II. Hulk Mortality—Sinecure made to screen it.

I thought I had done troubling Your Lordship about the Hulks: but fates have ordered otherwise. Accident has this moment put into my hands the interesting publication of Mr Nield. Visit paid to the Hulks in March last, by the author and Sir Henry Mildmay; {the official screens broke through,} and among the results the following—

No 1. Portsmouth Harbour. *Captivity Hulk*, March 15th 1782.a Many with ruptures; some with trusses: ‘Sore legs’, and a number unable to work in consequence ..... Cause, according to the Surgeon, ‘an impoverished habit, and want of proper care’: viz: during their confinement in the Gaols: in those Gaols which had been kept crowded by Lord Pelham contrary to law, in pursuance of the plan laid down by the Duke of Portland. Mortality, however, as yet a trifle: ‘not one half’, as great in proportion as on board the Langston Hulks, which see:—in a twelvemonth, not so much as an eighth part of the whole.b

a Neild’s *Account of Society for discharge of small debts*, pp. 307–322.

b ib. p. 311.

No 2. Langston Harbour; *La Fortunée*, March 16th 1802. ‘Hospital ward ... Persons in all stages of disease and with all complaints .... intermixed together. ‘Water penetrated into it, through the floor of the quarter deck. Straw in the sacking almost reduced to powder and full of vermin. Decks extremely low, much crowded: no proper ventilation: many of the ports nailed down, and could not be opened.’—

‘Divine service ... a small part only of the convicts can have access to it: ... Captain never attends himself.’ Deaths in 1797, nine out of 600; in 1801, 120 out of 500: not quite one in four. In 1802, before the first quarter was at an end, (viz: March 16th) deaths 34; though the number alive was by that time reduced to three hundred. Number of the dead for the whole year, supposing no such visit, and the mortality continuing at the same rate, 165 out of the 300:—more than half the number of the living.—Nobly done, Duke of Portland and Lord Pelham!—how convenient to Mr Addington in his accounts! What a relief to the only grievance that presses upon most noble minds, that ‘*the expences attending the custody*’ of these wretches, are ‘*borne by government*’.

Of the survivors

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Invalids or cripples on deck | 50 |
| Confined to their beds | 11 |
| In the Hospital Ward | 11 |
| Total Invalids out of 300  But besides these, ‘20 of the worst invalids recently removed.’ | 72 |
| Invalids, therefore, out of 320 | 92 |

All this sickness is not without its consolations: ‘discipline, considerably improved’: ‘of late’, no ‘insurrection’—‘*of late*’, ‘none of them had been shot’. Here, as in New South Wales, such is the use of famine. Among the dying, insurrection difficult: among the dead, impossible. Erasmus sang the praise of folly: who shall sing the praise of famine? To whom, if sung, shall it be dedicated? What rivalry—what generous rivalry—between Your Lordship, and the Duke of Portland,— and Mr ———and Mr Pitt? Who has done most to furnish materials? By famine, budgets are eased: without famine, noble Lords could not propagate the Gospel at their ease: by famine, noble Lords oblige their friends.

Such was the state of things in a ship ‘manifestly prepared’ (say the Visitors) ‘for our reception’.

Labour and expence of inspection by Sr Henry Mildmay and Mr Neild: auspices and sufferance by Lord Pelham. What a troublesome man, this Sir Henry! What a troublesome man, this Mr Neild! why could not they have kept quiet!

With whom did the enquiry originate? With any of the gentlemen who, in Your Lordship’s office, by one name or another, Secretary, Under Secretary, Secretary’s Law Clerk, Secretary’s Law Clerk’s Clerk, are so well paid for looking after these things? No, my Lord, the wretches might have been rotten, the whole hulk-full of them, as, at the rate they were rotting, half of them would have been by this time, before any of these. Under [...?] would have thought of disturbing the slumbers of the Subahdar by so much as a whisper about what was passing in the *Black Hole*: in the Black Hole which, exceeded as it has been in mortality—eclipsed as it is in barbarity, as much as the barbarity of a night is eclipsed by the barbarity of months and almost years, will henceforward yield in proverbiality to Lord Pelham’s and Mr King’s and Mr Baldwin’s Hulk: the Hulk *La Fortunée*: for such, by a horrible catachresis, happens to be the denomination of this ever memorable scene of official barbarity and negligence. Figures of rhetoric would here be thrown away: figures of arithmetic say every thing for themselves.

