

TO THE

Labouring Poor of England.

FELLOW MEN,

YOUR fathers were free. The blood of many ages purchased the independence of Englishmen; but experience has taught us, that it is not by war alone, that a nation may be enslaved. Benevolence itself has assisted to rob the English Poor of their property and personal freedom. They had once cottages and gardens, with extensive rights of common, all over England: now they have lost their all; nor can they regain possession of a single foot of land, whereon to erect a shed for independent residence. The ruined cottages of their fathers are their's, only during the pleasure of masters, themselves at the will of others; and the workhouse is the heartless abode of thousands, who have toiled, and fought, and bled, for their country's renown.

Labourers of England! It is proper that these truths should be told; and it is proper that you should know that *one right* remains, by the exercise of which, you may better your condition, and rescue this, *once happy land*, from the degradation of pauperism, and the scourge of oppression:—this is the *RIGHT* of petitioning the Legislature,—the *birth-right* of every British subject.

For two years I have been teaching the people of my own parish, *how to exercise this right*, and they have twice exercised it. They see clearly, that if the people of every parish would follow their example, all that is wanted for the Poor would be obtained. It is not the interest or the wish of any one, that the Poor should be oppressed: but they are oppressed, and that grievously; and all because they know not how to speak up for themselves. Petitioning the legislature is the way, by which they must declare their wants,—petitioning by *single parishes, all over England.* No person dare prevent the poorest man from doing this; and that it may be distinctly understood, what should be asked for, a Copy of the Petition of the people of Wily is here printed. No person is so ignorant, but he will understand this, after it has been read over two or three times; and when it is understood, all that need be done, is to write off, from the short form below, a Petition, filling up the blanks with the names of the particular parish and county from which it is to be sent.

There is no parish, but has some one or two Labourers who can read and write, and who will take the trouble of reading the Wily Petition to their fellow parishioners, who cannot do so; and, as to signing any Petition, a man's *mark* is as good as his name, written by himself at length. Bad writing and bad spelling, have been declared by a very learned member of parliament, to be even more worthy of notice than what is perfectly correct, which is very encouraging for the Poor to seek for what they want.

When the people of a parish set about petitioning, they should first desire the *Heads* of the parish—the clergyman, farmers, &c. to join them; but on no account should they leave off, because of such people declining. I recommend this, only as a becoming compliment to superiors in station, not as absolutely necessary. One man's name is as good at a petition, as another's; and in this case, what is sought for is the peculiar benefit of the Poor, not of the Rich. It cannot be supposed, that the Rich will be so hearty in the cause, as the Poor themselves; and upon their own exertions alone, must the hope of success depend.

Every member of Parliament is bound in duty to present respectful Petitions: but it will be best for the people to chuse the member for this purpose, most nearly connected with the parish from whence any Petition is sent. I have given below, the *form* of a letter, in which to inclose any Petition, when signed, to be directed to the member chosen to do the business. Members of Parliament pay no postage for letters sent to them, and letters coming from them are also free of expense; so that the cost of petitioning need not exceed a few pence, for paper. It will be particularly necessary to keep copies of all the Petitions, with the names of those who sign them; as it would be desirable to publish these all together, as soon as many parishes have petitioned; so that every one may know how things proceed; and who are the people willing to join in the only peaceable way of procuring RELIEF TO THE POOR.

Robert Gourlay,
Deptford-Farm, 12th March, 1817.

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and Ireland, in Parliament assembled,
The humble Petition of the undersigned Inhabitants, of the Parish of Wily, in the County of Wilts.

(5th February, 1817.)

SHEWETH,

THAT on the 31st of May, 1815, a Petition from this parish to your honourable House, was presented by Paul Methuen Esq. member for this county, on the subject of the poor laws, to which your Petitioners beg leave again to call the attention of your honourable House.

That your Petitioners understood, that, at the close of the last Session of Parliament, your honourable House had appointed a committee to take into consideration, this most important subject, and your Petitioners would have looked with confidence towards the result of such consideration, had not a proposal been set forth, by the mover of this measure, not only subversive of law, but indicative of an intention and spirit absolutely abhorrent to the minds of your Petitioners.

