

ADDRESS

TO

THE PEOPLE OF SCOTLAND ON THE PRINCIPLE AND OPERATIONS OF THE CORN AND PROVISION LAWS, BY THE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF DISSENTING CHURCHES, ASSEMBLED IN CONFERENCE AT EDINBURGH, ON THE 11TH, 12TH, AND 13TH JANUARY, 1842.

FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN, — We, the Ministers and Members of Dissenting Churches, whom the piercing cry of bitter distress, heard in our respective localities, has constrained to assemble in Conference, at this inclement season of the year, to express our opinion of the injustice and immoral tendency of the Corn and Provision Laws, and to exert our combined influence for their total repeal, beg to address you on the principle and operation of these laws, and to state the reasons which have induced us to attribute to them the present stagnation of trade, and the widely-diffused sufferings of the community, and which cause us earnestly to call on you to unite with us in using, speedily and energetically, all peaceful and constitutional means, to secure the immediate and complete abolition of these oppressive enactments, and the establishment of an entirely free trade in food.

I. The principle and operation of the Corn and Provision Laws. The object of these laws is to keep the price of food high in this country. This is accomplished by a scale of import duties which effectually prevent the sale of foreign grain, till the price in the home market has reached the point of starvation, and by a system of enactments which impose high duties on the importation of every article which the British soil produces. The professed design of these laws is to give protection to the agriculturist; but while this protection is unjust and unnecessary, it sacrifices, for the advantage of the wealthy landlords, the interests of the manufacturing classes, and of the great majority of the community. It will be observed from the scale, which we have given in a note at the close, that when wheat is selling at 61s. the quarter, there is a duty imposed of 25s. 8d.; and that it is not till the price rises to 73s. that the ports are opened, and the duty falls to 1s. the quarter. Grain can at any time be brought in and warehoused; but these duties prevent the merchants from disposing of it, as they cannot pay the import duties till the home price is nearly 70s. This is very easily shown; and it evinces strikingly the severe and oppressive character of these laws. It appears that foreign wheat can be brought to our shores at about 45s. per quarter; and were a free trade in corn allowed, the price would, on an average of years, be kept nearly at that rate in our markets. Now, the way to discover when foreign wheat can be sold with any profit, is to add the import duty to the 45s., the price which the quarter costs when it reaches this country; and if you take the scale and do this, you will find that it cannot be disposed of without loss, while the price is under 67s. or 68s. the quarter. The following table will put this point in a clear light:—

| Home price. | Import duty. | Add price of Foreign Wheat. | | Cost of Foreign Wheat, including duty. | |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------------------|----|--|--------|
| s. | s. d. | s. | | s. d. | |
| 64 | 22 : 8 | + | 45 | = | 67 : 8 |
| 65 | 21 : 8 | + | 45 | = | 66 : 8 |
| 66 | 20 : 8 | + | 45 | = | 65 : 8 |
| 67 | 18 : 8 | + | 45 | = | 63 : 8 |
| 68 | 16 : 8 | + | 45 | = | 61 : 8 |

} Cannot be sold.

} May be sold.

Thus you perceive that if a merchant were to import grain when the home price is 64s., and to pay the import duty of 22s. 8d., this, added to the 45s., would amount to 67s. 8d., which is 3s. 6d. more than the home price at the time; and consequently sales cannot be effected till the price has mounted to the rate which has been specified. But in reality, as corn is a bulky and perishable commodity, and as the prices fluctuate rapidly, it is not till the rate is much higher, that our merchants can safely engage in the trade. This proves that the lowest price at which the landlords wish to sell their produce is 68s. the quarter; and if ever it