If, then, with no one of the official persons who were so well paid for it, with whom, then, did the enquiry originate? Remotely and in the first instance with a human Jailor, whose duty led him to bring Convicts to this Hulk.a In the first instance, with this unpaid Jailor: in the next place with an unpaid gentleman—with a gentleman to whom, because there were unpaid gentlemen to whom such intelligence would (it was known) be as interesting, as to the so well-paid gentlemen it would have been indifferent, if not worse than indifferent, the information was addressed. I speak of Mr Neild, a second Howard, who, with all the zeal, with all the munificence, and more than all the gentleness of his illustrious predecessor, has spoken the word—has started noble game, and caused the mask of humanity to fall off from faces of higher rank, than those of the subordinate tyrants, whom it fell to the lot of his predecessor to hunt out of their holes.

a Mr Chapple, Keeper of the New Prison, Bodmin. Letter dated 5th Feby 1802. In less than a year and a half, ending that day, out of 10 Convicts whom he had brought there, ‘6 dead, the other four looking very poorly’.*a* It is on that occasion that, in regard to the whole number confined in that same Hulk, he learns what is mentioned by Sir Henry Mildmay and Mr Neald:*b*—Out of 500, living at the commencement of the Year 1801, deaths 120, at the end of it. The survivors, upon his enquiry, say they are ‘half-starved’: appearances speak the same thing:—Officers plump and rosy. Would this be the case, if mere pestilence, without famine, were the cause?—The question is not mine: to the humane and intelligent informer belongs the credit of it.

*a* Neild, p. 322.

*b* Neild p. 315.

Note. J.B’s intercourse with Ld P.

On this score I claim to have some merit with Your Lordship. I have not to accuse myself of any such personal breaches of Your Lordship’s peace. For my own sake, for Your Lordship’s, I have never put Your Lordship to any such trouble as that of forgetting me, or Your Lordship’s porters to that of pronouncing his Lordship invisible. I was not to learn that, to ennobled guests, a poor relation is not a more unwelcome visitant than an impoverished host: impoverished by what means soever: most of all if by oppression, the continuance of which had been passed on together with the seals of office. The deluge had scarce begun to subside when I sent a dove out of the ark: the dove came fluttering back to me: but no olive-branch was in its mouth. In plain English, the General, my Brother, after permission asked, and for a special purpose declared though not specified, attended on Stratton Street. That Your Lordship was not at home to be seen by him, though at home, was a message brought out to him by a servant: that there ever would be a time when Your Lordship would be or might be at home was not said.

Though by this and other letters, when I have been troublesome to Your Lordship, it has been by proxy; and that proxy a spontaneous one. First came four words, then four letters: since the value of words and letters has been apparent, Sir Charles has turned Sheriff, and the new made power[?] has vied in invisib[il]ity with John Doe and Richard Roe.

A private gentleman could point to Lord Pelham’s office; it required a Member of Parliament, if not two, to force the intrenchments of it. Mortality (says one of them to whom the human Jailor’s letter had been shewn), mortality is raging in the Hulks: Sir Henry Mildmay—Mr Neild—were it but possible—would look at it. The visit not being to be prevented, nothing was left to persons in office (Gentlemen or Noble Lords, I know not exactly which) but to be delighted with it.

They were delighted with it accordingly. They had heard rumours—they were distressed—they did not know what to do about it—they did not know whom to trust—it was a happy opportunity—a real acquisition to have somebody to look into the business who was not in office ... An order, then, for the two visitors to take with them … O no! it was not necessary—they need not trouble themselves—it should meet them there.—It should meet them there! accordingly it did meet them there:—and why?—that every thing not fit to be seen might first be put out at sight as much as possible: that part of the filth might be shoveled away:—that eatable food for the moment take place of uneatable: that the plague of famine might for the time be stayed: that in the motley company there, each person might have his part given him to act: that instructions might be given to one class, menaces to another: that every mouth might have a padlock put to it:—that a varnish of some sort or other might be put upon every object—that a mask of some sort or other might be put on every face.

Were not these the motives? Then why the order refused to be *delivered*? why was it determined to be *sent*? Why was it that the visit was so ‘*manifestly prepared for*’? Why was it that, at the expence of a virtual confession of male-practice below, of connivance and protection above—of guilt in both places, the principle of *unexpected visitation*—so fundamental a principle in economics—a principle so universally recognized as such—was thus openly violated without so much as a pretence?

