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ART. I. *The Radical Cause of the Present Distresses of the West India Planters, &c.* By William Spence. The second edition. pp. 105. 1808.

A Permanent and Effectual Remedy suggested for the Evils under which the British West Indies now labour, in a Letter from a W. I. Merchant to a W. I. Planter. pp. 48. 1808.

IF the promises held out in the title-pages had been faithfully kept in the body of these pamphlets, we should have been most happy to discharge the humble duty of recording the diagnostics of Mr. Spence, and of communicating to our readers the panacea discovered by the anonymous letter-writer; but we are very sorry to observe that the disease which the former undertook to class, and the latter professed to cure, continues to assume new and more alarming symptoms; that the palliative administered by the regular practitioners has produced only a short intermission; and that the specific proposed by many able empirics is rendered useless by the present stage of the disorder. The situation of our colonies is apparently become more critical than ever, because the temporary consumption of sugar in the distilleries must soon cease; because our power of exporting any surplus depends upon the measures of our enemies; and because our supply will this year be increased by the whole annual produce and accumulated stock of Martinique, in addition to the imports from the colonies previously wrested from Holland and Denmark. Such a state of things will, we trust, be thought to justify us in venturing on a general examination of this important subject. We shall therefore submit to

our readers a few remarks on the theories and arguments advanced by others, and suggest some considerations which appear to have been hitherto neglected, as a preface to our criticism on the merits of the two pamphlets now before us.

The opinion which has been most powerfully urged and most widely disseminated, and which, from the advantages of its peculiar channel of communication, has been least subject to animadversion, is contained in the following propositions.

‘The radical evil is a general glut of produce, at least of the great staple, sugar and rum, in *the whole market of the world*; the West Indian colonies grow much more than *the whole world* can consume, and, consequently, the prices must fall, and a large portion of the commodity remain unsaleable at any price, until the supply shall be contracted.’* ‘The true remedy for the evil is only to be found in diminishing the growth of sugar. Things are brought to such a state that the sacrifice of many persons is the only means of re-establishing the general welfare. Thus has the abominable commerce in human flesh produced a crisis in our colonial system, which it is equally impossible to contemplate without alarm, and to relieve without disproportionate injury to the rest of the empire. Happy, indeed, would it have been for the planters had they in good time discovered, that a measure prescribed by justice may be also consistent with prudence; that the most calculating policy sometimes coincides with the dictates of humanity; and that *there are other risks besides those of taking counsel from speculative statesmen.*†

Now we cannot help thinking that the speculative statesmen, in their anxiety to elicit from their opinion a popular moral, have treated rather too discourteously our unfortunate planters, whom they consign at once to public ignominy and to hopeless ruin; and we object to this not as mere matter of taste, but as matter of justice; because we conceive that Great Britain, who, for her own supposed advantage, thought fit to monopolize the slave trade, cannot fairly avail herself of its iniquity as a bar to the claims of her colonists. But the general opinion is in itself so curious, that we must proceed without further comment to examine the principal arguments and facts on which it is founded.

We are told that the slave trade, by offering an unlimited supply of labour to the speculators in colonial agriculture, enabled them very suddenly to fill up the chasm in the usual sup-

* Ed. Rev. No. XXI. p. 156.

† Ibid. p. 164.

ply of produce occasioned by the revolution in St. Domingo. That this chasm was in fact filled up by the Spanish colonies alone. That Cuba exported, in 1805, no less than 300,000 boxes, or about 1,275,000 cwt. of sugar, although its produce, before 1790, had never exceeded 200,000 cwt. This is an augmentation of 1,075,000 cwt.; and, being principally clayed, is equal to 1,663,000 cwt. of muscovado sugar, that is to say, to the total export of St. Domingo about the period of its revolution. That the increase of produce in the British colonies within the last 20 years amounts to at least 1,500,000 cwt.;* that the probable augment of the other foreign colonies is at least 500,000 more, making together a total increase of 2,000,000 cwt. That there is no reason to believe in an additional demand at all commensurate to this supply, considering the general situation of the world; and that the regular decrease in the price of colonial produce, not only in London but at Amsterdam, evinces a general redundancy in the markets of Europe.

Now we are perfectly ready to admit that the abstraction of the produce of St. Domingo did excite, in all the rival islands of the West Indies, a new and extraordinary spirit of enterprize; and that the facility of procuring slaves from Africa did enable those islands to meet the unexpected increase of demand for sugar by a very considerable increase of supply. But the possible extent of such an augmentation, even supposing an indefinite increase of the slave trade, together with an inexhaustible space of fresh and fertile land, must every where be limited by the amount of capital applicable to the formation of new establishments. If we compare the produce of the British colonies in 1792 with that of the same colonies in 1805, we shall find an augmentation of about 78,000 hhds. of 12 cwt.; and this quantity, which supposes an additional investment of about 15 millions sterling in our colonial agriculture, would appear absolutely incredible, if it were not rendered probable by the preceding opulence of those colonies, and by the vast wealth and audacious speculations of British merchants. But that a single Spanish island should have been able to derive, from its own very limited resources, or from the apparently inadequate funds of the mother country, or from the speculations of American merchants, such an increase of capital as should increase its annual export in the short space of ten years to eight times its former amount, and place it on a level with that of St. Domingo, is so extraordinary, that we are

* Edinburgh Review, No. XXI. p. 158.