It was proposed in your honourable House,—not to better the condition of the poor,—not to lighten the overburthened wheels of industry,—not to rekindle the spirit of independence, nor to recruit the wasted strength of the labourers of England:—it was proposed to oblige them to pay four pence, out of every ten shillings of their earnings, that they who have hitherto paid poor rates may be eased of their burden! When such a proposal has been made, and patiently listened to, in the British Senate, under such circumstances as the present, it must be high time for every one, even the lowest, to think for himself,—to doubt if selfishness has left, in the human breast, one park of benevolence, or if any thing like reason is to dictate in the arrangements of civil society.

Your Petitioners were taught to believe, that after the struggle of war was at an end, plenty would come hand in hand with peace, to refresh the people, who had, with unparalleled fortitude and submission, for upwards of twenty years of war, supported the measures of their Government: your Petitioners have been disappointed,—most grievously disappointed: war had its horrors but the present peace is more horrible than war:—the people in thousands stand every where idle, famished, dejected, and desperate.

At such a period of disappointment and gloom your Petitioners would bridle in every inclination to reproach those, who have been the more immediate instruments of bringing down upon the country its load of calamity. Looking backward they recognize the people at every step, identifying their will with that of the Government fostering its ambition; cheering its victories: sharing its plunder. Your Petitioners wish to bury in oblivion, the follie and the crimes that are passed: they wish, now, that no urgent necessity proclaims that something must be done, that may be done, which may not only be safe and honourable for the British Government, but efficient to the comfort and prosperity of the people.

Your Petitioners conceive that there exists no mystery, as to the grand cause of the present distress. Excessive taxation, for a long period of years, has not only wasted the productions of industry, but the hind system has registered the price of these wasted productions, as a debt to be discharged by industry, while industry, deprived of the excitations which extraordinary circumstances afforded, has ceased to be able for such a discharge. Under these changed circumstances, your Petitioners have marked, for the last three years, a fatal blindness to consequences, and have beheld with sorrow, principles assumed and acted upon, with a design to remedy impending evils, not only, of a narrow and selfish character, but papably inadequate to the end in view. Your Petitioners conceive that the first step which should have been taken, after peace deprived this country of its monopoly of trade, and the peculiar incitements to industry, created by war and extraordinary circumstances, was, to have withdrawn those taxes which most directly bear upon the necessities and comforts of life, and to have substituted in their place, taxes upon IDLE PROPERTY and GREAT INCOME: accruing from the same. Such measures would not only have been politic and just among individuals, but their adoption would at once have enabled our industry to cope with that of other nations, and would have upheld that due degree of confidence in substantial stock, which was clearly wanted to maintain a balance against the dangerous influence of funded property, whose immediate security does not rest on the success of trade and industry, but in the power of taxation, and whose pressure increases as the strength to bear it is diminished.

Your Petitioners hoped that time and approaching ruin would not only have opened the eyes of all to the real situation of affairs, but have made it the first duty of ministers, to have declared the truth, and to have quieted the public mind, by an assurance of instantly altering the scheme of taxation. With utmost dread, however, have they now heard the Royal speech proclaiming, that the evils, which assail the country, spring from temporary causes, and from the transition from war to peace. Your Petitioners deem it their most sacred duty to oppose such sentiments, to deprecate such advice to Royalty, and to declare it to be the very extreme of infatuation to rest under such impressions for a moment. Your Petitioners, being mostly labourers and poor men, have comparatively little interest in the fate of property; but as sincere friends to peace and good order, they wish to see that which regulates all the commercial transactions of men, and which is necessary to give excitement to industry, kept in its proper place:—they wish no longer to see real property swallowed up and endangered, by a bubble, whose increase, under existing circumstances, must rapidly tend to explosion, and whose explosion can leave nothing behind, but wretchedness and woe. With a change in the scheme of taxation, your Petitioners have persuaded themselves, that certain proposals, if adopted, would co-operate immediately to revive the industry of the country, and in a short time do away all necessity, both for poor laws and poor rates.

These proposals are:

1st. That in every parish not comprehended in, nor containing a town of more than two thousand inhabitants, Government shall take possession of one hundred acres of land, being the nearest clear land to the respective parish-churches, and otherwise best suited the purposes in view.

2d. That Government shall pay to the owners of such land its fair estimated value, raising one half of the whole means for this purpose, by a rate similar to a poor rate, only that owners of property shall be assessed instead of tenants, these latter being obliged to pay legal interest to the former, during the currency of existing leases, upon the amount of assessment raised from their respective holdings; the other half of the whole means to be obtained by loan, so calculated, as to be liquidated by rents and purchase-money, mentioned below.

