

[From the Aberdeen Banner, October 16.]

TIDAL HARBOURS COMMISSION.

This Commission was appointed by royal order in April of last year, and has since that time presented to Her Majesty two reports, one for 1845, and another for 1846. According to the first of these, the various points of inquiry to which the attention of the Commissioners were directed, were—1. What changes have taken place in any of the tidal harbours or navigable rivers. 2. What measures are necessary as well to abate any injuries that have taken place as to prevent any future mischief. 3. What is the state of the law as regards the powers of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for the conservation of all the harbours, shores and rivers of the United Kingdom. 4. What measures may be expedient for the general improvement of the harbours and rivers of the United Kingdom. The labours of the Commission had been partly anticipated by returns from 340 harbours and rivers presented to the House of Commons; but impressed with the necessity of immediate legislation in order to remedy the injuries that have taken place, they confined their inquiries to a few specific cases, and selected as examples the rivers Clyde and Tay, and the harbour of Montrose, in Scotland, together with Southwold, Harwich, and Rye, in England. The general result of their inquiries relative to the state of the harbours of the country, as stated in their first report, is, "that very great and increasing injury to the best interests of the country has accrued from negligence of the several authorities in permitting the removal of soil and beach, as well as by embankments, weirs, and other obstructions of a similar nature, which check the free flow of the tide, impair its strength, and thus permanently diminish the general depth of the river—and on the other hand, that when the aid of experience and science has been called in, and a due vigilance has been exercised, a proportionate improvement has invariably been the result." The comparative general state of the harbours of England and Scotland is given as follows—"In the northern part of Your Majesty's dominions we have seen that although great want of vigilant control is manifest, and the landed, and fishing, and corporation interests, have too often been preferred to the rights of merchants and shipowners, and to the general interests of navigation, still the spirit of commercial enterprise has finally broken through the barrier, and by degrees has carried out to a certain extent improvements in some of the harbours. In the southern ports, which we have now to notice, we regret to report that those interests have proved too powerful, and that the consequence has been in several cases a dry bar, a deserted port, and all but ruin to the shipowner and merchant."

It further appears from the first report of the Commissioners, that in the present state of the law, the power, interest and jurisdiction of the crown extend over all the seas and shores of the United Kingdom—that Her Majesty has the right of property of the soil in all the rivers which have the flux and reflux of the sea up to high water mark of ordinary spring tides—and that conservancy of the harbours and navigable rivers is by law vested in the Lord High Admiral. It is also stated, that "the jurisdiction of the Admiralty has (in many cases) by charters and acts of Parliament been superseded, to the great detriment of the public service." In these circumstances, in order to remedy the acknowledged evils of the present practice, the Commissioners recommend "that a Board of Conservancy be established for the superintendence and protection of all the tidal harbours and navigable rivers in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland—that it be in connexion with the Admiralty—and that it be permanent"—being vested with certain powers detailed in the report. The Commissioners further recommend "the procuring of accurate plans and surveys on a sufficient scale of all the ports and navigable rivers of the United Kingdom."

In the second report the Commissioners state that "a more extended inquiry has fully confirmed the views which the limited examination of last year led them to submit to Her Majesty. Not only is there a general want of control over the management and revenue of the ports, but there is not a single exception, among the numerous cases which have come before the Commissioners, in which such a control might not have been the means of saving unnecessary outlay, of preventing encroachments that can now scarcely be remedied, or of stopping works that must be removed, in order to secure the objects to which the attention of the Commission is directed. The necessity of such supervision has also become more apparent since the publication of the returns to the order of the House of Commons of August last, from which it appears that the income of the various ports of the United Kingdom, considerably exceeds the sum of £800,000 a year—the whole levied by charter and acts of Parliament, or otherwise, from dues on shipping and on goods borne by shipping, but over the expenditure of which Parliament has not at present the slightest control." Again, "it appears from the parliamentary returns, that the aggregate debt of the several ports of the United Kingdom, exclusive of docks in the port of London, exceeds £6,000,000 sterling—one-third part, therefore, of the whole harbour income of £800,000 a year, must be appropriated to pay the interest of this debt, which will consequently materially cripple the means for future improvements. This large sum, although borrowed with the sanction of the legislature, has been laid out entirely by the several local boards, without the slightest control being exercised over it either by Parliament or by any other power specially charged to watch over the interests of the public." The Commissioners, therefore, in their second re-

port earnestly repeat their recommendation of a permanent Board of Conservancy.

