

AN ESSAY
ON THE
PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.
VOL. II.

AN ESSAY
ON THE
PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION;

OR,
A
VIEW OF ITS PAST AND PRESENT EFFECTS
ON
HUMAN HAPPINESS;

WITH
AN INQUIRY INTO OUR PROSPECTS RESPECTING
THE FUTURE REMOVAL OR MITIGATION OF
THE EVILS WHICH IT OCCASIONS.

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C O N T E N T S

OF THE

SECOND VOLUME.

BOOK. III.

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HAVE BEEN PROPOSED OR HAVE PREVAILED IN SO-
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THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION:

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ESSAY, &c.

BOOK III.

OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OR EXPEDIENTS
WHICH HAVE BEEN PROPOSED, OR HAVE PRE-
VAILED IN SOCIETY, AS THEY AFFECT THE
EVILS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF PO-
PULATION.

CHAP. I.

Of Systems of Equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

TO a person who views the past and present states of mankind in the light in which they have appeared in the two preceding books, it cannot but be a matter of astonishment, that all the writers on the perfectibility of man and of society, who have noticed the argument of the principle of population, treat it always very slightly, and invariably represent the difficulties

arising from it as at a great and almost immeasurable distance. Even Mr. Wallace, who thought the argument itself of so much weight as to destroy his whole system of equality, did not seem to be aware, that any difficulty would arise from this cause, till the whole earth had been cultivated like a garden, and was incapable of any further increase of produce. Were this really the case, and were a beautiful system of equality in other respects practicable, I cannot think that our ardour in the pursuit of such a scheme ought to be damped by the contemplation of so remote a difficulty. An event at such a distance might fairly be left to providence. But the truth is, that, if the view of the argument given in this essay be just, the difficulty, so far from being remote, would be imminent and immediate. At every period during the progress of cultivation, from the present moment to the time when the whole earth was become like a garden, the distress for want of food would be constantly pressing on all mankind, if they were equal. Though the produce of the earth would be increasing every year, population would be tending to increase much faster, and the redundancy must necessarily be checked by

by the periodical or constant action of moral restraint, vice, or misery.

M. Condorcet's *Esquissè d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* was written, it is said, under the pressure of that cruel proscription, which terminated in his death. If he had no hopes of its being seen during his life, and of its interesting France in his favour, it is a singular instance of the attachment of a man to principles, which every day's experience was, so fatally for himself, contradicting. To see the human mind, in one of the most enlightened nations of the world, debased by such a fermentation of disgusting passions, of fear, cruelty, malice, revenge, ambition, madness, and folly, as would have disgraced the most savage nations in the most barbarous age, must have been such a tremendous shock to his ideas of the necessary and inevitable progress of the human mind, as nothing but the firmest conviction of the truth of his principles, in spite of all appearances, could have withstood.

This posthumous publication is only a sketch of a much larger work, which he proposed should be executed. It necessarily wants therefore that detail and application, which can alone prove the truth of any theory. A few

observations will be sufficient to show, how completely this theory is contradicted, when it is applied to the real and not to an imaginary state of things.

In the last division of the work, which treats of the future progress of man towards perfection, M. Condorcet says, that comparing in the different civilized nations of Europe the actual population with the extent of territory, and observing their cultivation, their industry, their divisions of labour, and their means of subsistence, we shall see, that it would be impossible to preserve the same means of subsistence, and consequently the same population, without a number of individuals who have no other means of supplying their wants than their industry.

Having allowed the necessity of such a class of men, and adverting afterwards to the precarious revenue of those families, that would depend so entirely on the life and health of their chief,^a he says very justly, “ There exists then a
“ necessary cause of inequality, of dependence,
“ and even of misery, which menaces without

^a To save time and long quotations, I shall here give the substance of some of M. Condorcet's sentiments, and I hope that I shall not misrepresent them; but I refer the reader to the work itself, which will amuse if it do not convince him.

“ ceasing the most numerous and active class
“ of our societies.” The difficulty is just and
well stated; but his mode of removing it will,
I fear, be found totally inefficacious.

By the application of calculations to the probabilities of life, and the interest of money, he proposes, that a fund should be established, which should assure to the old an assistance produced in part by their own former savings, and in part by the savings of individuals, who in making the same sacrifice die before they reap the benefit of it. The same or a similar fund should give assistance to women and children who lose their husbands or fathers; and afford a capital to those who were of an age to found a new family, sufficient for the developement of their industry. These establishments, he observes, might be made in the name and under the protection of the society. Going still further, he says, that by the just application of calculations, means might be found of more completely preserving a state of equality, by preventing credit from being the exclusive privilege of great fortunes, and yet giving it a basis equally solid, and by rendering the progress of industry and the activity of commerce less dependent on great capitalists.

Such establishments and calculations may ap-

pear very promising upon paper; but when applied to real life, they will be found to be absolutely nugatory. M. Condorcet allows, that a class of people which maintains itself entirely by industry is necessary to every state. Why does he allow this? No other reason can well be assigned, than because he conceives, that the labour necessary to procure subsistence for an extended population will not be performed without the goad of necessity. If, by establishments upon the plans that have been mentioned, this spur to industry be removed; if the idle and negligent be placed upon the same footing with regard to their credit, and the future support of their wives and families, as the active and industrious; can we expect to see men exert that animated activity in bettering their condition, which now forms the master-spring of public prosperity? If an inquisition were to be established to examine the claims of each individual, and to determine whether he had or had not exerted himself to the utmost, and to grant or refuse assistance accordingly, this would be little else than a repetition upon a larger scale of the English poor laws, and would be completely destructive of the true principles of liberty and equality.

But

But independently of this great objection to these establishments, and supposing for a moment, that they would give no check to production, the greatest difficulty remains yet behind.

Were every man sure of a comfortable provision for a family, almost every man would have one; and were the rising generation free from the "killing frost" of misery, population must increase with unusual rapidity. Of this M. Condorcet seems to be fully aware himself; and after having described further improvements, he says,

"But in this progress of industry and happiness, each generation will be called to more extended enjoyments, and in consequence, by the physical constitution of the human frame, to an increase in the number of individuals. Must not there arrive a period then when these laws equally necessary shall counteract each other; when the increase of the number of men surpassing their means of subsistence, the necessary result must be, either a continual diminution of happiness and population—a movement truly retrograde; or at least a kind of oscillation between good and evil? In societies arrived at this term, will not this oscillation be a constantly subsisting cause

“ of periodical misery? Will it not mark the
“ limit, when all further melioration will be-
“ come impossible, and point out that term to
“ the perfectibility of the human race, which
“ it may reach in the course of ages, but can
“ never pass?” He then adds,

“ There is no person who does not see how
“ very distant such a period is from us. But
“ shall we ever arrive at it? It is equally im-
“ possible to pronounce for, or against, the fu-
“ ture realization of an event, which cannot
“ take place but at an æra, when the human
“ race will have attained improvements, of which
“ we can at present scarcely form a conception.”

M. Condorcet's picture of what may be expected to happen, when the number of men shall surpass their means of subsistence, is justly drawn. The oscillation which he describes will certainly take place, and will without doubt be a constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery. The only point in which I differ from M. Condorcet in this description is, with regard to the period when it may be applied to the human race. M. Condorcet thinks, that it cannot possibly be applicable, but at an æra extremely distant. If the proportion between the natural increase of population and food, which was stated

stated in the beginning of this essay, and which has received considerable confirmation from the poverty that has been found to prevail in every stage of human society, be in any degree near the truth; it will appear on the contrary, that the period when the number of men surpasses their means of subsistence has long since arrived; and that this necessary oscillation, this constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery, has existed ever since we have had any histories of mankind, and continues to exist at the present moment.

M. Condorcet however goes on to say, that should the period, which he conceives to be so distant, ever arrive, the human race, and the advocates of the perfectibility of man, need not be alarmed at it. He then proceeds to remove the difficulty in a manner, which I profess not to understand. Having observed, that the ridiculous prejudices of superstition would by that time have ceased to throw over morals a corrupt and degrading austerity, he alludes either to a promiscuous concubinage, which would prevent breeding, or to something else as unnatural. To remove the difficulty in this way will surely, in the opinion of most men, be to destroy that virtue and purity of manners, which
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the advocates of equality, and of the perfectibility of man, profess to be the end and object of their views.

The last question which M. Condorcet proposes for examination is, the organic perfectibility of man. He observes, if the proofs which have been already given, and which, in their development, will receive greater force in the work itself, are sufficient to establish the indefinite perfectibility of man, upon the supposition of the same natural faculties and the same organization which he has at present; what will be the certainty, what the extent of our hopes, if this organization, these natural faculties themselves, be susceptible of melioration?

From the improvement of medicine; from the use of more wholesome food and habitations; from a manner of living, which will improve the strength of the body by exercise, without impairing it by excess; from the destruction of the two great causes of the degradation of man, misery and too great riches; from the gradual removal of transmissible and contagious disorders by the improvement of physical knowledge, rendered more efficacious by the progress of reason and of social order; he infers, that, though man will not absolutely become immortal, yet
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the duration between his birth and natural death will increase without ceasing, will have no assignable term, and may properly be expressed by the word indefinite. He then defines this word to mean either a constant approach to an unlimited extent without ever reaching it; or an increase in the immensity of ages to an extent greater than any assignable quantity.

But surely the application of this term in either of these senses to the duration of human life is in the highest degree unphilosophical, and totally unwarranted by any appearances in the laws of nature. Variations from different causes are essentially distinct from a regular and unretrograde increase. The average duration of human life will to a certain degree vary from healthy or unhealthy climates, from wholesome or unwholesome food, from virtuous or vicious manners, and other causes: but it may be fairly doubted, whether there has been really the smallest perceptible advance in the natural duration of human life, since first we had any authentic history of man. The prejudices of all ages have indeed been directly contrary to this supposition; and though I would not lay much stress upon these prejudices, they will in some measure tend

tend to prove, that there has been no marked advance in an opposite direction.

It may perhaps be said, that the world is yet so young, so completely in its infancy, that it ought not to be expected, that any difference should appear so soon.

If this be the case, there is at once an end of all human science. The whole train of reasonings from effects to causes will be destroyed. We may shut our eyes to the book of nature, as it will no longer be of any use to read it. The wildest and most improbable conjectures may be advanced with as much certainty, as the most just and sublime theories, founded on careful and reiterated experiments. We may return again to the old mode of philosophising, and make facts bend to systems, instead of establishing systems upon facts. The grand and consistent theory of Newton will be placed upon the same footing as the wild and eccentric hypotheses of Descartes. In short, if the laws of nature be thus fickle and inconstant; if it can be affirmed, and be believed, that they will change, when for ages and ages they have appeared immutable; the human mind will no longer have any incitements to inquiry, but
must

must remain fixed in inactive torpor, or amuse itself only in bewildering dreams and extravagant fancies.

The constancy of the laws of nature, and of effects and causes, is the foundation of all human knowledge; and if, without any previous observable symptoms or indications of a change, we can infer, that a change will take place, we may as well make any assertion whatever; and think it as unreasonable to be contradicted, in affirming that the moon will come in contact with the earth to morrow, as in saying that the sun will rise at its appointed time.

With regard to the duration of human life, there does not appear to have existed, from the earliest ages of the world to the present moment, the smallest permanent symptom or indication of increasing prolongation. The observable effects of climate, habit, diet, and other causes, on length of life, have furnished the pretext for asserting its indefinite extension; and the sandy foundation on which the argument rests is, that because the limit of human life is undefined, because you cannot mark its precise term, and say so far exactly shall it go, and no further, therefore its extent may increase for ever, and be properly termed indefinite or unlimited.

But

But the fallacy and absurdity of this argument will sufficiently appear from a slight examination of what M. Condorcet calls the organic perfectibility or degeneration of the race of plants and animals, which, he says, may be regarded as one of the general laws of nature.

I have been told, that it is a maxim among some of the improvers of cattle, that you may breed to any degree of nicety you please; and they found this maxim upon another, which is, that some of the offspring will possess the desirable qualities of the parents in a greater degree. In the famous Leicestershire breed of sheep, the object is to procure them with small heads and small legs. Proceeding upon these breeding maxims it is evident, that we might go on, till the heads and legs were evanescent quantities; but this is so palpable an absurdity, that we may be quite sure, that the premises are not just, and that there really is a limit, though we cannot see it, or say exactly where it is. In this case, the point of the greatest degree of improvement, or the smallest size of the head and legs, may be said to be undefined; but this is very different from unlimited, or from indefinite, in M. Condorcet's acceptance of the term. Though I may not be able in the present instance to mark the
 limit,

limit, at which further improvement will stop, I can very easily mention a point, at which it will not arrive. I should not scruple to assert, that were the breeding to continue for ever, the heads and legs of these sheep would never be so small as the head and legs of a rat.

It cannot be true therefore, that among animals some of the offspring will possess the desirable qualities of the parents in a greater degree; or that animals are indefinitely perfectible.

The progress of a wild plant to a beautiful garden flower is perhaps more marked and striking, than any thing that takes place among animals; yet even here it would be the height of absurdity to assert, that the progress was unlimited or indefinite. One of the most obvious features of the improvement is the increase of size. The flower has grown gradually larger by cultivation. If the progress were really unlimited, it might be increased, ad infinitum; but this is so gross an absurdity, that we may be quite sure, that among plants as well as among animals there is a limit to improvement, though we do not exactly know where it is. It is probable, that the gardeners who contend for flower prizes have often applied stronger dressing

sing without success. At the same time it would be highly presumptuous in any man to say, that he had seen the finest carnation or anemone that could ever be made to grow. He might however assert without the smallest chance of being contradicted by a future fact, that no carnation or anemone could ever by cultivation be increased to the size of a large cabbage; and yet there are assignable quantities greater than a cabbage. No man can say, that he has seen the largest ear of wheat, or the largest oak, that could ever grow; but he might easily, and with perfect certainty, name a point of magnitude, at which they would not arrive. In all these cases therefore, a careful distinction should be made between an unlimited progress, and a progress where the limit is merely undefined.

It will be said perhaps, that the reason why plants and animals cannot increase indefinitely in size is, that they would fall by their own weight. I answer, how do we know this but from experience? from experience of the degree of strength, with which these bodies are formed. I know, that a carnation long before it reached the size of a cabbage would not be supported by its stalk; but I only know this from my experience

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rience of the weakness and want of tenacity in the materials of a carnation stalk. There might be substances of the same size that would support as large a head as a cabbage.

The reasons of the mortality of plants are at present perfectly unknown to us. No man can say why such a plant is annual, another biennial, and another endures for ages. The whole affair in all these cases, in plants, animals, and in the human race, is an affair of experience; and I only conclude, that man is mortal, because the invariable experience of all ages has proved the mortality of those materials, of which his visible body is made.

“What can we reason but from what we know?”

Sound philosophy will not authorise me to alter this opinion of the mortality of man on earth, till it can be clearly proved, that the human race has made, and is making, a decided progress towards an illimitable extent of life. And the chief reason why I adduced the two particular instances from animals and plants was to expose and illustrate, if I could, the fallacy of that argument, which infers an unlimited progress merely because some partial improvement has taken place, and that the limit of this improvement cannot be precisely ascertained.

