

by the ordinary law of supply and demand. We can do nothing for them."

But I ask, then, why do you pass a law to keep up the price of corn, and at the same time say you cannot pass a law to keep up the price of the poor man's labor? This is the point of view in which the country are approaching this question; and the flimsy veil of sophistry you are throwing over the question, and the combination of figures put together and dovetailed to answer a particular purpose will not satisfy the people of England till you show them that you are legislating impartially for the advantage of all classes, and not for the exclusive benefit of one.

What are the pretexts upon which this corn tax is justified? We have heard, in the first place, that there are exclusive burdens borne by the agriculturists. I heard one explanation given of those burdens by a facetious gentleman who sits near me. He said that the only exclusive burden upon the land which he knew of were mortgages. I think the country has a right to know, and indeed I think it would have been no more than what was due to this House if those burdens of which we have heard so much had been named and enumerated.

The answer I heard from the right honorable gentleman [Sir R. Peel] opposite was that there was a great variety of opinions on the subject of these burdens. That I could myself have told the right honorable baronet. As a law is to be framed, founded expressly upon these alleged burdens, it would have been but fair at least to tell us what they are. I shall not enter upon the subject now; but this I will tell the right honorable gentleman, that for every particular burden he can show me as pressing upon the land, I will show him ten exemptions. Yes, ten for his one.

There is one burden that was referred to by the right honorable member for Renfrewshire [Mr. P. M. Stewart], which is the land tax. I am surprised we have not yet got the returns moved for many months since relative to the land tax of other countries. What are our ambassadors and diplomatists about that we cannot have the returns of the revenue and expenditure of foreign countries? Our own bureaux must be badly kept or we ought to have this information already here in London. Being without official information, however, I will not run the risk of making a general statement lest I should fall into error. I have, however, one document which is authentic as it is on the authority of M. Humaun, the finance minister of France; and he states that the land tax in that country is forty per cent. on the whole revenue, and twenty-five per cent on the revenue of the proprietors of the soil; so that in France the landowner pays five shillings in the pound, while in this country you have a land tax of £1,900,000, not five per cent. of the income, and you call for a fresh tax upon the poor man's loaf to compensate you for the heavy burden you bear.

I will tell the prime minister that in laying on this tax without first stating his views on this point he is not treating the House and the country with proper respect. I have seen with some satisfaction that admissions have been made (and indeed it has not been denied) that the profits of the bread tax go to the landowners.

Now in all the old committees on agricultural concerns it was alleged that it was a farmer's question—an agricultural laborer's question; and never till lately did I hear it admitted that the bread tax did contribute to the benefit of the landowners on account of those exclusive burdens that are set up as a pretence for its continuance. Ought we not to know what

these burdens were when this Corn Law was passed? Having patiently waited for twenty-five years I think we are entitled at last to a clear explanation of the pretext upon which you tax the food of the people for the acknowledged benefit of the landowners.

The right honorable baronet tells us we must not be dependent upon foreigners for our supply, or that that dependence must be supplementary, that certain years produce enough of corn for the demand, and that we must legislate for the introduction of corn only when it is wanted. Granted. On that point the right honorable baronet and I are perfectly agreed. Let us only legislate, if you please, for the introduction of corn when it is wanted. Exclude it as much as you please when it is not wanted.

But all I supplicate for on the part of the starving people is, that they and not you shall be the judges of when corn is wanted. By what right do you pretend to gauge the appetites and admeasure the wants of millions of people? Why, there is no despotism that ever dreamed of doing anything so monstrous as this; yet you sit here and presume to judge when people want food, dole out your supply when you condescend to think they want it, and stop it when you choose to consider that they have had enough. Are you in a position to judge of the wants of artisans, of hand-loom weavers? you, who never knew the want of a meal in your lives, do you presume to know when the people want bread? Why, in the course of the present debate the right honorable baronet said that from 1832 to 1836 sufficient corn was produced at home for the population, and yet in his last speech he told us that there were 800,000 hand-loom weavers who in 1836 were unable to supply themselves with the commonest wants and necessaries of existence, even though they worked sixteen and eighteen

hours a day. Was it not also of that period that Mr. Inglis, the traveller in Ireland, wrote, when he wound up his account of that country by the emphatic and startling declaration that one third part of the population perished prematurely from diseases brought on by the want of the necessaries of life? Yet, in that state of things, the right honorable baronet gravely comes forward and tells us that the country produces a sufficiency of food!

