

WHAT IS THE PEOPLE?

March 7, 1818.

—AND who are you that ask the question? One of the people. And yet you would be something! Then you would not have the People nothing. For what is the People? Millions of men, like you, with hearts beating in their bosoms, with thoughts stirring in their minds, with the blood circulating in their veins, with wants and appetites, and passions and anxious cares, and busy purposes and affections for others and a respect for themselves, and a desire of happiness, and a right to freedom, and a will to be free. And yet you would tear out this mighty heart of a nation, and lay it bare and bleeding at the foot of despotism: you would slay the mind of a country to fill up the dreary aching void with the old, obscene, drivelling prejudices of superstition and tyranny: you would tread out the eye of Liberty (the light of nations) like “a vile jelly,” that mankind may be led about darkling to its endless drudgery, like the Hebrew Sampson (shorn of his strength and blind), by his insulting taskmasters: you would make the throne every thing, and the people nothing, to be yourself less than nothing, a very slave, a reptile, a creeping, cringing sycophant, a court favourite, a pander to Legitimacy—that detestable fiction, which would make you and me and all mankind its slaves or victims; which would, of right and with all the sanctions of religion and morality, sacrifice the lives of millions to the least of its caprices; which subjects the rights, the happiness, and liberty of nations, to the will of some of the lowest of the species; which rears its bloated hideous form to brave the will of a whole people; that claims mankind as its property, and allows human nature to exist only upon sufferance; that haunts the understanding like a frightful spectre,

returned such an awful repulse to those halting and time-serving Prelates, that, after much importunity they went their way, not without shame and tears.”—*Milton—Of Reformation in England, and the Causes that have hitherto hindered it.*

and oppresses the very air with a weight that is not to be borne ; that like a witch's spell covers the earth with a dim and envious mist, and makes us turn our eyes from the light of heaven, which we have no right to look at without its leave : robs us of " the unbought grace of life," the pure delight and conscious pride in works of art or nature ; leaves us no thought or feeling that we dare call our own ; makes genius its lacquey, and virtue its easy prey ; sports with human happiness, and mocks at human misery ; suspends the breath of liberty, and almost of life ; exenterates us of our affections, blinds our understandings, debases our imaginations, converts the very hope of emancipation from its yoke into sacrilege, binds the successive countless generations of men together in its chains like a string of felons or galley-slaves, lest they should " resemble the flies of a summer," considers any remission of its absolute claims as a gracious boon, an act of royal clemency and favour, and confounds all sense of justice, reason, truth, liberty, humanity, in one low servile deathlike dread of power without limit and without remorse ! *

Such is the old doctrine of Divine Right, new-vamped up under the style and title of Legitimacy. " Fine word, Legitimate ! " We wonder where our English politicians picked it up. Is it an echo from the tomb of the martyred monarch, Charles the First ? Or was it the last word which his son, James the Second, left behind him in his flight, and bequeathed with his *abdication*, to his legitimate successors ? It is not written in our annals in the years 1688, in 1715, or 1745 . It was not sterling then, which was only fifteen years before his present Majesty's accession to the throne. Has it become so since ? Is the Revolution of 1688 at length acknowledged to be a blot in the family escutcheon of the Prince of Orange or the Elector of Hanover ? Is the choice of the people, which raised them to the throne, found to be the only flaw in their title to the suc-

* This passage is nearly a repetition of what was said before ; but as it contains the sum and substance of all I have ever said on such subjects, I have let it stand.

cession; the weight of royal gratitude growing more uneasy with the distance of the obligation? Is the alloy of liberty, mixed up with it, thought to debase that *fine carat*, which should compose the regal diadem? Are the fire-new specimens of the principles of the Right-Liners, and of Sir Robert Filmer's patriarchal scheme, to be met with in *The Courier*, *The Day*, *The Sun*, and some time back, in *The Times*, handed about to be admired in the highest circle, like the new gold coinage of sovereigns and half-sovereigns? We do not know. It may seem to be *Latter Lammas* with the doctrine at this time of day; but better late than never. By taking root in the soil of France, from which it was expelled (not quite so long as from our own), it may in time stretch out its feelers and strong suckers to this country; and present an altogether curious and novel aspect, by ingrafting the principles of the House of Stuart on the illustrious stock of the House of Brunswick.

"Miraturque novas frondes, et non sua poma."

What then is the People? We will answer first, by saying what it is not; and this we cannot do better than in the words of a certain author, whose testimony on the subject is too important not to avail ourselves of it again in this place. That infatuated drudge of despotism, who at one moment asks, "Where is the madman that maintains the doctrine of divine right?" and the next affirms, that "Louis XVIII. has the same right to the throne of France, independently of his merits or conduct, that Mr. Coke of Norfolk has to his estate at Holkham,"* has given us a tolerable clue to what we have to

* What is the amount of this right of Mr. Coke's? It is not greater than that of the Lords Balmerino and Lovatt to their estates in Scotland, or to the heads upon their shoulders, the one of which however were forfeited, and the other stuck upon Temple Bar, for maintaining, in theory and practice, that James II. had the same right to the throne of these realms, independently of his merits or conduct, that Mr. Coke has to his estate at Holkham. So thought they. So did not think George II.

expect from that mild paternal sway to which he would so kindly make us and the rest of the world over, in hopeless perpetuity. In a violent philippic against the author of the *Political Register*, he thus inadvertently expresses himself:—"Mr. Cobbett had been sentenced to two years imprisonment for a libel, and during the time that he was in Newgate, it was discovered that he had been in treaty with Government to avoid the sentence passed upon him; and that he had proposed to certain of the agents of Ministers, that if they would let him off, they might make what future use they pleased of him; *he would entirely betray the cause of the people*; he would either write or not write, or write against them, as he had once done before, just as Ministers thought proper. To this, however, it was replied, that "Cobbett had written on too many sides already *to be worth a groat for the service of Government*;" and he accordingly suffered his confinement!"—We here then see plainly enough what it is that, in the opinion of this very competent judge, alone renders any writer "worth a groat for the service of Government," *viz.* that he shall be able and willing entirely to betray the cause of the people. It follows from this principle (by which he seems to estimate the value of his lucubrations in the service of Government—we do not know whether the Government judge of them in the same way), that the cause of the people and the cause of the Government, who are represented as thus anxious to suborn their creatures to write against the people, are not the same but the reverse of one another. This slip of the pen in our professional retainer of legitimacy, though a libel on our own Government, is, notwithstanding, a general philosophic truth (the only one he ever hit upon), and an axiom in political mechanics, which we shall make the text of the following commentary.