The capacity of improvement in plants and animals, to a certain degree, no person can possibly doubt. A clear and decided progress has already been made; and yet I think it appears, that it would be highly absurd to say, that this progress has no limits. In human life, though there are great variations from different causes, it may be doubted whether, since the world began, any organic improvement whatever of the human frame can be clearly ascertained. The foundations therefore, on which the arguments for the organic perfectibility of man rest, are unusually weak, and can only be considered as mere conjectures. It does not however by any means seem impossible, that, by an attention to breed, a certain degree of improvement similar to that among animals might take place among men. Whether intellect could be communicated may be a matter of doubt; but size, strength, beauty, complexion, and perhaps even longevity, are in a degree transmissible. The error does not seem to lie in supposing a small degree of improvement possible, but in not discriminating between a small improvement, the limit of which is undefined, and an improvement really unlimited. As the human race however could not be improved in this way, without con-

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demning all the bad specimens to celibacy, it is not probable, that an attention to breed should ever become general; indeed I know of no well-directed attempts of this kind except in the ancient family of the Bickerstaffs, who are said to have been very successful in whitening the skins and increasing the height of their race by prudent marriages, particularly by that very judicious cross with Maud the milk-maid, by which some capital defects in the constitutions of the family were corrected.

It will not be necessary, I think, in order more completely to show the improbability of any approach in man towards immortality on earth, to urge the very great additional weight, that an increase in the duration of life would give to the argument of population.

M. Condorcet's book may be considered not only as a sketch of the opinions of a celebrated individual, but of many of the literary men in France at the beginning of the revolution. As such, though merely a sketch, it seems worthy of attention.

Many, I doubt not, will think, that the attempting gravely to controvert so absurd a paradox, as the immortality of man on earth, or indeed even the perfectibility of man and so-

ciety, is a waste of time and words ; and that such unfounded conjectures are best answered by neglect. I profess, however, to be of a different opinion. When paradoxes of this kind are advanced by ingenious and able men, neglect has no tendency to convince them of their mistakes. Priding themselves on what they conceive to be a mark of the reach and size of their own understandings, of the extent and comprehensiveness of their views ; they will look upon this neglect merely as an indication of poverty and narrowness in the mental exertions of their contemporaries ; and only think, that the world is not yet prepared to receive their sublime truths.

On the contrary, a candid investigation of these subjects, accompanied with a perfect readiness to adopt any theory warranted by sound philosophy, may have a tendency to convince them, that in forming improbable and unfounded hypotheses, so far from enlarging the bounds of human science, they are contracting it ; so far from promoting the improvement of the human mind, they are obstructing it : they are throwing us back again almost into the infancy of knowledge ; and weakening the foundations of that mode of philosophizing, under
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the auspices of which science has of late made such rapid advances. The late rage for wide and unrestrained speculation seems to have been a kind of mental intoxication, arising perhaps from the great and unexpected discoveries, which had been made in various branches of science. To men elate and giddy with such successes, every thing appeared to be within the grasp of human powers; and under this illusion they confounded subjects where no real progress could be proved, with those, where the progress had been marked, certain, and acknowledged. Could they be persuaded to sober themselves with a little severe and chastised thinking, they would see, that the cause of truth and of sound philosophy cannot but suffer, by substituting wild flights and unsupported assertions, for patient investigation and well-authenticated proofs.

CHAP. II.

Of Systems of Equality. Godwin.

IN reading Mr. Godwin's ingenious work on political justice, it is impossible not to be struck with the spirit and energy of his style, the force and precision of some of his reasonings, the ardent tone of his thoughts, and particularly with that impressive earnestness of manner, which gives an air of truth to the whole. At the same time it must be confessed, that he has not proceeded in his inquiries with the caution that sound philosophy requires. His conclusions are often unwarranted by his premises. He fails sometimes in removing objections, which he himself brings forward. He relies too much on general and abstract propositions, which will not admit of application. And his conjectures certainly far outstrip the modesty of nature.

The system of equality, which Mr. Godwin proposes, is, on a first view, the most beautiful and engaging of any that has yet appeared. A melioration of society to be produced merely
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by reason and conviction gives more promise of permanence than any change effected and maintained by force. The unlimited exercise of private judgment is a doctrine grand and captivating, and has a vast superiority over those systems, where every individual is in a manner the slave of the public. The substitution of benevolence, as the masterspring and moving principle of society, instead of self-love, appears at first sight to be a consummation devoutly to be wished. In short, it is impossible to contemplate the whole of this fair picture, without emotions of delight and admiration, accompanied with an ardent longing for the period of its accomplishment. But alas! that moment can never arrive. The whole is little better than a dream—a phantom of the imagination. These “gorgeous palaces” of happiness and immortality, these “solemn temples” of truth and virtue, will dissolve, “like the baseless fabric of a vision,” when we awaken to real life, and contemplate the genuine situation of man on earth.

Mr. Godwin, at the conclusion of the third chapter of his eighth book, speaking of population, says, “There is a principle in human society, by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence.

“ Thus among the wandering tribes of America
“ and Asia we never find, through the lapse of
“ ages, that population has so increased, as to
“ render necessary the cultivation of the earth.”
This principle, which Mr. Godwin thus mentions as some mysterious and occult cause, and which he does not attempt to investigate, has appeared to be the grinding law of necessity—misery, and the fear of misery.

The great error, under which Mr. Godwin labours throughout his whole work, is, the attributing of almost all the vices and misery, that prevail in civil society, to human institutions. Political regulations, and the established administration of property, are, with him, the fruitful sources of all evil, the hotbeds of all the crimes that degrade mankind. Were this really a true state of the case, it would not seem an absolutely hopeless task, to remove evil completely from the world; and reason seems to be the proper and adequate instrument for effecting so great a purpose. But the truth is, that though human institutions appear to be and indeed often are, the obvious and obtrusive causes of much mischief to mankind, they are, in reality, light and superficial, in comparison with those deeper-seated causes of evil, which result

from the laws of nature and the passions of mankind.

In a chapter on the benefits attendant upon a system of equality, Mr. Godwin says, “ The
“ spirit of oppression, the spirit of fervility, and
“ the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate
“ growth of the established administration of
“ property. They are alike hostile to intellec-
“ tual improvement. The other vices of envy,
“ malice, and revenge, are their inseparable
“ companions. In a state of society where men
“ lived in the midst of plenty, and where all
“ shared alike the bounties of nature, these sen-
“ timents would inevitably expire. The nar-
“ row principle of selfishness would vanish. No
“ man being obliged to guard his little store, or
“ provide with anxiety and pain for his restless
“ wants, each would lose his individual exist-
“ ence in the thought of the general good. No
“ man would be an enemy to his neighbours,
“ for they would have no subject of contention ;
“ and of consequence philanthropy would re-
“ sume the empire which reason assigns her.
“ Mind would be delivered from her perpetual
“ anxiety about corporal support ; and free to
“ expatiate in the field of thought which is
“ congenial

“ congenial to her. Each would assist the inquiries of all.”

This would indeed be a happy state. But that it is merely an imaginary picture with scarcely a feature near the truth, the reader, I am afraid, is already too well convinced.

Man cannot live in the midst of plenty. All cannot share alike the bounties of nature. Were there no established administration of property, every man would be obliged to guard with force his little store. Selfishness would be triumphant. The subjects of contention would be perpetual. Every individual would be under a constant anxiety about corporal support, and not a single intellect would be left free to expatiate in the field of thought.

How little Mr. Godwin has turned his attention to the real state of human society will sufficiently appear, from the manner in which he endeavours to remove the difficulty of an overcharged population. He says, “ The obvious answer to this objection is, that to reason thus is to foresee difficulties at a great distance. Three fourths of the habitable globe are now uncultivated. The parts already culti-

* Political Justice, b. viii, c. iii, p. 458.

“ vated are capable of immeasurable improve-
“ ment. Myriads of centuries of still increas-
“ ing population may pass away, and the earth
“ be still found sufficient for the subsistence of
“ its inhabitants.”

I have already pointed out the error of sup-
posing, that no distress or difficulty would arise
from a redundant population, before the earth
absolutely refused to produce any more. But
let us imagine for a moment Mr. Godwin's
system of equality realized in its utmost extent,
and see how soon this difficulty might be ex-
pected to press, under so perfect a form of so-
ciety. A theory that will not admit of appli-
cation cannot possibly be just.

Let us suppose all the causes of vice and mi-
sery in this island removed. War and conten-
tion cease. Unwholesome trades and manufac-
tories do not exist. Crowds no longer collect
together in great and pestilent cities for pur-
poses of cost and intrigue, of commerce, and vi-
cious gratification. Simple, healthy, and ra-
tional amusements take place of drinking, gam-
ing, and debauchery. There are no towns suf-
ficiently large to have any prejudicial effects on
the human constitution. The greater part of
the happy inhabitants of this terrestrial Paradise

* Polit. Justice. b. viii, c. ix, p. 510.

live in hamlets and farm houses scattered over the face of the country. All men are equal. The labours of luxury are at an end; and the necessary labours of agriculture are shared amicably among all. The number of persons and the produce of the island we suppose to be the same as at present. The spirit of benevolence, guided by impartial justice, will divide this produce among all the members of society according to their wants. Though it would be impossible, that they should all have animal food every day, yet vegetable food, with meat occasionally, would satisfy the desires of a frugal people, and would be sufficient to preserve them in health, strength, and spirits.

Mr. Godwin considers marriage as a fraud and a monopoly.^a Let us suppose the commerce of the sexes established upon principles of the most perfect freedom. Mr. Godwin does not think himself, that this freedom would lead to a promiscuous intercourse; and this I perfectly agree with him. The love of variety is a vicious, corrupt, and unnatural taste, and could not prevail in any great degree in a simple and virtuous state of society. Each man would probably select for himself a partner, to whom he

^a Polit. Justice, b. viii, c. viii, p. 498 et seq.

would adhere, as long as that adherence continued to be the choice of both parties. It would be of little consequence, according to Mr. Godwin, how many children a woman had, or to whom they belonged. Provisions and assistance would spontaneously flow from the quarter in which they abounded to the quarter in which they were deficient.* And every man according to his capacity would be ready to furnish instruction to the rising generation.

I cannot conceive a form of society so favourable upon the whole to population. The irremediableness of marriage, as it is at present constituted, undoubtedly deters many from entering into this state. An unshackled intercourse on the contrary would be a most powerful incitement to early attachments; and as we are supposing no anxiety about the future support of children to exist, I do not conceive, that there would be one woman in a hundred, of twenty-three years of age, without a family.

With these extraordinary encouragements to population, and every cause of depopulation, as we have supposed, removed, the numbers would necessarily increase faster than in any society that has ever yet been known. I have before mentioned, that the inhabitants of

* *Political Justice*, b. viii, c. viii, p. 504.

the back settlements of America appear to double their numbers in fifteen years. England is certainly a more healthy country than the back settlements of America; and as we have supposed every house in the island to be airy and wholesome, and the encouragements to have a family greater even than in America, no probable reason can be assigned, why the population should not double itself in less, if possible, than fifteen years. But to be quite sure, that we do not go beyond the truth, we will only suppose the period of doubling to be twenty-five years; a ratio of increase, which is slower than is known to have taken place throughout all the northern states of America.

There can be little doubt, that the equalization of property which we have supposed, added to the circumstance of the labour of the whole community being directed chiefly to agriculture, would tend greatly to augment the produce of the country. But to answer the demands of a population increasing so rapidly, Mr. Godwin's calculation of half an hour a day would certainly not be sufficient. It is probable, that the half of every man's time must be employed for this purpose. Yet with such or much greater exertions, a person who is acquainted with the nature of the soil in this country, and
who

who reflects on the fertility of the lands already in cultivation, and the barrenness of those that are not cultivated, will be very much disposed to doubt, whether the whole average produce could possibly be doubled in twenty-five years from the present period. The only chance of success would be from the ploughing up most of the grazing countries, and putting an end almost entirely to animal food. Yet this scheme would probably defeat itself. The soil of England will not produce much without dressing; and cattle seem to be necessary to make that species of manure, which best suits the land.

Difficult however as it might be to double the average produce of the island in twenty-five years, let us suppose it effected. At the expiration of the first period therefore, the food, though almost entirely vegetable, would be sufficient to support in health the doubled population of 22 millions.

During the next period where will the food be found, to satisfy the importunate demands of the increasing numbers? Where is the fresh land to turn up? Where is the dressing necessary to improve that which is already in cultivation? There is no person with the smallest knowledge of land but would say, that it was impossible, that

that the average produce of the country could be increased during the second twenty-five years by a quantity equal to what it at present yields. Yet we will suppose this increase, however improbable, to take place. The exuberant strength of the argument allows of almost any concession. Even with this concession however, there would be eleven millions at the expiration of the second term unprovided for. A quantity equal to the frugal support of 33 millions would be to be divided among 44 millions.

Alas! what becomes of the picture, where men lived in the midst of plenty, where no man was obliged to provide with anxiety and pain for his restless wants; where the narrow principle of selfishness did not exist; where the mind was delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporal support, and free to expatiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her? This beautiful fabric of the imagination vanishes at the severe touch of truth. The spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul. The temptations to evil are too strong

strong for human nature to resist. The corn is plucked up before it is ripe, or secreted in unfair proportions; and the whole black train of vices that belong to falsehood are immediately generated. Provisions no longer flow in for the support of a mother with a large family. The children are sickly from insufficient food. The rosy flush of health gives place to the pallid cheek and hollow eye of misery. Benevolence, yet lingering in a few bosoms, makes some faint expiring struggles, till at length self-love resumes his wonted empire, and lords it triumphant over the world.

No human institutions here existed, to the perverseness of which Mr. Godwin ascribes the original sin of the worst men.^a No opposition had been produced by them between public and private good. No monopoly had been created of those advantages, which reason directs to be left in common. No man had been goaded to the breach of order by unjust laws. Benevolence had established her reign in all hearts. And yet in so short a period as fifty years, violence, oppression, falsehood, misery, every hateful vice, and every form of distress, which degrade and sadden the present state of society,

^a Polit. Justice, b. viii, c. iii, p. 340.

seem to have been generated by the most impetuous circumstances, by laws inherent in the nature of man, and absolutely independent of all human regulations.

If we be not yet too well convinced of the reality of this melancholy picture, let us but look for a moment into the next period of twenty-five years, and we shall see 44 millions of human beings without the means of support; and at the conclusion of the first century the population would be 176 millions, and the food only sufficient for 55 millions, leaving 121 millions unprovided for. In these ages want indeed would be triumphant, and rapine and murder must reign at large: and yet all this time we are supposing the produce of the earth absolutely unlimited, and the yearly increase greater than the boldest speculator can imagine.

This is undoubtedly a very different view of the difficulty arising from the principle of population from that which Mr. Godwin gives, when he says, “Myriads of centuries of still increasing population may pass away, and the earth be still found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants.”

