this description. No harm in any way can be produced by this association, much good will certainly result from it. Men cannot receive information half so readily when isolated, as they can when associated; discussion must lead to information, and more especially now, when so many amongst the working people are comparatively well-informed, and able and willing to communicate useful knowledge to their associates.

A committee, appointed to conduct the affairs of the association, published a tract, called "The United Trades' Co-operative Journal;" it appeared once a week, and was sold at as low a price as the number purchased would permit. On this tract, the commissioners of stamps laid their deadly paws. They informed the publisher, that if he continued the publication without putting a fourpenny stamp upon it, he would be prosecuted. This at once extinguished the pamphlet; but the penny-a-week subscription, which had for some time been carried on, was now more strenuously urged, for the purpose of establishing a newspaper, and so rapidly did it increase, and so widely did it spread, that upwards of 3,000*l.* were soon collected, and on the first day of the present year the paper appeared, under the title of the "Voice of the People:" it is wholly got up by working men, and is particularly well conducted. Several circumstances of considerable importance are connected with these proceedings. Had not the pamphlet been put down, it would in time have been read by many thousands of workpeople, who will never see the newspaper, which will not, therefore, be the one-hundredth part so useful as the pamphlet would have been. By means of this cheap tract, the errors which the workpeople still cherish, would have been gradually exposed, reasoned on, and removed in a much shorter time than they can be by any other means. Putting down the tract is considered a wanton and oppressive act of

power, directed against the poorer class of workmen, who cannot afford to purchase the paper; and so it is. But the most important and most remarkable circumstance is, that in "An Address to the Workmen of the United Kingdom," urging them to subscribe their pence to establish the newspaper, in which every thing likely to operate on them is urged, not one word is said against machinery, and yet, only four years ago, complaints against machinery were relied upon as by far the most likely to influence the very same persons, and so they would still have been, but for the discussions in the newspapers, the meetings, and the private conversations: these satisfied the leaders, and produced effects upon others to such an extent, as to warrant the leaders in refraining from depreciating the use of machinery in their address. Had there been an unshackled press, there would now be very few working men, or even husbandry labourers, who would not have understood the principles which relate to machinery and wages, and not an ordinarily honest man amongst them, who would not be ready to acknowledge that machinery, instead of being an evil, was a positive good.'—p. 6-8.

We know that it is now felt by the larger manufacturers in every part of the country, that the most ignorant of the workmen are not only the most dangerous, but are becoming the most unprofitable; and that it is much better to conduct and settle disputes by means of writing or print, than by the breaking of machines and the burning of factories on the one side, and rounds of musketry and the shedding of blood on the other. Our space will only permit us to advert to a few of the immediate advantages of extending the circulation of the public journals to the labouring classes.

It is of great importance, that there should exist means of obtaining constant, certain, and speedy access to their minds, for the purpose of instructing them as to facts, and reasoning with them whenever an emergency occurs. Many striking examples of this, equally applicable to the manufacturing classes, might be drawn from the occurrences in the agricultural districts during the last winter. At the commencement of the disturbances, addresses and proclamations were distributed, and exhortations were published in the newspapers, stating what were the penalties which the law attached to the commission of the acts of the nature of those prevalent. But the newspapers were entirely beyond the reach even of those of the labouring population, who happened to be able to read, and they were then in too high a state of excitement to pay any attention to separate addresses, nor would they have trusted these strange communications if they had paid attention to them. Week after week whole parishes of labourers went on daily committing capital offences, but at the same time never suspect-

ing that they rendered themselves liable to heavier penalties than fine and imprisonment. They were only undeceived when they saw the work of the executioner. The publication of the examination of the first prisoner apprehended would in the metropolis have at once checked the progress of the crime, in so far as it was occasioned by ignorance of the punishment attached to it. With the exception of those guilty of arson, the great majority of the culprits were punished for their ignorance, the consequence of misgovernment. By means of pre-established channels of communication, a multitude of evils would be checked at the outset. As compared with such channels how limited is the influence, how slow and uncertain the operation of irregular addresses and separate treatises, even upon the reading classes in the metropolis? Compared with the former, it is worse than the old mode of supplying a town with water by means of water-carriers, as contrasted with the modern invention of conveying simultaneously, by means of an arrangement of pipes, a supply to every apartment of that town, where it is wanted. Let the taxes be removed as soon as they may, we fear from the condition of large bodies of the people that we must be prepared for many calamities, which habits of consulting channels for information,—habits which unhappily require time to form—would have averted.

Since, judging from all past experience, we cannot expect a very large portion of the educated classes to study the language and state of mind of the uneducated for the purpose of instruction; it is important that the uneducated should be habituated gradually to understand the mode of expressing ideas used by the educated. We can only expect to have the value of this object appreciated by those who have paid attention to education, and who are aware of how few there are qualified to instruct the labouring classes, and how great is the labour requisite to write to them so as to be understood. At no time was it ever of greater moral and political importance, that every means of communication between various classes should be facilitated.

From what other source than the reports of judicial proceedings, which are published in the newspapers, can the public derive any notion of the laws which they are bound to obey, "By publicity," says our great jurist, "The temple of justice adds to its other functions that of a school; a school of the highest order, where the most impressive branches of morality are, (or might be, we should add), taught by the most impressive means; a theatre in which the sports of the imagination give place to the more interesting exhibitions of real life. Sent

thither by the self-regarding motive of curiosity, men imbibe without intending it, and without being aware of it, a disposition to be influenced more or less by the social and tutelary motive, the love of justice. Without effort on their own parts, without effort and without merit on the parts of their respective governments, they learn the chief part of what little they are permitted to learn of the state of the laws, on which their fate depends."

A habit of reading the public journals, cannot fail gradually to loosen the authority of a certain class of ignorant popular leaders, whose governing motives are less sympathy for the sufferings of the people and a desire to advance social happiness than insatiable vanity and love of power, and whose only claims to authority are reckless confidence and incessant action, which never waits, or allows others to wait, for evidence or deliberation. To such men as to the priests who sway an ignorant people, divided attention is divided power. Discussion as to the merit of their actions is fatal to implicit unity of action, to habits of blind obedience. A master of the art of war, in speaking of a particular occurrence, says, "The soldiers reasoned openly on the chances of success; which in times of danger, is only one degree removed from mutiny." And it is much the same with the ignorant classes, towards their leaders in times of excitement. We by no means expect or wish, that political excitement and exertions by large classes of the community should cease, but we do wish to see abated the blind fury by which the labouring classes are constantly impelled to courses, not less mischievous to themselves than to others. There are yet a strong body of the disciples of Mandeville whose sentiment, "If a horse knew as much as a man, I should not like to be his rider," is more constantly seen to govern their actions than avowed in their discourse. The sentiment is as false as it is base, and we venture to say that those by whom it is entertained would find such an animal above all price. There would be less of brutal conduct on the one side, and service would be better performed on the other. If, for example, the farmer's horse did not often know much more than his master, as when bearing him home fuddled from market, on a dark night, there is not a district in the country which would not weekly hear of some one of that valuable class of men having been found defunct in a ditch or pool or fen. In the metropolis we have almost daily some fatal illustration that a little knowledge is indeed a dangerous thing, and that the possession of much more would have conduced to the safety of the creature and its superior, and have saved it from the impulse by which both are