naturally induced to examine, with some attention, the fact by which the allegation is supported. Cuba, it seems, exported in the year 1805, no less than 300,000 boxes of sugar. But, since it is evident that the export of a single year is not usually admitted as an exact criterion of the average annual produce of a colony, some reason ought to have been assigned for the use of such an imperfect document as the sole foundation to a long chain of reasoning. Perhaps too, as the custom-house valuation rates *chests* of sugar at 3 cwt. each, it would have been as well to state some reason for estimating these boxes at $4\frac{1}{4}$ cwt.* and if this alteration was, as we are willing to suppose, adopted for the sake of more minute precision, the same attention to accuracy ought to have been maintained in the remainder of the process. Instead of this, an addition of nearly 600,000 cwts. is made to the contents of these most expansive boxes, not because any part of their sugar was refined, but because a great part of them was *clayed*;† and by this process are finally produced 1,663,599 cwts. equal, as we are told, to the whole produce of St. Domingo at the time of its revolution. But is this assertion correct? We think not. Our readers will find in Malouet's *Mémoires sur les Colonies* (vol. iv. p. 208.) an official statement of the exports of St. Domingo, which seems to accord very nearly with the alleged produce of Cuba in 1805.‡ But this is for the year 1774, at which time the number of negroes in St. Domingo, as we learn from Neckar, did not exceed 250,000. Now it is stated by Malouet himself that they amounted, before the revolution, to at least double that number. We know too that the produce of sugar in St. Domingo, on an average of four years, to 1792, amounted to 2,035,208 cwt.; and we believe, extraordinary as it may appear, that this was also known to the authors of this statement, because they exult (No. XXI. p. 159.)

* These authors have adopted from the custom house the valuation of the hogshead at 12 cwt. and we shall follow their example, because the practice of the West Indians, though perhaps more nearly accurate, is less convenient.

† The operation of claying occasions a loss of about one-sixth, not ten-sevenths (Edward's West India, II. 223). It subjects the sugar to an additional duty of only 4s. (4th Rep. Dist. Com.). Besides, as the operation is carried on in the islands, no allowance is made for it in the custom house returns. Refined sugar is, in those accounts, reduced into raw by the proportion of 34 to 20, not on account of its greater efficacy, but because 34 cwts. of raw sugar are supposed to have been imported to make 20 cwts. of loaf.

‡ He rates the clayed sugar (*sucré blanc*) at 80,600,000 lbs. the raw sugar (*sucré brut*) at 28,800,000 lbs. French; making together 109,400,000, or about 1,052,000 cwts. English. The amount of the Cuba boxes, as first stated, was 1,075,000.

in the avowal that 'they have *not* taken into the account that St. Domingo itself had been rapidly increasing.' Why this omission was necessary it is for them to explain; but in the mean time we must observe that it is very embarrassing to their readers. It is also rather awkward that the increase of colonial produce *during the last twenty years* is suddenly substituted for the increase between 1792 and 1805. If we take the augment of the import from the whole British settlements during this interval, or even that from Jamaica, an island possessing an indefinite extent of fresh land, together with the advantages of a vast existing capital, an almost unlimited credit, and a direct trade with Africa, and, assuming this as the probable rate of universal increase, compare the calculated supply from the whole West Indies in 1805 with that of 1792, we shall find that the loss of St. Domingo was *not* compensated. The alleged increase of Cuba, therefore, stands alone, an insulated fact, certainly unparalleled in the history of the world, and consequently requiring very strong evidence before it can be admitted as a ground of argument.*

We now come to the main proposition, viz. that the glut in the British market is the result of a redundant supply in the whole market of the world. Now if we consider that Buonaparte has so long been waging war with Great Britain for the avowed purpose of annihilating her trade; and, as a means of distressing her, has every where laboured to intercept the commercial intercourse of mankind, it must appear rather improbable that during such a period the markets of Europe should have been inundated by a uniformly excessive importation of produce from far distant settlements; and we confess that the evidence of a losing voyage to Amsterdam, accompanied by a list of prices current from Dutch Gazettes, though perhaps very faithfully stated, will not induce us to adopt an opinion so repugnant to common experience. We sincerely wish to believe that the power and malice of Napoleon have been ineffectually exerted against us; but we cannot help thinking, with the West Indians and with the committee of the House of Commons, that the nations of the continent, far from being satiated with an excess of sugar and coffee, are very unwillingly submitting to a privation of comforts to which they have been accustomed. Had the ex-

* Mr. Spence, who has also adduced this fact, quotes, as his authority, a letter, signed Mercator, in a weekly newspaper. We presume that the authors from whom we cite have had access to less suspicious documents.

travagance of speculation in the West Indies been carried to the extent which has been supposed, it is evident that the peace of Amiens must have proved to the colonists the fatal effects of their pernicious industry; because, during the intermission of hostilities from October 1801 to May 1803, France and her allies had full leisure to bring home whatever colonial produce might have been accumulated in their respective settlements during the war. Yet, such was the demand for sugar amongst the nations of the continent, that they consented to purchase from us not only the whole produce imported by us from the ceded colonies, but a large share, if not the whole, of our own accumulation. Our foreign exports, in 1802, amounted to above 155,000 hhds. and, in the following year, to 128,470; after which they fell very suddenly below 80,000, and, during the last year (1808) have still decreased to 57,318 hhds. Now this diminution took place precisely at the time when the supply of Europe through any other channel than that of Great Britain was nearly annihilated, by the joint operation of the French decrees, of our orders in council, of the American embargo, and of our war with Denmark. Such a state of things speaks for itself, and clearly points out its real cause, viz. the impossibility of forcing, to any considerable extent, a contraband trade in a bulky commodity. That the introduction of sugar from Britain into the continent can ever be totally prevented by fiscal regulations is certainly very improbable, because this would suppose that all the agents of France are inaccessible to corruption; but, as the price of sugar in London is regularly published, the foreign custom house officer who betrays his trust must know how to fix the price of his connivance; and, by taking such a share of the profit as shall reduce that of the merchant to a minimum, must greatly circumscribe the extent of the trade.