What are the interests of the people? Not the interests of those who would betray them. Who is to judge of those interests? Not those who would suborn others to betray them. That Government is instituted for the benefit of the governed,

there can be little doubt; but the interests of the Government (when once it becomes absolute and independent of the people) must be directly at variance with those of the governed. The interests of the one are common and equal rights: of the other, exclusive and invidious privileges. The essence of the first is to be shared alike by all, and to benefit the community in proportion as they are spread: the essence of the last is to be destroyed by communication, and to subsist only—in wrong of the people. Rights and privileges are a contradiction in terms: for if one has more than his right, others must have less. The latter are the deadly nightshade of the commonwealth, near which no wholesome plant can thrive,—the ivy clinging round the trunk of the British oak, blighting its verdure, drying up its sap, and oppressing its stately growth. The insufficient checks and balances opposed to the overbearing influence of hereditary rank and power in our own Constitution, and in every Government which retains the least trace of freedom, are so many illustrations of this principle, if it needed any. The tendency in arbitrary power to encroach upon the liberties and comforts of the people, and to convert the public good into a stalking-horse to its own pride and avarice, has never (that we know) been denied by any one but “the professional gentleman,” who writes in *The Day and New Times*. The great and powerful, in order to be what they aspire to be, and what this gentleman would have them, perfectly independent of the will of the people, ought also to be perfectly independent of the assistance of the people. To be formally invested with the attributes of Gods upon earth, they ought first to be raised above its petty wants and appetites: they ought to give proofs of the beneficence and wisdom of Gods, before they can be trusted with the power. When we find them seated above the world, sympathizing with the welfare, but not feeling the passions of men, receiving neither good nor hurt, neither tithes nor tythe from them, but bestowing their benefits as free gifts on all, they may then be expected, but not till then, to rule over us like another Providence. We may make them a present of all

the taxes they do not apply to their own use: they are perfectly welcome to all the power, to the possession of which they are perfectly indifferent, and to the abuse of which they can have no possible temptation. But Legitimate Governments (flatter them as we will) are not another Heathen mythology. They are neither so cheap nor so splendid as the Delphin edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. They are indeed "Gods to punish," but in other respects "men of our infirmity." They do not feed on ambrosia or drink nectar; but live on the common fruits of the earth, of which they get the largest share, and the best. The wine they drink is made of grapes: the blood they shed is that of their subjects: the laws they make are not against themselves: the taxes they vote, they afterwards devour. They have the same wants that we have: and having the option, very naturally help themselves first, out of the common stock, without thinking that others are to come after them. With the same natural necessities, they have a thousand artificial ones besides; and with a thousand times the means to gratify them, they are still voracious, importunate, unsatisfied. Our State-paupers have their hands in every man's dish, and fare sumptuously every day. They live in palaces, and loll in coaches. In spite of Mr. Malthus, their studs of horses consume the produce of our fields, their dog-kenels are glutted with the food which would maintain the children of the poor. They cost us so much a year in dress and furniture, so much in stars and garters, blue ribbons, and grand crosses,—so much in dinners, breakfasts, and suppers, and so much in suppers, breakfasts, and dinners.* These heroes of the Income-tax, Worthies of the Civil List, Saints of the Court-calendar (*compagnons du lys*), have their naturals and non-naturals, like the rest of the world, but at a dearer rate. They are real *bona fide* personages, and do not live upon air. You will find it easier to keep them a week than a month; and at the end of that time, waking from the sweet dream of Legitimacy, you may say with

* See the description of Gargantua in Rabelais.

Caliban, "Why, what a fool was I to take this drunken monster for a God!" In fact, the case on the part of the people is so far self-evident. There is but a limited earth and a limited fertility to supply the demands both of Government and people; and what the one gains in the division of the spoil, beyond its average proportion, the other must needs go without. Do you suppose that our gentlemen-placemen and pensioners would suffer so many wretches to be perishing in our streets and highways, if they could relieve their extreme misery without parting with any of their own superfluities? If the Government take a fourth of the produce of the poor man's labour, they will be rich, and he will be in want. If they can contrive to take one half of it by legal means, or by a stretch of arbitrary power, they will be just twice as rich, twice as insolent and tyrannical, and he will be twice as poor, twice as miserable and oppressed, in a mathematical ratio to the end of the chapter, that is, till the one can extort and the other endure no more. It is the same with respect to power. The will and passions of the great are not exerted in regulating the seasons, or rolling the planets round their orbits for our good, without fee or reward, but in controlling the will and passions of others, in making the follies and vices of mankind subservient to their own, and marring,

"Because men suffer it, their toy, the world."

This is self-evident, like the former. Their will cannot be paramount, while any one in the community, or the whole community together, has the power to thwart it. A King cannot attain absolute power, while the people remain perfectly free; yet what King would not attain absolute power? While any trace of liberty is left among a people, ambitious Princes will never be easy, never at peace, never of sound mind; nor will they ever rest or leave one stone unturned, till they have succeeded in destroying the very name of liberty, or making it into a by-word, and in rooting out the germs of every popular right and liberal principle from a soil once sacred to liberty. It is not enough

that they have secured the whole power of the state in their hands, —that they carry every measure they please without the chance of an effectual opposition to it: but a word uttered against it is torture to their ears,—a thought that questions their wanton exercise of the royal prerogative rankles in their breasts like poison. Till all distinctions of right and wrong, liberty and slavery, happiness and misery, are looked upon as matters of indifference, or as saucy, insolent pretensions,—are sunk and merged in their idle caprice and pampered self-will, they will still feel themselves “cribbed, confined, and cabin’d in:” but if they can once more set up the doctrine of Legitimacy, “the right divine of Kings to govern wrong,” and set mankind at defiance with impunity, they will then be “broad and casing as the general air, whole as the rock.” This is the point from which they set out, and to which by the grace of God and the help of man they may return again. Liberty is short and fleeting, a transient grace that lights upon the earth by stealth and at long intervals—

“ Like the rainbow’s lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm;
Or like the Borealis race,
That shift ere you can point their place;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white, then melts for ever.”