The visit paid, the facts ascertained, report drawn up, the result is whispered to Ld Pelham. His Lordship starts out of his sleep. What does he then?—Does he change the system? Does he bethink himself of law? of engagement of a system of unintermitted inspection? of appropriate separation and aggregation? of universal industry? Does it occurr to him to transfer the undestroyed remnant from the clutches of their destroyers to the hands of a guardian already named by Parliament? of a keeper acting under thousands of eyes? of a life-insurer who would lose £50 and more by every escape—£100 and more by every death? of a system and a person he had so often been reminded of by higher persons, as often discussed with tokens of pretended approbation and manufactured smiles? In this way or in any other way, does he make, or for a moment think of making, any the smallest change in the system of management?—or rather of destruction carried on on pretence of management? No: he employs a gentleman to look at it. Does he abate the nuisance?—No: he creates a place. A page or two and we shall see what *sort* of a place, what the *object*, and what the *fruit* of it. An Act is necessary. The visit is on the 16th of March, and already on the 24th the Act has passed the sceptre. There is a time for all things. When is the time for waking? when a place is to be created. When is the time for sleeping? When Parliament is to be obey’d, engagements fulfilled, reformation and economy planted, pestilence and famine stayed, and a system established which puts an end to places.

The Act is passed, my Lord, and what is done by it? Matters of ‘extreme and pressing necessity’ are supposed; and by whom is the remedy to be applied? By ‘*the Justices of his Majesty’s Court of King’s Bench*’—by a body, a most competent one while it exists, but which, for one knows not how many months out of the twelve, has no existence. In Circuit time, for example, while dispersed all over England, then it is they are ‘to take order’ about a hulk[?]—to act together with hundreds of miles between them, or the mischief which is so ‘extreme and pressing’ is to run on its course.

Duty of the Inspector, ‘*one visit in each quarter*’: add ‘*at least*’, ‘*or oftener if occasion shall require*’. Salary carefully limited: not to exceed £350 a year for gentleman and clerk: and then ‘*for all charges and expences*’:—£87: 10s a time for *four* times, and not a penny for a fifth. In this state of things, what is the occasion that shall require it? *Time* for going, if to any purpose, when *unexpected*: *duty* to go, if *use* were the object of it, at such *times*: penalty for the performance of such duty, trouble and costs. Suppose a call for such a visit—for the exercise of any such duty—by whom shall the call be heard?—By the Inspector? every journey he takes is a fine upon him: so much as the charge of the journey amounts to: so much of his fixed salary is cut out by it. By whom, then? By Noble Lords, or by Gentlemen who are supposed to think for them?—When it was their own business, they thought nothing about the matter: they destroy’d men by hundreds, for want of thought. Henceforward, now that they have made it other people’s business to think of it—now that they have made a pretence for themselves for not thinking of it—a pretence which they never had till now—is it now that they will begin to think of it?—they of whom, upon the most favourable of all possible constructions, the best that can be said is, that they never bestowed a thought upon it before?

Thus much as to *principle*: now for experience. The time is short: yet not so short, but that experience crowds into it. Under Lord Pelham, if Remedy is a sluggard, Abuse shews the speed which it is in the power of encouragement to produce.

In solemn forms of Majesty, men are ordered for execution by units: by justice, they are starved by hundreds: by neglect, they are starved with [...?] without [...?] by scores and hundreds.

Would I have starved them? am I so fond of starving men, as to give £100 a-piece for the pleasure of it. I am [...?] selfish [...?] in every thing but that character of superior intelligence and wisdom which so odious to little men in great places.

The place being to be made, by whom was it to be filled? By any body that had the *will* to fulfill the duties of it? by any body who had so much as the *power*?—Alas! no:—under Lord Pelham, such requisites are not required.

Had the removal of the abuse been the object, one description of persons were marked out, by the nature of the case, as the persons to be *advised with* at least, about the choice. These, it is scarce necessary to say, were the persons, from whose spontaneous and disinterested exertions knowledge of the existence of the mischief had been obtained. In that quarter appeared at any rate the fairest presumption in regard to *will*—the clearest proof of a *disposition* at least, not to grudge exertions towards the application of a remedy, howsoever that disposition might be over-ruled by other circumstances. From the mere circumstance of a man’s having given information of a mischief, the conclusion is certainly far enough from being a necessary one, that, whether obtainable or not obtainable, he would himself [be] a fit person to be employed in the application of a remedy. A person so circumstanced is, however, the first person the idea of whom would naturally present itself in that view, supposing him not set aside by other specific considerations. I mean always in the eye of any official person, to whom the cure of the mischief was either the sole object or so much as the primary object in view. To mind contemplating the subject in any such point of view, a man, in whose instance such *primâ facie* evidence of fitness had manifested itself, would naturally present himself as standing first upon the list of candidates.