dashed to pieces. The Mandevillians have brutalized millions of human beings, and brought them to a state in which they are ready to rush on to the injury of themselves, and the destruction of all around them. But happily it is no longer a question whether the labouring population shall read or not. Dr. Whately observes in a sermon on the education of the poor. "There are but two ways of preserving the established order of things: one is, to keep the lower orders in a state of ignorance and degradation; the other that the higher orders should avail themselves of their own ample opportunities, to cultivate their own minds, and acquire a superiority of knowledge and intelligence. Which of these two is the more *honourable* procedure is a question which needs not be discussed because it so happens that the choice is not allowed us. It is in the power of the higher orders to improve their own education: to keep the mass of the people in a state of blind and brutish ignorance is not in their power. I wonder not much, considering what human nature is, that some should think the education of the poor an evil: I do wonder at their not perceiving that it is *inevitable*. We can indeed a little advance or retard it; but the main question is how they shall be educated and by whom." Circumstances have created a demand for political information and will ensure a supply. It has been abundantly proved, that the taxes on knowledge, act as a smuggler's premium, and ensure the circulation of a commodity of the description which advocates for such taxes would deem the worst, whilst it excludes from competition the journals which are under the heaviest securities against extravagance, and present the greatest extent and variety of the particular facts from which sound general rules of action may be deduced and receive illustration. If the man of one book is to be avoided, much more is the politician with one remedy, one universal nostrum; and yet these are the description of writers to whom the advantage of a protecting duty is secured by the Government. In an article which appeared some time ago in the "Examiner," it was shewn that since fanaticism and monomanias generally obtain possession of minds of a very limited range of ideas, the chief preservative against these maladies, is the occupation of the mind by a variety of objects of attention, which prevent any one object from obtaining exclusive mastery over it. For this purpose, after want and the dread of want have been removed, instruction of every kind, and all innocent amusements should be promoted. But the most powerful instrument for supplying constantly a variety of objects of attention, the newspaper, has hitherto by means of the taxes on knowledge been withheld from the people.

Adverting to the class of publications on political subjects, which are now circulated in defiance of the law, the "Examiner" stated some facts which cannot be too often presented to the consideration of the enemies of the Press.

"Were it possible for the government to suppress these publications which it deems the most mischievous (and prosecution, we need not say, only gives them interest, and wider circulation and influence), nevertheless it would be expedient to tolerate them, since they actually supersede a mode of communicating sentiment which, whenever there is an adequate motive to put it in action, is infinitely more dangerous. Fanaticism, says a philosopher, "est une maladie de l'esprit, qui se gagne comme la petite verole. Les livres, la communication beaucoup moins que les assembles et les discours. On s'échauffe rarement en lisant; car alors on peut avoir le sens rassisi. Mais quand un homme ardent, et d'une imagination forte, parle à des imaginations faibles, ses yeux sont en feu et ce feu se communique; ses tons, ses gestes, ébranlent tous les nerfs des auditeurs. Il crie: 'Dieu vous regarde, sacrifiez ce qui ne est qu'humain; combattez les combats du Seigneur; et on va combattre.'"

'Sentiment is now propagated amongst the agricultural population, by *vivâ voce* communication, from farm to farm—from parish to parish—in their daily or Sunday meetings—in the same manner as before the invention of printing. An apt expression of sentiment, by the wear of frequent repetition, is rounded into verse, and it runs on feet in the style of the old saw,

"When Adam delv'd, and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman?"

'As an instance of the prevalence of this mode of communication, we may cite a case tried at the Sleaford quarter sessions.* The poor people, as their best circular for summoning their fellows to a meeting, put the summons in verse, or rather on feet, on which it hobbled round. The following is a verbatim copy:—

"Notice is hereby given to all labourers to meet upon the Green; at the hour of seven,

For to state the ways here,
Or else at Sleaford they must appear;
And if no justice there be done,
Elsewhere they must run."

'So we have a saw, which was copied from a wall in Kent; and is, we are assured, in circulation amongst the labourers as 'their sentiment':—

"If the people of England be wise,
They will neither pay taxes nor tithes."

'Another which has got amongst them is pithy in sentiment, and is better finished, by more frequent repetition, or has been borrowed from the store of some skilful workman:—

* See Morning Chronicle, Jan. 15.

“Hungry guts and empty purse,
May be better,—can’t be worse.”

‘At the examination of a labourer and his wife, brought before the Lewes bench of magistrates, in November last, on suspicion of having set fire to some premises, the wife was asked whether her husband had not drank an inflammatory toast? She declared that she had; and she gladly repeated it. It was as follows:

“Ye gods above, send down your love,
With swords as sharp as sickles,
To cut the throats of gentlefolks,
Who rob the poor of victuals.”

‘Print is necessarily comparatively diffuse, and therefore more difficult to be remembered and communicated. These saws, however, are apt to the tongue; and the gingle gives them their iterative quality. They are suggested to the mind of the labourer by any the slightest occasion for anger. Like the barbarous laws by which he is punished, they allot one indiscriminate measure of vengeance to every variety of offence. When a sentiment is in print, there is something to be seen, and answered, and guarded against, and to persons in power this form of communication would also have the recommendation of there being something to prosecute. These saws circulate unseen; and we fear that many a life will be lost on the point of an epigram. The instance of our agricultural population may be added to those of the uneducated population of France before the Revolution, and that of the Irish peasantry (and indeed of any country sunk in ignorance and impelled by want), in proof that government, by keeping them in political ignorance, prepares a retribution of evil for itself in common with the remainder of the community.

Before we advert to some of the effects which the monopoly created by the tax, has upon the quality of the commodity taxed, we must notice the external operation of these imposts.