But power is eternal; it is “enthroned in the hearts of Kings.” If you want the proofs, look at history, look at geography, look abroad; but do not look at home!

The power of an arbitrary King or an aspiring Minister does not increase with the liberty of the subject, but must be circumscribed by it. It is aggrandized by perpetual, systematic, insidious, or violent encroachments on popular freedom and natural right, as the sea gains upon the land by swallowing it up.—What then can we expect from the mild paternal sway of absolute power, and its sleek minions? What the world has always received at its hands, an abuse of power as vexatious, cowardly, and unrelenting, as the power itself was unprincipled, prepos-

terous, and unjust. They who get wealth and power from the people, who drive them like cattle to slaughter or to market, "and levy cruel wars, wasting the earth;" they who wallow in luxury, while the people are "steeped in poverty to the very lips," and bowed to the earth with unremitting labour, can have but little sympathy with those whose loss of liberty and property is their gain. What is it that the wealth of thousands is composed of? The tears, the sweat, and blood of millions. What is it that constitutes the glory of the Sovereigns of the earth? To have millions of men their slaves. Wherever the Government does not emanate (as in our own excellent Constitution) from the people, the principle of the Government, the *esprit de corps*, the point of honour, in all those connected with it, and raised by it to privileges above the law and above humanity, will be hatred to the people. Kings who would be thought to reign in contempt of the people, will shew their contempt of them in every act of their lives. Parliaments, not chosen by the people, will only be the instruments of Kings, who do not reign in the hearts of the people, "to betray the cause of the people." Ministers, not responsible to the people, will squeeze the last shilling out of them. *Charity begins at home*, is a maxim as true of Governments as of individuals. When the English Parliament insisted on its right of taxing the Americans without their consent, it was not from an apprehension that the Americans would, by being left to themselves, lay such heavy duties on their own produce and manufactures, as would afflict the generosity of the mother-country, and put the mild paternal sentiments of Lord North to the blush. If any future King of England should keep a wistful eye on the map of that country, it would rather be to hang it up as a trophy of legitimacy, and to "punish the last successful example of a democratic rebellion," than from any yearnings of fatherly goodwill to the American people, or from finding his "large heart" and capacity for good government, "confined in too narrow room" in the united kingdoms of Great Britain, Ireland, and Hanover. If Ferdinand VII. refuses the South

American patriots leave to plant the olive or the vine, throughout that vast continent, it is his pride, not his humanity, that steels his royal resolution.*

In 1781, the Controller-general of France, under Louis XVI. Monsieur Joli de Fleuri, defined the people of France to be *un peuple serf, corveable et baillable, a merci et misericorde*. When Louis XVIII. as the Count de Lille, protested against his brother's accepting the Constitution of 1792 (he has since become an acceptor of Constitutions himself, if not an observer of them,) as compromising the rights and privileges of the noblesse and clergy as well as of the crown, he was right in considering the Bastile, or "King's castle," with the picturesque episode of the Man in the Iron Mask, the fifteen thousand *lettres de cachet*, issued in the mild reign of Louis XV., *corvees*, tythes, game-laws, holy water, the right of pillaging, imprisoning, massacring, persecuting, harassing, insulting, and ingeniously tormenting the minds and bodies of the whole French people at every moment of their lives, on every possible pretence, and without any check or control but their own mild paternal sentiments towards them, as among the *menus plaisirs*, the chief points of etiquette, the immemorial privileges, and favourite amusements of Kings, Priests, and Nobles, from the beginning to the end of time, without which the bare title of King, Priest, or Noble, would not have been worth a groat.

The breasts of Kings and Courtiers then are not the safest depository of the interests of the people. But they know best what is for their good! Yes—to prevent it! The people may indeed feel their grievance, but their betters, it is said, must apply the remedy—which they take good care never to do! If the people

* The Government of Ovando, a Spanish Grandee and Knight of Alcantara, who had been sent over to Mexico soon after its conquest, exceeded in treachery, cruelty, wanton bloodshed, and deliberate extortion, that of all those who had preceded him; and the complaints became so loud, that Queen Isabel on her death-bed requested that he might be recalled; but Ferdinand found that Ovando had sent home much gold, and he retained him in his situation.—See *Capt. Burney's History of the Buccaneers*.

want judgment in their own affairs (which is not certain, for they only meddle with their own affairs when they are forcibly brought home to them in a way which they can hardly misunderstand), this is at any rate better than the want of sincerity, which would constantly and systematically lead their superiors to betray those interests, from their having other ends of their own to serve. It is better to trust to ignorance than to malice—to run the risk of sometimes miscalculating the odds than to play against loaded dice. The people would in this way stand as little chance in defending their purses or their persons against Mr. C—— or Lord C——, as an honest country gentleman would have had in playing at put or hazard with Count Fathom or Jonathan Wild. A certain degree of folly, or rashness, or indecision, or even violence in attaining an object, is surely less to be dreaded than a malignant, deliberate, mercenary intention in others to deprive us of it. If the people must have attorneys, and the advice of counsel, let them have attorneys and counsel of their own choosing, not those who are employed by special retainer against them, or who regularly hire others to *betray their cause*.

“O silly sheep,
Come ye to seek the lamb here of the wolf?”