I am sufficiently aware, that the redundant millions which I have mentioned could never have

have existed. It is a perfectly just observation of Mr Godwin, that "there is a principle in human society, by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence." The sole question is, what is this principle? Is it some obscure and occult cause? Is it some mysterious interference of Heaven, which at a certain period strikes the men with impotence, and the women with barrenness? Or is it a cause open to our researches, within our view; a cause which has constantly been observed to operate, though with varied force, in every state in which man has been placed? Is it not misery, and the fear of misery, the necessary and inevitable results of the laws of nature, which human institutions, so far from aggravating, have tended considerably to mitigate, though they can never remove?

It may be curious to observe in the case that we have been supposing, how some of the principal laws, which at present govern civilized society, would be successively dictated by the most imperious necessity. As man, according to Mr. Godwin, is the creature of the impressions to which he is subject, the goadings of want could not continue long, before some violations of public or private stock would necessarily take place.

place. As these violations increased in number and extent, the more active and comprehensive intellects of the society would soon perceive, that, while the population was fast increasing, the yearly produce of the country would shortly begin to diminish. The urgency of the case would suggest the necessity of some immediate measures being taken for the general safety. Some kind of convention would be then called, and the dangerous situation of the country stated in the strongest terms. It would be observed, that while they lived in the midst of plenty it was of little consequence who laboured the least, or who possessed the least, as every man was perfectly willing and ready to supply the wants of his neighbour. But that the question was no longer whether one man should give to another that which he did not use himself; but whether he should give to his neighbour the food which was absolutely necessary to his own existence. It would be represented, that the number of those who were in want very greatly exceeded the number and means of those who should supply them; that these pressing wants, which, from the state of the produce of the country, could not all be gratified, had occasioned some flagrant violations of justice; that

that these violations had already checked the increase of food, and would, if they were not by some means or other prevented, throw the whole community into confusion; that imperious necessity seemed to dictate, that a yearly increase of produce should, if possible, be obtained at all events; that, in order to effect this first great and indispensable purpose, it would be advisable to make a more complete division of land, and to secure every man's property against violation by the most powerful sanctions.

It might be urged perhaps, by some objectors, that as the fertility of the land increased, and various accidents occurred, the shares of some men might be much more than sufficient for their support; and that when the reign of self-love was once established, they would not distribute their surplus produce without some compensation in return. It would be observed in answer, that this was an inconvenience greatly to be lamented; but that it was an evil which would bear no comparison to the black train of distresses inevitably occasioned by the insecurity of property; that the quantity of food, which one man could consume, was necessarily limited by the narrow capacity of the human stomach; that it was certainly not probable, that he should

throw away the rest ; and if he exchanged his surplus produce for the labour of others, this would be better than that these others should absolutely starve.

It seems highly probable therefore, that an administration of property, not very different from that which prevails in civilized states at present, would be established as the best though inadequate remedy for the evils, which were pressing on the society.

The next subject which would come under discussion, intimately connected with the preceding, is the commerce of the sexes. It would be urged by those who had turned their attention to the true cause of the difficulties under which the community laboured, that, while every man felt secure, that all his children would be well provided for by general benevolence, the powers of the earth would be absolutely inadequate to produce food for the population which would ensue ; that, even if the whole attention and labour of the society were directed to this sole point, and if by the most perfect security of property, and every other encouragement that could be thought of, the greatest possible increase of produce were yearly obtained, yet still the increase of food would by no means keep pace with

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with the much more rapid increase of population; that some check to population therefore was imperiously called for; that the most natural and obvious check seemed to be, to make every man provide for his own children; that this would operate in some respect as a measure and a guide in the increase of population, as it might be expected, that no man would bring beings into the world for whom he could not find the means of support; that, where this notwithstanding was the case, it seemed necessary for the example of others, that the disgrace and inconvenience attending such a conduct should fall upon that individual, who had thus inconsiderately plunged himself and his innocent children into want and misery.

The institution of marriage, or at least of some express or implied obligation on every man to support his own children, seems to be the natural result of these reasonings in a community under the difficulties that we have supposed.

The view of these difficulties presents us with a very natural reason, why the disgrace which attends a breach of chastity should be greater in a woman than in a man. It could not be expected, that women should have re-

sources sufficient to support their own children. When, therefore, a woman had lived with a man, who had entered into no compact to maintain her children ; and, aware of the inconveniences that he might bring upon himself, had deserted her, these children must necessarily fall upon the society for support or starve. And to prevent the frequent recurrence of such an inconvenience, as it would be highly unjust to punish so natural a fault by personal restraint or infliction, the men might agree to punish it with disgrace. The offence is besides more obvious and conspicuous in the woman, and less liable to any mistake. The father of a child may not always be known ; but the same uncertainty cannot easily exist with regard to the mother. Where the evidence of the offence was most complete, and the inconvenience to the society, at the same time, the greatest, there, it was agreed, that the largest share of blame should fall. The obligation on every man to support his children the society would enforce by positive laws ; and the greater degree of inconvenience or labour, to which a family would necessarily subject him, added to some portion of disgrace, which every human being must incur who leads another into
unhappi-

unhappiness, might be considered as a sufficient punishment for the man.

That a woman should at present be almost driven from society for an offence, which men commit nearly with impunity, seems to be undoubtedly a breach of natural justice. But the origin of the custom, as the most obvious and effectual method of preventing the frequent recurrence of a serious inconvenience to a community, appears to be natural, though not perhaps perfectly justifiable. This origin however is now lost in the new train of ideas, that the custom has since generated. What at first might be dictated by state necessity is now supported by female delicacy; and operates with the greatest force on that part of the society, where, if the original intention of the custom were preserved, there is the least real occasion for it.

When these two fundamental laws of society, the security of property, and the institution of marriage, were once established, inequality of conditions must necessarily follow. Those who were born after the division of property would come into a world already possessed. If their parents, from having too large a family, were unable to give them sufficient for their support, what could they do in a world where every thing

was appropriated? We have seen the fatal effects that would result to society, if every man had a valid claim to an equal share of the produce of the earth. The members of a family, which was grown too large for the original division of land appropriated to it, could not then demand a part of the surplus produce of others as a debt of justice. It has appeared, that from the inevitable laws of human nature some human beings will be exposed to want. These are the unhappy persons, who in the great lottery of life have drawn a blank. The number of these persons would soon exceed the ability of the surplus produce to supply. Moral merit is a very difficult criterion except in extreme cases. The owners of surplus produce would in general seek some more obvious mark of distinction; and it seems to be both natural and just, that, except upon particular occasions, their choice should fall upon those who were able, and professed themselves willing, to exert their strength in procuring a further surplus produce, which would at once benefit the community, and enable the proprietors to afford assistance to greater numbers. All who were in want of food would be urged by imperious necessity, to offer their labour in exchange for this article,

so absolutely necessary to existence. The fund appropriated to the maintenance of labour would be the aggregate quantity of food possessed by the owners of land beyond their own consumption. When the demands upon this fund were great and numerous it would naturally be divided into very small shares. Labour would be ill paid. Men would offer to work for a bare subsistence; and the rearing of families would be checked by sickness and misery. On the contrary, when this fund was increasing fast; when it was great in proportion to the number of claimants, it would be divided in much larger shares. No man would exchange his labour without receiving an ample quantity of food in return. Labourers would live in ease and comfort, and would consequently be able to rear a numerous and vigorous offspring.

On the state of this fund, the happiness or the degree of misery, prevailing among the lower classes of people in every known state, at present, chiefly depends; and on this happiness or degree of misery, depends principally the increase, stationariness, or decrease of population.

And thus it appears, that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving

moving principle instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason, not force, would from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, or of human institutions, degenerate in a very short period into a society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present; a society, divided into a class of proprietors and a class of labourers, and with self-love for the mainspring of the great machine.

In the supposition which I have made, I have undoubtedly taken the increase of population smaller, and the increase of produce greater, than they really would be. No reason can be assigned, why, under the circumstances supposed, population should not increase faster than in any known instance. If then we were to take the period of doubling at fifteen years instead of twenty-five years, and reflect upon the labour necessary to double the produce in so short a time, even if we allow it possible; we may venture to pronounce with certainty, that, if Mr. Godwin's system of society were established in its utmost perfection, instead of myriads of centuries, not thirty years could elapse before its
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utter destruction from the simple principle of population.

I have taken no notice of emigration in this place, for obvious reasons. If such societies were instituted in other parts of Europe, these countries would be under the same difficulties with regard to population, and could admit no fresh members into their bosoms. If this beautiful society were confined to our island, it must have degenerated strangely from its original purity, and administer but a very small portion of the happiness it proposed, before any of its members would voluntarily consent to leave it, and live under such governments as at present exist in Europe, or submit to the extreme hardships of first settlers in new regions.

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CHAP. III.

Observations on the Reply of Mr. Godwin.

MR. Godwin in a late publication has replied to those parts of the Essay on the Principle of Population, which he thinks bear the hardest on his system. A few remarks on this reply will be sufficient.

In a note to an early part of his pamphlet he observes, that the main attack of the essay is not directed against the principles of his work, but its conclusion.^a It may be true indeed, that, as Mr. Godwin had dedicated one particular chapter towards the conclusion of his work to the consideration of the objections to his system from the principle of population, this particular chapter is most frequently alluded to: but certainly, if the great principle of the essay be admitted, it affects his whole work, and essentially alters the foundations of political justice. A

^a Reply to the attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the author of an Essay on Population, and others, p. 10.

great part of Mr. Godwin's book consists of an abuse of human institutions, as productive of all or most of the evils which afflict society. The acknowledgment of a new and totally unconsidered cause of misery would evidently alter the state of these arguments, and make it absolutely necessary, that they should be either newly modified or entirely rejected.

In the first book of *Political Justice*, chap. iii, entitled, "The Spirit of Political Institutions," Mr. Godwin observes, that "Two of the greatest abuses relative to the interior policy of nations, which at this time prevail in the world, consist in the irregular transfer of property, either first by violence, or secondly by fraud." And he goes on to say, that, if there existed no desire in individuals to possess themselves of the substance of others, and if every man could with perfect facility obtain the necessaries of life, civil society might become what poetry has feigned of the golden age. Let us inquire, he says, into the principles to which these evils are indebted for existence. After acknowledging the truth of the principal argument in the essay on population, I do not think, that he could stop in this inquiry at mere human institutions. Many other
other

other parts of his work would be affected by this consideration in a similar manner.

As Mr. Godwin seems disposed to understand, and candidly to admit the truth of the principal argument in the essay, I feel the more mortified, that he should think it a fair inference from my positions, that the political superintendents of a community are bound to exercise a paternal vigilance and care over the two great means of advantage and safety to mankind, misery and vice; and that no evil is more to be dreaded, than that we should have too little of them in the world, to confine the principle of population within its proper sphere.* I am at a loss to conceive, what class of evils Mr. Godwin imagines is yet behind, which these salutary checks are to prevent. For my own part I know of no greater evils than vice and misery; and the sole question is respecting the most effectual mode of diminishing them. The only reason why I object to Mr. Godwin's system is my full conviction, that an attempt to execute it would very greatly increase the quantity of vice and misery in society. If Mr. Godwin will undo this conviction, and prove to me, though it be only in theory, provided that

* Reply, &c. p. 60.

theory be consistent and founded on a knowledge of human nature, that his system will really tend to drive vice and misery from the earth, he may depend upon having me one of its steadiest and warmest advocates.

Mr. Godwin observes, that he should naturally be disposed to pronounce that man strangely indifferent to schemes of extraordinary improvement in society, who made it a conclusive argument against them, that, when they were realized, they might peradventure be of no permanence and duration. And yet, what is morality individual or political, according to Mr. Godwin's own definition of it, but a calculation of consequences? Is the physician the patron of pain, who advises his patient to bear a present evil, rather than betake himself to a remedy, which, though it might give momentary relief, would afterwards greatly aggravate all the symptoms? Is the moralist to be called an enemy to pleasure, because he recommends to a young man just entering into life not to ruin his health and patrimony in a few years by an excess of present gratifications, but to economize his enjoyments, that he may spread them over a longer period? Of Mr. Godwin's system, according to the present arguments by which it

is supported, it is not enough to say, *peradventure* it will be of no permanence; but we can pronounce with *certainty*, that it will be of no permanence: and under such circumstances an attempt to execute it would unquestionably be a great political immorality.

Mr. Godwin observes, that, after recovering from the first impression made by the Essay on Population, the first thing that is apt to strike every reflecting mind is, that the excess of power in the principle of population over the principle of subsistence has never, in any past instance, in any quarter or age of the world, produced those great and astonishing effects, that total breaking up of all the structures and maxims of society, which the essay leads us to expect from it in certain cases in future.^a This is undoubtedly true; and the reason is, that in no past instance, nor in any quarter or age of the world, has an attempt been made to establish such a system as Mr. Godwin's; and without an attempt of this nature none of these great effects will follow. The convulsions of the social system, described in the last chapter, appeared by a kind of irresistible necessity, to terminate in the establishment of the laws of property and

^a Reply, p. 70.

marriage;

marriage; but in countries where these laws are already established, as they are in all the common constitutions of society with which we are acquainted, the operation of the principle of population will always be silent and gradual, and not different to what we daily see in our own country. Other persons beside Mr. Godwin have imagined, that I looked to certain periods in future, when population would exceed the means of subsistence in a much greater degree than at present, and that the evils arising from the principle of population were rather in contemplation than in existence; but this is a total misconception of the argument.^a Poverty, and not absolute famine, is the specific effect of the principle of population, as I have before endeavoured to show. Many countries are now suffering all the evils, that can ever be expected to flow from this principle; and even if we were arrived at the absolute limit to all further increase of produce, a point which we shall certainly never reach, I should by no means expect, that these evils would be in any marked manner aggravated. The increase of produce in most European countries is so very slow com-

^a In other parts of his Reply, Mr. Godwin does not fall into this error.

pared with what would be required to support an unrestricted increase of people; that the checks, which are constantly in action to repress the population to the level of a produce increasing so slowly, would have very little more to do in wearing it down to a produce absolutely stationary.

But Mr. Godwin says, that, if he looks into the past history of the world, he does not see, that increasing population has been controlled and confined by vice and misery alone. In this observation I cannot agree with him. I believe Mr. Godwin would find it difficult to name any check, which in past ages has contributed to keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence, that does not fairly come under some form of vice or misery; except indeed the check of moral restraint, which I have already insisted on; and which, to say the truth, whatever hopes we may entertain of its prevalence in future, has undoubtedly in past ages operated with inconsiderable force.^a

^a It should be recollected always, that by moral restraint I mean a restraint from marriage from prudential motives, which is not followed by irregular gratifications. In this sense I am inclined to believe, that the expression I have here used is not too strong.

I do not think, that I should find it difficult to justify myself in the eyes of my readers from the imputation of being the patron of vice and misery ; but I am not clear, that Mr. Godwin would find such a justification so easy. For though he has positively declared, that he does not “ regard them with complacency ;” and “ hopes that it may not be considered as a taste “ absolutely singular in him, that he should entertain no vehement partialities for vice and “ misery ;”^a yet he has certainly exposed himself to the suspicion of having this singular taste, by suggesting the organization of a very large portion of them for the benefit of society in general. On this subject I need only observe, that I have always ranked the two checks,^b which he first

^a Reply, p. 76.