In the effect of the tax, and of the Post Office regulations, in restricting the circulation of newspapers to the colonies, we have a striking instance of the Yahoo legislation of our (late) government. The stamp-duty was not sufficient in checking the exchange of intelligence, and the maintenance of sympathy between the mother country and the colonies, and post charges have been added. In the Hobart’s Town Courier, of July the 10th, 1830, we find the following statement:—

‘By a new Post Office regulation, commencing the 1st of January, newspapers may be sent by the regular mails to Van Dieman’s Land, New South Wales, and Swan River, on the same terms as they have hitherto been sent to India, namely, on payment of the charge of two-pence an ounce—a charge which the India nabobs could well afford to pay, while it will operate as a complete denial on the humble settler in young agricultural colonies like these. Considering the great revenue which these useful vehicles of information pay to the govern-

ment in England, we think it a pity that the little trouble they would occasion to the people at the Post-offices should be charged so high. For on weighing one of the late Morning Heralds now before us, we find it amounts to $1\frac{3}{4}$ ounces, which would subject it to a postage of threepence half-penny. The earnest desire which exists in these colonies to be familiar with the condition and with every transaction of the parent country, had newspapers been allowed to go free instead of being subjected to so heavy a tax, would have given their circulation such a stimulus in England, in order to be forwarded hither, that the advantage to the revenue through the additional stamp-duties, would have much more than counterbalanced the small gains which will now accrue through the Post Office, to say nothing of the infinitely greater advantage, in a national and political point of view, than would have arisen by drawing closer the knot of allegiance to the home government, and of attachment to the Mother Country; while the check these sentiments will sustain by the present measure in the absence of intercourse and information will be apt to bring on forgetfulness and estrangement.

So no captain is permitted to deliver a colonial journal to any person on his arrival into this country. He is bound to put it into the Post Office, in order that a tax may be imposed in the shape of a postage charge for service which is not wanted. It is no exaggeration, to state that these regulations will hasten by some years the separation of such colonies from the mother country. We object to them, as tending to interfere with the social feelings between people and people, and to produce a greater distance in this respect than is occasioned by space, and difference of circumstances.

But the effect of fiscal rapacity is strikingly exemplified in the regulations respecting the transmission of the English journals to France. It appears that the clerks of the Foreign Post Office charge 3*l.* 6*s.* 3*d.* for forwarding a daily paper to France. A proportionate sum is charged for forwarding weekly publications. The paper must be purchased by the clerks, so that, as we understand, a person could not if he would, have the use of a paper and then forward it to his friend, or send it abroad in exchange for a foreign paper. Whether the clerks pay the full price for a paper, or purchase, at a reduced price, one that has been used, we cannot state, but it must be obvious that such exactions must defeat the object; which is, to obtain the greatest amount of money. On the continent English papers sell for from one shilling to half a dollar each. The various imposts which might be abolished by our government, or, by the exercise of its influence, amount to a prohibition of the circulation of English journals abroad. The following is a copy of the official return. "An account of London newspapers sent beyond the

seas by the officers in the Foreign Post Office, during the year 1829, distinguishing the morning, evening, and other papers: morning 153; evening, 163; three days a week, 130; weekly, 113!"

At Paris, Hamburgh, and one or two other places on the continent, English newspapers are reprinted. These reprints being dearer than the original English journals, without the tax, would be, have a proportionately limited circulation. Otherwise, the mischief occasioned by the English imposts, consists in the gratuitous injury done to the English paper-makers, printers, and journalists. In those cases where, in consequence of the taxes, English journals have no circulation whatever, it is scarcely necessary to state, that the effect of those taxes is, to prevent English ideas and modes of thinking from obtaining their fair influence in forming the opinions and feelings of the civilized world. If educated people on the continent had been accustomed to read our parliamentary debates, would opinions, such as now prevail in many parts of the continent respecting the English people, have been generated? and would the whole people have received the character which has hitherto belonged chiefly to its government? Would it, for instance, have been believed, that the supporters of free trade only aimed at the suppression of rival manufactures abroad; and that the sole motive of the English people as well as the English government, in adopting the measures which have cost them so much for the abolition of the slave trade, was to check the prosperity of rival colonies! Were our government to perform its duty in removing all fiscal imposts, and in obtaining a system of reciprocity in the post, English journals would be extensively exchanged for foreign, and much social good would be accomplished; national prejudices and antipathies would be softened down, and a feeling of honourable emulation and sympathy between country and country, would take their place.*

* We are happy to mention a fact, which evinces a disposition on the part of the French government to set a liberal example of reciprocity in the diffusion of information. Prince Talleyrand has been instructed to propose to our government, that it shall send to Paris one copy of each work published in England, and that, in return, the French government should send to this country one copy of each of the works published in France. The English works to be deposited for public use in the National Library at Paris; the French works to be placed for public use in the British Museum. With the exception of the copy deposited in the British Museum, there is not one of the other so called public libraries, which has the privilege of receiving a copy of every published work, from which that privilege might not be withdrawn, and be advantageously trans-

It is unnecessary to enforce the importance which should be attached to the faithful publication of what takes place in parliament. But it should be well understood, that reporting is essentially a business of abridgement, requiring for its best performance severe labour, superior talent and integrity. The report of a speech of one hour, delivered by a fluent speaker, will occupy from four to five columns close print, or nearly one page of a full-sized daily newspaper. A close report of a ten hours debate would, therefore, fill two papers of the size of the Times or the Morning Chronicle. It has been calculated, that a paper like the Times, contains as much print as a book of Thucydides, or as one volume of Sir Walter Scott's novels. To report every word that is uttered, as some ignorant members of parliament have proposed to require, would be to destroy the utility of the debates; for how could the people read them, even if they were as instructive as Thucydides, or as amusing as Sir Walter Scott? In order that the most extensive knowledge possible may be communicated to the public, respecting the proceedings in parliament, the reports must necessarily be considerably abridged. Hence the business of reporting public proceedings, if it be well performed, must always be one of considerable discretion and responsibility, and can only be well performed by persons of more than common attainments; and certainly it is often performed in a masterly manner. Mediocre speeches generally gain rather than lose by the reports in the daily papers, and the public have not unfrequently suffered by an offence to which the reporters are addicted, of the character of that recently charged against a candidate for public office:—dressing up jackasses, as an exercise of skill, to impose them on the world as creatures of a superior order. They have also been charged with offences of an opposite description. A faithful abridgement, it has been observed, like the faithful picture of a statue or any other object, would present each part of the figure reduced in just proportions. The newspapers, to make the productions of orators fill their columns, often abridge them in the same way as Procrustes abridged his victims to make them fit his bed. Even if the process of

ferred to the purpose proposed by the French government. It would be of great public advantage, as well in the example of a national exchange of good offices, as for the promotion of literature, if the same system were extended to other continental states. The international recognition of copyrights would be another step gained in civilization. One measure called for from our government, and immediately practicable, is the removal of the duty on foreign books. This duty, which is contemptible in amount, forms part of the taxes on knowledge, and is a barbarous tax on the cultivation of foreign literature.

getting rid of the redundant length be accomplished by the laborious course of reducing instead of the shorter one of lopping off the limbs, the work is done so irregularly and clumsily, as to produce deformity. They place the head and shoulders of a colossus on the trunk or legs of a pigmy, and make other more strange distortions; they heighten beauty, and aggravate or conceal deformity, as favour or aversion to subjects or persons may direct. The effect of the monopoly, created by the taxes, is to give enormous power to the daily press in directing with greater or less force, the public attention to particular subjects by reporting them at disproportionate length, or suppressing them altogether. Hence it has been well said, that there is now a new and fourth estate in the constitution, and that the acts of the legislature should be recorded as having been sanctioned by the King, Lords, Commons, and Reporters in Parliament assembled.

