

**A LEGACY TO
LABOURERS; WITH A
DEDICATION TO SIR
ROBERT PEEL, BART**

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A Legacy to Labourers; With a Dedication to Sir Robert Peel, Bart by William Cobbett

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WILLIAM COBBETT

**A LEGACY TO
LABOURERS; WITH A
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ROBERT PEEL, BART**

A

LEGACY TO LABOURERS;

AN ARGUMENT, SHOWING THE RIGHT OF THE POOR TO RELIEF
FROM THE LAND; ALSO AN ENQUIRY AS TO WHAT IS THE
RIGHT OF THE LORDS, BARONETS, AND SQUIRES TO THE
OWNERSHIP OF THE LANDS OF ENGLAND: IN SIX
LETTERS, ADDRESSED TO THE WORKING
PEOPLE OF ENGLAND.



With a Dedication to Sir Robert Peel, Bart.

WILLIAM COBBETT, M.P.
FOR OLDHAM.

"A due care for the relief of the poor is an act of great civil prudence and political wisdom: for poverty in itself is apt to emasculate the minds of men, or, at least, it makes men tumultuous and unquiet. Where there are many very poor, the rich cannot long or safely continue such."—SIR MATTHEW HALE, *Tract touching Provision for the Poor. Preface.* 1688.

A NEW EDITION.

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STATIONERS' HALL COURT.

MDCCLXXXII.

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DEDICATION.

TO SIR ROBERT PEEL, BARONET.

Wolsley Hall, 10 Dec., 1834.

SIR,

DEDICATIONS are, generally, things of a very unmeaning character. Whatever this may be in other respects, it shall not be without a meaning: it shall state to you, without flattery and without rudeness; FIRST, my reasons for writing and publishing this book; and, SECOND, my reasons for dedicating it to you.

My reasons for writing and publishing this book are these: it has always been my wish, that the institutions of England and her fundamental laws should remain *unchanged*. Not that I was unable to discover, in the order of nobility, and the circumstances connected with that order; in the distribution of the immense property of the church; in some other really properly called *institutions* of the country, things which I could have wished to be otherwise, than to be as they were: but there was so much of good in the institutions which we inherited from our fathers, that I always looked at any change in them with

great apprehension. But, with regard to the *innovations* on those institutions: with regard to the monstrous encroachments of the aristocracy and of the usurers, within the last fifty years especially, it was impossible for me not to wish for a change, and as impossible for me not to resolve on assisting in effecting that change, if it were to be effected. It was impossible for me to look at the new treason laws, new felony laws, Bourbon-police laws, laws violating the compact between the people and the clergy, new and multiplied laws hostile to the freedom of the press, hundreds of acts of parliament, subjecting men's persons and property to be disposed of, to a certain extent, without trial by jury; the monstrous partiality in taxation; a standing army in time of peace, greater than was ever before needed in time of war: new crimes in abundance, created by act of parliament; new punishments for old crimes; employment of spies justified in the House of Parliament; or, at least, no punishment inflicted on any one for being a spy, or for having employed spies.

It was impossible for me to behold these things; to hold a pen at the same time, and to know that a good many of my countrymen were ready to read what I wrote; it was impossible for me to be thus situated, and not exert myself in an endeavour to put a stop to these encroachments, and to bring my country back to something like the government which existed when I was born: to put a stop to the Bourbon innovations, and to bring England back again to English government.

I was in hopes that the "*Reformed* Parliament" would, at once, have set to work to sweep away these innovations. Not only did it not do this, but it set itself to work to add to them in number, and to enlarge those that already existed. I pass over twenty instances of this, and come to that great and terrible innovation, the POOR-LAW BILL. Long before I was in Parliament, I saw the deep-laid scheme gradually preparing for execution. When it was matured and brought before us, I opposed it with all my might. I did every thing that I could do to prevent it from being passed.

In this case how stood the matter? There was a proposition to abrogate (though not by name), in effect, those rights of the poor which had always existed, since England had been called England; which rights had been so solemnly recognised by the Act of the 43rd of ELIZABETH; which act had existed upwards of two hundred years, and which had seen, during its existence, the most orderly, the most independent, yet the most obedient; the best fed and the best clad, and, at the same time, the most industrious, and most adroit working people that ever lived upon the face of the earth; being, along with these qualities, the best parents, the best children, the most faithful servants, the most respectful in their demeanour towards superiors, that ever formed a part of any civil community.

And, sir, what was THE GROUND stated for abrogating this law; for uprooting the old and amiable parochial governments of England? What was the ground stated for the doing of this thing; for the

swEEPING away of this government, carried on by neighbours for their mutual good and happiness; what was the ground stated for the tearing to pieces of this family government, and subjecting thirteen thousand parishes to the absolute will of three Commissioners, stuck up in London by the servants of the king, and removable at their pleasure? Why, the grounds were as follow, as stated by the Lord Chancellor, who was backed by Lord MADNOR and by the Duke of WELLINGTON, and a majority of the two Houses, you, sir, being in the majority of one of those Houses.

There were many pretences urged; many assertions made; but the main ground, which, like the rod of AARON, devoured all the rest, was, that, *if this Bill were not passed the poor-rates would soon swallow up the estates of the lords and the gentlemen*; and that it was necessary to be passed, in order to *save their estates*; for that, unless it were passed, there was no *security for property*.

Often as I have disproved these assertions; often as I have shown that the increased amount of poor-rates has not been so great, nor any thing like so great, as the increased amount of rent and taxes: often as I have shown that the inevitable tendency of the Bill is, to bring down the farmers and labourers of England to the state of those in Ireland; often as I have shown these things, I must show them again here; because I intend this little book to go into every parish in this whole kingdom; and to be in all the industrious classes (who alone give strength to the country, and who furnish the rich with all their riches), the YOUNG