

THE PLIGHT OF THE FRAMEWORK KNITTERS - 1812

1812. March

Sir.

The United Committee of Framework Knitters at Nottingham, with great surprise, received a letter of the 2d instant from a person in the Town, over which you hold jurisdiction, stating, that you had prohibited the framework-knitters in your town from meeting to discuss the nature of their grievances, and to prepare [sic] a petition to parliament.

You no doubt had your reasons for so doing; but whatever they were sane or otherwise is not material, because they were both unconstitutional and unjust, as well as extremely dangerous to the liberties of the subject.

Know you not, Sir, that the Act, commonly called "The Gagging Act" is long since dead of its own natural death; therefore, your opinion, as a Magistrate, is of no avail respecting the holding of a popular meeting.

But even were that not the case, is it an act of policy on the part of a Magistrate to prohibit men from meeting, in a peaceable manner, to state their grievances; when, by preventing them from venting their complaints in a constitutional way, they may be driven to the commission of crimes, for the purpose of exercising their vengeance, when they cannot exercise their rights.

How different were your conduct, on the occasion alluded to, to that shewn by the Magistrates of Hatton Garden, London, on a similar occasion they, when informed of the desire of the London stocking-makers to hold a meeting, immediately afforded the men every facility in their power for the accomplishment of the design they sent an officer to attend the meeting, and presented the Resolutions agreed upon at such meeting to the secretary of State, along with a copy of the propositions sent from the Nottingham Committee.

This was a measure consistent with the constitutional duty of a Magistrate; and consistent with the wishes of every honest man. Then compare this conduct with your own; and, if you are an Englishman, your punishment will be sentimentally complete.

Sir, you may perhaps conceal this letter from all eyes but your own; but that will avail you nothing; for other means, which you, to your own confusion, will hereafter be made acquainted with, will be resorted to, to make its contents public.

The men of Nottingham are acquainted with the laws of their Country; and, in common with every honest man, condemn the outrageous conduct of a few misguided individuals in their neighbourhood; and they know, that the proper means to prevent those outrages are, for those in authority to act directly contrary to the manner in which you have acted.

Sir, the Nottingham Committee will again call upon their Tukesbury friends to have a meeting; the post-master may again open the letter directed to them; and you may again exert an unconstitutional authority; but, if you do, legal means will be resorted to, to exhibiting [sic] your conduct in proper colours to the public.

Thos. Latham Secty.