Whether the means of consumption have in general increased or diminished throughout the aggregate of the world, is a distinct and speculative question which we will not attempt to investigate, and which we think of no real moment to our colonists; but in the mean time it is of importance to know the proportion which the internal demand of the British empire bears to our own colonial supply; and on this subject the writers already quoted are at variance with the Committee of the House of Commons. The latter, considering the difference between our exports and imports on an average of years as a fair expression of the national consumption, had stated that the surplus produce of the old British colonies would, on a return
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of peace, be insufficient to meet the probable continental demand (estimated from the average export of 1802 and 3) by above 100,000 hhds. To this it has been objected by the former, that, in the first place, even admitting the fairness of the proposed criterion, the exports of 1802 and 3 included about 45,000 hhds. brought from the enemies' colonies, which, therefore, ought to be subtracted; and, secondly, that the criterion itself was inadmissible, because it involved what was really glut in the supposed consumption. And so far, we think that the objections are valid: but it ought to have been added, that, if the proposed corrections be applied, and the most accurate criterion adopted, the supposed excess would be reduced, but by no means annihilated. We think too that the authors of the objection have taken great pains to invent an algebraic formula, by means of which they have arrived, by the help of a very scientific road, at an absurd and false conclusion. For we conceive that, whenever the gazette price of sugar is below 58 shillings, the exporter receives back the whole duty on raw, and some little bounty on refined sugar; and that, at lower prices, he receives a bounty on both. Consequently, as the prices during the years 1805, 6, and 7, were always below, and sometimes much below 58 shillings, it is clear that if we divide by £1 7s. the average amount of net duties in those years as an approximation to the quantity of sugar consumed, the result must fall short of the real consumption. Now the amount of the net duties of sugar during the three years was (Distill. Rep. Ap. A. 185) £8,566,869, and the annual average therefore, £2,855,623, which, divided by £1 7s. gives 2,115,276 cwt. or 176,273 hhds. The algebraic formula is said to give about 167,000; and it is added that 'the consumption of Ireland being reduced, according to the same proportion, to 21,000 hhds. this would give the whole consumption of the empire at 188,000.' We believe that the consumption of the empire exceeded 200,000; and we know that in 1808, when aided by the effect of the distilleries, it increased to 257,793 hhds; the produce of the net revenue on sugar being for Great Britain £3,543,360, and for Ireland £642,420.

It is only because the statements and reasonings to which we have ventured to object have been repeatedly and triumphantly quoted, as examples of mathematical precision and of logical acuteness, that we have entered into this minute and dry examination: for it is, in fact, of very little practical importance, whether the glut of colonial produce be confined to the British market,

market, or extended to all the markets of the world. In both cases we are reduced to the same alternative. It is necessary either to augment the consumption or to diminish the supply; and, in the latter event, very general distress, and probably much individual ruin must be incurred. Such must be, we admit, the final and fatal results of the disease if much longer neglected; but we cannot help thinking it a strange perversion of reason to prescribe and administer distress and ruin as a 'severe but radical remedy.' Besides, it is evident that the infliction of this remedy on our own colonies would not relieve our market; because, if their supply were suddenly reduced below our actual consumption, the influx of sugar from our West Indian conquests would still, in the present state of our trade, be much more than sufficient to perpetuate the glut. This, indeed, has been since confessed; and we are now told that the 'radical remedy' was prescribed under some implied qualification; but surely, if the colonists could neither prevent the capture of Martinique, nor hope for relief from the remedy in the event of that capture, this qualification ought to have been explained. It should seem also that the Committee of the House of Commons did not deserve the censure which it has been attempted to fix upon them for having resorted to the other alternative; for having recommended a measure calculated to increase the internal consumption of the empire, and which has greatly increased it.

We will now state, as concisely as we can, our own view of the whole subject.

We believe that the present consumption of the empire, after allowing very liberally for the temporary demand of the distilleries, may be fairly estimated at about 225,000 hhds; that the import from our old colonies is about 255,000; and consequently, that the excess of our own colonial import above our internal consumption is about 30,000. In addition to this, our conquests in the West Indies had brought into our market above 40,000 hhds, before the capture of the Danish islands, which may be estimated at about 20,000 more. Martinique is supposed to yield from 20 to 25,000 annually; so that, if we rate at about 40,000 the accumulation found there at the time of its surrender, we may expect, at the close of the present year, a redundancy of 155,000 hhds, a quantity equal to our export in 1802, and more than double that of last year. Now we do not conceive that our fellow subjects in the colonies who have contributed 30,000, or the British government who have contributed

buted 125,000 hhds towards this redundancy, have been therefore criminal; neither should we consider a great superfluity of colonial produce as a formidable evil, or as any evil at all, if the supply by which it is occasioned were certain and permanent; because, when both are steady, supply and demand will infallibly regulate each other, excepting the case of some manufactures which depend on fashion and caprice.

It must not be forgotten that sugar is an article of food; that it is at once nutritive and highly palatable; and that it is consumed, though sparingly, even by the most needy of the labouring poor. We suspect that the consumers of sugar are not much less numerous than the consumers of wheat; for assuming 28 pounds weight as the average annual expenditure of the poor of both sexes and of all ages, that is, about eight ounces per week, which we conceive to be a liberal allowance, this will suppose it to be used by more than ten million and a half of persons in the United Kingdoms. It may perhaps be objected that sugar is a luxury, whereas wheat is a necessary of life. But wheat also is, at this hour, a luxury in many parts of Europe, as it once was with us. The great mass of the population in Germany, and in a great part of France, is fed with rye; the Russians subsist, almost entirely on buck-wheat; oats and barley bread are not yet forgotten as articles of food in many of our own provinces; and potatoes are now become almost everywhere a common substitute, and in Ireland are said to be a favourite substitute for grain. Wheat, thanks to our liberty, to our laws, and to our consequent opulence, is no longer a luxury in Britain; and for this reason, principally, have we been sometimes rather unreasonably alarmed by the apprehension of famine. Sugar is still a luxury, because in the general acceptation of the term, all those comforts of which, without endangering life or health, we can endure the privation, are confounded with the exclusive enjoyments of fastidious opulence. It is still a luxury because, having been, in the infancy of colonial agriculture and of British navigation, rare and costly; having slowly made its way into general use; and having been considered, during its progress, as ministering to sensuality or to fashion, the stigma first imposed on it by prejudice has been confirmed by taxation. The mere tax on a pound of sugar exceeds, by about one third, the whole price of a pound of wheat; and this must derange their respective ranks in the scale of food, but it cannot alter the nature of the substance to which it attaches. We therefore consider a long continued glut of sugar as an event no less