^b Mr Godwin does not acknowledge the justice of Hume’s observation respecting infanticide ; and yet the extreme population and poverty in China, where this custom prevails, tends strongly to confirm the observation. It is still however true, as Mr. Godwin observes, that the expedient is, in its own nature, adequate to the end for which it was cited (p. 66) ; but to make it so in fact, it must be done by the magistrate, and not left to the parents. The almost invariable tendency of this custom to increase population, when it depends entirely on the parents, shows the extreme pain which they must feel in making such a sacrifice, even when the distress

first mentions, among the worst forms of vice and misery.

In one part of his Reply, Mr. Godwin makes a supposition respecting the number of children that might be allowed to each prolific marriage ; but as he has not entered into the detail of the mode by which a greater number might be prevented, I shall not notice it further than merely to observe, that although he professes to acknowledge the geometrical and arithmetical ratios of population and food, yet in this place he appears to think, that, practically applied, these different ratios of increase are not of a nature to make the evil resulting from them urgent, or alarmingly to confine the natural progress of population.^a This observation seems to contradict his former acknowledgement.

arising from excessive poverty may be supposed to have deadened in great measure their sensibility. What must this pain be then upon the supposition of the interference of a magistrate, or of a positive law, to make parents destroy a child, which they feel the desire and think they possess the power of supporting ? The permission of infanticide is bad enough, and cannot but have a bad effect on the moral sensibility of a nation ; but I cannot conceive any thing much more detestable or shocking to the feelings than any direct regulation of this kind, although sanctioned by the names of Plato and Aristotle.

^a Reply, p. 70.

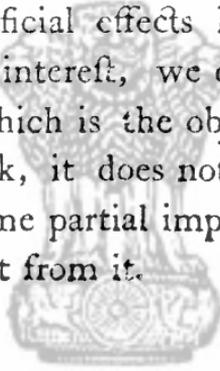
The last check which Mr. Godwin mentions, and which I am persuaded is the only one which he would seriously recommend is, “that sentiment, whether virtue, prudence, or pride, which continually restrains the universality and frequent repetition of the marriage contract.”^a On this sentiment, which I have already noticed, it will appear, that in the sequel of this work I shall lay considerable stress. Of this check therefore itself I entirely approve; but I do not think, that Mr. Godwin’s system of political justice is by any means favourable to its prevalence. The tendency to early marriages is so strong, that we want every possible help that we can get to counteract it; and a system which in any way whatever tends to weaken the foundation of private property, and to lessen in any degree the full advantage and superiority which each individual may derive from his prudence, must remove the only counteracting weight to the passion of love, that can be depended upon for any essential effect. Mr. Godwin acknowledges, that in his system “the ill consequences of a numerous family will not come so coarsely home to each man’s individual interest, as they do at present.”^b But

^a Reply, p. 72.^b Id. p. 74.

I am sorry to say, that, from what we know hitherto of the human character, we can have no rational hopes of success without this coarse application to individual interest, which Mr. Godwin rejects. If the whole effect were to depend merely on a sense of duty, considering the powerful antagonist that is to be contended with in the present case, I confess that I should absolutely despair. At the same time I am strongly of opinion, that a sense of duty, super-added to a sense of interest, would by no means be without its effect. There are many noble and disinterested spirits, who, though aware of the inconveniencies, which they may bring upon themselves by the indulgence of an early and virtuous passion, feel a kind of repugnance to listen to the dictates of mere worldly prudence, and a pride in rejecting these low considerations. There is a kind of romantic gallantry in sacrificing all for love, naturally fascinating to a young mind; and to say the truth, if all is to be sacrificed, I do not know in what better cause it can be done. But if a strong sense of duty could in these instances be added to prudential suggestions, the whole question might wear a different colour. In delaying the gratification of passion from a sense of duty, the most disinterested

terested spirit, the most delicate honour, might be satisfied. The romantic pride might take a different direction, and the dictates of worldly prudence might be followed with the cheerful consciousness of making a virtuous sacrifice.

If we were to remove or weaken the motive of interest, which would be the case in Mr. Godwin's system, I fear we should have but a weak substitute in a sense of duty. But if to the present beneficial effects known to result from a sense of interest, we could superadd a sense of duty, which is the object of the latter part of this work, it does not seem absolutely hopeless, that some partial improvement in society should result from it.



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CHAP. IV.

Of Emigration.

ALTHOUGH the resource of emigration seems to be excluded from such a society as Mr. Godwin has imagined; yet in that partial degree of improvement, which alone can rationally be expected, it may fairly enter into our consideration. And as it is not probable, that human industry should begin to receive its best direction throughout all the nations of the earth at the same time, it may be said, that in the case of a redundant population in the more cultivated parts of the world, the natural and obvious remedy that presents itself is, emigration to those parts that are uncultivated. As these parts are of great extent, and very thinly peopled, this resource might appear, on a first view of the subject, an adequate remedy, or at least of a nature to remove the evil to a distant period: but when we advert to experience, and to the actual state of the uncivilized parts of the globe, instead of
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any thing like an adequate remedy, it will appear but a slight palliative.

In the accounts which we have of the peopling of new countries, the dangers, difficulties, and hardships, with which the first settlers have had to struggle, appear to be even greater, than we can well imagine they could be exposed to in their parent state. The endeavour to avoid that degree of unhappiness arising from the difficulty of supporting a family might long have left the new world of America unpeopled by Europeans, if those more powerful passions, the thirst of gain, the spirit of adventure, and religious enthusiasm, had not directed and animated the enterprise. These passions enabled the first adventurers to triumph over every obstacle; but in many instances in a way to make humanity shudder, and to defeat the true end of emigration. Whatever may be the character of the Spanish inhabitants of Mexico and Peru at the present moment, we cannot read the accounts of the first conquests of these countries, without feeling strongly, that the race destroyed was in moral worth as well as numbers superior to the race of their destroyers.

The parts of America settled by the English, from being thinly peopled, were better adapted

to the establishment of new colonies; yet even here, the most formidable difficulties presented themselves. In the settlement of Virginia, begun by Sir Walter Raleigh, and established by Lord Delaware, three attempts completely failed. Nearly half of the first colony was destroyed by the savages, and the rest, consumed and worn down by fatigue and famine, deserted the country, and returned home in despair. The second colony was cut off to a man in a manner unknown; but they were supposed to be destroyed by the Indians. The third experienced the same dismal fate; and the remains of the fourth, after it had been reduced by famine and disease in the course of six months from 500 to 60 persons, were returning in a famishing and desperate condition to England, when they were met in the mouth of the Chesapeak bay by Lord Delaware, with a squadron loaded with provisions, and every thing for their relief and defence.*

The first puritan settlers in New England were few in number. They landed in a bad season, and were only supported by their private funds. The winter was premature and terribly

* Burke's America, vol. ii, p. 219.
p. 83, 85.

Robertson, b. ix.

cold; the country was covered with wood, and afforded very little for the refreshment of persons sickly with such a voyage, or for the sustenance of an infant people. Nearly half of them perished by the scurvy, by want, and the severity of the climate; yet those who survived were not dispirited by their hardships, but, supported by their energy of character, and the satisfaction of finding themselves out of the reach of the spiritual arm, reduced this savage country by degrees to yield a comfortable subsistence.^a

Even the plantation of Barbadoes, which increased afterwards with such extraordinary rapidity, had at first to contend with a country utterly desolate, an extreme want of provisions, a difficulty in clearing the ground unusually great from the uncommon size and hardness of the trees, a most disheartening scantiness and poverty in their first crops, and a slow and precarious supply of provisions from England.^b

The attempt of the French in 1663, to form at once a powerful colony in Guiana, was attended with the most disastrous consequences. Twelve thousand men were landed in the rainy season, and placed under tents and miserable sheds. In this situation, inactive, weary of ex-

^a Burke's *America*, vol. ii, p. 144.

^b *Id.* p. 85.

istence, and in want of all necessaries; exposed to contagious distempers, which are always occasioned by bad provisions, and to all the irregularities, which idleness produces among the lower classes of society; almost the whole of them ended their lives in all the horrors of despair. The attempt was completely abortive. Two thousand men, whose robust constitutions had enabled them to resist the inclemency of the climate, and the miseries to which they had been exposed, were brought back to France, and the 26,000,000 of livres, which had been expended in the expedition, were totally lost.^a

In the late settlements at Port Jackson in New Holland, a melancholy and affecting picture is drawn by Collins of the extreme hardships, with which, for some years, the infant colony had to struggle, before the produce was equal to its support. These distresses were undoubtedly aggravated by the character of the settlers; but those which were caused by the unhealthiness of a newly cleared country, the failure of first crops, and the uncertainty of supplies from so distant a mother country, were of themselves sufficiently dis-

^a Raynal, *Hist. des Indes*, tom. vii, liv, xiii, p. 43. 10 vols. 8vo. 1795.

heartening,

heartening, to place in a strong point of view the necessity of great resources, as well as unconquerable perseverance, in the colonization of savage countries.

The establishment of colonies in the more thinly peopled regions of Europe and Asia would evidently require still greater resources. From the power and warlike character of the inhabitants of these countries, a considerable military force would be necessary, to prevent their utter and immediate destruction. Even the frontier provinces of the most powerful states are defended with considerable difficulty from such restless neighbours; and the peaceful labours of the cultivator are continually interrupted by their predatory incursions. The late Empress Catharine of Russia found it necessary, to protect by regular fortresses the colonies, which she had established in the districts near the Wolga; and the calamities which her subjects suffered by the incursions of the Crimean Tartars furnished a pretext, and perhaps a just one, for taking possession of the whole of the Crimea, and expelling the greatest part of these turbulent neighbours, and reducing the rest to a more tranquil mode of life.

The difficulties attending a first establishment
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from soil, climate, and the want of proper conveniences, are of course nearly the same in these regions as in America. Mr. Eton, in his account of the Turkish Empire, says, that 75,000 Christians were obliged by Russia to emigrate from the Crimea, and sent to inhabit the country abandoned by the Nogai Tartars; but the winter coming on before the houses built for them were ready, a great part of them had no other shelter from the cold, than what was afforded them by holes dug in the ground, covered with what they could procure, and the greatest part of them perished. Only seven thousand remained a few years afterwards. Another colony from Italy to the banks of the Borysthenes had, he says, no better fate, owing to the bad management of those, who were commissioned to provide for them.

It is needless to add to these instances, as the accounts given of the difficulties experienced in new settlements are all nearly similar. It has been justly observed by a correspondent of Dr. Franklin, that one of the reasons why we have seen so many fruitless attempts to settle colonies at an immense public and private expense by several of the powers of Europe is, that the moral and mechanical habits adapted to the
mother

mother country are frequently not so to the new-settled one, and to external events, many of which are unforeseen; and that it is to be remarked, that none of the English colonies became any way considerable, till the necessary manners were born and grew up in the country. Pallas particularly notices the want of proper habits in the colonies established by Russia, as one of the causes why they did not increase so fast as might have been expected.

In addition to this, it may be observed, that the first establishment of a new colony generally presents an instance of a country peopled considerably beyond its actual produce; and the natural consequence seems to be, that this population, if not amply supplied by the mother country, should at the commencement be diminished to the level of the first scanty productions, and not begin permanently to increase, till the remaining numbers had so far cultivated the soil, as to make it yield a quantity of food more than sufficient for their own support; and which consequently they could divide with a family. The frequent failures in the establishment of new colonies tend strongly to show the order of precedence between food and population.

It must be acknowledged then, that the class of people, on whom the distress arising from a too rapidly increasing population would principally fall, could not possibly begin a new colony in a distant country. From the nature of their situation, they must necessarily be deficient in those resources, which alone could ensure success: and unless they could find leaders among the higher classes urged by the spirit of avarice or enterprise, or of religious or political discontent; or were furnished with means and support by government; whatever degree of misery they might suffer in their own country from the scarcity of subsistence, they would be absolutely unable to take possession of any of those uncultivated regions, of which there is such an extent on the earth.

When new colonies have been once securely established, the difficulty of emigration is indeed very considerably diminished; yet, even then, some resources are necessary to provide vessels for the voyage, and support and assistance till the emigrants can settle themselves, and find employment in their adopted country. How far it is incumbent upon a government to furnish these resources may be a question; but whatever be its duty in this particular, perhaps

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it is too much to expect, that, except where any particular colonial advantages are proposed, emigration should be actively assisted.

The necessary resources for transport and maintenance are however frequently furnished by individuals or private companies. For many years before the American war, and for some few since, the facilities of emigration to this new world, and the probable advantages in view, were unusually great; and it must be considered undoubtedly as a very happy circumstance for any country, to have so comfortable an asylum for its redundant population. But I would ask whether, even during these periods, the distress among the common people in this country was little or nothing; and whether every man felt secure before he ventured on marriage, that, however large his family might be, he should find no difficulty in supporting it without parish assistance. The answer, I fear, could not be in the affirmative.

It will be said, that, when an opportunity of advantageous emigration is offered, it is the fault of the people themselves, if instead of accepting it they prefer a life of celibacy or extreme poverty in their own country. Is it then a fault for a man to feel an attachment to his

native soil, to love the parents that nurtured him, his kindred, his friends, and the companions of his early years? or is it no evil that he suffers, because he consents to bear it rather than snap these cords, which nature has wound in close and intricate folds round the human heart? The great plan of Providence seems to require, indeed, that these ties should sometimes be broken; but the separation does not, on that account, give less pain; and though the general good may be promoted by it, it does not cease to be an individual evil. Besides, doubts and uncertainty must ever attend all distant emigrations, particularly in the apprehensions of the lower classes of people. They cannot feel quite secure, that the representations made to them of the high price of labour, or the cheapness of land, are accurately true. They are placing themselves in the power of the persons who are to furnish them with the means of transport and maintenance, who may perhaps have an interest in deceiving them; and the sea which they are to pass appears to them like the separation of death from all their former connexions, and in a manner to preclude the possibility of return in case of failure, as they cannot expect the offer of the same means to
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bring them back. We cannot be surpris'd then, that, except where a spirit of enterprize is added to the uneasiness of poverty, the consideration of these circumstances should frequently

“ Make them rather bear the ills they suffer,
“ Than fly to others which they know not of.”

If a tract of rich land as large as this island were suddenly annexed to it, and sold in small lots, or let out in small farms, the case would be very different, and the melioration of the state of the common people would be sudden and striking; though the rich would be continually complaining of the high price of labour, the pride of the lower classes, and the difficulty of getting work done. These, I understand, are not unfrequent complaints among the men of property in America.

