

THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 1736.

Gentlemen,



HILE the Drinkers, as well as Venders of Spirituous Liquors, are struggling under the pressure of the Act; and many are forming Schemes for their relief, in hopes the Parliament will take their Case into farther consideration the next session: it may not be amiss to take a view of the several methods hitherto proposed; in doing which I

shall remark the conveniencies or inconveniencies of each; and afterwards propose an expedient of my own, wherein I shall have a particular regard to some of the inferior classes of Retailers, whose Case has been almost wholly neglected by the Schemists, and yet seems to deserve the compassion and indulgence of the Legislature as much as, if not more than any of the rest.

The methods hitherto proposed have been adapted by the several Writers according to the causes, to which out of interest, prejudice, or real concern for the welfare of the subject, they have attributed the evil arising from the abuse of home distilled Liquors: which causes are chiefly three, viz. the nature of the Liquor, the number of Retailers, and the cheapness of the Liquors.

Most of those who ascribe the evil to the first cause, consider Geneva, as a far more pernicious, inflaming, and at the same time bewitching Spirit than any other, and are for that reason for destroying the whole Distillery at once. But their notion of the qualities of this Liquor is as idle as their Remedy is wicked and cruel; for there is nothing in the composition of Gin, which makes it more hurtful than French Brandy; and as for its inticing quality, either Brandy or Rum must be vastly more agreeable to the palates of the generality of people. These Virtuosi judge of the Liquor by the effect it has when drank to excess. But would not Brandy, Rum, and especially Arrack; be attended with as bad consequences if drank to excess in the same manner?

But supposing Gin was altogether as bad as they represent it; what a monstrous remedy would they propose! To ruin 100,000 families at once, is a work only becoming Tartars and Savages, who have no sentiments of humanity, compassion or mercy. NERO himself, who withed the Romans had but one head, that he might cut it off at a stroke, could scarce think of a more cruel expedient. What desolation and confusion would be introduced in the nation, were the power in such arbitrary hands?

Men who never make other people's case their own, are ever ready to impose hardships which they do not feel themselves; or to suppress any publick business which they have no interest in supporting, however detrimental or destructive to others. An Usurer or Lawyer cries, *Down with the Distillery, the bane of the nation*; nor minds what the Distillers say in their own behalf. But was there an attempt made for suppressing at once Usury or the Malpractice of the Law, those notorious banes of the nation, who would be more forward to vindicate and support them than those very Usurers and Lawyers? the evils might increase till the whole nation was ruined, before they would once open their mouths to suppress them. Which shews the true motive of such men's zeal against any vice or evil, is not any real view to the public good, but some particular interest, caprice or disgust. And why otherwise should they have the health of the dregs of the people more at heart, than the health of one part of the middling sort of people, and the livelihood of another part.

This Remedy therefore, on account of its extreme violence, has been justly condemned by all honest men, who are most averse to Spirituous Liquors; and can never possibly be establish'd by Law, so long as any other expedient can be thought of.

Those who attribute the evil to the number of Retailers, propose the making a considerable reduction of them; which they would effect, either by limiting Retailers to certain classes, or else by limiting the number of Retailers in every class.

Of those who are for limiting the classes of Retailers, some would confine the selling of Spirituous Liquors to Distillers: others are for allowing all those who deal in Spirituous Liquors only, and excluding those who sell any thing besides.

If the first of these methods was to take place, the ill consequence would be little inferior to that which would follow from the suppression of the whole Distillery.

The greater number of Retailers would be sacrificed to the interest of a few, which would only enrich the Distillers without remedying the evil; nay, a greater evil would probably ensue, by setting so many thousand families adrift, which must necessarily increase the number of our Beggars, Highwaymen, and Street Robbers, an evil equal to that of the Gin already. Should the Distillers, especially after propagating Retailers as much as they have done, desire any thing so barbarous and inhumane, they would justly deserve no favour themselves from the Legislature.

The last method, which is by far the milder of the two, would yet ruin a world of people, and what is still worse, would bring the punishment almost wholly on the innocent. For 'tis well known that several thousand families, many of them very numerous, subsist by keeping Coffee-houses, and Chandlers shops; which requiring neither much money nor experience to set up, afford an easy means of relief to indigent people, who being reduced either by infirmities or misfortunes, or else bred to no trade, are unable to get their livelihood any other way: and therefore such sorts of business ought to be encouraged. But the great increase of them making it difficult to live, they are constrained to have recourse to the selling of Spirituous Liquors also, in order to help out; and after all, their whole gain scarce suffices to keep the majority of them from starving.

However that be, it is certain the first sort of business is so great a check on the latter, that one hardly ever sees any of those houses or shops frequented by loose and disorderly people, such as are indeed too often found in the inferior Gin-shops and Ale-houses, to which the evil is principally and almost solely owing: the sight of such persons would drive away customers, and ruin their other trade: nor does ever perhaps a soldier set his foot within their doors; excepting the soldier, who to the great distress and often breaking of many, is quartered on them.

It is evident therefore, that these 2 classes of Retailers contribute but little to the evil in comparison of the rest; and consequently deserve most indulgence, tho' they have commonly been treated with least of all, for the very reason why they ought to be treated better.