I have heard other admissions too; one in particular by the right honorable paymaster of the forces [Sir E. Knatchbull], who said the landlords were entitled to the Corn Law to enable them to maintain a high station in the land.

[Sir E. Knatchbull: To enable them to maintain their present station in society.]

A noble lord [Lord Stanley] also admitted that the price of food did keep up the rent of land, but did not raise wages. What does that mean but that the rent of land is kept up at the expense of the working classes, who are unrepresented in this House? I say that the right honorable paymaster of the forces and the noble lord do not deal fairly with the people, for they are giving themselves an outdoor relief which they deny to the poor in the union workhouses. It is not merely an extension of the pension list to the landed proprietors, as was said by "The Times" some years ago, when that paper stigmatized the corn laws as an extension of the pension list to the whole of the landed aristocracy; it is the worst form of pauperism; it is the aristocracy submitting to be fed at the expense of the poorest of the poor. If this is to be so, if we are to bow our necks to a landed oligarchy, let things be as they were in ancient Venice; let the nobles inscribe their names in a golden book, and draw their money direct from the exchequer.

It would be better for the people thus to suffer our aristocracy than to circumscribe our trade, destroy our manufactures, and draw the money from the pockets of the poor by indirect and insidious means. Such a course would be more easy for us, and more honest for you. But have the honorable gentlemen who maintain a system like this considered that the people of this country are beginning to understand it a little better than they did?

And do they think that the people with a better understanding of the subject will allow one class not only to tax the rest of the community for their own exclusive advantage, but to be living in a state of splendor upon means obtained by indirect taxation from the pockets of the poor? The right honorable baronet [Sir R. Peel], I apprehend, knows more of the state of the country than most of his followers, and I would exhort him to bear in mind that there is a widespread feeling extending into every part of the country that upon him, and him alone, will rest the responsibility of the manner in which he shall legislate upon this subject.

He has now been in the possession of a great power for many months; he had due warning when he took office of the course it would be necessary for him to pursue. He knows the existing state of commerce and manufactures. He has had ample opportunities of acquainting himself with the actual condition of the people. He is not legislating in the dark, and this I will venture to tell him, that, bad as he finds trade now, he will live (if he follows out the course in which he purposes to embark) to find it much worse. I hope, sincerely hope, that he is prepared for the consequence. We have never heard of an honest English merchant coming forward to say that this law would give him a trade in corn. The corn traders alone have been appealed to.

The right honorable baronet tells us that we must force forward this discussion, that we must proceed at once to the settlement of this question, because, forsooth, he has heard from many corn traders that it is very important that the matter should remain no longer in abeyance. If the trade in corn is still to be left in the hands of a peculiar class of dealers, in the hands of a class who are habitual gamblers, will that be an alteration of the law calculated to mend the situation of those who are engaged in the general trade and commerce of the country? Why should there be corn merchants any more than tea merchants or sugar merchants? Why should not the general merchant be enabled to bring back corn in exchange for his exports as well as cotton, tea, or sugar?

Until you pass a law enabling the merchant to make a direct exchange for corn as well as for other commodities of foreign production you will give no substantial relief to commerce. Nor is your law calculated to lower the price of food. You will have people amongst you maintaining the same wolfish competition to raise the price of bread and you will have capitalists day by day struggling against bankruptcy.

For this state of things the right honorable baronet [Sir Robert Peel] will be responsible. I own, indeed, that I heard in the right honorable baronet's second speech something like an apologetic tone of reasoning; something deprecatory as to his present position, not being able to do all that he would do. That tone would be very well if the right honorable baronet had been forced into the present position by the people or summoned there by the queen; then with some shadow of fairness he might resort to the plea that his position was a difficult one and that he would do more if his party would permit him.

But let me remind the right honorable baronet that he

sought the position he now fills, and though I am no friend, no political partisan, of the noble lord the member for London [Lord John Russell], though I have no desire to see him again in power, governed by his old opinions, this I must say, that the measure which the noble lord proposed upon the Corn Law, though in itself not good, was still infinitely better than that of the right honorable baronet.

And I beg to call to the right honorable baronet's mind that if he is now placed in a situation of difficulty that difficulty was sought by himself and consequently cannot now be pleaded in extenuation of his present measure. He told us at Tamworth that for years and years, aye, even from the passing of the Reform Bill, he had been engaged in reconstructing his party. I presume he knew of what materials that party was composed. I presume he was not ignorant of the fact that it consisted of monopolists of every kind; of monopolists of religion, monopolists of the franchise, monopolists of sugar, monopolists of corn, monopolists of timber, monopolists of coffee.