The merit of having carried the Catholic Question, is commonly ascribed to the duke of Wellington, but we believe that he was, on that occasion, a mere agent acting under paramount influence; and that the fourth estate has superior claims to the glory of having achieved that measure so many years before the majority of the lower and even perhaps of the middle classes in England were prepared for it. It is probably known, that the greater number of the reporters are Irish law students, who are obliged to come to London to keep their terms, and Irish barristers who have not succeeded in obtaining practice. The circumstances which gave them the majority, were partly perhaps their greater aptitude for debate and declamation; partly doubtless, because theirs were the best available talents in the market, and the majority has been kept up perhaps from some such causes as those by which we find that the Welch occupy the business of supplying milk, and the Scotch, that of baking, in the metropolis. At present, there is a proportion of English law students and barristers in the gallery, but Ireland has there an overwhelming majority of representatives.

Whenever the Catholic question was brought forward, they worked with redoubled zeal; and morning after morning, as the public may too well remember, the papers appeared full of the debate. Every speaker had all the aid that zeal and ability could give him. Volunteer patriots were sure to be repaid with the display which forms part of the existence of orators. Hence members of the legislature judging from the space which the subject always occupied in the daily papers, formed an exaggerated estimate of the strength of public opinion on the question, and the attention and zeal thus stimulated re-acted

upon the public and especially upon the reformers. Ultimately the public opinion upon the subject certainly acquired strength, but we believe that, in truth, it was at all times over estimated, and that had such exertions been made in all the counties as were made in Kent, the fact would have been proved. In the city the public took very little interest in the question until the later debates, when it was the defeat of the high-church party, rather than the question itself which occasioned the excitement amongst the great majority of the people. Had the matter been in the hands of the English reporters exclusively, we doubt whether they would have cared more about it than any question which related to the eligibility of the worshippers of Bramah or Vishnu to hold office in India, or have taken a deeper interest in it than the Irish reporters themselves would take in any question which concerned the spiritual scruples of the members of the kirk of Scotland. The English reporters would certainly have been friendly to toleration, but we cannot believe that they could have been made to comprehend that the making the Irish Catholic gentry eligible to office, was the first and only certain measure to relieve the sufferings of the Irish people. The question would therefore, in all probability, have been permitted to occupy no more space in the public attention, than an ordinary debate on a petition, and a report of one eighth or of one quarter the length of any of those which actually appeared would have been given. In this way the zeal of advocates would have been damped in England, and possibly in Ireland, seeing the little attention gained for the subject in the metropolis: thus it might have been delayed for years, and it is questionable whether Absenteeism, the Poor-laws, and many other questions which English reporters would have understood much better, might not have taken precedence of it. It is, however, perhaps "all for the best." But it was extremely edifying to observe into what hands the high-church party had by their measures against the press placed irresponsible power, and the way in which their sin against the truth was visited upon them.*

Formerly parliament was much more under the control of the fourth estate than at present. One or two great questions were laboriously reported, but on all the others both Houses were dealt with in the most independent and summary manner.

* We have been assured by one gentleman who is a member of the fourth estate, and who speaks the sentiments of others of it, that they are determined to do their best for the repeal of the Union.

At ten or eleven o'clock the Houses were adjourned, for on the motion being put, and seconded, the reporters adjourned; those of the Lords to discuss a bottle at the Star and Garter, those of the Commons at the Ship. Whether Burke or Fox spoke afterwards mattered not: all that the public were permitted to know was, that "The House sat until late." It was a rule that the public should not be troubled with any debate, which occurred in Committee, and whilst the House was thus occupied the reporters often sat in committee over a bowl of punch: one being left as a scout to watch the House; but if the House thought proper to resume, it by no means followed that the reporters would. The control exercised over individuals was frequently as potent. Mr. Windham for some intemperate expressions was condemned to obscurity, and during one whole Session, when his talents shone with the greatest brilliancy, his speeches were suppressed. These continual vexations are believed to have preyed upon his mind, and probably accelerated his decease. Competition somewhat more powerful has occasioned more complete reports, but even now an enormous amount of power is exercised irresponsibly by the corps. Amongst other orders, which they have adopted (justly indeed in their own defence against excessive labour) is one, that there shall be no debate, or what is very nearly the same thing, that there shall be no debate reported on the Wednesday night. In the Session of 1830 one of the most brilliant debates which have occurred for some years past, was suppressed, because it took place on a Wednesday. Individuals have been dealt with more arbitrarily than questions. Mr. Tierney, we understand, was for a time under the cloud of their displeasure. Mr. Spring Rice was in the same predicament.* A short time ago, a gentleman related at a public meeting, (what by the way none of the papers reported) that he was one night in the gallery of the House of Commons, and that he overheard the reporters whisper to each other, on the occasion of a particular member rising, "Let us Burke this fellow," His speeches were stifled

* As a body, the reporters are gentlemen, and we never heard that they were corrupted, except by affection or aversion, or by civilities in a gentlemanly way. Old Mr. Joliffe, for example, used to go into the Reporters' room, merely as a lounge, and say, "are there any gentlemen of the press who want franks," and a reporter was sure to have as many as he chose to accept. Soon after, when this civility was forgotten, the member was forgotten, when he would go and remonstrate in a lachrymose tone, saying, "Now, my good fellows—give us a decent speech, don't cut it short by saying only that Mr. Joliffe supported the motion. Remember I am a county member, and people think what I say of consequence, and you know I am a friend of the press."

on other occasions, and had he been a younger or less powerful speaker, he certainly would have been "Burked" effectually. To protect the legislature and the public, it has been proposed, that each House of Parliament should engage sworn short-hand-writers, and publish the reports of its own proceedings. If trustworthy reports could be obtained, we should only object to the plan on the ground of the great expense and delay; for otherwise it would be of great service to have verbatim reports, from which the public might see what vile rubbish in matter and style is sometimes uttered by their representatives. But we should utterly distrust the House or the chief orators, as we well know how untrustworthy in such matters are all orators; for their practice being to colour and exaggerate in manner as well as in words, for the sake of immediate effect, the mendacious habit of mind thus generated is sure to govern them in all their acts relating to effect, when not placed under strong restraints. Unless some private pique or sinister motive can be proved against the reporter, he is on all questions, as to the accuracy of reports, immeasurably the more credible witness, even where the orator happens to be *bonâ fide*. The reports of the examination of witnesses before committees have hitherto been constantly garbled and interpolated. We have shown that it would be folly to expect the reports to be read, unless they are to be abridged, and to what party should that duty be intrusted?

