

THE DISPATCH.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1843.

Ourselfes.

In presenting ourselves to our readers, we cannot avoid the conventional custom which time has sanctioned, of saying a few words as to our peculiar merits. We plead guilty to no extraordinary share of bashfulness, when we state, that the best warrant for our success is the necessity which exists for a candid, unbiassed, and popular organ of public opinion. Without referring individually to any of our contemporaries, we deny that such an organ does exist. We deny that the press is now the watch-dog of Australia. We deny that it has proved adequate to the altered political condition of the colony, farther than its mechanical arrangements are concerned;—for we contend, that whilst its accounts of Council proceedings would have done credit to the reporters' gallery of the House of Commons, that upon all the great questions that have been opened up, it has done nothing in the way of instruction to our legislators, or of information to the public. Its energies, instead of expanding to the increased sphere for their exertions, unequal to the task allotted them, have dwindled down into helpless inefficiency, and, politically considered, the press of Australia is now a machine without the working power—a body without a soul.

We confess the value of the excellent mechanical arrangements of the Sydney press, but they are not its great desideratum; and while it is impossible under present circumstances that we can hope to equal, or even to compete with others in this respect, yet, while we turn the appliances we possess to the best account, our principal aim will be, that which they have utterly neglected—“to carefully watch the public interest, to carefully guide public opinion.”

The Governor and Council—The Collision—are the People to be Taxed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, or by their Representatives?

Emphatically and solemnly, in his last speech on the final dissolution of the old Council, did his Excellency Sir George Gipps wish, with pious fervour, that the new Legislature of New South Wales would ponder well over the heavy responsibility entrusted to them, and much did he ejaculate on the allowances to be made for its inexperience. Gravely did he enlarge on their important labours to the assembly in his opening speech, and enforce the lecture of prudence and economy, with sage aphorisms.

Now, what has been the result of all this talk? That while the representatives of the people have been faithfully and carefully discharging these grave responsibilities, they are brought up as it were in a dead lock—their present proceedings stayed, their past deliberations stultified, not by any fault, any error of their own, but by the rashness, or the inconsistency of this prattling teacher. Nor is this all; for not only has confusion been introduced into the Council by his Excellency's errors, but those grave and decorous restraints which have been placed between the Parliament and the Sovereign, have been overstepped the dignity of the house outraged, and its privileges infringed, before its maiden session is expired.

We repeat its dignity outraged, and its privileges infringed, for we can recognise no palliation that has been offered in the shape of explanation, for the sneering satire which breathes in every word of his Excellency's message with respect to the course pursued by the opposition. But it is not the message with which we have to do. It is the financial principle which it involves.

The case stands simply thus:—A certain sum out of the ordinary revenue, produced by the taxation of the community of New South Wales, is retained by her Majesty, for the purpose of defraying the expenses of carrying on the Government. This sum is not supposed to be the actual cost of so carrying on the Government, but the very lowest at which it might be so carried on. Now, one item of this sum, is an amount of £33,000 for the administration of justice. Out of this item it is specified in the act by which these provisions were made, that certain salaries shall be paid to the Governor and Judges. It also specifies that a sum of £20,000

is to be divided amongst the details of the administration of justice. Now, so long as this sum of £20,000 is sufficient for the purpose, we admit that it is not in the power of the Council to refuse to grant it, or to interfere with its appropriation. But the Government say it is not enough, and ask the Council for £10,000 more. What can the Council do in this case? Must it perforce give £10,000 without enquiry, or investigation? No, says his Excellency in the first minute in which he asks for the £10,000, “When I want more than is given me by the Act of Parliament, I submit the whole details to you, so that for all practical purposes, you have the same control over the judicial estimate as though no such reservation had been made.” And what are these practical purposes of control? Why, the Council of course would treat the matter thus—Ten thousand pounds more than the £20,000 given is too much. We don't want to render the administration of justice inefficient but shew us what you want it for. The estimate is unrolled, and there, says the hon Member for Durham, you pay too much for that, and the hon Member for Sydney thinks, such and such an officer, equally able, might be got for less, and as the house think so too, they will only give so much of the £10,000 extra as is actually required to get the business done as well as it is at present.