less anomalous than a permanent glut of wheat, as an event which cannot have resulted from any of the causes which have been hitherto adduced to explain it. The most rapid extension of agriculture in the West Indies, assisted by the most unusual series of favourable and prolific seasons, could only occasion a transient and temporary superabundance, if some unknown and constant impediment did not prevent the natural progress of consumption. A great influx of foreign colonial produce, the necessary result of our conquests is, indeed, a most untoward circumstance; but this is accidental; the obstacle to which we allude is constant. We will first state our facts, and then attempt to explain them.

The committee of the House of Commons have printed, in their report on the state of the colonies in 1807, (Appendix p. 73, or Rep. Dist. Com. App. p. 305) an account of the British colonial sugar imported and exported, during alternate periods of five years, from 1761 to 1806 both inclusive; but as the last average, which comprehends some years of glut, has been objected to, we will confine ourselves to the first four, and, reduce the figures to hogsheads of 12cwt. The first column contains the last year of each average; the second the import; the third the foreign export; and the fourth the consumption or quantity retained for Great Britain and Ireland.

Years	Import	Export	Consumption
1765	123,781	29,536	94,245
1775	152,944	6,910	146,034
1785	181,628	13,120	118,502
1795	168,443	41,339	127,104

We lament the want of the alternate periods which would have given the complete series, but the results, of which we cannot doubt the accuracy, are extremely striking. They present to our view two very dissimilar periods. In the first, which comprehends the interval between 1761 and 1775, we find a great augmentation of import, the result of our conquests, which we retained at the peace of 1763; a much greater increase of consumption, the effect of our growing opulence; and a decrease of exports which we believe to be unexampled, and which can only be attributed to the same cause. From 1781 to 1795 we have a similar period of 14 years, at the end of which we find our imports swelled beyond any former amount; and our exports increased to six times their extent in 1775, whilst our

our consumption, though evidently beginning to recover, had not yet risen within 18,000 hogsheads of its former level. How shall we account for this strange fact? If we should be told that it arose from the American war, we answer that peace was made in 1783, and that the revival of credit and wealth was, through the wise financial measures of Mr. Pitt, its almost immediate consequence; if it be attributed to the calamities which so long afflicted our colonies, we refer to the augmented import; if to a diminished taste for the article, we reply that the commutation tax, one of the first acts of Mr. Pitt's administration, produced an unprecedented increase in the consumption of tea, which renders this supposition very improbable.

The reader has perhaps anticipated the only explanation which seems to accord with this state of things; it is that the very system which was devised by mercantile ingenuity for the benefit of our colonists, and which those colonists have most uniformly and anxiously cherished, has been the original cause of this disorder. We think that, had it not been for the action of bounties and drawbacks, the home-consumption of this article would have been as uniform as the consumption of any other article of food; that it could only have varied with the extent of supply, and with the faculties of the consumer; and could never have been much diminished but by the decay of colonial industry or of national opulence. But the fact proves that the poorer classes of native consumers, to whom this portion of their subsistence came burthened by successive duties, were unable to withstand the competition of the foreigner who paid no duty. Until the year 1775 the duty had never risen beyond 6s. 7d. a sum which perhaps exceeded the expence of the double freight paid by the foreigner, but was insufficient to check the demand of the bidders at home; in 1795 the duty was 15s. and has since been doubled, so that we cannot wonder at the result. There is evidently a term where the competition of purchasers thus circumstanced must completely cease, and accordingly, the grower of sugar has become progressively more and more dependent on the foreign demand for the sale of his produce; the export price, as the traders themselves acknowledge, has fixed the price of the whole import; and the interruption of trade by the decrees of the enemy which, had it taken place 35 years ago, would have had scarcely any effect on our market, has now, for a series of years, almost annihilated the profits of the planter.

The friends of this system, however, are not unprovided with arguments in its favour which it is necessary to examine. They contend

contend that a drawback on sugar is necessary, because it is impossible to tax the foreign consumer; that if any of the internal duties were retained all export would cease; and that an encouragement which tends to extend the market, to excite competition, and to raise the price, must obviously be favourable to the grower. But it may be objected to these arguments that the supposed impossibility of taxing foreigners cannot be very easily demonstrated. Mankind usually purchase what they want because they want it, and can afford to pay for it; and though some of them may be so curious as to examine why the price of any article is enhanced, they do not therefore abstain from any gratification within their reach. It would, apparently, be more correct to say that a tax on exports is often impolitic, than that it is ever impossible. It may be impolitic to tax an article of manufacture when exported, because industry and ingenuity are, or may be common to all mankind; but the produce of particular climates, and the staples which suppose a particular state of society may, it should seem, be generally taxed with impunity. It is by duties on export that Russia raises the greater part of her revenue of customs; and she is enabled to do so, because the more wealthy and populous nations who trade with her cannot breed, with equal advantage, the herds of cattle which are pastured on her spacious deserts, and supply her with hides and tallow; nor spare, for the cultivation of hemp, which grows abundantly on her virgin soil, the land which is employed in other operations of agriculture; consequently, as the sugar-cane cannot be raised in the climate of Russia, of Germany, or even of Italy, so readily as in our tropical settlements, we suspect that sugar, when the commercial intercourse of nations was permitted, might have borne a moderate tax on export. To the second argument it may be answered that the drawback does, indeed, support the price of sugar, but does not apparently augment the profits of the grower, because, being a great consumer of British manufactures, the price of which is enhanced by a rise on every article of provisions, he must thus progressively incur some additional expence in prosecuting his cultivation. The amount of this addition will appear by comparing the average value of supplies sent out to the West Indies (*App. Distil. Com. p. 311*) with the average amount of sugar produced during corresponding periods. Now the latter, as the reader has seen, was augmented between the years 1775 and 1795 in the proportion of 3 to 4 very nearly, whilst the former was much more than doubled; consequently, the expence on every cwt. was increased

