

Sep. 17 1812

Memorial respecting the
present state of the British Press.

About the beginning of the present Reign, in a celebrated Trial for a libel against Government, it was observed, by a very eminent Judge, "that the British Constitution could never be beat down by paper: shot." If that great Judge had lived till the present day, His Lordship would probably have thought differently; for no reflecting Man can now fail to be of opinion, that, for several years past, the great majority of News: papers, and other periodical publications, circulated throughout this Country, have had a direct and immediate tendency to set His Majesty's Subjects at War with their Rulers, and to sap the foundations of our whole political Establishment. Some of these publications content themselves with attacking the characters of those Statesmen and Senators whose principles they affect to disapprove; others proceed to the length of throwing dirt upon all publick men without distinction; while not a few have been daring enough to revile their Sovereign himself, and to pay compliments to our Enemies, at the expence of our own Prince: King.

Such, uncharitably, is but too just a character of all the News: papers which are said, in common language, to
be &

be friendly to Opposition. They tell us, with unblushing effrontery, that they proceed upon "true Whig: principles." - What meaning they affix to this antiquated term, it is of little consequence to enquire. - The doctrines which they are, daily and hourly, disseminating, make it but too plain, that they have departed very far indeed from those principles, by which the most zealous Patriots were actuated at the glorious Revolution in 1688. - Were any one, - even the most popular, Supporter of Whiggism, of that day, to rise now from the dead, and to peruse a single page of those inflammatory Writings by which the publick is every day insulted, he would be penetrated with as much Horror, as would the highest-flying Tory that ever existed. It is almost unnecessary to observe, that the British Government has, for more than a Century, been, and could only be, a Whig-Government; and that the present Administration is, as every Administration in this Country must necessarily be, a Whig-Administration: For a Whig-Government, means now, as it has always meant, nothing else than a Government established by Laws equally binding upon the King and the Subject. -

While the News papers thus described have been spreading their dangerous doctrines far and wide, they

have

us, have met with but little resistance -
 they from any quarter. Certainly with none,
 of material consequence, from those
 papers which are commonly called -
Ministerial. - Men are not quite agreed
 in opinion, with regard to what a
 Ministerial paper, in this Country, is. -
 Some people think it enough to consti-
 tute a Ministerial News:paper, that
 it uniformly takes part with the ad-
 ministracion of the day; and, accord-
 ing to this definition, we have plenty
 of ministerial papers, such as they
 are. Others, with a little more malignity,
 tell us, without much hesitation, that
 such and such a News:paper is in
 the pay of the Treasury. If such persons
 really mean what they say, on this sub-
 ject, it is greatly to be feared, that there
 is no such thing as a Ministerial
 paper in Great Britain; because it has
 never yet been proved, to the conviction
 of any sensible man, that Government
 are in the habit of bestowing a single
 fraction of publick money for the sup-
 port of any News paper whatever, or
 of giving them any kind of encourage-
 ment, except perhaps by ordering a
 few copies for the use of the publick
 Offices; - a species of encouragement
 so trifling, as would never create a
 political bias in the mind of any
 Editor, who is in tolerable credit. -

These remarks are intend-
 ed to apply chiefly to the daily News:
 papers, to the multiplication of which,
 beyond &

beyond all possible bounds, there is just one barrier, namely, the considerable Expence which their readers must incur, before partaking of the poison, ^{which} they contain. - A London daily paper cannot be bought in Town at less than £8, 10. - , per annum; nor in the Country at less than £9, 4. - ; an expence very unsuitable to the pockets of those who are most likely to be misled by false doctrines. But what shall be said of the weekly papers, which can be read for one sixth part of the expence? What shall be said of the Sunday's papers. It is a fact, not very generally known, that, in the morning of every Lord's day, there are published in London, no less than eighteen different News-papers, under the following Names: -

