

The Yellow Dwarf,

A WEEKLY MISCELLANY.

"A stirring DWARF we do allowance give
"Before a sleeping Lion."—SHAKESPEARE.

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CASE OF THOMAS FERGUSON.

"O perilous mouths,
That bear in them one end the self-same tongue
Either of condemnation or approval;
Bidding the law awake courtesy to their will,
Hooking both right and wrong to the appetite,
To follow as it draws."—*Measure for Measure.*

WE had recently occasion to call the attention of our readers to the state of moral feeling in the House of Commons; we have had, in the case of Thomas Ferguson, an excellent illustration of it. This Thomas Ferguson had written a letter to a voter of a Scots county, to whom, on behalf of Lord Douglas, whose agent he is, he promised a place under Government, in return for his vote to a candidate whom Lord Douglas supports. For this he was brought before a Committee of the House of Commons, and was sent to Newgate—and the House proceeds to accumulate punishment on his head; for notice is given of a motion, by the Chairman of the Committee, to procure his removal from the office of Tax-gatherer, which he holds. Thomas Ferguson of course had declared that his use of Lord Douglas's name was quite unauthorised, and the Committee had much better manners than to make further enquiries on this delicate subject.

There are two ways of considering this subject. If we suppose that this House knew that the individual will be fully indemnified for his sufferings by Lord Douglas, their votes and committal, their addresses and indignation, deserve only to be considered as an idle mummery,—as an attempt at deception not so ingenious or amusing as the act of the juggler, who pretends to cut off the head of a cock, which afterwards struts and crows as well as ever. This we own appears the most probable supposition, to any one who considers whether or no it is likely that an under-agent,—a collector of taxes,—would employ the name of a Nobleman without his authority, in an election in which that Nobleman might feel an interest, but in which the agent personally could feel none,—or whether it was likely that the agent would eat his words without a promise of reward. But let us suppose, on the other hand, that the House thought that they really were inflicting pain upon Ferguson, we must enquire how they could reconcile it to their corporate and collective consciences. The offence of which they declared Ferguson to have been guilty, was "a corrupt interference with the freedom of election;" by which freedom of election they mean, the free choice of a fit Representative by the Electors, uninfluenced by the fear of punishment, or hope of reward. Yet in what condition is the House of Commons, by which this influence is declared to be a crime? It had been offered to be proved by Petitioners, whose statements have never been refuted, or even denied, that 157 of its members are returned, not by the free choice of the pretended Electors, but by the immediate authority of 84 individuals; and that 150 other Members are returned by the recommendation of 70 powerful

individuals, making in all a majority of the Members for Great Britain. There was not a Member in the House impudent or foolish enough to assert that he supposed the state of Representation was better than we have stated it to be;—there was not a Member who could deny that the buying and selling of seats—the corrupting of elections in the gross, was as notorious as the sun at noon-day; and yet the majority sent Thomas Ferguson to prison, well knowing that this act would produce no more effect than if they had sent a dog in his stead!

If indeed this act of punishment was all that it was in their power to do; though even then it would be wrong to inflict pain which they knew would be productive of no good, we might yet pardon the effervescence of their impotent virtue. But while they do this, they have the means open to them of destroying, without punishment or disturbance, the whole of this system of influence. They oppose any attempts to reduce it which promise to be effectual. They oppose them by speeches and by their votes; yet none of the men who thus oppose Reform have the honesty and manliness to declare, that the act for which Ferguson was punished is a natural, inseparable, necessary part of the system which they maintain; the effect, and end, and object of which is to expose the Electors to influence of every kind; that similar acts are every-day occurrences; and that, by means of them the majority of them obtain their seats. But we need not resort to general assertions, however incontrovertible. Mr. Wynn, in giving notice that he should move an Address for the dismissal of Thomas Ferguson, said, that "after such an act of delinquency, it would be most unbecoming to allow the prisoner to hold any office under the Government." But what is the case with Lord Castlereagh, the highest officer of the Crown in the House of Commons? It has been proved upon him, that he endeavoured to procure a seat in Parliament, by bartering the patronage of the India Company in the most illegal manner; it has been proved upon him that he took money for a seat in Parliament, for the sake of influencing future elections;—yet not only does he hold an office under the Government, but is honoured with the confidence of the House of Commons!

And all this is for the sake of decency,—this is the conduct by which the "collected wisdom" of Great Britain, the upholders of social order, the teachers of moral lessons, the builders of churches, the prosecutors of parodies, the declaimers against Revolutionary profligacy, uphold their dignity, and preserve the reputation of their virtue. This is their dignity,—to trample on vice which is low enough already, and to truckle to it when triumphant;—this is their decency, to practise corruption avowedly and upon system, and occasionally to punish a helpless offender.