This then is the cause of the people, the good of the people, judged of by common feeling and public opinion. Mr. Burke contemptuously defines the people to be “any faction that at the time can get the power of the sword into its hands.” No: that may be a description of the Government, but it is not of the people. The people is the hand, heart, and head of the whole community acting to one purpose, and with a mutual and thorough consent. The hand of the people so employed to execute what the heart feels, and the head thinks, must be employed more beneficially for the cause of the people, than in executing any measures which the cold hearts, and contriving heads of any faction, with distinct privileges and interests, may dictate to betray their cause. The will of the people necessarily tends to the ge-

neral good as its end ; and it must attain that end, and can only attain it, in proportion as it is guided—First, by popular feeling, as arising out of the immediate wants and wishes of the great mass of the people,—secondly, by public opinion, as arising out of the impartial reason and enlightened intellect of the community. What is it that determines the opinion of any number of persons in things they actually feel in their practical and home results? Their common interest. What is it that determines their opinion in things of general inquiry, beyond their immediate experience or interest? Abstract reason. In matters of feeling and common sense, of which each individual is the best judge, the majority are in the right; in things requiring a greater strength of mind to comprehend them, the greatest power of understanding will prevail, if it has but fair play. These two, taken together, as the test of the practical measures or general principles of Government, must be right, cannot be wrong. It is an absurdity to suppose that there can be any better criterion of national grievances, or the proper remedies for them, than the aggregate amount of the actual, dear-bought experience, the honest feelings, and heart-felt wishes of a whole people, informed and directed by the greatest power of understanding in the community, unbiassed by any sinister motive. Any other standard of public good or ill must, in proportion as it deviates from this, be vitiated in principle, and fatal in its effects. *Vox populi vox Dei*, is the rule of all good Government: for in that voice, truly collected and freely expressed (not when it is made the servile echo of a corrupt Court, or a designing Minister), we have all the sincerity and all the wisdom of the community. If we could suppose society to be transformed into one great animal (like Hobbes's Leviathan), each member of which had an intimate connexion with the head or Government, so that every want or intention of every individual in it could be made known and have its due weight, the State would have the same consciousness of its own wants and feelings, and the same interest in providing for them, as an individual has with respect to his own welfare. Can any one

doubt that such a state of society in which the greatest knowledge of its interests was thus combined with the greatest sympathy with its wants, would realize the idea of a perfect Commonwealth? But such a Government would be the precise idea of a truly popular or *representative* Government. The opposite extreme is the purely hereditary and despotic form of Government, where the people are an inert, torpid mass, without the power, scarcely with the will, to make its wants or wishes known: and where the feelings of those who are at the head of the State, centre in their own exclusive interests, pride, passions, prejudices; and all their thoughts are employed in defeating the happiness and undermining the liberties of a country.

WHAT IS THE PEOPLE?

(CONCLUDED.)

March 14, 1818.

IT is not denied that the people are best acquainted with their own wants, and most attached to their own interests. But then a question is started, as if the persons asking it were at a great loss for the answer,—Where are we to find the intellect of the people? Why, all the intellect that ever was is theirs. The public opinion expresses not only the collective sense of the whole people, but of all ages and nations, of all those minds that have devoted themselves to the love of truth and the good of mankind,—who have bequeathed their instructions, their hopes, and their example to posterity,—who have thought, spoke, written, acted, and suffered in the name and on the behalf of our common nature. All the greatest poets, sages, heroes, are ours originally, and by right. But surely Lord Bacon was a great man? Yes; but not because he was a lord. There is nothing of hereditary growth but pride and prejudice. That “fine word Legitimate” never produced any thing but bastard philosophy and patriotism! Even Burke was one of the people, and would have remained

with the people to the last, if there had been no court-side for him to go over to. The King gave him his pension, not his understanding or his eloquence. It would have been better for him and for mankind if he had kept to his principles, and gone without his pension. It is thus that the tide of power constantly setting in against the people, swallows up natural genius and acquired knowledge in the vortex of corruption, and then they reproach us with our want of leaders of weight and influence, to stem the torrent. All that has ever been done for society, has, however, been done for it by this intellect, before it was cheapened to be a cat's-paw of divine right. All discoveries and all improvements in arts, in science, in legislation, in civilization, in every thing dear and valuable to the heart of man, have been made by this intellect—all the triumphs of human genius over the rudest barbarism, the darkest ignorance, the grossest and most inhuman superstition, the most unmitigated and remorseless tyranny, have been gained for themselves by the people. Great Kings, great law-givers, great founders, and great reformers of religion, have almost all arisen from among the people. What have hereditary Monarchs, or regular Governments, or established priesthoods, ever done for the people? Did the Pope and Cardinals first set on foot the Reformation? Did the Jesuits attempt to abolish the Inquisition? For what one measure of civil or religious liberty did our own Bench of Bishops ever put themselves forward? What judge ever proposed a reform in the laws! Have not the House of Commons, with all their "tried wisdom," voted for every measure of Ministers for the last twenty-five years, except the Income-tax? It is the press that has done every thing for the people, and even for Governments.—"If they had not ploughed with our heifer, they would not have found out our riddle." And it has done this by slow degrees, by repeated, incessant, and incredible struggles with the oldest, most inveterate, powerful, and active enemies of the freedom of the press and of the people, who wish, in spite of the nature of things and of society, to retain the idle and mischievous privileges they possess

as the relics of barbarous and feudal times, who have an exclusive interest as a separate cast in the continuance of all existing abuses, and who plead a permanent *vested right* in the prevention of the progress of reason, liberty, and civilization. Yet they tax us with our want of intellect; and *we* ask them in return for their court-list of great names in arts or philosophy, for the coats of arms of their heroic vanquishers of error and intolerance, for their devout benefactors and royal martyrs of humanity. What are the claims of the people—the obvious, undoubted rights of common justice and humanity, forcibly withheld from them by pride, bigotry, and selfishness,—demanded for them, age after age, year after year, by the wisdom and virtue of the enlightened and disinterested part of mankind, and only grudgingly yielded up, with indecent, disgusting excuses, and sickening delays, when the burning shame of their refusal can be no longer concealed by fear of favour from the whole world. What did it not cost to abolish the Slave Trade? How long will the Catholic Claims be withheld by our State-jugglers? How long, and for what purpose? We may appeal, in behalf of the people, from the interested verdict of the worst and weakest men now living, to the disinterested reason of the best and wisest men among the living and the dead. We appeal from the corruption of Courts, the hypocrisy of zealots, and the dotage of hereditary imbecility, to the innate love of liberty in the human breast, and to the growing intellect of the world. We appeal to the pen, and they answer us with the point of the bayonet; and, at one time, when that had failed, they were for recommending the dagger.* They quote Burke, but rely on the Attorney-General. They hold Universal Suffrage to be the most dreadful of all things, and a Standing Army the best representatives of the people abroad and at home. They think Church-and-King mobs good things, for the same reason that they are alarmed at a meeting to petition for a Reform of Parliament. They consider the cry of “No Popery” a sound, excellent, and constitutional cry,—but the cry of a starving popu-