1. Monitor and Recorder
2. Englishman
3. Observer
4. Sunday Advertiser
5. Review
6. British Neptune
7. Bell's Messenger
8. The News
9. Examiner
10. Phoenix
11. National Register
12. Independent Whig
13. Bell's Dispatch

- is 14. Antigallican
 sider 15. Tribunal
 16. Rifleman
 the 17. Peacem
 daily 18. Constitution

There can be no harm cer-
 tainly in publishing a News: paper
 on Sunday; on the contrary, it affords
 a fair and proper relaxation to those
 who are immersed in Business through-
 out the week; and, were the pages of
 such Papers filled with matter fit
 for the eye of a loyal subject, or of
 a good Christian, they would deserve
 every sort of encouragement. But,
 when it is found, upon experience,
 that, with very few exceptions, these
 Sunday's papers abound in nothing
 but the most libellous and scandalous
 matter; (setting at nought every esta-
 blishment, civil or religious, in the
 Country, and not seldom throwing
 defiance in the teeth of Mr. Attorney
 General) no one who wishes well to his
 Country can mark the progress of this
 growing evil, without the strongest
 feelings of apprehension and alarm.

Those who have reflected
 deeply upon the passing events of the
 last twelve months, must have come
 to this conclusion, that the Licentious-
ness of the Press has arrived at its
 utmost height; and that it has, at
 last, become an evil, which nothing
 but the press itself can cure. In for-
 mer times, even sensible men were
 ac:

accustomed to boast of the Liberty of printing
 the Press, as a privilege enjoyed by very
 Englishmen beyond all other Nations
 and, after all the clamour that has decla-
 recently been heard, it is a privilege
 enjoyed, at this moment, in its utmost
 possible extent. It is, however, a privi-
 -lege which never meant more, and
 which never can, or ought to, mean
 more, than "the right competent to every
 "man, of printing and publishing
 "what he pleases, with a fair respon-
 "sibility to the Law of the Land." ~

Such was the result of the maxims
 established by our Fore-fathers. But
 they also knew, that, if a Man pub-
 -lished Slander against his Neigh-
 -bour; if a Man published Treason
 against his Sovereign; or if a Man
 published Blasphemy against his
 God, he was just as much amenable
 to the laws of his Country, as he
 who robbed his fellow-subject on the
 high-way.

While such is, and has been
 the law for a long period of time
 liberty of the Press has not only ^{not} been
 diminished, but has been greatly
 enlarged, in the course of the present
 most auspicious Reign, which has
 added more to the Liberty of the
Subject, than has been added in all
 other Reigns which have occurred
 since the Revolution. ~

In the year 1792, an Act
 (in:

ty of (introduced into Parliament by a
 by very popular Member, Mr. Fox) was
 tion passed into a law, by which it was
 has declared, that, in all subsequent Trials
 ge for Libel against Government, the
 most Jury should be entitled (contrary to
 the former Law) to decide upon the
 whole merits of the trial; whether
 arising from the character of the
 publication, or from the simple fact
 of publishing. One should have
 conceived, that this was going the
 utmost possible length, which, in
 reason, could be desired. But still
 some Men are not satisfied. Mr.
Fox is quite forgotten; and the ba:
 liminators of the present day care
 just as little for his memory, as
 they care for that of Oliver Cromwell,
 or of any other person who ever ac:
 quired the silly appellation "Man
 of the People." Nay, a still farther
 step has, of late, been taken; because
 it is most evident, that the effort
 now is, not to maintain the Liberty
 of the Press (every one knows what
 that is) but to put an end to all
 responsibility whatever, for criminal
publications. If a Man is sentenced
 to imprisonment for such deliri:
 quency, a subscription is immediately
 opened for his relief, and motion
 all after motion made in the House of
 Commons for his enlargement. If
 he happens to be acquitted, instantly
 we have publick Dinners in Honour
 of

of the independent Jury who acquitted under-
 stood him, and not seldom proposals, imposed
 for having the Head of Mr. Attorney and
 General placed on a lamp post!