Every resource however from emigration, if used effectually, as this would be, must be of short duration. There is scarcely a state in Europe, except perhaps Russia, the inhabitants of which do not often endeavour to better their condition by removing to other countries. As these states therefore have nearly all rather a redundant than deficient population, in proportion to their produce, they cannot be supposed to afford any effectual resources of emigration to

each other. Let us suppose for a moment, that in this more enlightened part of the globe, the internal economy of each state were so admirably regulated, that no checks existed to population, and that the different governments provided every facility for emigration. Taking the population of Europe, excluding Russia, at a hundred millions, and allowing a greater increase of produce than is probable, or even possible, in the mother countries, the redundancy of parent stock in a single century would be eleven hundred millions, which, added to the natural increase of the colonies during the same time, would more than double what has been supposed to be the present population of the whole earth.

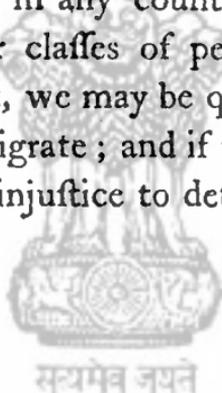
Can we imagine, that in the uncultivated parts of Asia, Africa, or America, the greatest exertions and the best directed endeavours could, in so short a period, prepare a quantity of land sufficient for the support of such a population? If any sanguine person should feel a doubt upon the subject, let him only add 25 or 50 years more, and every doubt must be crushed in overwhelming conviction.

It is evident therefore, that the reason why the resource of emigration has so long continued
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to be held out as a remedy to redundant population is, because, from the natural unwillingness of people to desert their native country, and the difficulty of clearing and cultivating fresh soil, it never is or can be adequately adopted. If this remedy were indeed really effectual, and had power so far to relieve the disorders of vice and misery in old states, as to place them in the condition of the most prosperous new colonies, we should soon see the phial exhausted; and when the disorders returned with increased virulence, every hope from this quarter would be for ever closed.

It is clear therefore, that with any view of making room for an unrestricted increase of population, emigration is perfectly inadequate; but as a partial and temporary expedient, and with a view to the more general cultivation of the earth, and the wider spread of civilization, it seems to be both useful and proper; and if it cannot be proved, that governments are bound actively to encourage it, it is not only strikingly unjust, but in the highest degree impolitic in them to prevent it. There are no fears so totally ill-grounded as the fears of depopulation from emigration. The *vis inertiae* of people in general, and their attachment to their homes,

are qualities so strong and general, that we may rest assured, that they will not emigrate unless, from political discontents or extreme poverty, they are in such a state, as will make it as much for the advantage of their country as of themselves, that they should go out of it. The complaints of high wages in consequence of emigrations are of all others the most unreasonable, and ought the least to be attended to. If the wages of labour in any country be such as to enable the lower classes of people to live with tolerable comfort, we may be quite certain, that they will not emigrate; and if they be not such, it is cruelty and injustice to detain them.



CHAP. V.

Of Poor Laws.

TO remedy the frequent distresses of the poor, laws to enforce their relief have been instituted; and in the establishment of a general system of this kind England has particularly distinguished herself. But it is to be feared, that, though it may have alleviated a little the intensity of individual misfortune, it has spread the evil over a much larger surface.

It is a subject often started in conversation, and mentioned always as a matter of great surprise, that, notwithstanding the immense sum which is annually collected for the poor in this country, there is still so much distress among them. Some think that the money must be embezzled for private use; others, that the churchwardens and overseers consume the greatest part of it in feasting. All agree, that somehow or other it must be very ill managed. In short, the fact, that even before the late scarcities three millions were collected annually for the
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the poor, and yet that their distresses were not removed, is the subject of continual astonishment. But a man who looks a little below the surface of things would be much more astonished, if the fact were otherwise than it is observed to be; or even if a collection universally of eighteen shillings in the pound, instead of four, were materially to alter it.

Suppose, that by a subscription of the rich the eighteen pence or two shillings, which men earn now, were made up five shillings: it might be imagined, perhaps, that they would then be able to live comfortably, and have a piece of meat every day for their dinner. But this would be a very false conclusion. The transfer of three additional shillings a day to each labourer would not increase the quantity of meat in the country. There is not at present enough for all to have a moderate share. What would then be the consequence? the competition among the buyers in the market of meat would rapidly raise the price from eight pence, or nine pence to two or three shillings in the pound, and the commodity would not be divided among many more than it is at present. When an article is scarce, and cannot be distributed to all, he that can show the most valid patent, that is, he that
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offers the most money, becomes the possessor. If we can suppose the competition among the buyers of meat to continue long enough for a greater number of cattle to be reared annually, this could only be done at the expense of the corn, which would be a very disadvantageous exchange; for it is well known, that the country could not then support the same population; and when subsistence is scarce in proportion to the number of people, it is of little consequence, whether the lowest members of the society possess two shillings or five. They must, at all events, be reduced to live upon the hardest fare, and in the smallest quantity.

It might be said, perhaps, that the increased number of purchasers in every article would give a spur to productive industry, and that the whole produce of the island would be increased. But the spur that these fancied riches would give to population would more than counterbalance it; and the increased produce would be to be divided among a more than proportionably increased number of people.

A collection from the rich of eighteen shillings in the pound, even if distributed in the most judicious manner, would have an effect similar to that resulting from the supposition
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which I have just made ; and no possible sacrifices of the rich, particularly in money, could for any time prevent the recurrence of distress among the lower members of society, whoever they were. Great changes might indeed be made. The rich might become poor, and some of the poor rich : but while the present proportion between population and food continues, a part of the society must necessarily find it difficult to support a family, and this difficulty will naturally fall on the least fortunate members.

It may at first appear strange, but I believe it is true, that I cannot by means of money raise the condition of a poor man, and enable him to live much better than he did before, without proportionably depressing others in the same class. If I retrench the quantity of food consumed in my house, and give him what I have cut off, I then benefit him without depressing any but myself and family, who perhaps may be well able to bear it. If I turn up a piece of uncultivated land, and give him the produce, I then benefit both him and all the members of society, because what he before consumed is thrown into the common stock, and probably some of the new produce with it. But if I only give him money, supposing the produce of the

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the country to remain the same, I give him a title to a larger share of that produce than formerly, which share he cannot receive without diminishing the shares of others. It is evident, that this effect in individual instances must be so small as to be totally imperceptible; but still it must exist, as many other effects do, which like some of the insects that people the air elude our grosser perceptions.

Supposing the quantity of food in any country to remain the same for many years together, it is evident, that this food must be divided according to the value of each man's patent, or the sum of money which he can afford to spend in this commodity so universally in request. It is a demonstrative truth, therefore, that the patents of one set of men could not be increased in value, without diminishing the value of the patents of some other set of men. If the rich were to subscribe and give five shillings a day to five hundred thousand men, without retrenching their own tables, no doubt can exist, that as these men would live more at their ease, and consume a greater quantity of provisions, there would be less food remaining to divide among the rest; and consequently each man's patent would be diminished in value, or the same number of
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pieces of silver would purchase a smaller quantity of subsistence, and the price of provisions would universally rise.

These general reasonings have been strikingly confirmed during the late scarcities. The supposition which I have made of a collection from the rich of eighteen shillings in the pound has been nearly realized; and the effect has been such as might have been expected. If the same distribution had been made when no scarcity existed, a considerable advance in the price of provisions would have been a necessary consequence; but following as it did a scarcity, its effect must have been doubly powerful. No person, I believe, will venture to doubt, that, if we were to give three additional shillings a day to every labouring man in the kingdom, as I before supposed, in order that he might have meat for his dinner, the price of meat would rise in the most rapid and unexampled manner. But surely, in a deficiency of corn, which renders it impossible for every man to have his usual share, if we still continue to furnish each person with the means of purchasing the same quantity as before, the effect must be in every respect similar.

It seems in great measure to have escaped observation,

observation, that the price of corn in a scarcity will depend much more upon the obstinacy with which the same degree of consumption is persevered in, than on the degree of the actual deficiency. A deficiency of one half of a crop, if the people could immediately consent to consume only one half of what they did before, would produce little or no effect on the price of corn. A deficiency of one twelfth, if exactly the same consumption were to continue for ten or eleven months, might raise the price of corn to almost any height. The more is given in parish assistance, the more power is furnished of persevering in the same consumption, and of course the higher will the price rise, before the necessary diminution of consumption is effected.

It has been asserted by some people, that high prices do not diminish consumption. If this were really true, we should see the price of a bushel of corn at a hundred pounds or more, in every deficiency, which could not be fully and completely remedied by importation. But the fact is, that high prices do ultimately diminish consumption; but on account of the riches of the country, the unwillingness of the people to resort to substitutes, and the immense sums which are distributed by parishes, this object cannot

cannot be attained, till the prices become excessive, and force even the middle classes of society, or at least those immediately above the poor, to save in the article of bread from the actual inability of purchasing it in the usual quantity. The poor who were assisted by their parishes had no reason whatever to complain of the high price of grain; because it was the excessiveness of this price, and this alone, which by enforcing such a saving left a greater quantity of corn for the consumption of the lowest classes, which corn the parish allowances enabled them to command. The greatest sufferers in the scarcity were undoubtedly the classes immediately above the poor; and these were in the most marked manner depressed by the excessive bounties given to those below them. Almost all poverty is relative; and I much doubt whether these people would have been rendered so poor, if a sum equal to half of these bounties had been taken directly out of their pockets, as they were, by that new distribution of the money of the society which actually took place.^a

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^a Supposing the lower classes to earn on an average ten shillings a week, and the classes just above them twenty, it is not to be doubted, that in a scarcity these latter would be more straitened in their power of commanding the necessaries

This distribution, by giving to the poorer classes a command of food so much greater, than that to which their degree of skill and industry entitled them, in the actual circumstances of the country, diminished exactly in the same proportion that command over the necessaries of life, which the classes above them, by their superior skill and industry, would naturally possess; and it may be a question, whether the degree of assistance which the poor received, and which prevented them from resorting to the use of those substitutes, which in every other country on such occasions the great law of necessity teaches, was not more than overbalanced by the severity of the pressure on so large a body of people from the extreme high prices, and the permanent evil which must result from forcing

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necessaries of life, by a donation of ten shillings a week to those below them, than by the subtraction of five shillings a week from their own earnings. In the one case, they would be all reduced to a level; the price of provisions would rise in an extraordinary manner from the greatness of the competition; and all would be straitened for subsistence. In the other case, the classes above the poor would still maintain a considerable part of their relative superiority; the price of provisions would by no means rise in the same degree; and their remaining fifteen shillings would purchase much more than their twenty shillings in the former case.

so many persons on the parish, who before thought themselves almost out of the reach of want.

If we were to double the fortunes of all those who possess above a hundred a year, the effect on the price of grain would be slow and inconsiderable; but if we were to double the price of labour throughout the kingdom, the effect in raising the price of grain would be rapid and great. The general principles on this subject will not admit of dispute; and that, in the particular case which we have been considering, the bounties to the poor were of a magnitude to operate very powerfully in this manner will sufficiently appear, if we recollect, that before the late scarcities the sum collected for the poor was estimated at three millions, and that during the year 1801 it was said to be ten millions. An additional seven millions acting at the bottom of the scale,^a and employed exclusively

^a See a small pamphlet published in November 1800, entitled, *An investigation of the cause of the present high price of provisions*. This pamphlet was mistaken by some for an inquiry into the cause of the scarcity, and as such it would naturally appear to be incomplete, adverting, as it does, principally to a single cause. But the sole object of the pamphlet was to give the principal reason for the extreme high price of provisions.

sively in the purchase of provisions, joined to a considerable advance in the price of wages in many parts of the kingdom, and increased by a prodigious sum expended in voluntary charity, must have had a most powerful effect in raising the price of the necessaries of life, if any reliance can be placed on the clearest general principles confirmed as much as possible by appearances. A man with a family has received, to my knowledge, fourteen shillings a week from the parish. His common earnings were ten shillings a week, and his weekly revenue therefore, twenty-four. Before the scarcity he had been in the habit of purchasing a bushel of flour a week with eight shillings perhaps, and consequently had two shillings out of his ten, to spare for other necessaries. During the scarcity he was enabled to purchase the same quantity at nearly three times the price. He paid twenty-two shillings for his bushel of flour, and had as before two shillings remaining for other wants. Such instances could not possibly have been universal, without raising the price of wheat very much

vifions, in proportion to the degree of the scarcity, admitting the deficiency of one fourth, as stated in the Duke of Portland's letter; which, I am much inclined to think, was very near the truth.

higher than it really was during any part of the dearth. But similar instances were by no means unfrequent, and the system itself of measuring the relief given by the price of grain was general.

If the circulation of the country had consisted entirely of specie, which could not have been immediately increased, it would have been impossible to give such an additional sum as seven millions to the poor without embarrassing to a great degree the operations of commerce. On the commencement therefore of this extensive relief, which would necessarily occasion a proportionate expenditure in provisions throughout all the ranks of society, a great demand would be felt for an increased circulating medium. The nature of the medium then principally in use was such, that it could be created immediately on demand. From the accounts of the bank of England, as laid before Parliament, it appeared, that no very great additional issues of paper took place from this quarter. The three millions and a half added to its former average issues were not probably much above what was sufficient to supply the quantity of specie, that had been withdrawn from the circulation. If this supposition be true, and the small quantity
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of gold which made its appearance at that time furnishes the strongest reason for believing, that nearly as much as this must have been withdrawn, it would follow, that the part of the circulation originating in the bank of England, though changed in its nature, had not been much increased in its quantity; and with regard to the effect of the circulating medium on the prices of all commodities it cannot be doubted, that it would be precisely the same, whether this medium were made up principally of guineas, or of pound notes and shillings which would pass current for guineas.

The demand therefore for an increased circulating medium was left to be supplied principally by the country banks, and it could not be expected, that they should hesitate in taking advantage of so profitable an opportunity. The paper issues of a country bank are, as I conceive, measured, by the quantity of its notes which will remain in circulation; and this quantity is again measured, supposing a confidence to be established, by the sum of what is wanted to carry on all the money transactions of the neighbourhood. From the high price of provisions, all these transactions became more

expensive. In the single article of the weekly payment of labourers' wages, including the parish allowances, it is evident, that a very great addition to the circulating medium of the neighbourhood would be wanted. Had the country banks attempted to issue the same quantity of paper without such a particular demand for it, they would quickly have been admonished of their error by its rapid and pressing return upon them; but at this time it was wanted for immediate and daily use, and was therefore eagerly absorbed into the circulation.

It may even admit of a question, whether under similar circumstances the country banks would not have issued nearly the same quantity of paper, if the bank of England had not been restricted from payment in specie. Before this event the issues of the country banks in paper were regulated by the quantity, that the circulation would take up; and after, as well as before, they were obliged to pay the notes which returned upon them in bank of England circulation. The difference in the two cases would arise principally from the pernicious custom, adopted since the restriction of the bank, of issuing one and two pound notes, and from the
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little preference that many people might feel, if they could not get gold, between country bank paper and bank of England paper.