* See Coleridge's “Friend,” No. 15.

lation for food, strange and unnatural. They exalt the war-whoop of the Stock Exchange into the voice of undissembled patriotism, while they set down the cry for peace as the work of the Jacobins, the ventriloquism of the secret enemies of their country. The writers on the popular side of the question are factious, designing demagogues, who delude the people to make tools of them: but the government-writers, who echo every calumny, and justify every encroachment on the people, are profound philosophers and very honest men. Thus when Mr. John Gifford, the Editor of the "Anti-Jacobin" (not Mr. William Gifford, who at present holds the same office under Government, as the Editor of the "Quarterly Review"), denounced Mr. Coleridge as a person, who had "left his wife destitute and his children fatherless," and proceeded to add—" *Ex hoc disce* his friends Lamb and Southey"—we are to suppose that he was influenced in this gratuitous statement purely by his love for his King and country. Loyalty, patriotism, and religion, are regarded as the natural virtues and plain unerring instincts of the common people: the mixture of ignorance or prejudice is never objected to in these: it is only their love of liberty or hatred of oppression that are discovered, by the same liberal-minded junto, to be proofs of a base and vulgar disposition. The Bourbons are set over the immense majority of the French people against their will, because a talent for governing does not go with numbers. This argument was not thought of when Bonaparte tried to shew his talent for governing the people of the Continent against their will, though he had quite as much talent as the Bourbons. Mr. Canning rejoiced that the first successful resistance to Bonaparte was made in Russia, a country of barbarians and slaves. The heroic struggles of "the universal Spanish nation" in the cause of freedom and independence, have ended in the destruction of the Cortes and the restoration of the Inquisition, but without making the Duke of Wellington look thoughtful:—not a single renegado poet has vented his indignation in a single ode, elegy, or sonnet; nor does Mr. Southey "make him a willow cabin at its gate, write loyal

cantos of contemned love, and sing them loud even in the dead of the night!" He indeed assures us in the "Quarterly Review," that the Inquisition was restored by the voice of the Spanish people. He also asks, in the same place, "whether the voice of God was heard in the voice of the people at Jerusalem, when they cried, 'Crucify him, crucify him?'" We do not know; but we suppose, he would hardly go to the Chief Priests and Pharisees to find it. This great historian, politician, and logician, breaks out into a rhapsody against the old maxim, *vox populi vox Dei*, in the midst of an article of 55 pages, written expressly to prove that the last war was "the most popular, because the most just and necessary war that ever was carried on." He shrewdly asks, "Has the *vox populi* been the *vox Dei* in France for the last twenty-five years?" But, at least, according to his own shewing, it has been so in this country for all that period. We, however, do not think so. The voice of the country has been for war, because the voice of the King was for it, which was echoed by Parliament, both Lords and Commons, by Clergy and Gentry, and by the populace, till, as Mr. Southey himself states in the same connected chain of reasoning, the cry for war became so popular, that all those who did not join in it (of which number the Poet-laureate himself was one) were "persecuted, insulted, and injured in their persons, fame, and fortune." This is the true way of accounting for the fact, but it unfortunately knocks the Poet's inference on the head. Mr. Locke has observed, that there are not so many wrong opinions in the world as we are apt to believe, because most people take their opinions on trust from others. Neither are the opinions of the people their own, when they have been bribed or bullied into them by a mob of Lords and Gentlemen, following in full cry at the heels of the Court. The *vox populi* is the *vox Dei* only when it springs from the individual, unbiassed feelings, and unfettered, independent opinion of the people. Mr. Southey does not understand the terms of this good old adage, now that he is so furious against it: we fear, he understood them no better when he was as loudly in favour of it.

All the objections, indeed, to the voice of the people being the best rule for Government to attend to, arise from the stops and impediments to the expression of that voice, from the attempts to stifle or to give it a false bias, and to cut off its free and open communication with the head and heart of the people—by the Government itself. The sincere expression of the feelings of the people must be true; the full and free development of the public opinion must lead to truth, to the gradual discovery and diffusion of knowledge in this, as in all other departments of human inquiry. It is the interest of Governments in general to keep the people in a state of vassalage as long as they can—to prevent the expression of their sentiments, and the exercise and improvement of their understandings, by all the means in their power. They have a patent, and a monopoly, which they do not like to have looked into or to share with others. The argument for keeping the people in a state of lasting wardship, or for treating them as lunatics, incapable of self-government, wears a very suspicious aspect, as it comes from those who are trustees to the estate, or keepers of insane asylums. The long minority of the people would, at this rate, never expire, while those who had an interest had also the power to prevent them from arriving at years of discretion: their government-keepers have nothing to do but to drive the people mad by ill-treatment, and to keep them so by worse, in order to retain the pretence for applying the gag, the strait waistcoat, and the whip as long as they please. It is like the dispute between Mr. Epps, the angry shopkeeper in the Strand, and his journeyman, whom he would restrict from setting up for himself. Shall we never serve out our apprenticeship to liberty? Must our indentures to slavery bind us for life? It is well, it is perfectly well. You teach us nothing, and you will not let us learn. You deny us education, like Orlando's eldest brother, and then "stying us" in the den of legitimacy, you refuse to let us take the management of our own affairs into our own hands, or to seek our fortunes in the world ourselves. You found a right to treat us with indignity on the plea of your own neglect and in-