*Principles* standing thus, now as to *facts*. Of two persons *competent* in the highest degree to do the business, men above all exception *willing* to do the business, in at least one instance, (for they had done it in one instance) indication had been given by experience. Inspectors spontaneous, zealous, gratuitous; two for his one office. The place being to be made, was it offered [to] either of these gentlemen? was it offered to Sir Henry Mildmay? Was it offered to Mr Neild?—the negative is but too notorious. If, in one of the two instances, situation in life was such as to exclude hope of acceptance, that could not be the case in the other.

Thirty years ago, the indefatigable and gratuitous Agent of the Charity for the relief of Debtors, travelled the first of two circuits three years before even Howard had begun his. I correct myself. I called Neild a second Howard. With more propriety, I might have called Howard a second Neild. Howard sunk under a Jail fever, Neild has survived one. The exertions of Howard have long since received their quietus from above: Neild’s seem but to encrease with age. Five such circuits in one year adorn the annals of 1802. His Honourable Colleague—a Member of the legislature, and not an idle one—a man standing already in full light—could derive nothing like illustration from a hand like mine.

In a station like your Lordship’s, there have been men that would have knelt to both these gentlemen, rather than not have gained one of them for the office. In the instance of Mr Neild at any rate, whether he would or would not have accepted of the office could not be known, to a certainty at least, without asking: accordingly he was not asked. The experiment would have been too dangerous: it was a case not to be trifled with. Seeing how he had been occupying himself, and what he lived for, would any prudent man have answered for his non-acceptance? Year after year his active beneficence had embraced and covered the whole island: who could answer for his not consenting to charge himself with these two or three spots. Year after year, he had gone through the same sort of business gratis: who could answer for his refusal to undertake for a portion of it for a price. Year after year, he had done the same sort of business without authority: who could say but that, with or without ordinary recompense, he might have accepted of that authority, the effect of which could not but be to second, in such a variety of ways, his generous endeavours. Below—above—every where—authority, even though it were without power, is of use. *Below*, it commands information: *above*, it gives a claim to notice.

Were these gentlemen, or either of them, so much as consulted with on the choice?—Nor that, neither. How could they have been? Under the auspices of Lord Pelham—under the administration of the gentleman on the other side of the wainscot— places are made for gentlemen, not gentlemen searched out for places. Is it not so? a page or two will soon demonstrate.

Would there have been any thing wild, speculative, incongruous, unprecedented, so much as unaccustomed, in a choice guided by considerations such as above suggested? Let us look back a little. In the case of Convicts, Howard was the first investigator of the system of abuse: Howard’s was the hand first chosen for the application of the remedy. I speak of the Penitentiary establishment in its first intended shape. In a succeeding list, to known zeal in this line of service, rank afforded an additional pledge—an additional recommendation. Where a second set of Superintendents were to be looked out for, sought or unsought, it was destined for Lord Minto and Sir Charles Bunbury: neither Lord Minto nor Sir Charles Bunbury disdained the office.

Other principles of selection guide Lord Pelham. Abuse being brought to light by these busy-bodies, what was to be done? Ingenuity of one sort is not wanting: the answer was neither difficult nor tardy. What the eye does not see, the heart will not rue. Put in a sure man and give it him in charge to cover up:—the pretence for meddling will thus be taken from all such busy-bodies. Thus (as Blackstone would have said) ‘every thing is as it should be’. By one and the same operation, abuse obtains concealment; favourites, provision; Ministers, patronage. By a metamorphosis as prompt as it was ingenious: out of the bitter thus cometh forth sweet. The busy-bodies thought to have put an end to the abuse: they thought to have served the public. Good creatures, they are compleatly taken in, compleatly jockey’d. A new screen is bought for the abuse, and the public pays for it. Lord Pelham taps the wainscoat as usual, for the gentleman by whom, whether any thing be or be not thought of, every thing at any rate is done. The wainscoat sounds: and in comes the gentleman, with a friend in his pocket for the place.

That recommendations by subordinates should be taken without enquiry is natural enough, customary enough, certainly not illegal, and so far without dispute not culpable. In the present instance, for judging of the propriety of the recommendation, and of the views which gave it birth, two points may afford some light: the one antecedent to the appointment; the other subsequent:—the person recommended for the office, and his conduct when invested with it.