3rd. That each hundred acres shall be divided into two equal parts, as to extent, and in such a manner, as shall best suit purposes in view.

4th. That one of these parts, in each parish, shall be inclosed, and otherwise in the best manner improved, for the purpose of a common pasture, to remain so for ever.

5th. That the other half shall be divided into half-acre allotments, making one hundred allotments in each parish.

6th. That the present inhabitants, male parishioners, of such parishes, shall be allowed immediately to occupy the allotments, one each; the choice of allotments to proceed by seniority.

7th. That where the present inhabitants of parishes are not sufficiently numerous to occupy all the allotments of their respective parishes, other persons shall have a choice, seniority and proximity giving a preference, while any allotment remains unoccupied.

8th. That each person, when he takes possession of an allotment, shall thereby bind himself to pay forty shillings a year, as rent for the same; and at all times to keep it in good garden culture. A person, thus paying rent, shall be stiled a parish-holder.

9th. That as long as these conditions are fulfilled, no parish-holder shall be disturbed in, nor turned out of his allotment; and at his death, his son may occupy in his stead, if twenty-one years of age: an elder son having a priority of choice to a younger son; and failing sons, the choice of occupancy shall proceed to the nearest male relation, before it falls to the public.

10th. That as soon as any parish-holder shall have paid into a savings bank, to be for that purpose established by Government, the sum of one hundred pounds, he shall have a cottage built on his allotment to that value; he having the choice of a variety of plans for the construction of the said cottage.

11th. That neither the money deposited in the bank for the above purpose, nor the property of the cottage when built, shall be attachable for debt; nor shall they affect any claim of parochial relief, due by existing laws. A person when possessed of a cottage in this manner, shall be stiled a cottage-holder. At his death, his cottage-hold shall go to the nearest heir-male, as in the case of the parish-hold, with this difference, that the heir who takes possession shall pay to relations, equally near of kin with himself to the deceased, male and female, or to the nearest of kin female relation or relations, if such there be, nearer than himself, to the exclusion of others, a certain value for the cottage; and in case no heir takes possession to fulfil these terms, then they may be fulfilled by other persons who may desire possession, and whose claim to possess, shall be regulated by proximity and seniority; but if neither relations nor others shall claim possession, then the cottage-hold shall revert to Government, from whom heirs shall receive the value of the cottage, and the cottage-hold shall be open to public purchase or exchange.

12th. That as soon as a cottage-holder shall have had no relief from the parish, for the space of two years, he shall be entitled to a vote in the parish, and have a right to pasture a cow on the common. He shall be stiled a freeman.

13th. That if a freeman shall throw himself for relief on the parish, he shall lose that designation, his right to vote, and pasture; nor shall he recover these, till he has lived five years without parochial aid.

14th. That as soon as a freeman has paid into the bank the sum of sixty pounds, the same shall be received by Government as purchase-money for his allotment, shall free him from the yearly payment of rent, and make him eligible into parish-officers. He shall be stiled a parish freeholder. Succession to be regulated as above.

15th. That all sales and exchanges shall be made through public medium; and at once to facilitate and regulate these, there shall be corresponding registries; parochial, district, county and national.

16th. That no person whatever shall possess either in one or more parishes, more than one holding, and no person shall have a choice, nor be allowed to purchase under twenty-one years of age; but on heir male shall be allowed, while a minor, to hold possession, although he shall have no vote, nor be eligible to offices, till he come of age: provided always, that none of the relations, entitled as above to a share of the valued property, become chargeable to the parish, while their share is unpaid, nor the heir himself, for in such cases the holding shall revert to public possession, and the residue only, if any, of the value of the cottage and freehold, be paid to the heir or heirs, after the parish charges for maintenance, have been deducted.

Although your Petitioners frankly submit these Proposals to the consideration of your honourable House, they do not press their adoption in the letter. Your honourable House may see fit to modify the scheme. The common pasture may be dispensed with, and the number of allotments may be increased, diminished, or regulated, as circumstances may require. Your Petitioners chiefly insist that it is essential to the abolition of Pauperism in England, that an opportunity be afforded, for the labouring people to acquire property and personal freedom; both which they have lost through the operation of the poor laws, and which they can never regain under existing circumstances. To afford half an acre of land to all who would require it, would not occupy a hundredth part of the national territory; and when it is considered that the poor once possessed many houses and gardens in every parish, and enjoyed over all England extensive common rights, of which, in many cases, they have been unjustly deprived, such restitution must seem far from extravagant or unreasonable.