justice. You abuse a trust in order to make it perpetual. You profit of our ignorance and of your own wrong. You degrade, and then enslave us; and by enslaving, you degrade us more, to make us more and more incapable of ever escaping from your selfish, sordid yoke. There is no end of this. It is the fear of the progress of knowledge and a *Reading Public*, that has produced all the fuss and bustle and cant about Bell and Lancaster's plans, Bible and Missionary, and Auxiliary and Cheap Tract Societies, and that when it was impossible to prevent our reading something, made the Church and State so anxious to provide us with that sort of food for our stomachs, which they thought best. The Bible is an excellent book; and when it becomes the Statesman's Manual, in its precepts of charity—not of beggarly almsgiving, but of peace on earth and good will to man, the people may read nothing else. It reveals the glories of the world to come, and records the preternatural dispensations of Providence to mankind two thousand years ago. But it does not describe the present state of Europe, or give an account of the measures of the last or of the next reign, which yet it is important the people of England should look to. We cannot learn from Moses and the Prophets what Mr. Vansittart and the Jews are about in 'Change-alley. Those who prescribe us the study of the miracles and prophecies, themselves laugh to scorn the promised deliverance of Joanna Southcott and the Millennium. Yet they would have us learn patience and resignation from the miraculous interpositions of Providence recorded in the Scriptures. "*When the sky falls*"—the proverb is somewhat musty. The worst compliment ever paid to the Bible was the recommendation of it as a political palliative by the Lay Preachers of the day.

To put this question in a different light, we might ask, What is the public? and examine what would be the result of depriving the people of the use of their understandings in other matters as well as government—to subject them to the trammels of prescriptive prejudice and hereditary pretension. Take the stage as an example. Suppose Mr. Kean should have a son, a little crook-

kneed, raven-voiced, disagreeable, mischievous, stupid urchin, with the faults of his father's acting exaggerated tenfold, and none of his fine qualities,—what if Mr. Kean should take it into his head to get out letters-patent to empower him and his heirs for ever, with this hopeful commencement, to play all the chief parts in tragedy, by the grace of God and the favour of the Prince Regent! What a precious race of tragedy kings and heroes we should have! They would not even play the villain with a good grace. The theatres would soon be deserted, and the race of the Keans would “hold a barren sceptre” over empty houses, to be “wrenched from them by an unlineal hand!”—But no! For it would be necessary to uphold theatrical order, the cause of the legitimate drama, and so to levy a tax on all those who staid away from the theatre, or to drag them into it by force. Every one seeing the bayonet at the door, would be compelled to applaud the hoarse tones and lengthened pauses of the illustrious house of Kean; the newspaper critics would grow wanton in their praise, and all those would be held as rancorous enemies of their country, and of the prosperity of the stage, who did not join in the praises of the best of actors. What a falling off would there be from the present system of universal suffrage and open competition among the candidates, the frequency of rows in the pit, the noise in the gallery, the whispers in the boxes, and the lashing in the newspapers the next day!

In fact, the argument drawn from the supposed incapacity of the people against a representative Government, comes with the worst grace in the world from the patrons and admirers of hereditary government. Surely, if government were a thing requiring the utmost stretch of genius, wisdom, and virtue, to carry it on, the office of King would never even have been dreamt of as hereditary, any more than that of poet, painter, or philosopher. It is easy here “for the Son to tread in the Sire's steady steps.” It requires nothing but the will to do it. Extraordinary talents are not once looked for. Nay, a person, who would never have risen by natural abilities to the situation of churchwarden or parish beadle,

succeeds by unquestionable right to the possession of a throne, and wields the energies of an empire, or decides the fate of the world, with the smallest possible share of human understanding. The line of distinction which separates the regal purple from the slabbering-bib, is sometimes fine indeed; as we see in the case of the two Ferdinands. Any one above the rank of an idiot is supposed capable of exercising the highest functions of royal state. Yet these are the persons who talk of the people as a swinish multitude, and taunt them with their want of refinement and philosophy. *

* * * * *

The great problem of political science is not of so profoundly metaphysical or highly poetical a cast as Mr. Burke represents it. It is simply a question on the one part, with how little expense of liberty and property the Government, "that complex constable," as it has been quaintly called, can keep the peace; and on the other part, for how great a sacrifice of both, the splendour of the throne and the safety of the state can be made a pretext. Kings and their Ministers generally strive to get their hands in our pockets, and their feet on our necks; the people and their representatives will be wise enough, if they can only contrive to prevent them; but this, it must be confessed, they do not always succeed in. For a people to be free, it is sufficient that they will to be free. But the love of liberty is less strong than the love of power, and is guided by a less sure instinct in attaining its object. Milton only spoke the sentiments of the English people of his day (sentiments too which they had acted upon), in strong language, when he said, in answer to a foreign pedant:—"*Liceat, quæso, populo qui servitutis jugum in cervicibus grave sentit, tam sapienti esse, tam docto, tamque nobili, ut sciat quid tyranno suo faciendum sit, etiamsi neque externos neque grammaticos sciscitatum mittat.*"—(*Defensio pro populo Anglicano.*) Happily the whole of the passage is not applicable to their descendants in the present day; but at all times a people may be allowed to know when they are op-

pressed, enslaved, and miserable, to feel their wrongs and to demand a remedy—from the superior knowledge and humanity of Ministers, who, if they cannot cure the State-malady, ought in decency, like other doctors, to resign their authority over the patient. The people are not subject to fanciful wants, speculative longings, or hypochondriacal complaints. Their disorders are real, their complaints substantial and well-founded. Their grumblings are in general seditions of the belly. They do not cry out till they are hurt. They do not stand upon nice questions, or trouble themselves with Mr. Burke's Sublime and Beautiful; but when they find the money conjured clean out of their pockets, and the Constitution suspended over their heads, they think it time to look about them. For example, poor Evans, that amateur of music and politics (strange combination of tastes), thought it hard, no doubt, to be sent to prison and deprived of his flute by a State-warrant, because there was no ground for doing it by law; and Mr. Hiley Addington, being himself a flute-player, thought so too: though, in spite of this romantic sympathy, the Minister prevailed over the musician, and Mr. Evans has, we believe, never got back his flute. For an act of injustice, by the new system; if complained of "forsooth," becomes justifiable by the very resistance to it: if not complained of, nobody knows any thing about it, and so it goes equally unredressed in either way. Or to take another obvious instance and sign of the times: a tenant or small farmer who has been distrained upon and sent to gaol or to the workhouse, probably thinks, and with some appearance of reason, that he was better off before this change of circumstances; and Mr. Cobbett, in his twopenny Registers, proves to him so clearly, that this change for the worse is owing to the war and taxes, which have driven him out of his house and home, that Mr. Cobbett himself has been forced to quit the country to argue the question, whether two and two make four, with Mr. Vansittart, upon safer ground to himself, and more equal ground to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Such questions as