The gentleman who comes out of the pocket is without dispute the friend of the wearer of the pocket out of which he comes.—What are his other titles? To me, who neither am known nor know, he is known by nothing but a name: nor even by name shall he be spoken of by me. In matters of this kind—where public money is thus disposed of—in my estimate at least, which never looks for any thing more than human in the bulk of men—not the receiver, but the donor—I had almost used another word—is to blame. What is on record—what is public—may be mentioned without reserve: and it is quite sufficient for the purpose. Lord Pelham, on coming into office, finds him a Police Magistrate at £400 a year: By one of Lord Pelham’s two exertions, to this £400 is added another £100, God knows why or wherefore: and for decency’s sake, and because it could not be done otherwise, the whole Corps of the Police—(Magistrates I mean—for as to drudges who must attend, and must understand the business, the case is different)a the whole of the privileged order—indifferents and non-favourites together, share the boon with favourites. This not being yet sufficient for so much merit—for a gentleman whom the gentleman on t’other side of the wainscoat has the happiness to number among his friends—£350 a year is in this select instance added to it: and thus it is that substantial use is derived from the aërial labours of the well-meaning busy-bodies.

a Note about the Clerks

A gentleman, whose whole time had been bought already for the public, is thus twice over paid for it: paid under the old Act, overpaid for self and Co by one of these two new Acts, overpaid again by the other of these two new Acts— by an Act made in the same breath—an Act made for the sole and separate use of this single gentleman. Two Acts made *uno flatu* for one gentleman, both of them under Lord Pelham’s auspices: both of them for a friend of the gentleman on t’other side the wainscot. One to pay a gentleman a second time for business for which, in his own estimation, as proved by the very best evidence—his own acceptance —he had been paid enough already; another to call him off from that very business, pay and *over*pay still continued. One for making the worthy Magistrate receive more money: the other for making him do less service.

In these two Acts we see the two signs of life exhibited by Ld Pelham during an administration of |^^^| months: two measures sanctioned each by an Act on purpose, and the two Acts are these. Two Acts both of them to provide for one gentleman, a gentleman already provided for in a situation always beseiged by candidates: one Act to encrease his recompense, the other to reduce his service.

But, Sir, what ground for all this? Is there to be no end of all this malice—of all these imputations—these uncandid—these envenomed—insinuations?

My Lord, my answer is as distinct as possible. Four features—four antecedent features— betray, even of themselves, the complexion of the business.

First, the existence of such an abuse—and for such a length of time—year after year— under the very *noses* (the term is a coarse one—under the *eyes* I should have said, had gentlemen chosen to have eyes—) of such a pyramid of official personages as those whose duty it was to prevent it.

Secondly, the neglect—a neglect too undecorous to have been manifested without cogent reasons—the compleat might shewn to the only persons, by whom the mischief had been pointed out—the only persons by whom the smallest wish to see it remedied had ever been manifested.

Thirdly, the total absence of all signs of displeasure—as well towards the persons by whose immediate conduct the mischief had been brought about, as towards the perpetually silent and motionless official spectators, by whose connivance it had been fostered:—on the contrary—

Fourthly, the positive tokens of satisfaction given, by resorting to these very patrons and protectors of the abuse, for the recommendation of the persons by whom the semblance of a remedy was to be applied. Here I feel myself

The gentleman whose duty it had been—first under the Duke of Portland, then under Your Lordship—to have prevented the abuse (I speak of the individual abuse—the barbarity and consequent mortality) to have prevented it by drying it up in its source—I mean the whole system of hulk-confinement—the gentleman who to, avoid preventing it, set aside two Acts of Parliament, by the letter to which the Duke was ill-advised enough to give auspices and signature—this gentleman, instead of preventing the abuse, nurses it:—he nurses it for months and years: he nurses the mortality for a year and a quarter, and I know not how much longer;—he nurses the source of it, under Your Lordship, to this day. He nurses the abuse itself till it is ripe—ripe on the verge of universal rottenness—ripe by the rotting of the victims at a rate at which, by this time, they would have been more than half killed off—he keeps nursing it to this pitch of critical ripeness—when lo! by a misadventure, converted by his ingenuity into a lucky hit, an occasion turns up for recommending a friend to look at it: to look at it, and, on pretence of correcting it, to keep it uncorrected.

Thus, in an inferior hot-bed, an immature felon (I have heard it said) is nursed till he is become ripe: a felon worth but £10, till he is worth £40. Those are petty profits, fit for petty hands. £350 a year, a *douceur* for a gentleman—for the friend of the gentleman who does every thing—was not to be made up so easily: a hecatomb, and more than a hecatomb, of victims was to be sacrificed before an offering could be raised worthy of the chosen priest, who was to stretch his hands over the altar, and make as if he were putting a period to the sacrifice.