creased in the proportion of 3 to 2; and, as this more than compensated the increase in the price of sugar during the whole period, it is evident that no additional profit can have been gained by the planter. Indeed it seems to us that his profit or loss, as arising from the forced substitution of one class of his customers for another, is likely to depend on the relative wealth of those customers; so that, had the ports of Europe continued open, a considerable depreciation of colonial produce must have taken place, in consequence of the increased export forced into those ports by the additional duties imposed since the peace of Amiens, and of some diminution of demand resulting from the extension of the war. We therefore suspect that the only real operation of the drawback is, by checking the immediate depreciation of the taxed article, to conceal that decrease of internal consumption which is the necessary effect of excessive duties; and that Mr. Pitt's project of gradually diminishing the drawback, to which many of the West Indians attribute the commencement of their distresses will, whenever the commercial intercourse of nations shall be revived, be likely to prove the best expedient for restoring our colonies to a state of permanent prosperity.

We admit that, for the present, any departure from the established system would be manifestly absurd; because the natural channels of trade being choked up by artificial obstacles, every mode of forcing those obstacles, and restoring the current, must be expedient and useful; indeed our principal motive for entering into this discussion has been to shew that the late committee of the House of Commons have, in fact, taken a very just survey of the question, and have proposed, for the relief of the colonies, the best palliatives which could be suggested. We will now offer a few short observations on each of their reports.

Their first object was to produce an increase of the home consumption; and, as this could only be practicable, through the usual channels, by a further decrease of a price already ruinously low, it was necessary to devise some new and temporary outlet for the redundant quantity of sugar in the market, and the distilleries appeared to offer one of the least inconvenient. It is well known that sugar is wholly convertible into spirit, each pound of the one yielding, by careful distillation, nearly a pint of the other; and as no other substance will produce the same quantity, it is obvious that the use of sugar would, if not prevented by fiscal or prohibitory regulations, supersede the use of
grain

grain in our national distilleries, and greatly diminish it in the breweries. It would not indeed communicate to beer that flavour which is derived from malt, nor the mucilage which is obtained from grain, either malted or raw; but it is supposed that each hundred of sugar will give as much strength as eight bushels of grain; whereas, in the less favourable mode of fermentation which the distillers are compelled to adopt, the same quantity represents only five bushels; and consequently, as the brewers consume a much greater quantity of grain than the distillers, and are less subject to the inspection of the Excise, the employment of sugar in the breweries might lead to a considerable loss of revenue, and operate as a serious discouragement to our national agriculture. Indeed, the fear of injuring the price of barley would have deterred the legislature from opening the distillery market for sugar, had not the existing impediments to the importation of foreign grain occasioned reasonable apprehensions of an approaching scarcity: but it was thought that a measure which, without diminishing the price of barley, could only check its excessive increase, whilst it saved our colonists from ruin, by suspending the regulations which excluded sugar from the distilleries, could not be attended with any serious inconvenience; and it seems to us that very little could be feared from a permission thus modified. This temporary indulgence to the planters was, however, severely censured. It was contended that 'The introduction of sugar into the distilleries must ultimately diminish, by a large amount, the whole grain in *the market of the world*. According to the sixth report of the committee on the scarcity of 1800, there are used in the distilleries 500,000 quarters of barley, equal to 360,000 quarters of wheat. If sugar is substituted in the operation, an annual diminution will be produced in the amount of the grain used in this country, equal to the subsistence of 360,000 persons. In the event of a scarcity, therefore, we shall be deprived of a most important resource: we can no longer change our spirits into food. Then, say the West Indians, allow as much grain to be exported to the islands as they can take, instead of restricting the supplies. But, in that case, the evil is only removed one step; the American grower, on whom the islands now depend, will no longer raise so much grain, and a scarcity will leave this country in the dilemma, either of starving its colonies, or itself. In whatever way sugar is forced into the distilleries, the planter can only be relieved from the natural consequences of his excessive cultivation, by *forcing out of the world* five bushels of grain for every cwt. of

of sugar, and, in the brewery, eight bushels.' It does not appear that these objections had any great effect on the committee or on the House. Perhaps our legislators were not much alive to the distresses of the universe, over whose markets they possessed a very limited control; perhaps, the evidence of Mr. Arthur Young had led them to doubt the facility of applying barley-soils to the culture of wheat; perhaps they thought that the colonial demand for grain held out an encouragement to its cultivation, different in degree, but similar in its nature to that of the distilleries; perhaps they did not much fear that the Americans, whose persevering agriculture could resist the effects of their own embargo, would be deterred from sowing wheat by our regulations about barley; and perhaps, not rightly understanding the pugnacious nature of sugar, they omitted to provide against the contingency of its driving barley out of the world. In truth it does not appear that the evils, thus announced as the infallible consequences of the measure, were very likely to follow from its adoption; because the whole argument is founded on two very dubious suppositions, viz. that the barley, if not raised for the distilleries, would not be raised at all; and that the sugar, if not *forced* (by a modification of the duties which usually excluded it) into a competition for this employment, would be perfectly useless. Now, during the scarcity of 1800, we know that barley was excluded from the distilleries, and part of it was certainly consumed, by patriotic noblemen and gentlemen in lieu of wheat, but we believe that it was very little relished by the more numerous classes. Had it been used, much more extensively than before, as the food of man, its price would have indicated very nearly the same ratio to that of wheat (36 to 50) as its powers of nutrition. But its average price in that year was about 54 (whilst that of wheat was 106); and we may therefore presume that it was generally applied to the same uses as it is now, and that this general demand is sufficient to preserve it from the danger of depreciation, and to encourage its culture. During the same year, about 155,475 hogsheads of sugar, equal in weight to 522,790 quarters of wheat, were consumed in Great Britain at 85s. per cwt.; consequently three cwt. of wheat were exchanged, during the scarcity, for one of sugar; and consequently it is probable that, in the event of a new scarcity, a redundant supply of sugar might afford such a compensation for some diminution in the important resource of barley, that, although we should be precluded from exchanging (as we did in 1800)

1800) 108,000 hogsheads of sugar for 800,000 quarters of corn, we should not be exposed to all the miseries of famine.