these are, one would think, within the verge of common sense and reason. For any thing we could ever find, the people have as much common sense and sound judgment as any other class of the community. Their folly is second-hand, derived from their being the dupe of the passions, interests, and prejudices of their superiors. When they judge for themselves, they in general judge right. At any rate, the way to improve their judgment in their own concerns (and if they do not judge for themselves, they will infallibly be cheated both of liberty and property, by those who kindly insist on relieving them of that trouble) is not to deny them the use and exercise of their judgment altogether. Nothing can be pleasanter than one of the impositions of late attempted to be put upon the people, by persuading them that economy is no part of a wise Government. The people must be pretty competent judges of the cheapness of a Government. But it is pretended by our high-flying sinecurists and pensioners, that this is a low and vulgar view of the subject, taken up by interested knaves, like Paine and Cobbett, to delude, and, in the end, make their market of the people. With all the writers and orators who compose the band of gentlemen pensioners and their patrons, politics is entirely a thing of sentiment and imagination. To speak of the expenses of Government, as if it were a little paltry huckstering calculation of profit and loss, quite shocks their lofty, liberal, and disinterested notions. They have no patience with the people if they are not ready to sacrifice their all for the public good! This is something like a little recruiting cavalry-lieutenant we once met with, who, sorely annoyed at being so often dunned for the arrears of board and lodging by the people where he took up his quarters, exclaimed with the true broad Irish accent and emphasis—“*Vulgar ideas! These wretches always expect one to pay for what one has of them!*” Our modest lieutenant thought, that while he was employed on his Majesty’s service, he had a right to pick the pockets of his subjects, and that if they complained of being fobbed of what was their own, they were blackguards and *no gentlemen!* Mr. Canning hit

upon nothing so good as this, in his luminous defence of his Lisbon Job!

But allow the people to be as gross and ignorant as you please, as base and stupid as you can make them or keep them, "duller than the fat weed that roots itself at ease on Lethe's wharf,"—is nothing ever to rouse them? Grant that they are slow of apprehension—that they do not see till they feel. Is that a reason that they are not to feel then, neither? Would you blindfold them with the double bandages of bigotry, or quench their understandings with "the dim suffusion," "the drop serene," of Legitimacy, that "they may roll in vain and find no dawn" of liberty, no ray of hope? Because they do not see tyranny till it is mountain high, "making Ossa like a wart," are they not to feel its weight when it is heaped upon them, or to throw it off with giant strength and a convulsive effort? If they do not see the evil till it has grown enormous, palpable, and undeniable, is that a reason why others should then deny that it exists, or why it should not be removed? They do not snuff arbitrary power a century off: they are not shocked at it on the other side of the globe, or of the Channel: are they not therefore to see it, could it in time be supposed to stalk over their heads, to trample and grind them to the earth? If in their uncertainty how to deal with it, they sometimes strike random blows, if their despair makes them dangerous, why do not they, who, from their elevated situation, see so much farther and deeper into the principles and consequences of things—in their boasted wisdom prevent the causes of complaint in the people before they accumulate to a terrific height, and burst upon the heads of their oppressors? The higher classes, who would disqualify the people from taking the cure of their disorders into their own hands, might do this very effectually, by preventing the first symptoms of their disorders: They would do well, instead of abusing the blunders and brutishness of the multitude, to shew their superior penetration and zeal in detecting the first approaches of mischief, in withstanding every encroachment on the comforts and rights of the people, in

guarding every bulwark against the influence and machinations of arbitrary power, as a precious, inviolable, sacred trust. Instead of this, they are the first to be lulled into security, a security "as gross as ignorance made drunk"—the last to believe the consequences, because they are the last to feel them. Instead of this, the patience of the lower classes, in submitting to privations and insults, is only surpassed by the callousness of their betters in witnessing them. The one never set about the redress of grievances or the reform of abuses, till they are no longer to be borne; the others will not hear of it even then. It is for this reason, among others, that the *vox populi* is the *vox Dei*, that it is the agonizing cry of human nature raised, and only raised, against intolerable oppression and the utmost extremity of human suffering. The people do not rise up till they are trod down. They do not turn upon their tormentors till they are goaded to madness. They do not complain till the thumbscrews have been applied, and have been strained to the last turn. Nothing can ever wear the affections or confidence of a people from a Government (to which habit, prejudice, natural pride, perhaps old benefits and joint struggles for liberty have attached them) but an excessive degree of irritation and disgust, occasioned either by a sudden and violent stretch of power, contrary to the spirit and forms of the established Government, or by a blind and wilful adherence to old abuses and established forms, when the changes in the state of manners and opinion have rendered them as odious as they are ridiculous. The Revolutions of Switzerland, the Low Countries, and of America, are examples of the former—the French Revolution of the latter: our own Revolution of 1688 was a mixture of the two. As a general rule, it might be laid down, that for every instance of national resistance to tyranny, there ought to have been hundreds, and that all those which have been attempted ought to have succeeded. In the case of Wat Tyler, for instance, which has been so naturally dramatised by the poet-laureate, the rebellion was crushed, and the ringleaders hanged by the treachery of the Government; but the grievances of which

they had complained were removed a few years after, and the rights they had claimed granted to the people, from the necessary progress of civilization and knowledge. Did not Mr. Southey know, when he applied for an injunction against Wat Tyler, that the feudal system had been abolished long ago?—Again, as nothing rouses the people to resistance but extreme and aggravated injustice, so nothing can make them persevere in it, or push their efforts to a successful and triumphant issue, but the most open and unequivocal determination to brave their cries and insult their misery. They have no principle of union in themselves, and nothing brings or holds them together but the strong pressure of want, the stern hand of necessity—“a necessity that is not chosen, but chuses,—a necessity paramount to deliberation, that admits of no discussion and demands no evidence, that can alone, (according to Mr. Burke’s theory) justify a resort to anarchy,” and that alone ever did or can produce it. In fine, there are but two things in the world, might and right. Whenever one of these is overcome, it is by the other. The triumphs of the people, or the stand which they at any time make against arbitrary sway, are the triumphs of reason and justice over the insolence of individual power and authority, which, unless as it is restrained, curbed, and corrected by popular feeling or public opinion, can be guided only by its own drunken, besotted, mad pride, selfishness and caprice, and must be productive of all the mischief, which it can wantonly or deliberately commit with impunity.