The very great issue of country bank paper during the years 1800 and 1801 was evidently therefore, in its origin, rather a consequence than a cause of the high price of provisions; but being once absorbed into the circulation, it must necessarily affect the price of all commodities, and throw very great obstacles in the way of returning cheapness. This is the great mischief of the system. During the scarcity, it is not to be doubted, that the increased circulation, by preventing the embarrassments which commerce and speculation must otherwise have felt, enabled the country to continue all the branches of its trade with less interruption, and to import a much greater quantity of grain, than it could have done otherwise; but to overbalance these temporary advantages, a lasting evil might be entailed upon the community, and the prices of a time of scarcity might become permanent, from the difficulty of reabsorbing this increased circulation.

In this respect however it is much better, that the great issue of paper should have come from the country banks than from the bank of
© 4 England.

England. During the restriction of payment in specie, there is no possibility of forcing the bank to retake its notes when too abundant; but with regard to the country banks, as soon as their notes are not wanted in the circulation, they will be returned; and if the bank of England notes be not increased, the whole circulating medium will thus be diminished.

We may consider ourselves as peculiarly fortunate, that the two years of scarcity were succeeded by two events the best calculated to restore plenty and cheapness—an abundant harvest, and a peace; which together produced a general conviction of plenty, in the minds both of buyers and sellers; and by rendering the first slow to purchase, and the others eager to sell, occasioned a glut in the market, and a consequent rapid fall of price, which has enabled parishes to take off their allowances to the poor, and thus to prevent a return of high prices, when the alarm among the sellers was over.

If the two years of scarcity had been succeeded merely by years of average crops, I am strongly disposed to believe, that, as no glut would have taken place in the market, the price of grain would have fallen only in an inconsiderable degree, the parish allowances could not have
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been resumed, the **increafed** quantity of paper would ftill have been **wanted** and the price of all commodities might by degrees have been regulated **permanently** according to the increafed circulating medium.

If inftead of giving the temporary affiftance of parifh allowances, which might be withdrawn on the firft fall of price, we had raifed univerfally the wages of labour, it is evident, that the obftacles to a diminution of the circulation, and to returning cheapnefs, would have been ftill further increafed; and the high price of labour would have become permanent, without any advantage whatever to the labourer.

There is no one, that more ardently defires to fee a real advance in the price of labour than myfelf; but the attempt to effect this object by forcibly raifing the nominal price, which was practifed to a certain degree, and recommended almoft univerfally during the late fcarcities, every thinking man muft reprobate as puerile and ineffectual.

The price of labour, when left to find its natural level, is a moft important political barometer, expreffing the relation between the fupply of provifions, and the demand for them; between the quantity to be confumed and the
number

number of consumers; and taken on the average, independently of accidental circumstances, it further expresses clearly the wants of the society respecting population; that is, whatever may be the number of children to a marriage necessary to maintain exactly the present population, the price of labour will be just sufficient to support this number, or be above it, or below it, according to the state of the real funds for the maintenance of labour, whether stationary, progressive, or retrograde. Instead, however, of considering it in this light, we consider it as something which we may raise or depress at pleasure, something which depends principally upon his majesty's justices of the peace. When an advance in the price of provisions already expresses, that the demand is too great for the supply, in order to put the labourer in the same condition as before, we raise the price of labour, that is, we increase the demand, and are then much surpris'd that the price of provisions continues rising. In this we act much in the same manner as if, when the quick-silver in the common weather-glass stood at *stormy*, we were to raise it by some mechanical pressure to *settled fair*, and then be greatly astonish'd, that it continued raining.

Dr. Smith has clearly shown, that the natural tendency of a year of scarcity is either to throw a number of labourers out of employment, or to oblige them to work for less than they did before, from the inability of masters to employ the same number at the same price. The raising of the price of wages tends necessarily to throw more out of employment, and completely to prevent the good effects, which, he says, sometimes arise from a year of moderate scarcity, that of making the lower classes of people do more work, and become more careful and industrious. The number of servants out of place, and the manufacturers wanting employment, during the late scarcities, were melancholy proofs of the truth of these reasonings. If a general rise in the wages of labour had taken place proportioned to the price of provisions, none but farmers and a few gentlemen could have afforded to employ the same number of workmen as before. Additional crowds of servants and manufacturers would have been turned off; and those who were thus thrown out of employment would of course have no other refuge than the parish. In the natural order of things a scarcity must tend to lower, instead of to raise, the price of labour.

After the publication and general circulation of such a work as Dr. Smith's, I confess it appears to me strange, that so many men, who would yet aspire to be thought political economists, should still think, that it is in the power of the justices of the peace, or even of the omnipotence of parliament, to alter by a *fiat* the whole circumstances of the country; and when the demand for provisions is greater than the supply, by publishing a particular edict, to make the supply at once equal to or greater than the demand. Many men, who would shrink at the proposal of a maximum, would propose themselves, that the price of labour should be proportioned to the price of provisions, and do not seem to be aware, that the two proposals are very nearly of the same nature, and that both tend directly to famine. It matters not whether we enable the labourer to purchase the same quantity of provisions, which he did before, by fixing their price, or by raising in proportion the price of labour. The only advantage on the side of raising the price of labour is, that the rise in the price of provisions, which necessarily follows it, encourages importation: but putting importation out of the question, which might possibly be prevented by war, or other circumstances, a
universal

universal rise of wages in proportion to the price of provisions, aided by adequate parish allowances to those who were thrown out of work, would, by preventing any kind of saving, in the same manner as a maximum, cause the whole crop to be consumed in nine months, which ought to have lasted twelve, and thus produce a famine. At the same time we must not forget, that both humanity and true policy imperiously require, that we should give every assistance to the poor on these occasions, that the nature of the case will admit. If provisions were to continue at the price of scarcity, the wages of labour must necessarily rise, or sickness and famine would quickly diminish the number of labourers; and the supply of labour being unequal to the demand, its price would soon rise in a still greater proportion than the price of provisions. But even one or two years of scarcity, if the poor were left entirely to shift for themselves, might produce some effect of this kind, and consequently it is our interest, as well as our duty, to give them temporary aid in such seasons of distress. It is on such occasions, that every cheap substitute for bread, and every mode of economizing food should be resorted to. Nor should we be too ready to complain of that high price

price of corn, which by encouraging importation increases the supply.

As the inefficacy of poor laws, and of attempts forcibly to raise the price of labour, is most conspicuous in a scarcity, I have thought myself justified in considering them under this view; and as these causes of increased price received great additional force during the late scarcity from the increase of the circulating medium, I trust, that the few observations which I have made on this subject will be considered as an allowable digression.



CHAP. VI.

Subject of Poor Laws continued.

INDEPENDENTLY of any considerations respecting a year of deficient crops it is evident, that an increase of population, without a proportional increase of food, must lower the value of each man's earnings. The food must necessarily be distributed in smaller quantities, and consequently a day's labour will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions. An increase in the price of provisions will arise either from an increase of population faster than the means of subsistence, or from a different distribution of the money of the society. The food of a country which has been long peopled, if it be increasing, increases slowly and regularly, and cannot be made to answer any sudden demands; but variations in the distribution of the money of the society are not unfrequently occurring, and are undoubtedly among the causes, which occasion the continual variations in the prices of provisions.

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The poor laws of England tend to depress the general condition of the poor in these two ways. Their first obvious tendency is to increase population without increasing the food for its support. A poor man may marry with little or no prospect of being able to support a family without parish assistance. They may be said, therefore, to create the poor which they maintain; and as the provisions of the country must, in consequence of the increased population, be distributed to every man in smaller proportions, it is evident, that the labour of those who are not supported by parish assistance will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions than before, and consequently more of them must be driven to apply for assistance.

Secondly the quantity of provisions consumed in workhouses, upon a part of the society that cannot in general be considered as the most valuable part, diminishes the shares, that would otherwise belong to more industrious and more worthy members, and thus, in the same manner, forces more to become dependent. If the poor in the workhouses were to live better than they do now, this new distribution of the money of the society would tend more conspicuously to depress the condition of those out of the workhouses

houses by occasioning an advance in the price of provisions.

Fortunately for England, a spirit of independence still remains among the peasantry. The poor laws are strongly calculated to eradicate this spirit. They have succeeded in part; but had they succeeded as completely as might have been expected, their pernicious tendency would not have been so long concealed.

Hard as it may appear in individual instances, dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful. Such a stimulus seems to be absolutely necessary to promote the happiness of the great mass of mankind; and every general attempt to weaken this stimulus, however benevolent its intention, will always defeat its own purpose. If men be induced to marry from the mere prospect of parish provision, they are not only unjustly tempted to bring unhappiness and dependence upon themselves and children, but they are tempted, without knowing it, to injure all in the same class with themselves.

The poor laws of England appear to have contributed to raise the price of provisions, and to lower the real price of labour. They have therefore contributed to impoverish that class of people, whose only possession is their labour. It

is also difficult to suppose, that they have not powerfully contributed to generate that carelessness and want of frugality observable among the poor, so contrary to the disposition generally to be remarked among petty tradesmen and small farmers. The labouring poor, to use a vulgar expression, seem always to live from hand to mouth. Their present wants employ their whole attention; and they seldom think of the future. Even when they have an opportunity of saving, they seldom exercise it; but all that they earn beyond their present necessities goes, generally speaking, to the alehouse. The poor laws may therefore be said to diminish both the power and the will to save among the common people, and thus to weaken one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness.

It is a general complaint among master manufacturers, that high wages ruin all their workmen; but it is difficult to conceive, that these men would not save a part of their high wages for the future support of their families, instead of spending it in drunkenness and dissipation, if they did not rely on parish assistance for support in case of accidents. And that the poor employed in manufactures consider this assistance

as a reason why they may spend all the wages which they earn, and enjoy themselves while they can, appears to be evident, from the number of families, that, upon the failure of any great manufactory, immediately fall upon the parish; when perhaps the wages earned in this manufactory, while it flourished, were sufficiently above the price of common country labour, to have allowed them to save enough for their support, till they could find some other channel for their industry.

A man who might not be deterred from going to the alehouse from the consideration, that on his death or sickness he should leave his wife and family upon the parish, might yet hesitate in thus dissipating his earnings, if he were assured, that in either of these cases his family must starve, or be left to the support of casual bounty.

The mass of happiness among the common people cannot but be diminished, when one of the strongest checks to idleness and dissipation is thus removed; and positive institutions, which render dependent poverty so general, weaken that disgrace, which for the best and most humane reasons ought to be attached to it.

The poor laws of England were undoubtedly

instituted for the most benevolent purpose; but it is evident they have failed in attaining it. They certainly mitigate some cases of severe distress, which might otherwise occur; though the state of the poor who are supported by parishes, considered in all its circumstances, is very miserable. But one of the principal objections to the system is, that for the assistance which some of the poor receive, in itself almost a doubtful blessing, the whole class of the common people of England is subjected to a set of grating, inconvenient, and tyrannical laws, totally inconsistent with the genuine spirit of the constitution. The whole business of settlements, even in its present amended state, is contradictory to all ideas of freedom. The parish persecution of men whose families are likely to become chargeable, and of poor women who are near lying in, is a most disgraceful and disgusting tyranny. And the obstructions continually occasioned in the market of labour by these laws have a constant tendency, to add to the difficulties of those, who are struggling to support themselves without assistance.

These evils attendant on the poor laws seem to be irremediable. If assistance be to be distributed to a certain class of people, a power must

must be lodged somewhere of discriminating the proper objects, and of managing the concerns of the institutions that are necessary; but any great interference with the affairs of other people is a species of tyranny, and in the common course of things, the exercise of this power may be expected to become grating to those who are driven to ask for support. The tyranny of churchwardens and overseers is a common complaint among the poor; but the fault does not lie so much in these persons, who probably before they were in power were not worse than other people, but in the nature of all such institutions.

I feel persuaded, that, if the poor laws had never existed in this country, though there might have been a few more instances of very severe distress, the aggregate mass of happiness among the common people would have been much greater than it is at present.

The radical defect of all systems of the kind is that of tending to depress the condition of those that are not relieved by parishes, and to create more poor. If, indeed, we examine some of our statutes strictly with reference to the principle of population, we shall find, that they attempt an absolute impossibility; and we

cannot be surpris'd, therefore, that they should constantly fail in the attainment of their object.

The famous 43^d of Elizabeth, which has been so often referred to and admired, enacts, that the overseers of the poor, “ shall take order
 “ from time to time, by and with the consent
 “ of two or more justices, for setting to work
 “ the children of all such, whose parents shall
 “ not by the said persons be thought able to
 “ keep and maintain their children; and also
 “ such persons married or unmarried, as, having
 “ no means to maintain them, use no ordinary
 “ and daily trade of life to get their living by.
 “ And also to raise, weekly or otherwise, by
 “ taxation of every inhabitant, and every occu-
 “ pier of lands in the said parish, (in such com-
 “ petent sums as they shall think fit) a con-
 “ venient stock of flax, hemp, wool, thread,
 “ iron, and other necessary ware and stuff, to
 “ set the poor to work.”

What is this but saying, that the funds for the maintenance of labour in this country may be increased at will, and without limit, by a *fiat* of government, or an assessment of the overseers? Strictly speaking, this clause is as arrogant and as absurd, as if it had enacted, that two ears of wheat should in future grow where
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one only had grown before. Canute, when he commanded the waves not to wet his princely foot, did not in reality assume a greater power over the laws of nature. No directions are given to the overseers how to increase the funds for the maintenance of labour; the necessity of industry, economy, and enlightened exertion, in the management of agricultural and commercial capital, is not insisted on for this purpose; but it is expected, that a miraculous increase of these funds should immediately follow an edict of the government used at the discretion of some ignorant parish officers.

If this clause were really and *bona fide* put in execution, and the shame attending the receiving of parish assistance worn off, every labouring man might marry as early as he pleased, under the certain prospect of having all his children properly provided for; and as, according to the supposition, there would be no check to population from the consequences of poverty after marriage, the increase of people would be rapid beyond example in old states. After what has been said in the former parts of this work, it is submitted to the reader, whether the utmost exertions of the most enlightened government could, in this case, make the food

keep pace with the population ; much less a mere arbitrary edict, the tendency of which is certainly rather to diminish than to increase the funds for the maintenance of productive labour.

In the actual circumstances of every country, the prolific power of nature seems to be always ready to exert nearly its full force ; but within the limit of possibility, there is nothing perhaps more improbable, or more out of the reach of any government to effect, than the direction of the industry of its subjects in such a manner, as to produce the greatest quantity of human sustenance that the earth could bear. It evidently could not be done without the most complete violation of the law of property, from which every thing that is valuable to man has hitherto arisen. Such is the disposition to marry, particularly in very young people, that, if the difficulties of providing for a family were entirely removed, very few would remain single at twenty two. But what statesman or rational government could propose, that all animal food should be prohibited, that no horses should be used for business or pleasure, that all the people should live upon potatoes, and that the whole industry of the nation should be exerted in the production of them, except what was required for the
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mere necessaries of clothing and houses? Could such a revolution be effected, would it be desirable? particularly as in a few years, notwithstanding all these exertions, want, with less resource than ever, would inevitably recur.