"Handy dandy, which is the justice and which is the thief?"

When the subject was so ably brought before the House of Commons by Sir Francis Burdett, it is curious to see the defence which was made for these proceedings. The principal speakers were Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Wynn,—Lord

Castlereagh said, that he would not give an opinion on Ferguson's case, because he had not attended to it; but he charged upon Sir Francis Burdett a love of popularity, and a desire to destroy the constitution of Parliament,—that is, a desire to destroy that constitution,—the constitution of patronage, bartering, and seat-selling, in the theory and practice of which this person is so perfect. Mr. Wynn again said, that he had not approved of the conduct of Parliament in the case of Lord Castlereagh—he thought, truly, the censure too mild: but “it would be a sad thing indeed, if, because the House had in any single instance neglected its duty, it could in no subsequent instance perform it.” Truly we think so. But what is Mr. Wynn's corollary on this proposition? The House will not punish the eminent offenders, and Mr. Wynn will bow to the authority of the House.—Mr. Wynn, in common with others, will truckle to those offenders; but a tax-gatherer or under-steward the House will punish, and Mr. Wynn will suffer himself to be made the catspaw; and after a whining speech about purity and delinquency, will tear the victim to pieces according to the forms of the constitution! Now, supposing Mr. Wynn to be sincere in his indignation at these practices, must he not feel himself in a very contemptible situation,—to be kept like a muzzled cur, to be let loose on those only whom it suits the purpose of his masters that he shall worry? He would certainly better consult his own dignity by stopping his shrill pipe for ever, and letting the dignity of the House of Commons slift for itself. If the friends of rotten boroughs acted upon the principles of the Lacedaemonians, who permitted their children to steal, but punished them when detected, not for their want of honesty but for their want of ingenuity,—if they punished Ferguson because he proceeded too honestly to work in a knavish employment, and did not convey his meaning to Mr. Dykes in a manner more periphrastical, though quite as intelligible, we should understand the principle upon which they acted. But this they do not avow, and their proceedings in the case of Lord Castlereagh are at variance with the idea. The Members of the House retiring after they have performed this act of punishment on the man who wished to corrupt the purity of elections, will proceed to secure their seats in the new Parliament, just as they would if no such thing had happened. Promises of places and leases, threats and broad hints, bribery and treating, will go on just as they did before. This every man, who joins in the vote against Ferguson, knows, and knows how to prevent. Yet this influence, which, when it is occasionally discovered, they are ashamed not to condemn, they characterise in the gross as the golden chain which binds together the British Constitution—a chain, every link of which is made up of perjury or corruption. If they could hide the workings of the system, they would be happy: but the people are beginning to know, that a little more or less grossness or openness matters not to them. The effect of the system is all they look to; and it must be this, that while the power of electing those who dispose of the money of the nation is in the hands of a few persons, the electors and the elected will combine to plunder them. It matters little what name is given to the transaction which passes between these two classes, if the result be, that to their interests the interests of the community are sacrificed. This truth is becoming so familiar, that neither Lord Castlereagh's lessons on *mystification*, nor Mr. Wynn's constitutional hood-winking, will prevent the House of Commons from being known for what it is.

SIR FRANCIS BURDETT—MR. COBBETT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE YELLOW DWARF.

Sir,—A meeting was held on Monday in Spa-fields, at which it was naturally expected that Mr. Henry Hunt would have presided, for his name was first in the announcement stuck about the streets. Mr. Henry Hunt, however, thought proper to stay

