

In the present disturbed state of the country, when every artifice is practised to inflame the passions of the people and to diffuse discontent and dissatisfaction through the land, to which a licentious press has but too successfully contributed, we consider it to be our duty, as loyal subjects, to raise our warning voice against that fatal error,—fatal indeed, if it should prevail within the walls of Parliament,—which would lead to the belief that a popular clamour thus industriously excited for revolutionary innovations under the pretext of reform expresses the sense of the nation.

From the public meetings which have of late been holden for this purpose, as well as from those convened for voting congratulatory addresses on successful revolution abroad, the loyal and thinking classes of society have, for the most part, studiously absented themselves; such proceedings, whatever might be the views of the promoters, having a manifest tendency to the encouragement of discontent, the disturbance of the public peace, and, in their ultimate consequences, to the destruction of the balance of power vested by the Constitution in the three branches of the Legislature, upon which depends the preservation of our rights and liberties as subjects.

To our admirable form of government, as composed of King, Lords, and Commons, we are from every feeling of principle and conscience devotedly attached, convinced that of all political systems ever planned by human wisdom for insuring the rights, the liberties, and the general happiness of the subject, it is the most perfect and complete.

But greatly as we prize this inestimable birthright of Britons, we do not deny that it is, like all human institutions, subject to abuses and imperfections. Such defects, as they arise, it is our desire to see corrected: this, however, should be effected with caution, and in the spirit of the Constitution; all rash and ignorant attempts at improvement we deprecate, as endangering the whole fabric of our government; and, above all, we deprecate those theoretical and speculative innovations in the Constitution which, by the introduction of new elements therein, would be destructive of its very form and character.

The pre-eminence of the Protestant religion established within these realms we consider to be a main and essential principle of the Constitution; it is the basis of the national morals, and the prime source, under heaven, of the superior degree of civilization and prosperity which has so long distinguished this country above all the nations of Europe. Whatever, therefore, has a tendency to depress or weaken that pre-eminence will ever receive our determined and uncompromising opposition.

The open exercise of the elective franchise is another essential feature of our laws. That it is subject to abuse we readily admit; but the substitution of vote by ballot, so far from operating as any remedy against bribery and corruption, it is easy to perceive would increase the evil ten-fold. It would give to treachery and falsehood the protection of concealment. Instead of the present open and manly exercise of the proudest privilege of the subject, would be substituted the dark and secret machina-

tions of conspiracy and cabal, a mode of proceeding not less repugnant to the feelings of free men than opposed to the spirit of the Constitution, and leading in the end to a most degrading and fatal change in the national character.

Intimidation is another objection which has been prominently brought forward in the outcry against our representative system. That it exists to any considerable extent we utterly disbelieve. The character of Britons, and the shame and odium attendant upon flagrant acts of oppression, are the best security against its general prevalence. The influence which the possession of rank or property naturally gives over the regards and attachment of those to whom it affords the means of employment and subsistence, so far from being an evil in itself, is one of the surest tests of the sound moral state of society; and that, surely, would be a miserable policy which, with the view of remedying a partial abuse, would sever those ties of mutual protection and dependance, which, uniting the upper and lower classes of society in a bond of kindly and affectionate connection, form the best safeguard of social order,—and this we submit would be the inevitable effect of any enactment establishing the vote by ballot.

This innovation is further to be deprecated as being a preliminary step to the next object of radical reform—universal suffrage; and as thus tending by gradual but certain progression to the final consummation of the work of destruction—a total subversion of the Monarchical and Aristocratical parts of our Constitution.

That such would be the issue of these democratical innovations the evidence of all history attests. Our duty therefore to our King, our attachment to the two Houses of Parliament, and our jealous anxiety to preserve inviolate their respective prerogatives and privileges, forbid us to look with indifference upon changes pregnant with such fearful and fatal consequences to the State.

For these reasons, in the memorable words of our ancestors, but in the qualified sense already explained,—“We are unwilling that the laws of England should be changed.” For these reasons, we most earnestly implore that in the measures to be adopted for effecting any amendments in our representative system which lapse of time or a change of circumstances may render expedient, your Majesty will not sanction the admission of any novel and visionary principles opposed to the spirit of our Constitution, and dangerous to its stability. And, more especially, we pray that all attempts to introduce any new laws for the establishment of vote by ballot, or universal suffrage, may be met by a firm and decisive rejection.

In making this our dutiful appeal to your Majesty as the head of the State and the ultimate guardian of our civil rights and liberties, we intreat permission to renew the assurances of our inviolable loyalty and attachment.

[Here follow the signatures.]

January 28, 1831.

[Presented by the Duke of Gordon, accompanied by the Bishop of Bristol, the Recorder, and the Members for Bristol, and other Gentlemen.]