After a country has once ceased to be in the peculiar situation of a new colony, we shall always find, that in the actual state of its cultivation, or in that state which may rationally be expected from the most enlightened government, the increase of its food can never allow for any length of time an unrestricted increase of population; and therefore the due execution of the clause in the 43d of Elizabeth, as a permanent law, is a physical impossibility.

It will be said, perhaps, that the fact contradicts the theory; and that the clause in question has remained in force, and has been executed, during the last two hundred years. In answer to this, I should say without hesitation, that it has not really been executed; and that it is merely owing to its incomplete execution, that it remains on our statute book at present.

The scanty relief granted to persons in distress, the capricious and insulting manner in which it is sometimes distributed by the overseers, and the natural and becoming pride not
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yet quite extinct among the peasantry of England, have deterred the more thinking and virtuous part of them from venturing on marriage, without some better prospect of maintaining their families than mere parish assistance. The desire of bettering our condition, and the fear of making it worse, like the *vis medicatrix naturæ* in physick, is the *vis medicatrix reipublicæ* in politics, and is continually counteracting the disorders arising from narrow human institutions. In spite of the prejudices in favour of population, and the direct encouragements to marriage from the poor laws, it operates as a preventive check to increase; and happy for this country is it, that it does so. But besides that spirit of independence and prudence, which checks the frequency of marriage, notwithstanding the encouragements of the poor laws, these laws themselves occasion a check of no inconsiderable magnitude, and thus counteract with one hand what they encourage with the other. As each parish is obliged to maintain its own poor, it is naturally fearful of increasing their number; and every landholder is in consequence more inclined to pull down than to build cottages, except when the demand for labourers is really urgent. This deficiency of cottages operates necessarily as a strong

strong check to marriage; and this check is probably the principal reason, why we have been able to continue the system of the poor laws so long.

Those who are not prevented for a time from marrying by these causes, are either relieved very scantily at their own homes, where they suffer all the consequences arising from squalid poverty; or they are crowded together in close and unwholesome workhouses, where a great mortality almost universally takes place, particularly among the young children. The dreadful account given by Jonas Hanway of the treatment of parish children in London is well known; and it appears from Mr. Howlett and other writers, that in some parts of the country their situation is not very much better. A great part of the redundant population occasioned by the poor laws is thus taken off by the operation of the laws themselves, or at least by their ill execution. The remaining part which survives, by causing the funds for the maintenance of labour to be divided among a greater number than can be properly maintained by them, and by turning a considerable share from the support of the diligent and careful workman to the support of the idle and the negligent, depresses the

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the condition of all those who are out of the workhouses, forces more every year into them, and has ultimately produced the enormous evil, which we all so justly deplore; that of the great and unnatural proportion of the people, which is now become dependent upon charity.

If this be a just representation of the manner, in which the clause in question has been executed, and of the effects which it has produced, it must be allowed, that we have practised an unpardonable deceit upon the poor, and have promised what we have been very far from performing.

The attempts to employ the poor on any great scale in manufactures have almost invariably failed, and the stock and materials have been wasted. In those few parishes, which, by better management or larger funds, have been enabled to persevere in this system, the effect of these new manufactures in the market must have been to throw out of employment many independent workmen, who were before engaged in fabrications of a similar nature. This effect has been placed in a strong point of view by Daniel de Foe, in an address to parliament, entitled, *Giving alms no charity*. Speaking of the employment of parish children in manufactures, he says,
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For every skein of worsted these poor children spin, there must be a skein the less spun by some poor family that spun it before ; and for every piece of baize so made in London, there must be a piece the less made at Colchester, or somewhere else.^a Sir F. M. Eden, on the same subject, observes, that whether mops and brooms are made by parish children or by private workmen, no more can be sold, than the public is in want of.^b

It will be said, perhaps, that the same reasoning might be applied to any new capital brought into competition in a particular trade or manu-

^a See extracts from Daniel de Foe, in Sir F. M. Eden's valuable work on the poor, vol. i, p. 261.

^b Sir F. M. Eden, speaking of the supposed right of the poor to be supplied with employment while able to work, and with a maintenance when incapacitated from labour, very justly remarks, " It may however be doubted, whether any right, the gratification of which seems to be impracticable, can be said to exist," vol. i, p. 447. No man has collected so many materials for forming a judgment on the effects of the poor laws as Sir F. M. Eden, and the result he thus expresses : " Upon the whole therefore there seems to be just grounds for concluding, that the sum of good to be expected from a compulsory maintenance of the poor will be far out-balanced by the sum of evil, which it will inevitably create," vol. i, p. 467. I am happy to have the sanction of so practical an inquirer to my opinion of the poor laws.

facture, which can rarely be done without injuring, in some degree, those that were engaged in it before. But there is a material difference in the two cases. In this, the competition is perfectly fair, and what every man on entering into business must lay his account to. He may rest secure, that he will not be supplanted, unless his competitor possess superior skill and industry. In the other case, the competition is supported by a great bounty, by which means, notwithstanding very inferior skill and industry on the part of his competitors, the independent workman may be underfold, and unjustly excluded from the market. He himself perhaps is made to contribute to this competition against his own earnings, and the funds for the maintenance of labour are thus turned from the support of a trade which yields a proper profit, to one which cannot maintain itself without a bounty. It should be observed in general, that, when a fund for the maintenance of labour is raised by assessment, the greatest part of it is not a new capital brought into trade, but an old one, which before was much more profitably employed, turned into a new channel. The farmer pays to the poor's rates for the encouragement of a bad and unprofitable manufacture,

ture, what he would have employed on his land with infinitely more advantage to his country. In the one case, the funds for the maintenance of labour are daily diminished; in the other, daily increased. And this obvious tendency of assessments for the employment of the poor, to decrease the real funds for the maintenance of labour in any country, aggravates the absurdity of supposing, that it is in the power of a government to find employment for all its subjects, however fast they may increase.

It is not intended, that these reasonings should be applied against every mode of employing the poor on a limited scale, and with such restrictions as may not encourage at the same time their increase. I would never wish to push general principles too far; though I think, that they ought always to be kept in view. In particular cases the individual good to be obtained may be so great, and the general evil so slight, that the former may clearly overbalance the latter.

The intention is merely to show, that the poor laws as a general system are founded on a gross error: and that the common declamation on the subject of the poor, which we see so often in print, and hear continually in conversation, namely, that the market price of labour ought

ought always to be sufficient decently to support a family, and that employment ought to be found for all those who are willing to work, is in effect to say; that the funds for the maintenance of labour in this country are not only infinite, but might be made to increase with such rapidity, that supposing us to have at present six millions of labourers, including their families, we might have 96 millions in another century; or if these funds had been properly managed since the beginning of the reign of Edward I, supposing that there were then only two millions of labourers, we might now have possessed above four million millions of labourers, or about four thousand times as many labourers, as it has been calculated that there are people now on the face of the earth.

CHAP. VII.

Of increasing Wealth as it affects the Condition of the Poor.

THE professed object of Dr. Smith's inquiry is the nature and causes of the wealth of nations. There is another however perhaps still more interesting, which he occasionally mixes with it, the causes that affect the happiness and comfort of the lower orders of society, which in every nation form the most numerous class. I am sufficiently aware of the near connexion of these two subjects, and that generally speaking the causes, which contribute to increase the wealth of a state, tend also to increase the happiness of the lower classes of the people. But perhaps Dr. Smith has considered these two inquiries as still more nearly connected than they really are; at least, he has not stopped to take notice of those instances, where the wealth of a society may increase according to his definition of wealth, without having a proportional tendency to increase the comforts of the labouring part of it.

I do not mean to enter into any philosophical

cal discussion of what constitutes the proper happiness of man, but shall merely consider two universally acknowledged ingredients, the command of the necessaries and comforts of life, and the possession of health.

The comforts of the labouring poor must necessarily depend upon the funds destined for the maintenance of labour; and will generally be in proportion to the rapidity of their increase. The demand for labour, which such increase occasions, will of course raise the value of labour; and till the additional number of hands required are reared, the increased funds will be distributed to the same number of persons as before, and therefore every labourer will live comparatively at his ease. The error of Dr. Smith lies in representing every increase of the revenue or stock of a society as a proportional increase of these funds. Such surplus stock or revenue will indeed always be considered by the individual possessing it as an additional fund, from which he may maintain more labour; but with regard to the whole country, it will not be an effectual fund for the maintenance of an additional number of labourers, unless part of it be convertible into an additional quantity of provisions; and it may not be so convertible, where the increase has

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arisen merely from the produce of labour, and not from the produce of land. A distinction may in this case occur between the number of hands which the stock of the society could employ, and the number which its territory can maintain.

Dr. Smith defines the wealth of a state to be the annual produce of its land and labour. This definition evidently includes manufactured produce as well as the produce of the land. Now supposing a nation for a course of years to add what it saved from its yearly revenue to its manufacturing capital solely, and not to its capital employed upon land, it is evident, that it might grow richer according to the above definition, without a power of supporting a greater number of labourers, and therefore without any increase in the real funds for the maintenance of labour. There would notwithstanding be a demand for labour, from the extension of manufacturing capital. This demand would of course raise the price of labour; but if the yearly stock of provisions in the country were not increasing, this rise would soon turn out to be merely nominal, as the price of provisions must necessarily rise with it. The demand for manufacturing labourers would probably entice some from pri-

vate service, and some even from agriculture ; but we will suppose any effects of this kind on agriculture to be compensated by improvements in the instruments or mode of culture, and the quantity of provisions therefore to remain the same. Improvements in manufacturing machinery would of course take place ; and this circumstance, added to the greater number of hands employed in manufactures, would augment considerably the annual produce of the labour of the country. The wealth therefore of the country would be increasing annually, according to the definition, and might not be increasing very slowly.^a

The question is, how far wealth increasing in

^a I have supposed here a case which, in a landed nation, I allow to be very improbable in fact ; but approximations to it are perhaps not unfrequently taking place. My intention is merely to show, that the funds for the maintenance of labour do not increase exactly in proportion to the increase in the produce of the land and labour of a country, but with the same increase of produce, may be more or less favourable to the labourer, according as the increase has risen principally from agriculture or from manufactures. On the supposition of a physical impossibility of increasing the food of a country it is evident, that by improvements in machinery it might grow yearly richer in the exchangeable value of its manufactured produce, but the labourer, though he might be better clothed and lodged, could not be better fed.

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this way has a tendency to better the condition of the labouring poor. It is a self-evident proposition, that any general advance in the price of labour, the stock of provisions remaining the same, can only be a nominal advance, as it must shortly be followed by a proportional rise in provisions. The increase in the price of labour, which we have supposed, would have no permanent effect therefore in giving to the labouring poor a greater command over the necessaries of life. In this respect they would be nearly in the same state as before. In some other respects they would be in a worse state. A greater proportion of them would be employed in manufactures, and a smaller proportion in agriculture. And this exchange of professions will be allowed, I think, by all, to be very unfavourable to health, one essential ingredient of happiness; and to be further disadvantageous on account of the greater uncertainty of manufacturing labour, arising from the capricious taste of man, the accidents of war, and other causes which occasionally produce very severe distress among the lower classes of society. On the state of the poor employed in manufactories, with respect to health and other circumstances which affect their happiness, I will beg leave to quote a pas-

sage from Dr. Aikin's description of the country round Manchester.

“ The invention and improvements of ma-
 “ chines to shorten labour have had a surpris-
 “ ing influence to extend our trade, and also to
 “ call in hands from all parts, especially chil-
 “ dren for the cotton mills. It is the wise plan
 “ of Providence, that in this life there shall be
 “ no good without its attendant inconvenience.
 “ There are many which are too obvious in
 “ these cotton mills and similar factories, which
 “ counteract that increase of population usually
 “ consequent on the improved facility of labour.
 “ In these, children of very tender age are em-
 “ ployed, many of them collected from the
 “ workhouses in London and Westminster, and
 “ transported in crowds as apprentices to mas-
 “ ters resident many hundred miles distant,
 “ where they serve unknown, unprotected, and
 “ forgotten by those to whose care nature or
 “ the laws had consigned them. These chil-
 “ dren are usually too long confined to work in
 “ close rooms, often during the whole night.
 “ The air they breathe from the oil &c. em-
 “ ployed in the machinery, and other circum-
 “ stances, is injurious; little attention is paid
 “ to their cleanliness; and frequent changes
 “ from

“ from a warm and dense to a cold and thin
“ atmosphere are predisposing causes to sick-
“ nefs and difability, and particularly to the
“ epidemic fever which is fo generally to be
“ met with in these factories. It is also much
“ to be questioned, if society does not receive
“ detriment from the manner in which chil-
“ dren are thus employed during their early
“ years They are not generally strong to la-
“ bour, or capable of pursuing any other branch
“ of business, when the term of their appren-
“ ticeship expires. The females are wholly
“ uninstructed in sewing, knitting, and other
“ domestic affairs, requisite to make them
“ notable and frugal wives and mothers. This
“ is a very great misfortune to them and the
“ public, as is sadly proved by a comparison of
“ the families of labourers in husbandry, and
“ those of manufacturers in general. In the
“ former we meet with neatness, cleanliness,
“ and comfort; in the latter, with filth, rags,
“ and poverty, although their wages may be
“ nearly double to those of the husbandman.
“ It must be added, that the want of early re-
“ ligious instruction and example, and the nu-
“ merous and indiscriminate association in these

“ buildings, are very unfavourable to their future conduct in life.”

In addition to the evils mentioned in this passage, we all know how subject particular manufactures are to fail, from the caprice of taste, or the accident of war. The weavers of Spitalfields were plunged into the most severe distress by the fashion of muslins instead of silks; and numbers of the workmen in Sheffield and Birmingham were for a time thrown out of employment, from the adoption of shoe-strings and covered buttons, instead of buckles and metal buttons. Our manufactures, taken in the mass, have increased with great rapidity; but in particular places they have failed, and the parishes where this has happened are invariably loaded with a crowd of poor in the most distressed and miserable condition. In the work of Dr. Aikin just alluded to, it appears, that the register for the collegiate church at Manchester, from Christmas 1793 to Christmas 1794, stated a decrease of 168 marriages, 538 christenings,

^a P. 219. Endeavours have been made, Dr. Aikin says, to remedy these evils, and in some factories they have been attended with success. An act of parliament has of late also passed on this subject, from which it is hoped, that much good will result.

and 250 burials. And in the parish of Rochdale in the neighbourhood, a still more melancholy reduction, in proportion to the number of people, took place. In 1792 the births were 746, the burials 646, and the marriages 339. In 1794 the births were 373, the burials 671, and the marriages 199. The cause of this sudden check to population was the commencement of the war, and the failure of commercial credit, which occurred about this time; and such a check could not have taken place in so sudden a manner, without being occasioned by the most severe distress.

Under such circumstances of situation, unless the increase of the riches of a country from manufactures give the lower classes of the society, on an average, a decidedly greater command over the necessaries and conveniences of life, it will not appear, that their condition is improved.

It will be said, perhaps, that the advance in the price of provisions will immediately turn some additional capital into the channel of agriculture, and thus occasion a much greater produce. But from experience it appears, that this is an effect which sometimes follows very slowly; particularly if heavy taxes, that affect agricultural

tural industry, and an advance in the price of labour, had preceded the advance in the price of provisions.