These are awful things,
 which could only gain credit by being
 universally known to be true. -

The moment seems, therefore, from
 to have arrived when something
effectual must be done; and nothing
 appears so very efficacious, as
 the remedy that has been already
 hinted at, namely, that the poison
 of the Press should be counteracted
 by the antidote of the Press.

It is a curious circum-
 stance, that, after the British Em-
 pire has suffered so deeply from
 the wickedness of periodical publica-
 tions, it is the only Country in
 Europe which does not possess an
official Government News-paper.
 By this expression, it is by no means
~~meant~~ intended to convey the idea
 of a controversial Ministerial News
paper. That idea is absurd, and
 has always been so; because, no one
 who does not absolutely adhere to the
 administration of the day, out and
out, will ever look at a paper,
 which, in the vulgar and daily ac-
 ceptation of the word, may be called
 "Ministerial." The important object
 would be, to have a daily publication
 issued out to the Country, and
 under?

quit understood as containing a fair and
 impartial picture of publick measures,
 and of publick events; a publication
 to which should be immediately com-
 municated every circumstance, occur-
 ing with reference to national affairs,
 whether from the publick Offices, or
 from other authentic indubitable
 sources of intelligence.

It is most pitious and
 most woeful to see how these things
 are garbled at present; and they are
 garbled, only because no one official
 person seems to take the least charge
 of them. It is said to be a sort of
 perquisite at the Post-office, by which
 some obscure persons there shall
 make so much a-week for giving
 out News, in any manner which
 their utter incompetence may dictate;
 and the consequence is, that, in no
 two news-papers, is the same story
 told in the same words.

It appears, therefore, High
 time, that Government should take
 this most important Business into
 their own hands. It should be re-
 collected (and that speedily) that
 we are now engaged in a War of a
 very unusual description, and that
 the Enemy must be fought by his
 own weapons. The French, for the
 last twenty years, have been endeavour-
 ing to get the better of us at every
 point. They made their first effort
 upon

upon the Ocean; and there we can
 have extinguished them. They
 made an attempt at accelerating
 the Conveyance of Troops, which
 we have more than equalled by
 our own Waggon: Train, and
 other establishments for similar
 purposes. They have tried to surpass
 us in the department of the Ord-
nance, and in the service of Light
Artillery; while it is well known
 that, so long ago as the year 1799
 our own Horse: Regiments (with the
 effectual co: operation of Sir Sidney
 Smith) conquered the "Invincibles,"
 even with that their own boasted
 Engine of Warfare, in the plains of
 Damascus. -

It may be said, that, in
 all these particulars, Great Britain
 has followed the example of France
 So she has; but she has followed
 France effectually; just as the
 great Wellington is following the
 French Troops at this moment. But
 there are two modes of warfare
 in which Great Britain has taken
 the lead, and in which, down to
 this hour, the British Service has
 had no competitor. The important
 inventions of Colonel Congreve's
 Rockets, and of Colonel Shapnell's
^{experimental} Case = shot, are entirely unknown in
 France; and every naval Officer
 can

we can testify the efficacy of the one; while the whole British Artillery will subscribe to the universal destruction inflicted by the other. It is, indeed, scarcely possible to read any one dispatch from the Great Wellington, without being quite convinced, that, unless Colonel Shrapnell's wonderful Invention had been acted upon, even that illustrious Officer could not have peppered the Enemy to half the amount that he has done. Perhaps, at this moment, the whole Peninsula might have been lost.