away; and Messrs. Watson, Preston, and others, took the lead on the occasion. Several speeches were made, and a Petition to the Prince Regent was voted; after which the people, who conducted themselves well, peaceably retired. So far, there could be nothing to object to: indeed, I am not among those who think that the people should at any time be prevented from publicly meeting, and as publicly proclaiming their grievances and calling for redress. I like open and fearless discussion on all sides. While I contend for this, I claim, however, the right to speak out concerning such proceedings; and as I should animadvert on the conduct of a silly Lord, were he to preside and expose himself on a public occasion, so I shall not hesitate to notice the absurdities and rebuke the injustice of a vain plebeian, who, echoing the ungrateful and false and malignant cry of Mr. Cobbett, asserted that Sir Francis Burdett had “abandoned the cause of the people!” Yes; this is Mr. Cobnet's shameless cry, and this Mr. Watson had the hardihood to repeat in the presence of two thousand people. Mr. Watson did not favour his hearers with any proofs of Sir Francis's apostacy. Mr. Cobnet indeed has attempted something of the kind—and what are they? Why, that the Baronet did not chuse to be guided by Mr. Cobbett in his particular views of Reform, nor be associated with Mr. Henry Hunt in prosecuting those views!—This is the extent of his offending; and this is the reason why Mr. Cobbett is straining every nerve to depreciate a consistent and intrepid friend to liberty, and—oh shame!—to deery a man, who has conferred on this very person most important pecuniary obligations.* Really, one hardly knows which to admire most, Mr. Cobbett's want of head or want of heart in this his insidious attempt. In what way has Sir Francis Burdett deserted the people? Does he not maintain, in the House and out of the House, the same principles he always advocated? Has he changed his opinions on one important point? Has he ever strenuously advocated on Monday the limitation to householders of the elective franchise, and on the following Friday as strenuously maintained the necessity of Universal Suffrage? No; but Mr. Cobbett has. Has Sir Francis ever joined in the horrid yell against the liberties of a neighbour state, and after supporting the British Ministers in their expensive wars against France, impudently called out for the punishment of all those who had assisted in loading the nation with taxes in the support of such wars? No; but Mr. Cobbett has.—When Sir Francis Burdett was sent to the Tower for upholding the rights of Englishmen, did he want to compromise with the oligarchists—did he offer to refrain from writing any more, and to give up his means of attack, if he was suffered to escape—or did he wince and whine when he got into prison? No; but Mr. Cobbett did.—When the storm thickened, when gagging and imprisoning Bills were passed, and when any man obnoxious to Government was liable to be sent to jail, did Sir Francis Burdett, after calling upon others to resist these foul proceedings, did he abandon his associates and his post, and fly his country, for the fear,—that was all,—the uncalled for fear, of losing his personal liberty for a-while? No; but Mr. Cobbett did.—And yet this notorious changeling,—this supporter and denouncer of Pitt and all his Anti-Jacobin measures,—this noisy advocate (in one week) for limited and universal suffrage,—this bully in prosperity, this whiner in adversity, and this runaway in danger,—now forsooth, when self-exiled and self-disgraced, must turn round, and endeavour to bring disgrace on one of England's truest men!—“By Heaven, I'd rather be a dog and bay the moon, than such a Briton.” Mr. Watson ought to know, and Mr. Cobbett does know, better. He knows that Sir Francis has not abandoned the people,—that it is all “a lie, a wicked lie,”—and that his hostility to the Baronet is solely

* It is understood, that at this moment Mr. Cobbett is in debt to Sir Francis Burdett more than two thousand pounds.

owing to the latter's refusing to make common cause with him and Mr. Henry Hunt, for the safety of whose fox-hunting neck he exhibits such wonderful solicitude.

Some of the slavish papers, the *New Times* among them, were calling upon Ministers to prevent this Spa-fields Meeting, from which Mr. Cobbett's fox-hunting friend, who had assisted to bring it about, so valiantly kept away. Ministers are not quite such drivellers. Nothing can possibly delight them more or serve them more, than to have such a man as Burdett ran down, and such people as Preston and Henry Hunt put up. Ministers are aware, that their well-paid witting may in vain denounce the Reformers as "a desperate and degraded crew," while they are led by consistent and judicious and intellectual men; but their corrupt work, they know, is then best done for them, when ignorance, intolerance, and calumny unite, in Spa-fields or any where else, to disgust and alarm the nation.

I am the blind admirer of no man. I see in Sir Francis Burdett some things which I would rather not see. I wish he would at once disarm all such enemies, and gratify all his friends, by a more active attendance in Parliament, where there is so much to denounce and expose, and when so much good is really achieved, and so much evil prevented, by denouncing and exposing. Public opinion is now the chief remaining bulwark against despotism, and public opinion is formed and moulded by the press, and by the circulation of patriotic parliamentary speeches. I am aware that Sir Francis Burdett may have something to defend on this head—but while I see him, when in his place, the same bold advocate for the rights of the people as ever, the same consistent and earnest friend to liberty—while I see him paragonising by his presence and aiding by his purse a man like Mr. Hone, for having baffled and disgraced the canting oppressors—while I see him presiding at meetings held in aid of the imprisoned and the tortured under the Suspension Laws—while I see and hear all this, and more than this, I shall never cease to deem Sir Francis Burdett a true patriot, and to hold his vilifiers up as mistaken or designing or malevolent men. Mr. Cobbett surely imagines that the Reformers have neither recollection nor common sense nor common honesty, thus to hope to scare us from the well-tried friends of Reform by his treacherous and fugitive howl across the waters. J.

UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS.

SECT. IV.—LORD SOMERS, THE "EXPOSITOR OF CONSTITUTIONAL WHIG PRINCIPLES."

[FROM A CORRESPONDENT.]

(Continued.)

In a former number, an account was given of two productions from the pens of those who defended the conduct of the Outs.

One of them, under the pretence of promoting Reform, used quotations and arguments in abundance in its favour, but drew inferences directly the reverse of those which would naturally have followed from the premises. The other, under the pretence of being a Reformer, reprobated all Reform, and stigmatised all Reformers,—mis-quoted, mis-stated, and garbled whatever came under his hand. Both of them had their party to please,—both had their patrons, and these patrons could be served only in the way attempted by these writers; the conscience of the one would not allow him to suppress the information he possessed, although he seems to have succeeded in persuading himself that his sophistical and absurd conclusions would pass as legitimate, he went too far in his quotations and reasonings, however, to please those whom Lord Somers calls "Constitutional Whigs;" and the other, who followed close upon his heels, gave him a smart rap on the knuckles, by way of a remembrancer, just as the Chancellor had before treated his patron,

Lord Erskine, for exactly the same offence,—that of *appearing* not heartily to have given up Reform altogether.

Both these writers used disguise,—both attempted to carry their purpose covertly,—both of them were, in some respects, underlings; and what has been said of them, may serve as a sample of that class of the opponents of Parliamentary Reform.

We will now turn our attention towards a writer of another class, to one who is not a dependant,—towards one who has no patron to please or displease,—towards one of those who sit in the high places, one from whose mouth we may expect to hear the voice of the mighty delivering the oracles of reason; not, indeed, like the ambiguous responses of the oracles of old, but, in unambiguous words, the accurately weighed, and well-formed opinions, the magnanimous resolves, the virtuous intentions, and the profound instruction of those whom nature has purposely formed to govern the world in peace, or, in other times, "to ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm."

The work we are about to introduce to the notice of our readers, is from the pen of the Right Honourable John Somers Lord Somers, and is called "A Defence of the Constitution as by Law established, against the innovating and levelling Attempts of the Friends of Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage."

The Noble, Right Honourable, and Learned Lord scorns all disguise; he will neither trifle with us nor be misunderstood by us: he has also taken special care that the desires and intentions of his party shall not be misunderstood; he lays down their principles broad enough.

In this lay sermon of his, his Lordship takes three texts from which he preaches:—

1. He says,—“If ever there was a SINCERE WHIG, I AM ONE; acting, according to the best of my ability, on WHIG PRINCIPLES.”

2. “The object of my *attack* is a proposed measure, commonly distinguished by the appellation of *Parliamentary Reform*.”

3. “MILITARY FORCE is alone able to resist the attempts of revolutionary Reformers.”

Here there is no room for mistakes;—nothing can be more clearly expressed, nothing can be better defined. “Sincere Whig principles” teach a man, that it is fit and proper to attack the Parliamentary Reformers with the bayonet; and it will presently be seen, that this substitute for argument is the only thing intended to be used, whenever it can be SAFELY resorted to by both parties, because it will, it is hoped, by extinguishing mind, put an end to all attempts at Reform. Mr. Bentham said, it was their intention* “to return to all petitions for Reform,—to all groans,—to all CRIES FOR MERCY, the proper, and properly, and already proposed answer—the bayonet. The bayonet!—yes, by the blessing of God, the bayonet.” Right, says the Noble Lord; this is just what we intend doing.

The Noble Lord condescends to inform us, that he is 56 years of age; and that his opinions at the age of 21, when he first took his seat in the House of Commons, were precisely the same as they are now. No change has happened in him; he was just as wise 35 years ago as at the present moment,—he has learned nothing,—experience has been of no use to him; he was wise enough then, and why should he seek to be more so? His Lordship is a pious man, and probably recollected that Solomon had said, “Be not wise overmuch, why shouldst thou destroy thyself;” and perhaps he had heard the proverb which is often in the mouths of the vulgar people, of a man being “suffocated by his wisdom.” Those ordinary, every-day people, on whom experience has been operating,—those who, from the moment of their births, had every thing to learn,—those who have been constantly enlarging the bounds of their

* Parliamentary Reform Catechism, page 9.