Security might perhaps be found (there is reason to believe it was found in the Spanish Cortes by their *Comité de redaccion*) for recording the speeches of members in all their integrity,—and this would certainly be a great service done,—but, after all, the obvious and the most efficient remedy seems never to have occurred to them; namely, the entire removal of the taxes on knowledge, and the consequent powerful competition of Reports. Our legislators can comprehend, that if they made such arrangements as to diminish the traffic in a given road, and to permit only a certain number of coaches to run upon it, the coaches would not be uniformly so well horsed, nor the public so well treated; but they have yet to see and feel, that the only mode of having the newspapers subjected to proper responsibilities, is, by letting in upon them a full competition. At present, one or two journals lead the rest: the smaller journals are too poor and too weak to compete with them: increased profits from increased demand, and especially from the entire removal of the advertisement duty, would put flesh on their bones, and enable them to act independently and run their adversaries with vigour; it would bring new and powerful competitors into the field, and all the usual salutary

effects of competition would follow: No one journal could garble or suppress any matter of importance, which another would not find it to its interest to publish.

In another point of view, the entire freedom of the press is requisite, to subject the leading journals themselves to the salutary control of public opinion.

Much mischief is occasioned by a prevalent belief that large journals, such as the "Times," which are said to make it their business to follow public opinion, thereby represent that opinion on all public questions. Such organs would doubtless be of great value, but none such exist. It must be admitted, that on great and prevailing topics, a public journal which subsists by means of extensive sales, must conform, not to the prevalent opinions, but to the prevalent sentiment or feeling, with greater or less exactness. But on nearly all subjects, where no sentiment whatever, or no very strong sentiment is entertained by the public, such journals may, and do lead them. Where, however, a journal chimes in with the popular sentiment on one great question, it may, in the present state of the press, go directly in the teeth of the public sentiment, and falsify it, on many subordinate questions. Many illustrations of these positions will occur to those who have been in the habit of reading the "Times," and have at the same time been accustomed to converse with numbers of individuals moving in large societies. We select this journal for our illustrations, because if a body may be judged *ex pede*, much better may it be judged *ex capite*. The course of reform, for example, was too potent for any journal of its commercial character to withstand, but the question of the ballot it perhaps believed was a subordinate question, with respect to which no opinion, or no favourable opinion was entertained; and accordingly the Times took its own blundering course. The proposition was scouted, and its advocates were assailed in the coarsest style of vituperative ignorance and insult. Yet no sooner was the question of the ballot mooted in public meetings, than it was carried by acclamation, and not a doubt could be entertained that the great body of the people were zealously in its favour: then the journal thought fit to moderate its rancour. Again, with relation to the Belgians. Although the "Times" had written so strongly in favour of the Polignac administration, as to convince the French liberals that it was in its pay, yet the general demonstration of the public opinion in favour of the revolution, was in July so prompt and powerful, as to leave no doubt to such journalists as to the course to be taken. Not so, however, with regard to the Belgian revolution. The sympathies of the people were

indeed strongly in favour of the Belgians; when they heard of the repulse of the Dutch troops, they believed that the cause of the Belgians was one in common with that of the French people; but of course it was not conceived to be of any proportionate importance, and there were no loud manifestations in its favour. Day after day, the "Times" outraged the public feeling by its comments on the Belgians, by its falsehoods respecting their grievances, and the characters and views of their leaders. We remember that its conduct on that subject, gave rise to a strong suspicion that the Duke of Wellington meditated an armed interference with the Belgians, and that the "Times" was employed to blacken their cause, in order to prepare the public mind for the measure. We have not the slightest evidence on the subject. We merely assert as a fact, that the course taken by the "Times" did excite extensive disgust, and we adduce the fact as an instance, where if the views set forth by that journal had been acted upon by legislators or by foreigners, as the views of the people, it would have proved a false and mischievous guide. We have perceived, that whenever it has thus outraged public feeling, it has, at the same time, or shortly after, fetched up its way, by advocating some case which interested the narrow sympathies of the people, as some case of charity or suffering, the flogging of soldiers and sailors. It would move the public in favour of the Spanish or Italian refugees, whilst it aided men and measures even more noxious to the welfare of mankind, than those to which the refugees were victims.

Numbers of persons purchase the "Times" for its news, who detest its political conduct. They are in the situation of travellers compelled to submit to insolence and extortions, because there is not adequate competition. A choice of daily journals there certainly is, but, as Horne Tooke expressed it, when told he had a free selection of the jurors by whom he was to be tried, it is like offering a man a choice from so many rotten oranges. Were the taxes on knowledge removed, a journalist would be bound to good behaviour, under penalties of the loss of hundreds or thousands of his circulation for each act of misbehaviour.

In addition to the removal of fiscal imposts, another measure will be found requisite for the improvement of the public press; namely, the enactment of securities for the full enjoyment of the profit of literary labour, by the labourer.

A large portion of the daily press is made up of literary plunder. Some journals there are which are mere second editions of others. Now the profit of these piracies, or second editions, may, in most cases, be considered as so much taken

from the journal of original information, and creating a proportionable reduction of the price paid for news, or original contributions. The only check to this plunder is the slight one of public opinion, and that only operates with respect to original articles containing disquisitions, where direct theft, without any acknowledgment, would be deemed a flagrant outrage. The conventional payment, (for want of means to enforce better), for an article thus copied without the consent of the author, is to give the credit of it to the particular journal by naming it. Yet this piece of conventional morality is constantly violated, for we constantly observe in "The Times," as well as other papers, articles inserted with the acknowledgment only of "Daily Paper." But in the low *jalousie de métier*, the fraud is carried much farther. It is too much to give frequent credit to other daily papers, and as most articles of interest which appear in the morning papers, are copied into the evening papers, the stolen commodity is acknowledged only as having been taken from an evening paper; while no one can doubt, from the jealousy with which the papers must watch each other, that the article was thus pillaged in perfect consciousness that payment was not made to the right owners. This is one instance of the immorality occasioned by the defective state of the law. "Until small rights be protected, great ones will not be secure," says the philosopher, and the proposition remains yet to be carried into effect over the whole field of law. We remember an analogous complaint was made by a manufacturer, who stated to a Committee of the House of Commons, that in consequence of the impunity with which patterns of small works were copied immediately they appeared, the only repayment which the manufacturer can have for the labour of producing new patterns is a short and uncertain priority in the market: hence, it was not worth while to employ skilful artists to make designs; hence the progress of an important branch of the arts was checked. The daily press is similarly circumstanced, and the evil is becoming greater from the increased rapidity with which printing is now performed. We believe that a daily journal, which has any exclusive intelligence, is frequently obliged to wait until another is published, in order that the latter may not instantly pillage its information. They fence with each other on this system. A piece of intelligence is frequently a costly matter. During the war, the first account of a battle was often obtained at an expense of several hundred pounds. The report of a county meeting is often obtained at the expense of expresses. We consider then, that protec-