It was hoped that this measure, co-operating with the low price of sugar, would be sufficient to produce a considerable and immediate increase in the home consumption; the committee therefore next adverted to the means of relieving the distress of the colonists by the removal of an obstacle which impeded the home consumption of rum. It seems that foreign brandies, to the annual amount of more than two millions of gallons, had been usually imported directly from the ports of the enemy, not in British, but in foreign vessels, which sailed from hence in ballast, and were protected against our cruisers by licences from the Privy Council. Now, the above-mentioned quantity exceeds one half of the average import, or two thirds of the average home consumption of rum; and as the vicinity of the ports of France, and the cheapness of freight and insurance in a trade thus protected here, and connived at by the enemy, more than compensated the difference of duties, and gave to the French the principal profit of the supply of spirits to our navy, whilst no British shipping was employed in the conveyance, and no British manufactures exchanged in the purchase of these spirits, the committee thought fit to express their disapprobation of the traffic. The legislature have not yet taken into consideration the subject of this report, but we believe that the practice to which it alludes has been discontinued.

Of the further measures proposed by the committee there are two, viz. the permission of an exchange of sugar for lumber, and other necessaries, between our West Indian islands and the American states, and an eventual modification of the duties on sugar, we shall have occasion to speak in our examination of Mr. Spence's pamphlet. A third, viz. the proposal of substituting, for the prohibitory duty of eight guineas per cwt. on sugar refined in the colonies, a tax merely proportionate to that which is actually paid on raw sugar, although apparently just and wise, is so repugnant to that system of monopoly hitherto exercised against the colonies that we despair of its adoption. But we cannot refuse to state some of the reasons alleged in its favour. It appears, as we are told by the committee, that in consequence of the prohibition of the colonial refinery, very nearly one eighth of the sugar annually made and shipped for Great Britain, that is to say, a quantity equal to 20,000 hogsheads, whose value cannot be estimated at less than 600,000*l.* is lost by drainage and washed into the sea during the passage; consequently, near one eighth

eighth of the planter's capital is rendered unproductive to himself and to the mother country, and the same proportion of the British shipping in this trade is navigated to no purpose. We do not think that the whole of this enormous waste could, in any way, be effectually prevented, because a small degree of loss must take place, even on the best qualities of raw sugar, which would probably continue to be exported; but if we deduct, on this account, about one sixth of the present waste, it will appear that we sacrifice annually about half a million sterling, and misemploy the labour of about 20,000 negroes, for the satisfaction of refining at home, by means of German workmen, the sugar which is raised by our subjects at the western extremity of the empire.

But perhaps the most beneficial plan which can be suggested, and that which, if adopted to its full extent, would most effectually prevent the necessity of recurring to any other means of increasing the home consumption, is to employ sugar, free of duty, for the purpose of fattening cattle. Its efficacy cannot, we think, be doubted, and the objections hitherto brought against it are not, apparently, by any means insuperable. A substance which abounds in the juices of every fruit, and is the symptom of its maturity; which is developed in every sort of grain at the time of its germination; which seems to exist in all esculent vegetables, and in the milk of all animals; but which, in all these instances, is so combined with other principles, that it cannot be extricated and purified for the use of man but by a process of considerable difficulty, and even now very imperfectly understood, seems likely to answer all the required purposes; to be capable of affording plentiful nourishment, and of forming, with a variety of cheap substances, such a chemical union as shall resist any means of analysis practicable in our refineries, and render it useless in our distilleries. But whether the art of spoiling sugar cheaply be of easy or difficult attainment, the practice appears liable to many objections of a different nature. A new and extensive manufacture must be established; a large capital must be vested; the substances required for the mixture, though now of little or no price, will acquire, in consequence of a new and unexpected demand, a certain degree of value; they must be collected in enormous quantities and lodged somewhere for use; they must be brought from some distance and at some expense of land or water carriage—in short, the difficulties of detail appear to be very numerous; and, after all, we confess that this mode of degrading an article of aliment, and of de-

VOL. II. NO. III. B stroying

stroying the result of much industry and ingenuity, appears to us to be a perversion of skill and science, repugnant to all our prejudices, and apparently unnecessary, because we conceive that the beneficial purpose of the committee may be accomplished by much easier means.

If it be wished that the colonists, without diminishing their cultivation, should direct a great part of it to the production of food for cattle instead of food for man, it should seem that nothing more would be necessary than to omit the most tedious and difficult part of the process in the colonial manufacture of sugar. Our readers probably know that the object of that process is to obtain granulated sugar in a state of purity; and that in some cases, when the canes have grown in a very favourable soil with favourable seasons, this is readily effected by boiling the cane-juice to a proper consistence; after having clarified it by subsidence, and having removed the lighter impurities by skimming: but such cases rarely occur. It happens much more frequently that, from the untoward nature of the soil, from drought, from mildew, and from a variety of accidental causes, the cane juice contains a small quantity of sugar with a large proportion of clammy mucilage, in which, the dirt adhering to the cane, the fragments of its bark, and a thousand impurities are so entangled, that no degree of skill in *tempering* the liquor with lime and alkalis, no patience in skimming, no attention in regulating the fire, is always sufficient to insure the production of tolerable sugar. It often happens that, being very imperfectly granulated, half dissolved in molasses, clogged with impurities, and discoloured and half decomposed by the action of heat, it is much diminished by drainage during the passage, and on its arrival in Great Britain is sold at a price which is very far from compensating the labour expended on it. Yet, at present, the long and vexatious process of extorting sugar from the most refractory kinds of cane-juice must be attempted, or the whole must be distilled into rum; but, if the planter possessed any profitable alternative; if, reserving for the manufacture of sugar those canes only which were best suited to it, he could devote the remainder of his crop to the production of food for cattle, it may be presumed that he would not voluntarily incur unnecessary labour and disappointment. The cane-juice simply boiled to the consistence of common tar, and packed in close hogsheads, would arrive without waste; the impurities with which it would be mixed would prevent it from becoming the food of man; and it would probably be at least as well fitted