There is just one circumstance, in which the little Corsican Usurper has got the start of us; and we have not yet met him on that ground. It is a mortifying Truth, that, ever since he seized the Government of France, and he has, upon the Continent of Europe, done more mischief, and more for the furtherance of his own crooked purposes, by means of the Moniteur of Paris, than he has ever done during his whole life, effected by the united efforts of the Cannon and the Sword. His plan has, indeed, been uniformly that of circulating Lies; of suppressing Truth, when it happened to be unpleasant; and of embellishing any thing that might be accidentally favourable. But, (laying aside the meanness and wickedness of his attempts to impose, on a Nation, very willing, and even most anxious,

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to resume its allegiance to a legitimate Sovereign) it cannot be denied, that the present Ruler of France has, so far, made out his Point, as to render the Moniteur the exclusive vehicle of Government Intelligence, and to hold out every article as of doubtful authority, or of no authority, unless it has been sanctioned by previous insertion in the official pages of the Moniteurs.

But, if the authority of Government can give so much currency to Falsehoods, how much more must such authority give currency to plain and unvarnished Truth! The fair object in Great Britain, is, not to deceive the People, but to prevent the possibility of their being deceived. The Government is so free, the Press is so free, and the Debates in Parliament are so open and accessible, that, even were it possible to suppose our Rulers desirous (as they certainly are not) to impose on the public by disguising their measures, they have not the power. That is not the danger; but there is another. The danger is, that almost every measure of the State is misconstrued, and leads to a discussion as useless as it is pernicious to the Country. Every News-paper maintains what it supposes to be the sentiments of its

its Patron. Right or wrong, this is
 to be the ground uniformly taken, and
 taken without disguise. To seize on
 this a very familiar Example: Marquis
 Wellington has, in the course of this
 summer, done things which are only
not miraculous. Some of the Publi-
 cations say (very fairly) not merely
that he has done every thing within
human Power, but that those Minis-
ters who seat him out, judged well.
Others say, the Peninsula has been
almost betrayed; because a greater
Force was not sent thither many
months ago. In writing such -
 Nonsense, this class of Writers at-
 tempt to pay court to a noble Marquis,
 who is said to have retired from Of-
 fice, because he could not prevail
 on his Colleagues in the Cabinet to
 send over to the Peninsula a larger
 Force than happened to exist in
 Great Britain. A third descrip-
 tion of Editors abuse the whole
 proceedings in Spain and Portugal;
 because, forsooth, their Patrons had
long ago predicted (in the very
 words of Bonaparte) that the Eng-
 lish would very speedily be driven
unto the Sea!

These are the unfortunate
 results of throwing Government's In-
 telligence open to every adventurer:
 And perhaps there is not one object
 of deeper importance to the State,
 than

than that the matter should forthwith
 be taken into the most serious
 consideration of those who are entitled
 to watch over the national Security, and
 the National Character. The portentous
 aspect of the Times in which we live,
 does not dictate much discretion or much
 choice, with reference to the course most
 fit to be pursued. It is of little conse-
 quence to the Country, or to the cause
 of Europe, that our Warriors by Sea
 and by Land have put down our most
 implacable Enemies, and are just as ready
 to put down all others; if there are so
 many canker-worms preying on our
 vitals, as are every day to be found in
 the shape of disaffected News-papers.

The humble Individual, who, with the most dutiful respect, sub-
 mits these loyal sentiments to His
 Sovereign, is most anxious to have it
 distinctly understood, that he has thus
 expressed himself, from a perfect consci-
 ousness, that he is discharging the first
 Duty of a good Subject. He has not
 the vanity to suppose, that he has
 now put forward a single idea that
 can properly be called new. He feels,
 that his conscience is very nearly dis-
 charged of its responsibility, when he
 has impressed the subject, as strongly
 as he could, on the minds of all whom
 it may concern. The ground which
 he has now ventured to chalk out, has
 hitherto been untrodde; but it is
 truly &

North truly British Ground; and it is ground
 pointed out alike by the wishes of our
 Friends, and by the example of our
 Enemies. -