tion should be given for a certain period to the copyright of the smallest paragraph, as for a large book ; and that the publisher should within that period be allowed to retain the exclusive possession of it, or prescribe the terms on which he would allow it to be used.* At present, if a paper be made up of a dozen or twenty articles, each of which costs one or two guineas, it would be necessary, perhaps, to pursue the pirates with as many suits of law, if there were law on the subject ; a course preposterous and impossible. Therefore we conceive that the power of administering summary remedy should be given to magistrates, or the judges of the inferior courts, who should be allowed to award compensation, and inflict a penalty to the amount of the cost of the article pirated. Where a journal had the priority of publication of any article of intelligence, the *onus* of proof should be placed on any other publication, to show that he had truly been at the expense of procuring it by his own agent ; and in default, conviction should follow as for piracy. In many cases the proof would be difficult, but in the larger proportion it would be easy, and all of these would be so much gained to honesty. The proposition for giving protection to such labour will, we well know, excite much astonishment amongst the gentlemen of the press, who will find it as difficult to conceive how papers can subsist without pillage, as the Mahratta chieftain felt, to conceive how such fine armies as the Europeans brought into the field could be maintained without plunder. Those journals which are compilations would probably make arrangements with the journals of original information which would have their just preponderance. The circulation of intelligence would not be checked. On the whole it would be found that a reciprocity of payment would be a much better system, than one of a reciprocity of pillage. Enterprise would have its proper reward, and would be more completely stimulated. It is also of no small importance, that the maintenance of good moral habits should be enforced upon those who are by their vocation censors and guardians of the morals of others.

And now follows the proposed reformed system of circulating the public journals.

The committee appointed at a public meeting of the friends, to the diffusion of Useful Knowledge, held at the City of Lon-

* While we plead thus for the protection of copy-right in its various forms, we do not in our own case object, but rather invite, the republication of any portion of our pages in any form, for circulation, stipulating only that the republication shall contain an acknowledgment of its being reprinted from the Westminster Review.

don Literary and Scientific Institution, on the 31st of January last, (at which meeting Dr. Birkbeck presided), have proposed, that government should take away altogether the stamp duty on newspapers. The committee have also stated, that newspapers, books, and all printed publications, may be conveyed by the post with advantage to the public, and with the enjoyment of full liberty of conveyance, and that a revenue, not less than the present stamp duty might be thereby obtained for the government.

The grounds on which they supported this conclusion, in a conference with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were—

That the government, having already established the complete agency for the distribution of letters, this same agency might be used to distribute the great mass of publications by post, at a comparatively small additional expense.

That to compete with the government, the private distributors (or vendors) must maintain an agency, almost solely for this one purpose.

In all cases of the delivery of letters from the post-office, the labour of distributing a great quantity of other things may be performed, without any additional expense. The postman who traverses a street to deliver half a dozen letters may, in passing through it, deliver twenty or thirty newspapers, without any material additional expenditure of time, and the labour "is all in his day's work." But the private vendor must employ a person for the one purpose of delivering the newspapers, and he cannot, therefore, do it so cheaply as the government. For example, the cheap publications, at present sold for two-pence, three-pence, or six-pence, are forwarded to the country in monthly parts, as the sale and profit are insufficient to bear the expense of conveyance weekly, except in the case of the larger towns, such as Birmingham and Manchester. Were the government to convey these publications, as it might do weekly, by the post, and deliver them to the purchaser at such a rate of postage as would put them into his hands at the same price as he now pays monthly, it will not be deemed a rash presumption, that the more speedy mode of conveyance will be extensively preferred. Parcels of publications on which the profit is but a penny each, are sent to various towns which have a considerable population. The sale of these publications is confined to the residents in a town, or to those who visit it regularly, for it cannot extend to villages at the distance of several miles, as the ordinary profit, a penny, would not pay for the tradesman's labour of forwarding them thither. But it would pay the post, by whom the labour is already performed for other purposes.

But it may be said, that additional vehicles would be requisite

for the conveyance of the mass of papers which must be sent by the main roads. Doubtless; but a large profit might nevertheless be obtained after all additional expenses were paid. The average cost even for parcels sent irregularly by the mail is $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ per pound, or 14s. per cwt. every hundred miles. A thousand papers of the largest size usually weigh eighty-eight pounds, or two thousand papers are about the average weight of one male passenger. The carriage of a thousand papers at the maximum rate would be only ten shillings, fifty papers might be carried for one shilling, and the profit to government for the distribution of a thousand would be 3*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* Ten millions of papers are now annually transmitted to the country through the post. There can be little doubt that, by the removal of the stamp-duty, the number would be quadrupled; and it is to be taken into account, that every one thousand newspapers pay 1*l.* paper duty. But there can be no question that papers could be conveyed by contract to the extremity of the kingdom, for less than the sum mentioned.

It has been proposed, and we trust the plan will be speedily adopted, that printed papers, not exceeding four or six ounces, shall be permitted to be sent by the general post: that a sheet of demy of the ordinary or full-sized paper, namely, a sheet of the size of half the sheet of a daily newspaper, should be conveyed for one half-penny postage, and that a sheet of the size of the daily newspapers should be conveyed for one penny postage, to any part of the united kingdom.

Thus not only newspapers but pamphlets, essays, prospectuses, price currents, reviews, magazines, and almost every description of literature, would be sent by post.

That such arrangements are practicable is set beyond doubt or question, from even the most reluctant functionary, by the fact that in America, and in France, such a system has long been in operation. In France, books and all kinds of publications may be transmitted by post from Paris to any part of the kingdom, at the rate of five centimes, (or a halfpenny) per sheet. In America the charge for conveying a newspaper by post is three farthings every three thousand miles. In several of the German states similar facilities have long been enjoyed. In France, the postage for circulating a paper within each department, where it is published, is two centimes and one half, or one half the price charged for conveyance to any part of the kingdom. Half price is paid for the conveyance of a half sheet. The French government have directed that some descriptions of works which relate to the arts and sciences, shall be conveyed free of postage.

