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 hand the interesting publication of Mr Neild. Visit to the Hulks is March last, by the author and Sir Henry Mildmay: the official screens broke through and among the results the following—

No1. Portsmouth Harbour; *Captivity Hulk*, March 15th 1802.a ‘Many with ruptures: none 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 eight part of the whole.

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

No 2. Langston Harbour; *La Fortuneé*, 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 affends himself.’

Deaths in 1797, nine 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 54; though the number alive was by that time reduced to 300. 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 grand grievance that presses upon most Noble minds, ‘*the expences attending the custody*’ of these wretches ‘*borne by Government*.’

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

All this sickness 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 Sir 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 Omrahs would have thought of disturbing the slumbers of the Subahdar by so much as a whisper about what was passing in the *Black-Hole*.

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 humane Jailor,a whose duty led him to to bring Convicts to this Hulk. 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 Prisons, Bodmin. Letter dated 5th February 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 thatoccasion that, in regard to the whole number confined in that same Hulk, he learnt what is mentioned by Sir Henry Mildmay and Mr Neild:*b* out of 500, living at the commencement of the Year 1801, deaths 120, at the end of it.

*a* Neild, p. 322.

*b* Neild p. 315.

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 those to whom this humane 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 alarmed—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 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 of sight as much as possible:—that part of the filth might be shoveled away:—that eatable food might 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, injunctions backed with 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 upon every face.

a occasion that, in regard to the whole number confined in that same Hulk, he learnt what is mentioned by Sir Henry Mildmay and Mr Neild: 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. 315.

Were not these the motives? Then why was 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—a principle so invariably applied to practice where any thing like good management is meant—why was it that so indisputable and obvious a rule of prudence was thus openly violated, without so much as a pretence?

The visit paid, the facts ascertained, report drawn up, the result is whispered to Lord Pelham. His Lordship starts out of his sleep. What does he then?—Does he change the system? Does he bethink himself of law? of engagements? of a system of unintermitted inspection? of appropriate separation and aggregation? of universal industry? Does [it] occurr to him to transfer the undistroyed remnant from the clutches of their distroyers to the hand 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, who as often dismissed 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 under a 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, and 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 obeyed, 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*’, item ‘*or oftener if occasion shall require*’. Salary carefully limited: not to exceed £350 a Year for gentleman and clerk: and that ‘*for all charges 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 eat 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: let us hope so at least, and that when year after year they kept destroying 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 lingers, Abuse shews the speed which it is in the power of encouragement to produce.

The place being to the 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. |^^^| 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 toward the application of a remedy, howsoever that disposition might be overruled 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 a 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 this 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 circuits three years before even Howard had begun his. I called Neild a second Howard: with more propriety I 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 increase with age. Two such circuits in one year adorn the annals of 1802. This Honourable Colleague—a Member of the legislature and not an idle one—a man standing already in full light—would 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 would 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 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 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 gentlemen on t’other side the wainscoat—places are made for gentlemen, not gentlemen searc[h]ed out for places. Is it not so? a page or two will soon demonstrate.

Would there have been any thing wild, speculative, incongruous, 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. When a second set of super intendants 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 |^^^| the office.

Other principles of selection guide Lord Pelham. Abuse being brought to light by these intruders, 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 it up: the pretence for meddling will thus be taken from all such busy-bodies. Then (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 jockeyed. 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 every thing is done: by whom, whether any thing be or be not thought of or no, every thing at any rate is done. The wainscoat found, and in comes the gentleman with a friend in his pocket for the place.

That recommendation 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) 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 gentleman, whose whole time has 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, over paid 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 wainscoat. 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 Lord 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 besieged by candidates: an 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 indecorous to have been manifested without cogent reasons—the compleat neglect shewn to 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 misconduct the mischief had been brought about, as towards the perpetually silent and motionless official spectators, by whose connivance it had been fostered:—or 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. 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 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 pretty 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 in 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 wainscoat has pulled the wires. Friendship between the gentleman who popp’d 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 wainscoat could, either of them, by their evidence, put both points out of doubt. Fortunately or unfortunately, the favourite maxim about self-crimination and self-depredation, 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 events 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, and 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 November commenced the first Session after the appointment. On the |^^^| of December 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?

How should any Report have been made? To be reported, something must have been done: to be 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 ever 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 Jailor 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 me: once in the three quarters instead of once 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 gentlemen 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 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, 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 him, 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 agreeable 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 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 not persecution, these friends were to be and were inspected at any rate; inspected in person, 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 these convenient connexions.

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.

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

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

Portsmouth Decr 26 1802.

‘Sir

‘I have made the proposed enquiries and find there has been no regular Inspection of Convicts either here or at Langston Harbour. Mr {the nominal Inspector} not having been on board either Hulk near six months: he was at Portsmouth about three months since but did not come on board the Hulk.’

‘I cannot find any other person visits or inspects except the Captain who has the charge.’

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 in this Country and at this time of 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 distroyed so many as an eighth of its inhabitants in a year, was and perhaps is *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, my Lord—not a Report this, it must be confessed. Under Your Lordship’s auspices, it is not the custom for gentlemen in office 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 the names—I transcribe *verbatim* whatever bears reference to the present purpose. *Verbatim*, I say, my Lord: *literatim* 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 wainscoat, had passed upon Noble Lords?

11th 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 papers and pens and all that I hada ... 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 cannot keep ourselves clean*. The men are very lousy, *and are eat 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 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, and I think the rogues that have done it are gone to the Bay {Botany 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 things be? Could even the gentleman on the other side of the wainscoat 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 burgen for supper: neither good nor clean: ‘so that they that can get things 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 yours, 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 wainscoat, so long as he continues on the other side of the wainscoat. Of frank disclosure to Lord Pelham, what could be expected to be the consequence? Let