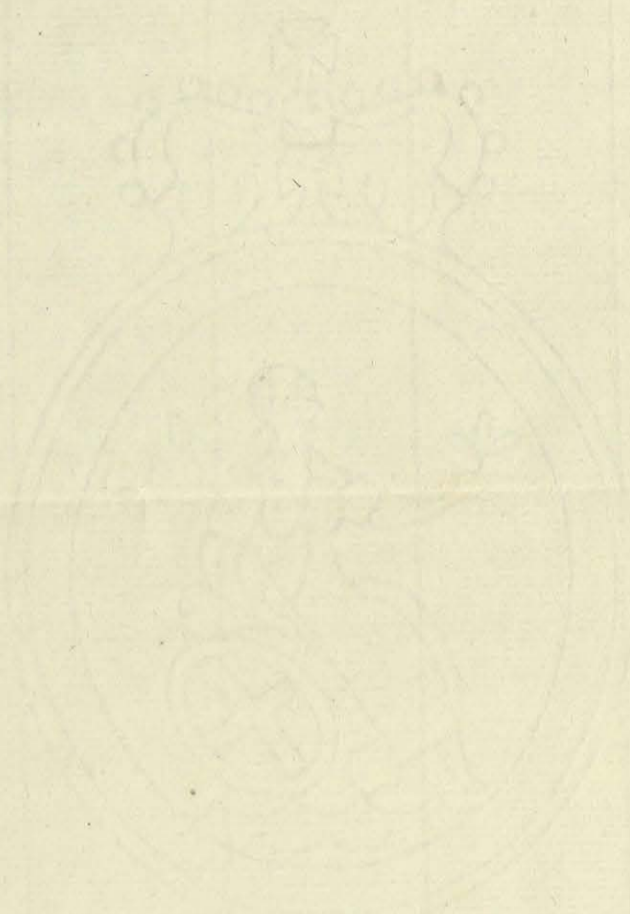
Surely one must be blind
 and stupid indeed, not to see, and to
 feel, the interesting situation of this
 Mighty Empire at the present Moment.
 Engaged in a complicated Warfare, we
 have a young Sovereign just seated on
 the Throne; a Sovereign who has made
 every sacrifice of feeling and of private
 comfort for the Good of his Country; who
 entertains warmly at his heart those
 principles of sacred Honour towards
 Foreign States by which his Royal Father
 has been actuated throughout his whole
 Reign; and, who, amidst difficulties
 the most trying, amidst calumnies the
 most treasonable, and with an amiable
 and worthy Minister assenated al-
 most by his side, has, with unexampled
 Firmness, shown to an admiring Nation,
 his unalterable Determination to bestow
 his Royal Confidence upon no man who
 has not, by well-proved conduct, mani-
 fested himself as the real Friend of the
 King and Constitution

Under such circumstances,
 it is not quite so easy to be silent. Every
 true British Subject should rally round
 his Prince, and contribute to the Great
 National Cause such Services as may be
 within his Competence. The Warrior should
 fight, the Minister should advise, the
 Senator should legislate, and the Poet
 should

should sing. Be it the province of others,
 in a humbler sphere, to render their Tri-
 -bute also. If they shall be so fortunate
 as to stem the Torrent of Defamation,
 to explain to their Countrymen (and
 the British character, when left to itself,
 is loyal without measure) the pure and
 unspotted Conduct of their Sovereign -
 Prince; - the Labours of such persons, al-
 -though less conspicuous and less Tremenda-
 -ous than those of a Wellington or a
 Nelson, may not perhaps prove less use-
 -ful to the vital interests of the Country.
 They, at least, will not, or should not, be,
 less the dictate of ultimate attachment
 and Devotion to the High and Illustri-
 -ous Personage who now sways the scepter
 over the First Kingdom in the World,
 and presides over the most beautiful -
 and perfect Constitution of Government,
 that was ever contrived for the aggrand-
 -izement and Happiness of Human
 Nature.

Westminster
 Septem^r. 17. 1812 }

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WINDSOR

1881

Memorial

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The present State of the
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17th Septem^r.

1812.

17 Sept 1812