Many persons justly consider it a matter of importance, that the metropolitan journals, on which greater capital and more talent are employed, should circulate with the utmost facility in the provinces, in order that metropolitan impressions may have their fair influence against local feelings and prejudices. They fear that the people would be disinclined to pay the postage in addition to the price of the newspaper, and that such a regulation would operate prejudicially against the metropolitan journals.

These fears we believe to be entirely unfounded. Competition will cause the public to be supplied with papers, without any addition to the price. The present news-vender's profit is one penny and a fraction. Upon the proposed system the penny would go to government, in payment for the labour of delivering the letters, and the fraction would pay a commission for the collection of subscriptions, quarterly or yearly, as it might be. This would be a matter which would easily adjust itself, and to every objection the committee may reply, "It is done in France."*

* After this article was in print we perceived that a writer in the Edinburgh Review asserts, that the mass of the people "would infinitely rather pay four-pence for a paper to the publisher, than three-pence to him and one penny to the Post-office." The objection is entirely fallacious; and founded on the supposition that each paper would be paid for as it arrives, when in fact, the money would be paid as it is now, to the publisher in advance, and he would settle with the Post office. Any American post officer would instruct the English Post office as to the details. The Reviewer contends, that an *ad valorem* stamp duty, with the privilege of free postage, should be retained. Now, those who have any technical knowledge on the subject, are aware that the first outlay for literary labour and printing falls with disproportionate weight on publications of a small circulation, and that the most popular journals might be sold the cheapest in consequence of the increased profits derived from all sales after the first expense is cleared. Is the writer aware, that one commercial journal in Scotland is enabled, by the profits derived from its advertisements, to distribute impressions gratis to ten or eleven thousand places? The popular journals would, therefore, pay but a slight *ad valorem* duty, or would evade it altogether, whilst it would often fall with the weight of a prohibitory tax upon those journals which rather deserve bounties; namely, upon those publications which, in consequence of their application to literature, to moral or scientific disquisitions in advance of the popular mind, would necessarily obtain but a limited circulation. A journal devoted to the collection and diffusion of information respecting any particular branch of education, would only circulate among the teachers concerned in it, or among the small class of philanthropists who take an interest in the subject. The expense of the outlay must therefore, for the want of the profit to be derived from an extensive sale, be made up by an increased price, incurring an increased duty. On the subject of the operation of the advertisement duty, and the necessity of its removal, the writer of the article in question has been well informed, and we concur in his observations: had he been equally well informed on the subject of the stamp duty, he must have advocated its im-

The government would, if the regulations were well framed, entirely supersede the private distribution so far as relates to distant conveyance, the immense multiplication of papers resulting from the change, would more than compensate them for the loss; and, certainly, if there is a subject on which private interests should not be permitted to stand in the way of public improvement, it is the present.

Not only would the sale of existing publications be immensely extended by the removal of the present obstructions, and the adoption of a system of cheap and free postage, but there is reason to believe that it would bring a number of new and valuable publications into existence. There are several bodies of individuals occupied in trades and branches of art and science, who are sufficiently numerous to maintain cheap publications, devoted to the collection and diffusion of information concerning their particular pursuits, but so widely spread, that at the present cost of conveyance such publications could not be sent to them. A cheap publication, for example, generally requires a sale of four or five thousand to pay. There are trades, comprehending eight or ten thousand individuals, of whom perhaps but three or four hundred reside in the metropolis, the remainder being spread all over the country. Such a body could not maintain a trades journal or price current, but it might upon an improved postage system. If this system be adopted, there can be little doubt that numerous price currents and journals for particular trades would arise. Innumerable publications, addresses, prospectuses, and circulars, which would not admit of the loss of time and labour of getting them stamped, would be sent by the post.

The great objection to any stamp duty is, that no one can be imposed that does not, and will not, however modified, place obstructions in the way of the efforts of individuals to

mediate abolition. Was he aware of the expense to the government of the labour of stamping the paper, or of the vexatious obstructions and loss occasioned to the consumer by the Stamp-office regulations? Was he acquainted with the fact, that the carriage of paper to be stamped, and other expenses incurred by provincial journals, which he says ought to be encouraged, are on an average not less than ten per cent? We beg to inform him, with relation to the post charges, that the people view them as remuneration for labour rather than as a tax; and that, although they sometimes justly complain of those charges as excessive, there is no direct tax which is paid more cheerfully, or which was ever so popular. We cannot believe that any class is so obtusely ignorant, as not to be able to perceive and acquiesce in the superior utility of a well-regulated postage charge in preference to any stamp duty.

adapt publications of various sizes and shapes to meet the wants of the people.

If the price of a publication be two-pence, a penny stamp will be eighty per cent on the wholesale price.

If the price is $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ the penny stamp is one hundred per cent.

If the price is one penny, the penny stamp will be one hundred and fifty per cent on the wholesale price.

Thus the burthen of the tax increases in proportion to the inability of the people to bear it. The fiscal obstacle to the diffusion of information becomes greater, precisely as every inducement of cheapness ought to be held out, and as the price is more adapted to the means of the working classes, by whom information is the most needed.

It may be proved, from an intimate inquiry into the means and habits of the people, that the capacity to purchase gratifications, which do not form part of what are considered necessities of life, extends from certain points, in proportion to the cheapness, in a greater than a geometrical ratio. Thus, if in any town or place, composed of the average relative proportions of the different classes of society, there are found one hundred persons who can purchase a work sold for one shilling, there also will be found more than three hundred able or disposed to purchase a thing for sixpence; more than a thousand able or disposed to purchase a work sold at three-pence, and so on.

The most enterprising publishers have discovered the fact, we have thus stated, as a general principle for the guidance of legislators, which might be proved by an overwhelming mass of evidence. And were the authors of financial measures accustomed to possess themselves of a knowledge of the state and habits of various classes of society; were they accustomed not to rely solely on the opinions of those who are governed by blind routine, or swayed by sinister interests, they would more frequently increase the revenue, while they benefited the subject, by bold reductions of fiscal imposts on articles of general consumption.

In France, the partial removal of some obstructions, and of reduced, though still iniquitously heavy imposts on the circulation of knowledge, have produced an immense increase of the channels for communicating it. In England, the variation of sales during several years has not been worth mentioning, and when considered with relation to the increase of population, it will be found that there has been a positive reduction. In 1815, the number of newspapers transmitted daily from Paris by the post was 25,000; in 1829, it was 58,000. We may

farther estimate the increased activity of communication in that country, by the increase of the postage for letters. In 1815, the number of letters sent from Paris, was 40,000; in 1829, it was 60,000. So that while the increase of letters has been 50 per cent, that of newspapers has been more than 80 per cent. The produce of the postage of letters and newspapers was in 1815, 5,248,000 francs; in 1829, 7,080,000; and we know that the demand for newspapers is still greatly on the advance.