These were the parties that gathered around him and out of which he was to construct his new Parliament. They were fully alive to the occasion. They set to work to revive the old system of corruption. They bribed and they bought. Yes, they bribed, they bought, and they intimidated until they found themselves in office and the right honorable baronet at their head as their leader and champion.

Did he expect that this party had expended their funds and their labor in the registration courts—for there, as the right honorable baronet himself has stated, I believe the constitution will henceforth be fought—did he think that they had expended this labor and this money in order that they might come into office and assist him to take away their monopolies?

The right honorable baronet must have known the party he had to deal with, for he had a very old connection with them; and therefore I presume he was not disappointed when he came into office, having thrust out men who, with all their faults, were still far better than those who succeeded them.

Having thrown those men out of office and being unable to carry the measure which they proposed and were ready to carry into effect, I say that he has now no right to set up the difficulty of his position as a bar to the universal condemnation which his proposition must receive in the estimation of every just politician in the country. He is the cause, yes, I say he is the cause, of our present position, and upon his shoulders will the people rest the whole of the responsibility.

I will now say a word to the gentlemen on this side of the House who have such great difficulties, such boggings and startings, at the danger of giving their assent to the motion of my honorable friend the member for Wolverhampton [The Hon. C. P. Villiers]. I will say a word or two to the noble lord the member for London [Lord John Russell] and to my noble and right honorable neighbors as to the difficulties of conscience which they appear to entertain about a total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws. I hear on this side of the House, in almost all directions, an acknowledgment of the principle for which I and others contend, that is, the principle of perfect freedom in the trade in corn. But there are some of my noble and right honorable neighbors who think there should be a duty on corn for the purpose of revenue. How can there be a duty for revenue unless it be a duty for protection? I ask my noble and right honorable neighbors who entertain that view of the subject to reconsider it before they go to a division.

With that word of advice to those who sit near me I proceed

to make a remark in reference to the little word "now," about which many gentlemen on this side of the House seem also to feel a considerable difficulty. There are gentlemen here who think that the corn laws ought to be repealed, but they cannot reconcile themselves to the immediate repeal of them. They do not like to repeal them now. "We admit," say they, "the injustice which these laws inflict upon twenty-five millions of the people for the advantage of a select few; but inasmuch as some thousands of persons have a beneficial interest in this wrong inflicted upon the millions, we cannot suddenly deprive them of the advantage they possess."

Now, with all due deference to gentlemen who use that argument, I must be permitted to say that I think they are showing a very great sympathy for the few who are gaining and vastly little sympathy indeed for the many who are suffering from the operation of these laws. I would put it to those gentlemen whether, if it had been in their power, immediately after the passing of the Corn Law in 1815, to repeal that law, they would have given any compensation to the landed interest in the shape of an eight or ten years' diminishing duty upon the importation of foreign grain?

No; they would have repealed them at once. Then, I ask, do they think that twenty-seven years' possession of the wrong—twenty-seven years of exclusive advantage—twenty-seven years of injustice to the rest of the community,—entitles this interested and selfish party to increase its demand in the shape of compensation? I give the honorable gentlemen who are near me credit for being quite sincere in their scruples. I have heard such scruples very often expressed before, but I once heard them met at a public meeting of electors in what appeared to me to be a very satisfactory manner. There was great difficulty on the platform among the Whig gentlemen

who were assembled there about the repeal of the corn laws and they were arguing about the danger and hardship of an immediate repeal of them. They were at length interrupted by a sturdy laboring man in a fustian coat who called out, "Whoi, mun! where's the trouble of taking them off? You put them on all of a ruck," meaning that they had been put on all of a sudden. And so they were. The law was passed without notice in 1815, notwithstanding the remonstrances of the people.

Then I say, let us abolish this law and the sooner the better. I will not trespass further upon the patience of the House. I consider that this question is now drawn within such narrow limits as to depend upon these two points: "Are you, the landed interest, able to show that you are subjected to exclusive burdens?" If so, then the way to relieve you is not to put taxes on the rest of the community, but to remove your burdens. Secondly, "Are you prepared to carry out even-handed justice to the people?" If not your law will not stand; nay, your House itself, if based upon injustice, will not stand!