In this place, truth compells me to acknowledge, proof that would be termed *legal* fails me: rumour—notoriety—whatsoever be the word—is on several points the only ground I can exhibit, even so much as in the way of reference. I have no eye-witness to depose, that as often as a Noble Secretary has appeared to act, a gentleman on the other side the wainscot has pulled the wires. Friendship between the gentleman who popped out of the pocket and the gentleman out of whose pocket the other popped, is a point not less difficult to prove, at least by the evidence of sense. The Noble Lord and the gentleman on the other side of the wainscot could, either of them, by their evidence put both points out of doubt. Fortunately or unfortunately, the favourite maxim about self-crimination and self-degradation, the maxim made to cover this and every thing else that ought to be disclosed, steps in and covers them: so that on this occasion, as on all others, they may do exactly as they please. On these obscure and delicate points, circumstantial evidence, then, is the sole resort: and before the bar of the public at least—not to speak of other bars—circumstantial evidence is not altogether without its weight. As to one point then[?], does not the same wire which at one time pulled the hand of a noble Duke, continue to pull the hand of his noble successor, and always in the same oblique and tortuous line?—The crowding plan—the plan so distinctly chalked out by the epistle from the upper floor to the under—is it not pursued still without deviation, pursued in full view of the effects of it, by those who, to pursue it, and pursue it with full effect, have nothing to do but to do nothing?—Then again, as to the fair side—the amiable—the friendly side of the business—I beg leave to ask—unless for a friend, a very particular friend indeed, is it in the nature of man thus—thus compleatly—to expose himself? I say *to expose himself*: but to shew how compleat the exposure is—and that on both sides—subsequent events will require to be called in—subsequent wants which I now proceed to submitt to a pair of Noble eyes on which they will make the same impression as all preceding ones. Yes, my Lord, subsequent facts, facts notorious and in direct proof—will manifest themselves, an in doing so will point backwards, and throw day-light upon *motives*.

Theory has been spoken of—now comes experience: duty has been spoken of—now comes performance. Even upon the face of the law, the duty is meagre and inefficient: and performance falls short even of the meagre scantling so carefully chalked out and narrowed by the law.

By the Act, at the commencement of every Session, this Report is to be made. On the 16th of Novr commenced the first Session after the appointment. On the |^^^| of Decr the House adjourns—and no such Report has been made. At the very outset, the duty is not done—no, not even that beggarly account of empty duty that has been made obligatory by the Act. When that which is made obligatory is left undone, can there be so much as a hope left for that which is left free? When that duty which is without expence is left undone, will that be done the expence of which, if repeated with a certain degree of frequency, would swallow up the only motive for acceptance?

I have no personal complaint against the gentleman. I have not the honour of [...?] personal knowledge of him. Knowing no knowledge of him except as excepted, of course I speak none. Finding him established on ground which I had purchased—to clear the ground of him, if it could be done [...?] [...?] [...?], is my right even by law.

A gentleman whose duty it was under the Duke of Portland and Your Lordship to have prevented the abuse and who, to avoid preventing the abuse, set aside the two Acts of Parliament by the letter which to the D of Portland was unadvised enough to give auspices and signature, this gentleman, instead of preventing the abuse, nurses it—he nurses it for months and even years. He nurses it till it appears ripe and then comes the occasion for recommending a friend to look at it. A friend and what friend? A gentleman whose whole time had already been bought for the public and twice overpaid for it: paid by one Act, overpaid by another Act—an Act made on purpose. Two Acts made for one gentleman: both of them at the instance of Your Lordship’s Secretary—both of them under Your Lordship’s auspices. One to overpay a man for business he was already paid for, which in his own estimation, as proved by the very best evidence, his own, by his acceptance, he had been paid enough already: another to call him off from that to other business, pay and overpay still continued: one for making him receive more money: another for making him do less service.

How should any report have been made? To be reported, something must have been done: to have been reported as seen, something must have been looked at. This, which is what ought to have been done, is precisely what had been left undone. Times prescribed for inspection, by this nugatory Act—(nugatory, or little better, had it even been executed—) times *for* inspection, once a quarter: times *of* actual inspection, a blank or what is next to it.

Of the three or four Hulk stations, the only two distant ones, one at Portsmouth, the other at Langston Harbour, four miles distant from the first, are all I have as yet enquired about: but these surely are sufficient. One of them is that which, but for the Bodmin Jailer and Mr Neild and Sir Henry Mildmay, might have buried all its inhabitants before now: the *La Fortunée*—the English Black Hole, now first known, but which ought to be had in everlasting remembrance.