Your Petitioners would desire your honourable House to consider, what universal contentment would instantly ensue from the adoption of these proposals, or even of a modification of them: what a fund of employment would be created: how universally this would be diffused; and how long it would continue. Even the early production of provisions to eke out the supply, before next harvest, would be no small advantage, in the present year of scarcity, and would certainly be obtained by affording to the poor, garden allotments of land, for individual cultivation and convenience. Your Petitioners deny what has been asserted by some, that such arrangements in rural economy, would stir up in the minds of the people a desire for any thing like a general agrarian law, or that their obtaining votes, would in any way endanger property. Your Petitioners refer to America, where, in many parts, the right of vote is equally shared among the rich and the poor, without having caused the least encroachment on property.

Your Petitioners, though they most earnestly desire to see a wise reform of Parliament, do not wish the parish vote to qualify directly for parochial election; and they positively disclaim and renounce what is commonly understood by universal suffrage. They feel that the mass of the people never could be competent, sufficiently to estimate the comparative merits of persons aspiring to a seat in parliament; although they could well judge, which of their fellow parishioners were most worthy of offices and trust within their respective parishes, and which of them might be best qualified to act as parish deputies, at district or county meetings, whether assembled for parliamentary election or other business.

Your Petitioners therefore most earnestly entreat that your honourable House will immediately withdraw all taxes on MALT, SALT, SOAP, CANDLES, LEATHER, BRICKS and TILES; contract no more debt; pay all natural charges unprovided for, by an assessment on rents and interest of money, increasing the ratio of assessment upon great incomes derived from the same.—That, having done this, your honourable House will take into most serious consideration the above proposals; and particularly, that you will so enact, that every British subject, grown to man's estate, shall have an opportunity of occupying HALF AN ACRE OF LAND for its value, whereon he may establish his freehold: And your Petitioners shall ever pray.

Subscribed by ninety-eight persons.

Form of a short Petition.

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and Ireland, in Parliament assembled.
The humble Petition of the undersigned Inhabitants,
of the Parish of * * * * in the County of * * * *

SHEWETH,

That on the 28th of February, 1817, a Petition from the parish of Wily, in the County of Wilts, was presented to, and received by, your Honourable House.

That your Petitioners, being well acquainted, and agreeing in sentiment, with the whole tenor of that Petition, beg leave to refer to the same; and most earnestly entreat that your Honourable House will withdraw all taxes on MALT, SALT, SOAP, CANDLES, LEATHER, BRICKS, and TILES, and, so enact, that every British subject may be allowed to occupy HALF AN ACRE OF LAND for its value, whereon he may establish his freehold;

And your Petitioners shall ever pray,

Form of a Letter wherein to send the above.

Parish of * * * * near * * * *

SIR

It will be obliging if you will present the inclosed Petition, to the House of Commons, as soon as your convenience will permit; and when presented, favour me with a letter, saying whether it has been received.

For myself and fellow Petitioners.

To * * * * Member of
Parliament for * * * *

[H. Gye, Printer, Bath.]

* These four words in Italics were expunged before the Petition was presented.

To the Labouring Poor of England.

FELLOW LABOURERS,

IT is upwards of five years since the reverse print was first exhibited: and, now, it is more worthy of consideration. You have here, in few words, the cause of public distress and a cure for it: you have here a cure for the greatest of national evils, that which has sprung from the maladministration of poor laws. The poor cannot be relieved from their present bondage unless a portion of land is allowed them; and here is a scheme by which this can be done safely and with profit: they cannot be relieved but by a lessening of their public burdens, and here is a mode by which these may be fairly lessened. Had the prayer of the Wily petition been granted five years ago, farmers would have felt little distress; many actors would have prospered; labourers would have had full employment.