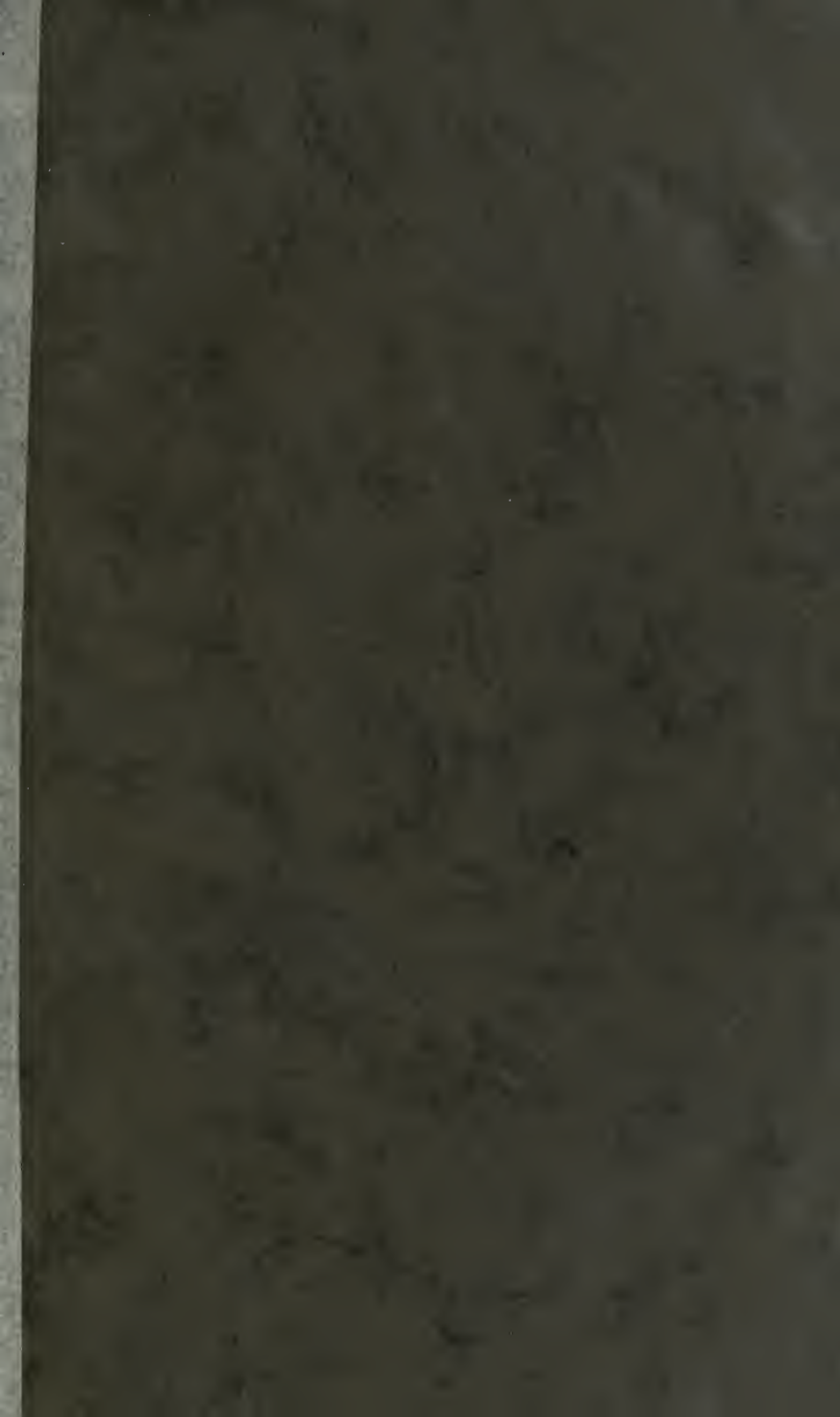
We know not from what sordid interests the alteration of the taxes on Knowledge may be opposed. But it is requisite, that the public should aid the friends to the diffusion of Knowledge by demanding firmly of the government, the entire abolition of all these noxious imposts. After what we have adduced, the plea that the produce of the taxes cannot be spared, can only be received as a discreditable fallacy. It is to be seen whether the journals will have the effrontery to claim their continuance. We observe that one has modestly suggested, with relation to the subject, "that when once property is vested under peculiar arrangements, every modification of them requires the nicest consideration." True, and we trust we have given it such consideration. "It is no slight mischief not to be at rest, nor to be able to repose confidence in any arrangement," growls "The Times." And may not the boroughmongers, and every possessor of mischievous power say the same? To all public or private remonstrances of these monopolists, a minister might reply in their own forcible and meritorious language, when disinterestedly aiding the public voice for the abolition of other monopolies. We would take for example the article on the abolition of the licensing system in "The Times" of April the 14th, 1830, when it complained of having received a thousand letters in favour of the brewers' and publicans' monopoly of the sale of beer, 'now, it is ardently to be hoped, abolished for ever.'

'Your monopoly, said "The Times," is a troublesome and vivacious beast: it yells, and kicks, and twists and struggles indefatigably, until the death blow has been struck, and only then have we any chance of relief from its annoyances. It is the same with all monopolies: they every one assail us with their 'reliance on public faith' their vested interests, 'their freeholds.' A pretty thing truly when ale-house and gin-shop keepers, (for these names we substitute newspaper proprietors and newspaper writers,) 'have a vested interest in robbing and poisoning,' (*i. e.* insulting and misleading) 'the king's subjects, and raise an outcry against the legislature, for its first though shamefully tardy and timid attempt to release the people of England from a nuisance imposed upon them by the fraudulent adulteration of a lawful beverage, and a scandalous abuse of legislative power. Astonished we are, at the grave presumption of men who write pamph-

lets,' (memorials), 'with the apparent design of turning the tables on the whole community, and making a poor mouth on behalf of the wrong-doers, as if they were the aggrieved parties, merely for being hindered from doing for ever what it was criminal to have done at all.'

Our space will not permit us to display the operation of these taxes in other directions. We have shewn, however, that scarcely any other taxes can be more objectionable in principle, or ultimately less productive; there is scarcely any other, therefore, which may not be advantageously substituted for them. We quit our task with the impression, that when all the facts we have stated are presented to the mind of a legislator, but one opinion can be entertained of his capacity or morality, who would oppose or refuse to aid in the entire removal of these taxes. If seeing their operation in maintaining moral evil, he does not exert himself for their removal, he is criminally careless about the continuance of that evil; if, seeing the misery and crime which result from ignorance, he determine to maintain the obstructions to the diffusion of knowledge, he is a certain contributor to that crime and misery. We trust that the public and the legislature will shortly be absolved from any participation in the guilt of their continuance

THE END.



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[Wilson, Effingham]
On the taxes on knowledge.

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