At what times or so much as time the new installed Hulk Inspector has inspected either of these Hulks, my authority has not informed: once in the three quarters, instead of in each quarter once ‘*at the least*’ I take for granted: the pride of new-blown authority must have been weak indeed if it could not send a gentleman upon one installation progress, to sip the first sweets of office. During what space of time this quarterly Inspector of scenes of daily abomination has *never* visited them is a point I can speak to with more confidence: I say, then, not these six months: so far at least as an untutored answer from a man of known intelligence and trustworthiness to a simply enquiring letter, the object of which was carefully and effectually concealed, is to be depended upon, in respect of a matter of fact thus simple. *What, Sir, has not Portsmouth then, do you wish me to understand, thus been visited by the Inspector of Hulks in all this time? Is it that the Police Office could not spare him?* Oh no, my Lord, the Police Office spared him without difficulty: was it possible in the nature of things that a Police office should not have spared a gentleman, to whom, by so recent a manifestation of superior pleasure, his Majesty’s Secretary of State had made it a matter of duty to go elsewhere?

Yes, my Lord, there was inspection enough for Portsmouth, but there was none left for the Hulks. The gentleman, I have already said, had connections at Portsmouth: in that agreable circumstance lay the convenience of the choice: the prolific convenience which gave birth to the Act of Parliament, and through Parliament to the Office. The gentleman had connections in Portsmouth. Should some future patron Secretary be severe;—in some contingent period of harsh discipline, under some Pharaoh that knew not Joseph, should each quarterly visit be insisted upon, a persecuted Inspector—an Inspector driven to his duty—might, under favour of that convenience, take refuge in the bosom of his friends. Persecution or no persecution, these friends were to be and were to be inspected at any rate, let what would come to the *Police*: as to the Convicts, they were inspected by proxy, and their proxies, whom they were saved the trouble of appointing, were those convenient connections. Four miles further would have brought the Inspector to the Langston Hulk: a few hundred yards would have been enough to bring him to the Portsmouth Hulk: humanity, official duty, recent engagement—the positive injunction of an Act of Parliament—all together could not prevail upon the gentleman for these[?] few hundred yards.

What has never been done, can not ever with perfect will, nor always with perfect safety, be reported. It will not, therefore, be matter of much surprize that the Report, such as that which was so carefully provided should be made at the beginning of each Session to both Houses, should not as yet have been made to either of them. The first Session, or what in effect is such, is at end, and no Report, not so much as the first, has yet been either made or thought of.

When the definite peremptory duties of the Office are thus disposed of, it were an anticlimax to speak of contingent half-formed duties—duties to be performed ‘*at least*’, and ‘*if need be*’: and if new brooms, even in the heyday of novelty, are thus far from sweeping clean, what may be expected of old brooms?

One would think there had been a wager between his Majesty’s late Secretary and his present, which should do most to shew his contempt for Parliament. The one takes up an Act of Parliament, an act in full force, obtained by his predecessor, dashes it down, and quashes it for ‘*inexpediency*’. The other, to serve a friend’s friend, obtains an Act of Parliament of his own, and in the same generous view, and in the very same year when made, sits still and sees it trampled upon before his face.

The peace of Paris was the inscription that the Earl of Bute, less fortunate in his peace than Mr Addington, chose for an epitaph on his tombstone. Which of his two Acts or both would be Ld Pelham’s choice? The Police Magistrate officer-pensioning[?] Act, or the Blind Inspectorship Act? Alas! talk not of separation. Parts of the same great design, each without the other would be incompleat. The verses of Bavius made not so compleat a match with Mavius [...?] [...?] but [...?] one Grenville Act [...?] [...?] hand down to posterity the *par nobile fratram* the two Pelham Acts.

Suspicion, grounded solely upon theory, was enough to prompt enquiry, and without disclosing the most distinct hint of my object, I penned the following letter, and got it sent to Portsmouth, to a person whose correctness was known by long experience.

With the omission of an immaterial line or two, the answer was literally as follows—

Such, as the letter shews, has been the *neglect*. From misconduct, the eye turns naturally and not improperly to consequences. Strike out consequences—say that no evil consequences either have followed or are in a way to follow, every thing *almost* is as it should be. The only practical inference is—that the place either ought never to have been created, or ought now to be abolished. Either it never had a use, or the use it had is at an end.