During these five years I have travelled far and seen much, and suffered much. My fate has been singular. I have aimed at objects great and good: I have never forgotten the cause of the English poor; but every effort has failed—every spark of success has sunk into darkness. In Canada I saw room for millions of people: I desired to open a passage thither for the redundant population of England: I desired to see that fine country improved by employing upon it our idle hands; but for this I was persecuted, and after being twice tried and honorably acquitted, was flung into jail and banished without the semblance of crime.—Returning to England, after 14 months detention, by false arrests and imprisonments, I found my affairs, left in the best possible order, in utter confusion: I found my lease of Deptford farm, the best in Wiltshire, given away for nothing: I found my stock valued over at half its worth; and, that half put into bond for the security of my successor: I found myself ruined; and, that my own attorney had induced me to seal my ruin.—Returning to England, I found a provision for my children disputed at law: I twice had judgment in my favour; but, now, the cause carried to the House of Peers, is beyond my reach. I have been nettled and worried by lawyers on every side: I have been beset by government spies and slanderers: I have been weakened by innumerable vexations: I have been oppressed in every way. I have lost my best friends by death, and others by desertion: nor is there solace but in the most perfect conviction, that an evil intention never dwelt in my mind—that I have uniformly aimed at objects great and good. In the midst of accumulating misfortune I have attended in London during three sessions of Parliament, pleading for Canada, for relief to the poor by emigration, and for my right as a British subject. In every thing I have been unsuccessful, yet do not despair. Born to affluence, I am now in poverty; and these hands must administer to my necessities: unaccustomed to toil I must begin in my forty-fifth year as a pauper of Wily, yet do not despair, for there is still a darling hope in my breast, that by perseverance I may prove instrumental in accomplishing the greatest good, by uprooting parish bondage and bettering the condition of English labourers. Being now one of them, they will believe me more sincere; and, in utmost sincerity, I would beseech them to trust chiefly to their own virtuous efforts. The rich never will, generally, bestir themselves for the poor: they are naturally selfish and must not be confided in. The poor, and by such name, alas! must all labourers now be called in this the wealthiest country of the world.—The poor are nine out of ten in every country parish: why, then, should they be afraid? surely they need not despair. They require nought but good agreement among themselves to accomplish their wishes: they have only to hold together, and their cause is won.

Bad as times have been they will soon be worse. Agricultural distress has not yet reached its height. Farmers will yet have less and less money; labourers will yet have less and less employment. The partial reduction of the salt, malt, and leather taxes, is all too late, and will prove quite ineffectual. Seeing a crisis approaching when poor-rates, and taxes, and tithes, may require the whole produce of the land, legislators have been devising methods to lower the poor rates. Last year Mr. Scartlett, a learned lawyer, made proposals for this; but they were monstrous: they were put down. This year he renewed his attempts; but, happily, with as little success. Now, another lawyer, Mr. Nolan, has had a bill laid before Parliament; and this bill, printed, is recommended by a pamphlet. It is altogether delusion and dangerous delusion. Mr. Nolan would punish the idle: would disgrace them with badges; and force poor young men to serve in the militia as substitutes for their wealthy neighbours. Mercy upon us! whither will not blind folks stray! what wrongful expedients will not selfishness suggest! These lawyers have eyes, but they see not. The poor require only fair play: require only what is their own—their natural right, and then demands on the parish would be small indeed:—then the rates would only have to maintain such as are destitute by extraordinary causes. There is no difficulty in determining what is the labourer's right. Scripture tells us, that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." Then, what is his hire? Is it a gallon loaf and sixpence per week; or double, or treble that? In America I found that a labourer could earn nearly a bushel of wheat per day; but, there, clothing is expensive. Here, where clothing is cheap, a labourer could earn half a bushel per day, but for turn laws, emigration laws, and taxes on necessities. Earning half a bushel of wheat per day, a labourer could house and clothe himself and family: he could educate his children, and enjoy comfort in life; but without Reform of Parliament no great good can be expected. To this, then, all should look: for this, then, all should strive, and act in concert. The cause has been injured by orators and great irregular meetings—by passion and rioting. It could be won by reason and parish petitioning—by the people of every parish petitioning the King, uniformly and systematically. The people should know their wants and be bounded in their wishes: in America every substantial householder has a vote, and that proves sufficient for the security of all. Labourers of England should not grudge to work out their independence by the sweat of the face; and with half a bushel of wheat per day every labourer could, in due time, possess himself of a freehold.