as the purest sugar for its peculiar destination; because the experiments hitherto made on different modes of fattening cattle seem to prove that even treacle, the last residuum of the sugar-baker's art, is rather more efficacious than sugar, although the mucilage, to which alone it can owe its superiority, is not likely to be at all improved by the united action of lime and fire to which it has been exposed.

We are aware that this proposal is liable to various and opposite objections: the planter may apprehend an uncertain sale, and inadequate profits; and government may be fearful of opening a new door to frauds on the revenue. To the first, we answer that what is once found useful is usually saleable; that the utility of oil-cake in fattening cattle has insured the consumption at a high price of an article formerly of little value; that the proposed substance, being superior to treacle in all its qualities, would probably obtain at least an equal price; that the quantity of juice which yields one hogshead of bad sugar would yield from two to three of inspissated extract; that the diminished expense of time, labour, and fuel, would be no trifling compensation in one way, and that a diminished import of sugar and rum would, by tending to raise the price, indemnify him in another. To the second objection we reply that, as the vigilance of the excise is usually able to exclude treacle from the distilleries and breweries, it would equally be able to exclude the substance here proposed; that its employment in the refinery might be prohibited by law; and that the bulk of an article containing three parts of mucilage to one of sugar, would expose the illicit manufacture to almost certain detection. We admit that, by an easy and not very expensive process it might be rendered applicable to some culinary purposes, and offer a new resource to the contrivances of domestic economy. But this objection, surely, is not very formidable. How few of those who, from motives of parsimony, brew their own beer, continue to pursue the economical practice of our ancestors in mixing a portion of raw barley with the malt employed, notwithstanding the successive duties with which that malt has been loaded? How few of our poor condescend to substitute the infusion of any native vegetable for foreign tea in their morning beverage? Indolence and vanity, we are persuaded, will always guard our revenue against dangerous encroachments of this nature; but, supposing that this new succedaneum for a very costly article, escaping the obloquy attached to it as the *food of cattle*, should ultimately contribute some comfort to those who are now struggling

gling with the load of taxation, or of those in a still lower class on whom the poverty which exempts them from taxes imposes other privations, this could not, we trust, be thought an insuperable objection to a measure otherwise advantageous.

We have hitherto intentionally confined ourselves to an examination of this important question so far only as our own colonies are most immediately concerned; and have endeavoured to impress upon the reader our own conviction that the difference between our natural supply and our home consumption has been produced, not by an excessive and pernicious increase of the one, but by a forced diminution of the other; that a diminished consumption is the necessary effect of an exorbitant price, which again is the result of too much aggravated duties, because they must either exhaust the faculties of the consumer, or absorb the profits of the grower; that this their certain tendency cannot be prevented, though it may be, and has been, concealed from general notice by the operation of an export trade so forced by means of drawbacks as to carry off progressively the superfluity progressively created; that the extraordinary obstacles by which the enemy has lately impeded this trade have been the immediate cause of a glut, which has been and is ruinous to our colonists; but, by lowering the price, and thus greatly extending the consumption of an article of food, has been and is beneficial to the other subjects of the empire; and, lastly, that without diminishing cultivation in the West Indies, or compelling the planters to sacrifice their whole profits for our subsistence, it is practicable to equalize our supply and consumption. But, to go beyond this, and to force consumption beyond our certain supply, would be most probably impracticable, and certainly absurd, because it could only lead to future privation. The enemies' decrees are levelled against us, not against his own colonies, or those of his humble allies; and the produce of our conquests has, hitherto, whether with his connivance or against his will, made its way to the foreign markets. Unfortunately, the means of enabling us to enforce this exportation, excepting in regard to Martinique, were quite neglected; and the Dutch and Danish colonists have obtained a right to share, with our own, the home as well as the foreign market; so that Napoleon still has it perhaps in his power, by increased vigilance, to encumber us with a glut to that amount. But, with regard to his own colony, he is powerless; he cannot command our consumption; and, unless the object of his wishes be promoted

moted by the co-operation of our own government, the mischiefs resulting from a ruined agriculture must fall on those who were, and must probably again become his own subjects.

We now proceed to the examination of the pamphlets before us; but, as Mr. Spence's leading opinion is that which we have hitherto attempted to combat, we must confine ourselves to a few remarks on some of his arguments, after simply stating the points which he supposes himself to have proved to the satisfaction of his readers. These are, that 'no increase of national wealth or revenue is derived from the home consumption of sugar and rum, which articles form nine tenths of the produce of the West Indies'—and, that 'we do not at present, nor have we any rational prospect that we shall in future, gain any accession of wealth' from the sale of these articles to foreigners (p. 108.) Mr. Spence was aware that his readers might possibly be startled by the first of these propositions, and has accordingly stated, and attempted to answer, in p. 96, an objection which would naturally be made to it.

'It may be asked, says he, where is the difference between the wealth which all allow is brought into existence by the growth of corn, and that which is brought into existence by the growth of sugar? Why not then admit, that the sugar-planter contributes to the national wealth, as well as the farmer?—The simple reason why the production of sugar and rum has not the same title to be regarded as an increase of national wealth with that of wheat and potatoes, is, that the latter serve as the *food of man*, and that by performing this valuable service they may be transmuted into the most valuable wealth; whereas the former merely serve as a *temporary gratification of the palate*, and leave no trace of their existence when consumed.'