The people are not apt, like a fine lady, to affect the vapours of discontent; nor to volunteer a rebellion for the theatrical eclat of the thing. But the least plausible excuse, one kind word, one squeeze of the hand, one hollow profession of good will, subdues the soft heart of rebellion, (which is “too foolish fond and pitiful” to be a match for the callous hypocrisy opposed to it) dissolves and melts the whole fabric of popular innovation like butter in the sun. Wat Tyler is a case in point again. The instant the effeminate king and his unprincipled courtiers gave them fair words, they dispersed, relying in their infatuation on the word of

the King as binding, on the oath of his officers as sincere; and no sooner were they dispersed than they cut off their leaders' heads, and poor John Ball's along with them, in spite of all his texts of Scripture. The story is to be seen in all the shop-windows, *written in very choice blank verse!*—That the people are rash in trusting to the promises of their friends, is true; they are more rash in believing their enemies. If they are led to expect too much in theory, they are satisfied with too little in reality. Their anger is sometimes fatal while it lasts, but it is not roused very soon, nor does it last very long. Of all dynasties, anarchy is the shortest lived. They are violent in their revenge, no doubt; but it is because justice has been long denied them, and they have to pay off a very long score at a very short notice. What Cæsar says of himself, might be applied well enough to the people, that they "did never wrong but with just cause." The errors of the people are the crimes of Governments. They apply sharp remedies to lingering diseases, and when they get sudden power in their hands, frighten their enemies, and wound themselves with it. They rely on brute force and the fury of despair, in proportion to the treachery which surrounds them, and to the degradation, the want of general information and mutual co-operation, in which they have been kept, on purpose to prevent them from ever acting in concert, with wisdom, energy, confidence, and calmness, for the public good. The American Revolution produced no horrors, because its enemies could not succeed in sowing the seeds of terror, hatred, mutual treachery, and universal dismay in the hearts of the people. The French Revolution, under the auspices of Mr. Burke, and other friends of social order, was tolerably prolific of these horrors. But that should not be charged as the fault of the Revolution or of the people. Timely Reforms are the best preventives of violent Revolutions. If Governments are determined that the people shall have no redress, no remedies for their acknowledged grievances, but violent and desperate ones, they may thank themselves for the obvious consequences. Des-

potism must always have the most to fear from the re-action of popular fury, where it has been guilty of the greatest abuses of power, and where it has shewn the greatest tenaciousness of those abuses, putting an end to all prospect of amicable arrangement, and provoking the utmost vengeance of its oppressed and insulted victims. This tenaciousness of power is the chief obstacle to improvement, and the cause of the revulsions which follow the attempts at it. In America, a free Government was easy of accomplishment, because it was not necessary, in building up, to pull down: there were no nuisances to abate. The thing is plain. Reform in old Governments is just like the new improvements in the front of Carlton House, that would go on fast enough but for the vile, old, dark, dirty, crooked streets, which cannot be removed without giving the inhabitants notice to quit. Mr. Burke, in regretting these old institutions as the result of the wisdom of ages, and not the remains of Gothic ignorance and barbarism, played the part of *Crockery*, in the farce of *Exit by Mistake*, who sheds tears of affection over the loss of the old windows and buttresses of the houses that no longer jut out to meet one another, and stop up the way.

There is one other consideration which may induce hereditary Sovereigns to allow some weight to the arguments in favour of popular feeling and public opinion. They are the only security which they themselves possess individually for the continuance of their splendour and power. Absolute monarchs have nothing to fear from the people, but they have every thing to fear from their slaves and one another. Where power is lifted beyond the reach of the law or of public opinion, there is no principle to oppose it, and he who can obtain possession of the throne (by whatever means) is always the rightful possessor of it, till he is supplanted by a more fortunate or artful successor, and so on in a perpetual round of treasons, conspiracies, murders, usurpations, regicides, and rebellions, with which the people have nothing to do, but as passive, unconcerned spectators.—Where the son succeeds to the father's throne by assassination, without being amenable to public

justice, he is liable to be cut off himself by the same means, and with the same impunity. The only thing that can give stability or confidence to power, is that very will of the people, and public censure exercised upon public acts, of which legitimate Sovereigns are so disproportionately apprehensive. For one regicide committed by the people, there have been thousands committed by Kings themselves. A Constitutional King of England reigns in greater security than the Persian Sophi, or the Great Mogul; and the Emperor of Turkey, or the Autocrat of all the Russias, has much more to fear from a cup of coffee or the bowstring, than the Prince Regent from the speeches and writings of all the Revolutionists in Europe. By removing the barrier of public opinion, which interferes with their own lawless acts, despotic Kings lay themselves open to the hand of the assassin,—and while they reign in contempt of the will, the voice, the heart and mind of a whole people, hold their crowns, and every moment of their lives at the mercy of the meanest of their slaves.

ON THE REGAL CHARACTER.

May 16, 1818.

THIS is a subject exceedingly curious, and worth explaining. In writing a criticism, we hope we shall not be accused of intending a libel.

Kings are remarkable for long memories, in the merest trifles. They never forget a face or person they have once seen, nor an anecdote they have been told of any one they know. Whatever differences of character or understanding they manifest in other respects, they all possess what Dr. Spurzheim would call the *organ of individuality*, or the power of recollecting particular local circumstances, nearly in the same degree; though we shall attempt to account for it without recurring to his system. This