In terms of that recommendation a bill was prepared and introduced by Mr. Ward and Admiral Dundas, and on the 14th of August last, was ordered by the House of Commons to be printed. It provides that a board of three Conservators, consisting of a navy officer, an officer of Engineers, and a barrister as legal adviser, shall be appointed under the title "The Board of Conservators of the Tidal Waters and Navigable Lakes and Rivers of Great Britain and Ireland"—that this port shall form part of the civil department of the Lord High Admiral—and that it shall sit along with four Conservators *ex officio*, viz:—One Commissioner of Admiralty, the Hydrographer of the Admiralty, one Commissioner of Woods and Forests, and one of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and Plantations. The extent of their powers will be seen from the following clause of the Bill:—

"And be it enacted, that for the purpose of enforcing and carrying out this Act, the said Board of Conservators shall have full power and authority to make general and special orders, rules, and regulations, under their seal, directed to any of the Commissioners, or other persons having the conservancy of any ports, harbours, creeks, tidal waters and navigable lakes and rivers under the said acts of Parliament, charters or otherwise; the said general and special orders, rules and regulations to be first sanctioned by the Lords of the Admiralty and the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, and by the Committee of the Privy Council for the affairs of Trade and Plantations; and if the said general or special orders, rules and regulations, should not be obeyed within a reasonable time by the persons to whom they shall be directed, then the said Board of Conservators may of their own motion employ persons to carry those general or special orders, rules and regulations into effect, and order the expenses thereof to be paid out of the dues respectively received under the said acts of Parliament, charters or otherwise, regard being had in the amount of the expenses to the amount of the dues; and the said Commissioners or others, as aforesaid, are hereby required respectively to pay the amount of expenses so incurred as aforesaid."

Our readers are already aware that the harbour Commissioners are still prosecuting their inquiries, and that some of them have recently visited our own and other northern harbours. What may be the final result of their investigations, we cannot venture to predict, and unskilled as we are in such matters, we cannot offer any opinion on the necessity that appears to exist for immediate and decided improvement on the harbours and rivers of the Kingdom. We are however perfectly satisfied that the Commissioners are fully qualified for their task, and that they will leave nothing undone for its completion. The subject is one in which all classes of the community are deeply interested—our shipping, home and foreign, in a great measure depends for success on the efficient state of our harbours—and insulated as Britain is, no means of internal communication, not even the gigantic and still growing system of railroads, is of superior importance to the perfection of our ports.

EVENING SEDERUNT.—The Presbytery resumed at seven o'clock according to the adjournment. Mr. Arnot, Mr. Lorimer, Mr. M'Beth, Dr. Buchanan, Mr. Bremner, Mr. King, Mr. Browne, Mr. Miller, Mr. Gibson, Mr. Finlay, and Dr. Willis, took part in the discussion on the overture. Dr. Buchanan moved as an amendment, the following motion:—"That while this Presbytery regard slavery with abhorrence, as an accursed system, equally contrary to the spirit of God's word, and to the natural rights of man,—and while they consider American slavery to be one of the most deplorable forms of the evil, unspeakably atrocious in itself, and highly aggravated by the fact, that it is maintained by a nation which boasts of its free institutions, and which has long enjoyed the blessed light of the gospel:—Yet, in respect that this whole subject was fully and deliberately considered in last assembly, and the mind of this Church, regarding it expressed in a unanimous decision,—and in respect that, by virtue of that decision, this Church is in the attitude of remonstrating with the Churches in America as to their duty in this matter,—the Presbytery does not deem it suitable to take any additional step at present, and therefore decline to transmit the overture."

On a division, there appeared

For the Overture.—Dr. Willis, Mr. Finlay, Mr. M'Beth,—Ministers; Messrs. Alex. Begg, and Matthew Liddell—Elders—5.

For Dr. Buchanan's Motion.—Drs. Henderson, Forbes, Buchanan, Messrs. Lorimer, King, Noble, Gibson, Miller, Browne, Sommerville, Arnot, Alex. Wilson, Bremner, Cunningham,—Ministers; Messrs. R. Thompson, Junior, David Campbell, John Gardiner, John Geddes, Duncan M'Nab, James Martin,—Elders—20.

[From the "Times" Commissioner.]

THE HIGHLANDERS.

It is difficult to estimate the state of society here by any English standard, for the two cases are totally and radically dissimilar. In England there are three classes—the upper, the middle, and the lower. It is no unusual thing in England to find the upper, or landlord class, totally neglectful of the poor on their estates. There are many bright examples to the contrary, it is true, but my own impression is, from the fact that instances to the contrary are so rarely heard of, that the poor of England are generally left to