Now, we must beg leave to enter our protest against this mode of proving a political paradox by means of a medical theory. Mr. Spence may disbelieve, in his maturer age, what he probably knew as a child—viz. that 'those who consume sugar consume on that account less of other kinds of food,' but he was bound to support his opinion by argument, and this he has not done. And the truth of his second proposition cannot, we think, be established, until he shall have shewn why the exchange of colonial produce for hemp, iron, timber, &c. is less beneficial than any other mode of obtaining those articles.

In discussing the question of duties, he begins by observing that as the British consumer pays the whole tax in addition to

the regulating market price which is fixed by the foreign purchaser, it is absurd to contend that any part of it falls on the planter. Then, having remarked that in Sir W. Young's tables the consumption is stated as greater in 1804, when the price of sugar was high, than in the preceding year when it was low, he wishes his readers to believe that high price does not diminish consumption. Lastly, he contends that if the duties were lowered, a corresponding fall of price would take place, so that nothing would be directly gained by the grower, and that, unless the whole tax were repealed no sensible augmentation would be made to the actual consumption. Now, in the first place, we conceive that no man has ever supposed that the tax is levied in kind, whilst the sugar is in the hands of the grower, or that it is not paid by the British consumer; but it is evident that the faculties of the said consumer are limited; that the utmost price which he is able to pay in addition to the tax may be insufficient to leave any profit to the grower, who, on this supposition is just as much impoverished as if the duty had been directly levied upon him; and as this case has been made out, it appears that the planters have a right to complain. Secondly, Mr. Spence might have known that 1804 was a year of glut, and that Sir W. Young had inadvertently used the word *consumed* instead of the words *retained for home consumption*. Thirdly, if the duties were reduced, the immediate effect of that reduction would be beneficial in every case, and it seems to be nearly indifferent whether an increased consumption or a direct profit to the planter is the result. We know that the last tax imposed on sugar has not been levied; we know that the present duty has been rendered effective solely by the surrender of the grower's profits; we know that it cannot be much longer thus supported; we know that during 20 years the home consumption was kept below its natural level by the operation of high prices, and that it has been augmented, by the effect of low prices, by at least 70,000 hogsheads since 1795; why then is it improbable that a repeal of the war duties should bring the consumption to a level with our import from the British colonies? If the experiment succeeded, the revenue would be no loser, because a tax of 20s. on this import would yield two millions, and the actual tax having been usually levied on about two-thirds of the import has done no more. But, says Mr. Spence, (p. 31) any one who is aware of the *extended consumption* of sugar in this country, will be unwilling to admit that even a deduction of the whole duty would increase its consumption at any such rate as to take off

off the whole of the vast surplus with which the market is now glutted. Now it is precisely on this ground that we entertain an opposite opinion; it is because Great Britain contains a numerous body of consumers, individually, limited by the price to a small demand, that we believe the consumption to be capable of successive augmentations by every successive reduction of duty and consequently of price.

But the most curious article in Mr. Spence's pamphlet, and that with which we will close our remarks on it, is his discussion of the proposal to permit, in our colonies, a limited barter of sugar for articles of American produce. He argues, indeed, (p. 49) '*without decidedly expressing his opinion* whether such a measure would be consistent with a due regard for national policy and individual interest,' and certainly it would have been strange if the professed disciple of Adam Smith and of the Economists had openly contended that any relaxation of that severe monopoly which he declares the colonies to have *enjoyed*, would be subversive of our national wealth; yet he brings forward the whole array of popular topics, the navigation acts, the shipping interests, and all the jargon of the mercantile school, and by variously modified calculations in pounds, shillings and pence, undertakes to prove that a direct barter has no advantages over a circuitous trade. He does, indeed, admit in words, that the colonial is a *home trade*, and that our colonies are only provinces of the empire; but he seems to think that there is, somewhere, a point of longitude and latitude where British subjects ought to lose the privilege of exchanging the produce of their industry for that of their neighbours; that our distant settlements are of no use but to grow mahogany, which is convertible into solid and permanent wealth; that their distance is, in some respects, their best attribute, because seas encourage British shippers, as roads encourage waggoners; but he is quite sure, and he declares this with peculiar triumph (in page 94) that Great Britain, in as much as she promotes the cultivation of tropical plants in a tropical climate, *exactly resembles* a nobleman who raises pines in a hot-house. Armed with these opinions, he reprobates in succession every measure proposed for the relief of the West Indians, whose distress, he thinks, can receive neither diminution nor aggravation from peace or war, from liberty or restriction, from an increase or decrease of foreign or domestic demand, or from the repeal or imposition of duties, but must of necessity be cured by a decrease of import.

A very few words will suffice for all that we wish to say on the subject of the 'permanent remedy' suggested in a letter from a West Indian merchant. We perfectly agree with him in his general assumption that 'the growth of sugar in the British West Indies must be confined to the home consumption of Great Britain and Ireland, and that in the present state of affairs, while the British planter is not allowed to contend upon equal terms with the foreign colonist in the European market, it is the only remedy which can be applied to the evil he has so long laboured under.' But we have given our reasons for thinking that it is much easier and more advantageous to increase the consumption of an article of food, than materially to lessen the supply. Every diminution of extravagant cultivation, every reduction of unprofitable labour must be right; and the measures recommended by this writer are such as well deserve the serious attention of our colonists; but we cannot help viewing with distrust any 'effectual and permanent' specific; and we do not believe that any retrenchments of extravagance in our colonies, can do away the effects of a glut which the interruption of commerce has occasioned, in a market inundated by the sudden contributions of our late conquests, in addition to the great regular supply produced by the progressive improvement of colonial agriculture.