On the 25th of June, 1822, Mr. Coke, of Norfolk, presented to the House of Commons a petition signed by me and 76 other parishioners of Wily, modifying the terms of our former petition: requiring only a rood of land whereon to establish a freehold: £20 for rent: £30 for purchase; and £50 for the erection of a cottage;—requiring only 25 acres to be appropriated in each parish, at an average, for the comfort of the poor—not a 200th part of the land of the kingdom. This would do, and with Parliament reformed, this might be done. Be peaceable then; be patient; be persevering, and never despair. Be thankful for the present that you have the "little-all"—the "minimum of misery"—the gallon loaf and sixpence a week. This will keep us from starving like the poor of Ireland: this will keep us alive for systematic petitioning. Events are working for good, and will soon be propitious to the industrious man. Next winter, when thousands and thousands in every quarter of the kingdom must be out of employment, it will be of the utmost consequence for the cause of the poor that they demean themselves well, and refrain from riot and disorder—that they employ every effort, which misery can strengthen, to push forward the cause of reform by systematic petitioning—by peaceably proclaiming the nature and extent of their wishes. No labourer is crushed as I am; no one has so much to endure; but I will patiently endure, and live, if possible, for the sake of reform. Out of adversity itself I shall recruit my hopes. I shall believe that fate has brought me thus low, to be more determined in the cause—to struggle for labourers, because in doing so, I struggle for myself. No great change in government—no great national good, has yet been obtained but by force. It does not however follow that men may not succeed by reason alone; and this we are bound, in duty, to adhere to, while it is possible. How glorious would it be for Englishmen to achieve this greatest triumph!—reform without bloodshed.

The reverse print was published only a few weeks before my departure for America, from whence I then expected to return in six months. Had I returned so soon I should have pushed on the practice of systematic petitioning. Now that time has been lost, we should be more diligent: time has been lost, but experience has been gained. If we have erred, let us err less in future: if we have failed, let us correct them. In Canada the people met by deputies in convention from five hundred miles distant, and much good might have been done, had not the barbarian government made a law to put down meetings by deputy. We shall here want no such meetings; and boroughmongers will not have face to oppose parish petitioning. We shall give them no excuse: we shall beware of six-acts; we shall endeavor to "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." We shall begin in Wily: we shall spread over Wiltshire: we shall extend our connection to every corner of the island: we shall do all in good order and peace: we shall succeed, for God will be with us. Yes! if we do all in good order and peace, God will be with us.

Fellow labourers, be of good cheer. With faith you shall be made free. Remember that the first flame of Christianity, which now shines over the whole earth, was first lit up in the cottage of a labourer: remember that this flame was first kept alive by a few poor fishermen. They had faith in the goodness of their cause—in the purity of their designs; and that was sufficient. Have faith, then, and you also shall succeed. The poor of England shall have their right—the labourer shall have the life of which he is worthy.

FORM OF AN ADDRESS

To his most gracious Majesty, George the Fourth, Sovereign of the united Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. &c. &c.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY:

We, the undersigned, parishioners of _____ in the County of _____ beg leave to approach your Majesty with sentiments of pure loyalty, and all due respect. Your Majesty can do no wrong, and may promote infinite good.

With extreme sorrow we have seen for many years the Throne beset by weak and selfish men; and we have dire experience, that these men can bear arbitrary sway in a parliament which represents but a very small portion of your Majesty's subjects. We have heard it proclaimed by a British Minister, that the corruption of parliamentary election was as clear as the sun at noon; we know that its baleful effects have spread over the whole earth; and we feel its influence in the deprivation of every legitimate good. Under the influence of corruption the poor are sacrificed to the rich; and the honest laborer toils only to pamper the idle and the wicked;—Under its influence morality is put down, and the forms of religion are upheld only to cover depravity of the deepest dye;—under its influence every gift of God is converted into a curse; and all nature lies prostrate before the mammon of unrighteousness.

To correct all this evil, there is but one thing wanted—a parliament fairly chosen by the great body of the people; and, by the principles which pierce your Majesty's family on the Throne, the people have a right to such a parliament.

May it therefore please your Majesty, having summoned parliament, to command a bill, laid before it, to be enacted into law, by which every substantial householder may be entitled to a vote in the choice of members of parliament; and that all members of parliament may be chosen by equal numbers of such householders; or, by others regularly appointed by them. Your Majesty cannot doubt the persistence of parliament to the royal command, when solicited by the great majority of your Majesty's loyal subjects.