Now, independent members began to think they had been making a great bugbear of this Civil List, which had been retained by her Majesty; and it didn't seem rather queer that £30,000 and upwards, of Colonial taxes, should be appropriated without the consent of the People. But here was the Governor coming to them, and offering the Estimates to their revision; and so if there was anything wrong, they could alter it. So hon. Members congratulated themselves, and went home and studied the Estimates, and resolved on all the great things they would do, and the reductions they would make in accordance with the lesson which his Excellency, and a rather sterner teacher, Necessity, had taught them. But the snake was scotched, not killed. Poor simple old country gentlemen! they reminded us, as many of their forebears in legislation had done, of a certain old woman, of legendary fame—we allude to that very respectable matron, Mother Hubbard, and the deceits which were practised on her by her dog. We are told

“She went to the undertaker's to buy him a coffin, And when she came back the dog was a laughin’.”

And so with these simple legislators. They went home to dig, in their own minds, the grave of a lavish expenditure. Already did they contemplate officials with proper wages, and clerks with proper work. Already had some of these salaries appeared to sink, embalmed, as they thought, in the sighs and groans from the Treasury Benches—when, chancing to cast their eyes towards Government House, and sure enough, here “the dog was a laughin’.”

Seriously:—The practical purposes of control were given, and the first operation, investigation, was commenced; and no sooner did this investigation begin to fructify—no sooner did the investigation shew how they might control the estimate to practically beneficial purposes, when down comes Sir George with a second message which says to the Council, “Come—none of that—I didn't bargain for that. You may vote me the £10,000, but don't be touching the salaries.”

The whole affair on the part of the Government is ridiculous and disgusting, and the arguments by which it is supported still more so. The Attorney-General says that the Act gives Her Majesty's representative entire control over the £20,000 thus reserved, and pledges his legal reputation on the law as thus laid down. The Colonial Secretary claims control over £10,000 only, being the salaries, and says, “the Council are at perfect liberty to do as they please with the rest.” Why, if they can deal with the one part, who can doubt their right to deal with the whole—and if they could not deal with the whole, why would particular appropriations have been specified with which they could not interfere? It is said that the faith of the English Government is pledged in these salaries—that the Home Government has guaranteed the payment of them—and that the officers have a right to expect all that was promised to them.

We do not believe that the English Government takes this view of the matter. Here were certain offices, open at certain salaries; some, under a different state of things, fixed by the Imperial Government, and some by the Local

Government, and ratified by Her Majesty. They were offered to certain gentlemen, with, of course, all the contingencies attached to such offices—and if they are lowered now, they will again be ratified by the Home Government. The spirit of the second message is one of selfish, avaricious and grasping aggrandisement on the part of the Government against the economic efforts of the representatives of the people, when their efforts are called for by every argument of a time of stern and compelling necessity.

Unemployed Working Classes.

We could have wished to have avoided, at least in our opening number, the taking up the important considerations urged upon us by the distress at present existent amongst the Working Classes in the City of Sydney. The subject is, however, of such paramount importance—it is so necessary that correct notions on it, should obtain, both for the guidance of the Working Classes themselves, and as the groundwork of some real and substantial relief, that we cannot allow our feelings to interfere with the performance of an imperative duty. We cannot pretend, in a single article, to go into the whole of this question—we cannot even hope to make our views and opinions generally understood; and in this lies our fear. For feeling, as we do, that the Working Classes themselves have been betrayed into great political error, we cannot expect their favourable reception of the statements we have to make, until the whole of our reasoning is before them. We ask them to suspend their judgment a while, until we have examined this great question—to which we promise from week to week to turn our most keen and anxious attention—and however much our ideas may seem at first distasteful to the working man, we are sure that he cannot have as advocate more earnest—a friend, more interested in his behalf, than ourselves.

We admit, then, without reserve, the existence in Sydney of a great amount of distress amongst the lower orders of the People. Compared with the privations which we remember to have witnessed amongst similar classes at home, we cannot call this distress by the term “destitution,” which has been applied to it. Severe cases of individual privation may, nay, we know do exist, but they are not general.

We admit also, however, that this comparison is not the right medium through which to look at this distress. We deny that the terrific and incredible amount of pauperism, and starvation, which centuries of over-population have accumulated in the crowded cities of England, is to be the criterion of the state of things which should prevail amongst the scanty population of a Colony like this.

But we must go still further, and admit, that if it were not for the unprecedented cheapness of all descriptions of the necessaries of life, that the distress prevalent would assume in its worst and most appalling features, the destitution of Great Britain; and when we reflect that this cheapness is not the result of any natural or legitimate causes—that it is not the consequence of exuberant seasons, and extraordinary plenty—when we reflect that the price of food now-a-days is not its value (intrinsically), and that upon the rise of that price the prosperity of the Colony must mainly depend, then indeed do we admit in this light, that the distress of the working classes becomes proper subject for the consideration, for the anxious solicitude, of the Government and the Legislature.