But the neglect has *not* been without its consequences. I give a specimen—I can give no more. Strip them of nine-tenths of their abominations, the Hulks—Lord Pelham’s Hulks—Lord Pelham’s and Mr |^^^|’s *Black Holes*—would be—would in this country, and at this time of the day be—what *Bastiles* were. Complaints, like men, escape out of them now and then—escape out of them through negligence. The letter of which the following is the extract, is from the least horrible of the two receptacles:—from that one in which, upon an expected visit, some outsides were found fair: from that one which, not having destroy’d so many as an eighth of its inhabitants in a year, was, and perhaps is, a *Montpelier* to the other. A letter from the Hulks? says somebody: a notable piece of evidence indeed! and by whom, pray, and to whom written, and for what purpose? By one of the imprisoned wretches, to a friend in a situation but too similar—a prisoner in a Jail in one of the distant provinces. Not official—not a *Report* this, it must be confessed, my Lord. Under Your Lordship’s auspices, it is not the custom for gentlemen in office to make Reports: especially when paid for it, and when Parliament has made it their duty in express words. Not official, certainly, my Lord: gentlemen, if they did make Reports, would not complain of their own acts.

Omitting the effusions of the heart—the little tokens of remembrance—from one poor creature to another, but especially, and most carefully, omitting names—I transcribe *verbatim* whatever bears reference to the present purpose. *Verbatim*, I say, my Lord: *literation*, not. *Spelling so quizzable, how could facts be credible?* of this argument—the best the case admitts of—I have deprived, defrauded, gentlemen and Noble Lords.—Alas, my Lord, how many hundreds of poor wretches had been in this world instead of another—had been comparatively happy—had been comparatively *pure*—if no worse logic than this had passed *from* gentlemen on t’other side the wainscot, had passed *upon* Noble Lords?

11 October 1802

‘I promised to write to you as soon as I came here, but could not so soon as I wished to do, for *when I came here* I was robbed of all my paper and pens and all that I had. About 500 Convicts was drafted on board his Majesty’s ship Glatton for New South Wales, a five months back: and I wish it had been my lot to have gone with them, for this place is a very bad one. We are *double-ironed*, and work hard: and *so close shut down betwixt decks* when from work, *and so many and so close together, that we have a sad stinking place*: and what is worse, *we can not keep ourselves clean*. The men are very lousy, *and are cut quite raw with lice*: and our *provisions are so bad, that the men break out all over sores, and look so bad and so yellow, that you would not take them to be Englishmen at all: nay you would be surprized to see them; for I was when I came first to this place. They rob one another*, and write to one another’s friends to draw money of them in their names: and they have served me so; and have kept me quite without money, and am without yet. I had some old letters by me, which they robbed me of when I came here at first: but I hope to get some {i:e: money?} soon, as I think the rogues that have done it are gone to the Bay.

a He does not say by whom robbed, whether by his fellow-prisoners or by their keepers. But if not by the keepers, but only by the prisoners, what, even on that supposition, must be the keepers? Such care! such custody! Such crimes, such oppressions, close to them, all round them, and no redress! In a Panopticon Penitentiary House, could such things be? Could even the gentleman on the other side of the wainscot find face to say as much?—to whisper as much even in the well-prepared ear of his noble superior in office?

Our victuals would do in quantity: but the quality is so bad, and the cooking so nasty, that nothing but clemming {starving} can force a man to eat it. We have meat for dinner one day, and bread and cheese the other: boiled barley for breakfast, and burgon[?] for supper: neither, good nor clean: so that they that can get any thing eat but little of the ship’s allowance. This is a very bad place .... It is impossible to live here long.

Well, Sir, but this correspondent of your’s, who is he? None of mine, my Lord: yet not the less, but the more, credible, in his undesigned and artless tale. Had the person written to been a person from whose interposition any the faintest hope of relief could have been conceived, motives for exaggeration at least, if not for absolute untruth, might have been imputed, and not altogether without cause. The fact is—written to a sharer, though not companion, in affliction, as above described, it fell by mere accident, though not without sufficient authentication, into the hands of a gentleman by whose permission the copy I have (the original having been also in my hands) was obtained.

But his name, Sir?—No, my Lord: there Your Lordship will have the goodness to excuse me. I have read *Don Quixote*, my Lord: I will not follow his example. The scourge of the tyrant shall not be brought down with redoubled force by an interference so powerless on my part, so inefficacious, so much worse than inefficacious, elsewhere. To a Committee of the House of Commons ... Yes, my Lord, at any time: not to his Majesty’s Secretary of State, so long as Lord Pelham continues his Majesty’s Secretary of State—least of all to the gentleman behind the wainscot, so long as he continues on the other side of the wainscot. Of frank disclosure to Lord Pelham, what could be expected to be the consequence?—Let experience—recent experience—speak. To the Inspector, an additional hundred a year to quicken his exertions; perhaps an Assistant or a Deputy, to support him under them. As to the wretched letter-writer, an additional port hole stopt up and the repose of office might be made secure for ever against all repetition of his impertinence.