'Tis true, there lies a particular objection against Chandlers selling distilled Liquors: namely, that their shops give servant maids an opportunity of tippling, which is a very popular, but idle objection. For supposing (far from granting) that all servant maids were Gin-drinkers, is there no way of restraining them but by sending so many thousand families a begging? can't their masters or mistresses send them immediately to the bakers, cheesemongers, grocers, &c. for what they want? No, says an Objector, that would be very inconvenient: Chandlers shops are useful; and if we send our servants to other places for what we want, they will, if they be fond of drams, call in at a Gin-shop by the way. But would they not do the same in case the Chandlers sold none? whose shops they would for that very reason abandon. So that the evil would not be remedied much, if at all, by prohibiting Chandlers to sell it; and the hardship would be so much the greater, since they do not live so much by those who keep servants, as those who keep none. It may be truly said, that scarce one in 20 who buy things of the Chandlers keep servants. Now can any thing be more extravagantly unreasonable than to ruin 20 families, that the servant maid or maids of one, might have no opportunity of coming at a Dram. But indeed the case would be quite otherwise, for if the greater part of the Chandlers shops were down, house-keepers would lose the convenience without getting rid of the inconveniency, so long as Drams were to be had elsewhere.

The consequences of limiting the number of Retailers in every class, may be better or worse than those of limiting the classes themselves, according as the duty laid on Licences, which is the means proposed for limiting them, is more or less; if the duty be very great, it may amount to a total prohibition. In what better condition are Inn-keepers and Victualers, by being entitled to the benefits of Licences which they cannot purchase, than Chandlers who seem to be wholly excluded from selling by retail? and supposing the duty much more moderate, numbers would be ruined who stand most in need of support; while this method tends only to enrich the rest, without remedying the evil in any tolerable degree. For were 2-thirds of the Retailers shops down, the Gin-bibbers would find enough left for their purpose still. How eager are they at present to find out the shops which ven-

ture to sell Drams? not caring how far they go for it, so they can meet with any at last.

And after all, perhaps it is not the number of Retailers, which makes the evil abound; the greatest mischief they do is to hurt one another. Put Gin but out of the common people's reach, and every house may be suffered to have a Gin-shop.

But were there a real necessity for reducing their number, methinks it ought to be done by degrees; and that not by suppressing any of the present Retailers, who do not keep disorderly houses, but rather by hindering the farther increase of them; and having limited the number of houses that were to be licenced, to suppress them as fast as the present occupants deceased, who had not children to succeed them in the business.

The last cause assigned for the evil complained of, is the cheapness of home distilled Liquors; and those who ascribe it rather to this than either of the other 2 causes, are indisputably in the right: but like the rest, they are divided about the nature of the Remedy, some being for a violent, others a mild one.

Those who are for applying extreme Remedies, are for laying an exorbitant duty on distilled Liquors in general that are retailed. Some have proposed no less than 40 or 50 shillings a gallon; which is in effect to prohibit under colour of suffering them, and to suppress the use rather than the abuse of them.

On the other hand, those who are for moderate methods, and have a tenderness for the Retailers, as well as the welfare of the common people at heart, propose only laying such a duty on all home distilled Liquors, as might raise the price of them to that of foreign Brandy and Rum; the dearness of which, was ever a bar against the abuse of them, as experience shews, and all agree.

Thus a stop will be put to the evil, at least in a great degree (which is all that need be done) without doing any mischief: the Seller will have a liberty of retailing his Liquors still; and the vulgar, on whose account the Act was made, of buying Drams without much danger of debauching themselves: because as much money will go for one dram then as for several before; and his stock will be out before he can get himself half seas-over, as they call it. 'Tis true, the Seller may mix his Liquors with water, in order to sell them cheaper; but still the Buyer will have no more Spirits for his money than he had before; besides, the effects of the quantity will be weakened, both by the mixture, and being taken at 2 different times; so that such an evasion of the Act would do more good than hurt.

Here then the Remedy would be effectual, and yet not violent. No one would have cause to complain more than another; all would have an equal chance of getting their living: the advantage and disadvantage would be pretty equally distributed amongst them; the innocent would suffer no more than the guilty, and for the future would meet with support, while the latter would by degrees be suppressed.

It may still be said by some, that this is a violent method, as it lays a restraint both on the Seller and Buyer: but it must be considered, that a desperate disease ought to be cured by some means, and this is the mildest Remedy that can possibly be thought of. The Distillers must not expect to have a liberty of destroying the healths of the people, because to be deprived of it will affect their interest. They ought to be content with being put on a foot with the Sellers of Foreign Brandy and Rum; and consider that some of the inferior classes of Retailers, who are less able to bear it, will be the greatest sufferers.

On the other hand, others think this Remedy would not be effectual enough. Even some who have proposed it as an effectual Remedy, are yet for laying a small duty on Licences, in order to lessen the number of Retailers, tho' without any necessity by their own account. So little regard most people shew for the poor, who have never experienced themselves the misery of being reduced, with their families, to want.

But I am against lessening the number of the Retailers for the reasons already given, and the rather since a small duty on Licences will do it; for this shews how near those people are already to starving, who should be deprived of a livelihood so easily: and therefore I think such ought to be treated with indulgence, and as those persons deserve who have contributed least to the evil: for there is no danger, but they who entertain disorderly and vagrant people, will always be able to pay a small Licence.

Were Licences thought necessary, methinks the duty,