Thus much, then, on the part of the working classes. We admit the distress—we deny the right of their opponents to measure that distress by the scale of British pauperism; and in the result of the continuance of such distress, we recognise the policy of Government interference.

We admit, except in the last extremity, the injustice of forcing men out of the avocations to which they have been brought up, and the hardships of driving wives and children into the uncivilized wilderness of the bush.

Now we think that if the working man will read over carefully what we have written, he will find that, with regard to his own position, that we think just as he (the working man) does. Now we put the question to his own candour, and ask, if he has looked beyond his own position—if he has not gone over the arguments pretty much as we have stated them, and come to the conclusion that no energy or industry of his own will enable him to subsist; and therefore that he has a right to look to the Government, without any consideration of the how the relief is to be rendered.

Far be it from us to protest against the working classes, and all classes, combining politically to assert their own rights—to redress their own grievances. We know the power of such unions, if properly exercised: we read in their formation the living principle of that popular feeling of political self-dependence, which has hitherto been a *vis inertia* amongst us. But wrong in principle, such unions will be injurious in their operations, fatal to political freedom, and suicidal of class interests.

We charge no intention of guile or dishonesty on the leaders of the Political Association lately formed—we allude to the Mutual Protection Association. We see not how they can have such intentions, composed as they are for the most part of individuals from out of the working classes; and yet we can trace, in the sentiments which they have disseminated already, that worst, that most fatal of principles which would set the employer and the operative at variance, and that without any fair or just reason.

Now we believe that the Mutual Protective Association had power to do great things, in the matter of bringing about a Government measure of relief; and we as firmly believe that all that they have done will be perfectly nugatory, inasmuch as, if its leaders will listen to us, we think we can show that they have not cast about, first of all to see the state of the other classes of Colonists, and secondly to find out how the Government might be put in a position to afford them relief;

“The wages of labour are paid out of the price or value of the produce of such labour; and the labour of the working classes is employed in the improvement of the stock or capital of the stockowner or capitalist.”

Before the stockowner or capitalist can afford to pay such wages, he must deduct a profit on his stock or capital for himself, and when such stock or capital ceases to pay such a profit, then he ceases to employ labour upon it, or only employs it at such a price as will leave him a profit for himself. Now we would ask the working classes to turn their eyes back a little and try to remember if the fall of the price of stock did not begin long before the reduction of wages took place? If sheep were not at two shillings and sixpence per head, and land at no price at all, before a grumble was heard from the labourer and mechanic of the remuneration they received for their labour; and yet it is these stock-owners, these employers of labour that the outcry is raised against. “You want to grind us down,” say the leaders of the Association, “and give us ten pounds a year, or two shillings a day.” Why cannot they see for themselves that the rate of wages which they complain of, is not given at the option but at the necessity of the employer.—There can be no concealment in this matter. If the working classes think their employers are imposing upon them, let them go and ask them what they will sell their stock for—and they will find out that the price is such, that a higher rate of wages cannot be paid. How unjust, then, how indiscreet, to raise a cry against the class who, by their own sufferings, are forced to make those employed by them suffer too. What absolute madness it is to blame the men who would legislate for this class, by calling them selfish, when the working man can see with his own eyes, as plain as noonday, that relief to the employer is relief to the employed. Give a price to stock, to houses, to ships, to manufactured articles, the produce of labour, out of which the employer can pay for labour and get a profit, and he will employ it. As that price rises, his profit will increase, he will be anxious to employ more labour upon it, till labour gets scarce, and then the working man may ask his own wages. So long as they leave a profit out of the produce of his work, he will get all he asks.

This is one great error of the Association. The next is, that they have entirely overlooked the axiom, that “the rate of wages will always be regulated, to a certain extent, by the price of provisions: nor is it reasonable for the working man to clamour for 40s. a week now, when he was content with 40s. a week three years ago, when the forty shillings would not buy one-half the amount of food and clothes which it will at present.

There is one other fatal error which has been committed by the Association and its supporters, to which we must allude—not because it comes next in order, but because we feel that delay in shewing it up will do injury. We mean that it has turned from its proper and legitimate course of acting—that what it ought to have asked politically, it has clamoured for merely as a boon which necessity required. It has raised its voice against the party which alone is disposed to assist

H. Bruce