No one will say that there is any harm in this address. No one will say that there can be any difficulty for the people of one or more parishes, even every parish in the kingdom, to draw out and sign such an address, and send it by Post directed to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Whitehall, London, for presentation to the King.—No one will say that the people signing such an address, may not record in print that they have done so, and exhibit their names, that the proportion of their number to that of those not petitioning may be known.—thus

The Parish of _____ in the County of _____ contains _____ adult Male Inhabitants, of whom the following have signed the Petition for Parliamentary Reform:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- E. _____
- F. _____

What can be more simple, fair, or effective, than for the people all over the kingdom, thus to show their desire and their strength? Surely, the most ignorant man alive may see that such a plan is safe, and all-sufficient, if followed up by the people desirous of reform.

When in the United States of America, I attended a meeting for parliamentary election. The people met in a church, and were so quiet and orderly, that you might have heard a pin fall. Soon after this, I heard from England of the Wiltshire election;—that it was scarcely safe to go abroad; that mobs of people armed with sticks and stones were every where fighting with each other, and endangering life. What a contrast!

When I was in one of the states of America, the people met in their respective parishes, and in one day voted for a change of constitution; and the new constitution, previously prepared, was without ado adopted, without the smallest bustle or confusion. Then, again, I heard from England, that a vast multitude of 40 or 50,000 people had assembled with flags and emblems, to excite passion; but without any declared scheme of proceeding—may fixed object—any rational hope of success; save what was to be learned at the moment from Orators, who could not be heard by a fourth part of those assembled. What another contrast! The people at Manchester were indeed peaceable; but were they wise and prudent? Far from it. They excited suspicion; they gave excuse, I do not say good excuse, to violence and bloodshed; they awakened fear; and fear gave the word to massacre. Systematic petitioning can be conducted on rational grounds; it can ascertain the will of the majority of the people, without affording the slightest pretext for violent opposition; it can proceed with safety to its end.

It is 14 years since I first recommended systematic petitioning to the people of Wiltshire, and each succeeding year has strengthened my belief in its practicability and effect—every year has increased hope that the time is approaching when the people will hold together, and obtain what is so much wanted for their common interest. It is seven years since I recommended this plan of proceeding to Mr. Cobett, the most active and persevering of public writers. He said "it was very good; very simple; very fair; but demanding to set it on foot more time and trouble than he could bestow." When we have set it on foot, will Mr. Cobett assist?—will Mr. Hunt with his Northern Union assist?—will whigs and radicals, all declared friends to reform, lay aside petty jealousies, petty differences of opinion, and in every parish think and act like men?—will they unite in one good, simple, and just plan of proceeding? We shall see; we shall at least set the plan on foot, and give fair opportunity for all to assist. Good men will not despise the fair claims of the poor—will not withhold assistance out of envy, or indifference, or pride. It is seven years since I declared, that "society must improve from the bottom upwards," and each succeeding year has strengthened this opinion. Wherever I have travelled, in the old world or the new, I have invariably found that the poor were more upright than the rich—that

the cottage leaves the palace far behind.

How much then is it to be desired that the poor should see what they want; that they should be fully and fairly acquainted with their strength; combine their efforts; and put all to proper use: not in mobs, to be infuriated by demagogues, weakened, disunited, and foil'd; but by mere printing—by orderly and peaceable communication from parish to parish. By such means only can they secure Reform of Parliament; and, by this alone can they get quit of corn laws, emigration laws, and taxes on necessities—by this only can every man expect to have, for his value, a rood of land whereon to erect his freehold. Hitherto the rich have been at the head of reforms, and thence these have been partial and too much in favour of the rich. When reform emanates from the poor, it will be equally for the good of all, and the government will approach perfection.

Till Parliament meets the people should petition the King; when met, they should petition Parliament also, to excite discussion and uphold patriotic members: still recording opinions and names. The landlords in Parliament are now ripe for one grand and most necessary move. The public are now well assured that church property is public property; and that its fee may be made the most of without injustice to any individual. This point I stoutly maintained seven years ago; and it is truly an important one. Church property with some other public property, well managed, might not only afford a good school for every parish, but leave a hundred millions of pounds for other useful purposes. This sum, well managed, would maintain all not able to maintain themselves, besides erecting in every parish a good freehold. This hundred millions, put to proper use, would at once relieve farmers and the country at large—would supply the place of poor-rates. Here, my fellow labourers, is what you can all understand; and, understanding this, your zeal should increase. The true church—the church of Christ, was not founded on wealth; but on the rock of poverty—on rock which wealthy bishops have broken. Up then, my poor fellow labourers! Be zealous; be bold; be peaceable; be persevering, and never despair. Your cause is infinitely more hopeful now than it was five years ago; your strength is now greatly increased. Farmers, tradesmen—all, indeed, who live by productive labor and skill, be fast adding to the number of the poor. It is now the interest of all of these to join in systematic petitioning for Reform of Parliament. They have been made to believe that Peel's bill is the cause of distress; a wretched delusion. The distress was severe two years before the bill was framed, and his chief causes pointed out in the 4th paragraph of the Wily petition. Now other causes, and the clamorous about man excellent bill among them, have given aid. People have been made to believe that the interest of the National Debt should be lowered—an insidious and dangerous fallacy. It would not benefit the poor to have the national debt violated, or the flame of society broken up. Interests, interests including tithes, should equally bear the burden of taxation, while corn laws, emigration laws, and taxes on necessities are withdrawn; but the first step of all should go to the right application of Church Property. Up then and be doing, for your cause is at once that of virtue and necessity.

One day in seven is wholly at your own disposal. On Sundays, besides attending church, you have abundant time to promote the good cause. On that day neighbors can converse on the subject, while the more active go from parish to parish, joining those who do not attend, instructing those who are ignorant—explaining how easy it would be for labourers (among whom may be included farmers, tradesmen, &c.) to carry all before them, were they to join heart and hand in the practice of systematic petitioning. On Sundays, it should be more particularly remembered, that success can only be insured by strict adherence in thought, word, and deed, to the rules of Christian morality. If these rules are disobeyed, success cannot possibly be better enjoyed, than in pushing on the cause of peaceable reform—the cause at once of virtue and necessity. Such a conversation as the following could not be more profitable.—A. Would it afford you any comfort, to have a rood of land for a garden? B. A great deal. A. Could you afford to pay sixpence a year for it? B. Yes; that I could. A. Can you live comfortably on an annual loaf and sixpence per week? B. You know I can't. A. Could you live comfortably, if you had half a bushel of wheat per day? B. Oh! bravely. A. Do you know that that would be the rate of wages, if corn laws, emigration laws, and taxes on necessities were abolished? B. I never thought of it before. A. It is nevertheless true; but we can have little chance of such abolition, unless parliament is reformed. B. Indeed! A. No, indeed; but, to get parliament reformed would be an easy matter, if all labourers, who are nine out of ten in every county parish, would behave as they ought—peaceably and steadily:—if they would petition the King and parliament regularly, at least once a year, and have their names printed in a book, to show how they were going on, and how well they agreed among themselves. Will you do this? B. With all my heart! A. Will you promise on no account to be led into riot: will you never suffer passion to bear sway over your conduct, but keep continually in your eye those rules which are clearly laid down in the gospel? B. I will. A. If you had half a bushel of wheat per day, and your wife and children in like proportion for their labour, would you relinquish all claims on the parish, for the maintenance of children? B. Most willingly, and for ever. A. Would you labour as hard then as you do now? B. Yes, harder; I would be both more free and willing. I would do more for myself, and more for the nation of course. A. What a glorious change it would be! B. Glorious indeed! A. Let us then be steady in the cause of reform: let us never forget our duty, by abolishing CORN LAWS, EMIGRATION LAWS, and TAXES ON NECESSARIES, every industrious man would be able to earn HALF A BUSHEL OF WHEAT OR WHATEVER HE CHOOSES PER DAY.

Handwritten note: It is long felt to be well on the globe that days should be devoted to the poor. The first plan made for ROBERT GOURLAY. My idea is that every man now in possession of a house worth £20 should have a vote; and another time I shall give reasons for this that have been long weighed, and which I am confident will be approved of. My proposal has in view a great and positive improvement in the condition of society at large. The first step of all should go to the right application of Church Property. Up then and be doing, for your cause is at once that of virtue and necessity. In a pamphlet entitled "RIGHT OF CHURCH PROPERTY SECURED" published in 1821. Publisher, Printer, Long Alley, Cross Street, Finsbury, London.