It may also be said, that the additional capital of the nation would enable it to import provisions sufficient for the maintenance of those whom its stock could employ. A small country with a large navy, and great accommodations for inland carriage, may indeed import and distribute an effectual quantity of provisions; but in large landed nations, if they may be so called, an importation adequate at all times to the demand is scarcely possible.

It seems in great measure to have escaped attention, that a nation, which, from its extent of territory and population, must necessarily support the greater part of its people on the produce of its own soil, but which yet in average years draws a small portion of its corn from abroad, is in a much more precarious situation, with regard to the constancy of its supplies, than such states as draw almost the whole of their provisions from other countries. The demands of Holland and Hamburg may be known with considerable accuracy by those who supply them. If they increase, they increase gradually, and are not subject from year to year
to

to any great and sudden variations. But it is otherwise with such a country as England. Supposing it, in average years, to want about four hundred thousand quarters of wheat. Such a demand will of course be very easily supplied. But a year of deficient crops occurs, and the demand is suddenly two millions of quarters. If the demand had been on an average two millions, it might perhaps have been adequately supplied, from the extended agriculture of those countries, which are in the habit of exporting corn: but we cannot expect, that it can easily be answered thus suddenly; and indeed we know from experience, that an unusual demand of this nature, in a nation capable of paying for it, cannot exist, without raising the price of wheat very considerably in all the ports of Europe. Hamburgh, Holland, and the ports of the Baltic, felt very sensibly the high prices of England during the late scarcity; and I have been informed, from very good authority, that the price of bread in New York was little inferior to the highest price in London.

A nation possessed of a large territory is unavoidably subject to this uncertainty in its means of subsistence, when the commercial part of its population is either equal to or has increased beyond

beyond the surplus produce of its cultivators. No reserve being in these cases left in the store destined for exportation, the full effect of every deficiency from unfavourable seasons must necessarily be felt: and though the riches of such a country may enable it for a certain period to continue raising the nominal price of wages, so as to give the lower classes of the society a power of purchasing imported corn at a high price; yet, as a sudden demand can very seldom be fully answered, the competition in the market will invariably raise the price of provisions, in full proportion to the advance in the price of labour; the lower classes will be but little relieved; and the dearth will operate severely throughout all the ranks of society.

According to the natural order of things, years of scarcity must occasionally recur in all landed nations. They ought always therefore to enter into our consideration; and the prosperity of any country may justly be considered as precarious, in which the funds for the maintenance of labour are liable to great and sudden fluctuations from every unfavourable variation in the seasons.

But putting, for the present, years of scarcity out of the question; when the commercial population

pulation of any country increases so much beyond the surplus produce of the cultivators, that the demand for imported corn is not easily supplied, and the price rises in proportion to the price of wages, no further increase of riches will have any tendency to give the labourer a greater command over the necessaries of life. In the progress of wealth this will naturally take place; either from the largeness of the supply wanted; the increased distance from which it is brought, and consequently the increased expense of importation; the greater consumption of it in the countries in which it is usually purchased; or what must unavoidably happen, the necessity of a greater distance of inland carriage in these countries. Such a nation, by increasing industry, and increasing ingenuity in the improvement of machinery, may still go on increasing the yearly quantity of its manufactured produce; but its funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently its population will be perfectly stationary. This point is the natural limit to the population of all commercial states.^a In countries

^a Sir James Stewart's Political Economy, vol. i, b. i, c. xviii, p. 119. It is probable, that Holland before the revolution had nearly reached this point, not so much however from

countries at a great distance from this limit, an effect approaching to what has been here described will take place, whenever the march of commerce and manufactures is more rapid than that of agriculture. During the last ten or twelve years it cannot be doubted, that the annual produce of the land and labour of England has very rapidly increased, and in consequence the nominal wages of labour have greatly increased; but the real recompense of the labourer, though increased, has not increased in proportion.

That every increase of the stock or revenue of a nation cannot be considered as an increase of the real funds for the maintenance of labour, and therefore cannot have the same good effect upon the condition of the poor, will appear in a strong light, if the argument be applied to China.

Dr. Smith observes, that China has probably long been as rich as the nature of her laws and institutions will admit; but that, with other laws and institutions, and if foreign commerce

from the difficulty of obtaining more foreign corn, but from the very heavy taxes, which were imposed on this first necessary of life. All the great landed nations of Europe are certainly at a considerable distance from this point at present.

were

were held in honour, she might still be much richer. The question is, would such an increase of wealth be an increase of the real funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently tend to place the lower classes of people in China in a state of greater plenty ?

If trade and foreign commerce were held in great honour in China, it is evident, that, from the great number of labourers, and the cheapness of labour, she might work up manufactures for foreign sale to an immense amount. It is equally evident, that from the great bulk of provisions, and the amazing extent of her inland territory, she could not in return import such a quantity, as would be any sensible addition to the annual stock of subsistence in the country. Her immense amount of manufactures therefore she could exchange chiefly for luxuries collected from all parts of the world. At present it appears, that no labour whatever is spared in the production of food. The country is rather overpeopled in proportion to what its stock can employ, and labour is therefore so abundant, that no pains are taken to abridge it. The consequence of this is probably the greatest production of food, that the soil can possibly afford ; for it will be observed, that processes for abridging

abridging agricultural labour, though they may enable a farmer to bring a certain quantity of grain cheaper to market, sometimes tend rather to diminish than increase the whole produce. An immense capital could not be employed in China in preparing manufactures for foreign trade, without taking off so many labourers from agriculture as to alter this state of things, and in some degree, to diminish the produce of the country. The demand for manufacturing labourers would naturally raise the price of labour; but as the quantity of subsistence would not be increased, the price of provisions would keep pace with it, or even more than keep pace with it, if the quantity of provisions were really decreasing. The country would however be evidently advancing in wealth; the exchangeable value of the annual produce of its land and labour would be annually augmented; yet the real funds for the maintenance of labour would be stationary or even declining; and consequently the increasing wealth of the nation would tend rather to depress than to raise the condition of the poor.^a With regard

^a The condition of the poor in China is, indeed, very miserable at present; but this is not owing to their want of foreign

gard to the command over the necessaries of life they would be in the same or rather worse state than before; and a great part of them would have exchanged the healthy labours of agriculture for the unhealthy occupations of manufacturing industry.

The argument perhaps appears clearer when applied to China, because it is generally allowed, that its wealth has been long stationary, and its soil cultivated nearly to the utmost. With regard to any other country it might always be a matter of dispute, at which of the two periods compared wealth was increasing the fastest; as it is upon the rapidity of the increase of wealth at any particular period, that, Dr. Smith says, the condition of the poor depends. It is evident, however, that two nations might increase exactly with the same rapidity in the exchangeable value of the annual produce of their land and labour; yet, if one had applied itself chiefly to agriculture, and the other chiefly to com-

foreign commerce, but to their extreme tendency to marriage and increase; and if this tendency were to continue the same, the only way, in which the introduction of a greater number of manufacturers could possibly make the lower classes of people richer, would be by increasing the mortality amongst them, which is certainly not a very desirable mode of growing rich.

merce, the funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently the effect of the increase of wealth in each nation, would be extremely different. In that which had applied itself chiefly to agriculture the poor would live in greater plenty, and population would rapidly increase. In that which had applied itself chiefly to commerce, the poor would be comparatively but little benefitted, and consequently population would either be stationary, or increase very slowly.^a

^a The condition of the labouring poor, supposing their habits to remain the same, cannot be very essentially improved but by giving them a greater command over the means of subsistence. But any advantage of this kind must from its nature be temporary, and is therefore really of less value to them than a permanent change in their habits. But manufactures, by inspiring a taste for comforts, tend to promote a favourable change in these habits; and in this way perhaps counterbalance all their disadvantages. The labouring class of society in nations merely agricultural are generally on the whole poorer than in manufacturing nations, though less subject to these occasional variations, which among manufacturers often produce the most severe distress. But the considerations, which relate to a change of habits in the poor, belong more properly to a subsequent part of this work.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Definitions of Wealth. Agricultural and Commercial Systems.

THERE are none of the definitions of the wealth of a state, that are not liable to some objections. If we take the gross produce of the land, it is evident, that the funds for the maintenance of labour, the population, and the wealth, may increase very rapidly, while the nation is apparently poor, and has very little disposable revenue. If we take Dr. Smith's definition, wealth may increase, as has before been shown, without tending to increase the funds for the maintenance of labour and the population. If we take the clear surplus produce of the land, according to the Economists, in this case the funds for the maintenance of labour and the population may increase, without an increase of wealth, as in the instance of the cultivation of new lands, which will pay a profit but not a rent; and *vice versa*, wealth may increase without increasing the funds for the

maintenance of labour and the population, as in the instance of improvements in agricultural instruments, and in the mode of agriculture, which may make the land yield the same produce, with fewer persons employed upon it; and consequently the disposable wealth or revenue would be increased without a power of supporting a greater number of people.

The objections however to the two last definitions do not prove, that they are incorrect; but merely that an increase of wealth, though generally, is not necessarily and invariably accompanied by an increase of the funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently by the power of supporting a greater number of people, or of enabling the former number to live in greater plenty and happiness.

Whichever of these two definitions is adopted as the best criterion of the wealth, power, and prosperity of a state, it must always be true, that the surplus produce of the cultivators measures and limits the growth of that portion of the society, which is not employed upon the land. Throughout the whole world the number of manufacturers, of proprietors, and of persons engaged in the various civil and military professions, must be exactly proportioned to this surplus produce,

produce, and cannot in the nature of things increase beyond it. If the earth had been so niggardly of her produce, as to oblige all her inhabitants to labour for it, no manufacturers or idle persons could ever have existed. But her first intercourse with man was a voluntary present, not very large indeed, but sufficient as a fund for his subsistence, till by the proper exercise of his faculties he could procure a greater. In proportion as the labour and ingenuity of man exercised upon the land have increased this surplus produce, leisure has been given to a greater number of persons to employ themselves in all the inventions which embellish civilized life. And though, in its turn, the desire to profit by these inventions, has greatly contributed to stimulate the cultivators to increase their surplus produce; yet the order of precedence is clearly the surplus produce; because the funds for the subsistence of the manufacturer must be advanced to him, before he can complete his work: and if we were to imagine, that we could command this surplus produce, whenever we willed it, by forcing manufactures, we should be quickly admonished of our error, by the inadequate support which the workman would receive, in spite of any rise that might take place

in his nominal wages. If, in ascertaining the peculiar productiveness of labour employed upon land, we look only to the clear monied rent yielded to a certain number of proprietors, we undoubtedly consider the subject in a very contracted point of view. The quantity of the surplus produce of the cultivators is indeed in part measured by this clear rent, but its real value consists in its affording the means of subsistence, and the materials of clothing and lodging, to a certain number of people, according to its extent; some of whom may live without manual exertions, and others employ themselves in modifying the raw materials of nature into the forms best suited to the gratification of man.

A clear monied revenue, arising from manufactures, of the same extent, and to the same number of individuals, would by no means be accompanied by the same circumstances. It would throw the country in which it existed into an absolute dependance for food and materials on the surplus produce of other nations; and if this foreign supply were by any accident to fail, the revenue would immediately cease.

The skill to modify the raw materials produced from the land would be absolutely of no value,

value, and the individuals possessing it would immediately perish, if these raw materials, and the food necessary to support those who are working them up, could not be obtained; but if the materials and the food were secure, it would be easy to find the skill sufficient to render them of considerable value.

According to the system of the Economists, manufactures are an object on which revenue is spent, and not any part of the revenue itself.*

* This account of manufactures and revenue is not in my opinion correct; because, if we measure the revenue of the whole state by its whole consumption, or even by the consumption of those who live upon surplus produce, manufactures evidently form a considerable part of it; and the raw produce alone would not be an adequate representation either of its quantity, or of its value. But even upon this system there is one point of view, in which manufactures appear greatly to add to the riches of a state. The use of a revenue, according to the Economists, is to be spent; and a great part of it will of course be spent in manufactures. But if, by the judicious employment of manufacturing capital, these commodities grow considerably cheaper, the surplus produce becomes proportionably of so much greater value, and the real revenue of the nation is virtually increased. If this view of the subject do not, in the eyes of the Economists, completely justify Dr. Smith in calling manufacturing labour *productive*, in the strict sense of that term, it ought, even according to their own definition, fully to warrant all the pains he has taken in explaining the nature and effects of commercial capital, and of the division of manufacturing labour.

But though from this description of manufactures, and the epithet sterile sometimes applied to them, they seem rather to be degraded by the terms of the Economists, it is a very great error to suppose, that their system is really unfavourable to them. On the contrary, I am disposed to believe, that it is only when commerce and manufactures follow agriculture, as in this system, and do not precede it, that they can prevail to a very great extent, without bringing with them at the same time the seeds of their own ruin. Before the late revolution in Holland, the high price of the necessaries of life had destroyed many of its manufactures.* Monopolies are always subject to be broken; and even the advantage of capital and machinery, which may yield extraordinary profits for a time, is liable to be greatly lessened by the competition of other nations. In the history of the world, the nations, whose wealth has been derived principally from manufactures and commerce, have been perfectly ephemeral beings, compared with those, the basis of whose wealth has been agriculture. It is in the nature of things, that a state, the most essential part of whose revenue is furnished by other countries, must be infinitely

* Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, vol. iii, b. v, c. ii, p. 392.

more exposed to all the accidents of time and chance, than one which, in this important point, is independent.

No error is more frequent than that of mistaking effects for causes. We are so blinded by the showiness of commerce and manufactures, as to believe, that they are almost the sole cause of the wealth, power, and prosperity of England. But they certainly must be considered in a great degree as the consequence, as well as the cause of this wealth. According to the definition of the Economists, which considers only the produce of land, England is the richest country in Europe in proportion to her size. Her system of agriculture is beyond comparison better, and consequently her surplus produce is more considerable. France is very greatly superior to England in extent of territory and population; but when the surplus produce, or disposable revenue of the two nations is compared, the superiority of France almost vanishes. And it is this great surplus produce in England, arising from her agriculture, which enables her to support such a vast body of manufacturers, such formidable fleets and armies, such a crowd of persons engaged in the liberal professions, and a proportion of the society living on money rents

very

very far beyond what has ever been known in any other country of the world. According to the returns lately made of the population of England and Wales, it appears, that the number of persons employed in agriculture is considerably less than a fifth part of the whole. There is reason to believe, that the classifications in these returns are incorrect; but making very great allowances for errors of this nature, it can scarcely admit of a doubt, that the number of persons employed in agriculture is very unusually small in proportion to the actual produce. Of late years indeed the part of the society not connected with agriculture has increased beyond this produce; but the average importation of corn, as yet, bears but a small proportion to that which is grown in the country; and consequently the power, which England possesses of supporting so vast a body of idle consumers, must be attributed principally to the greatness of her surplus produce.

It will be said, that it was her commerce and manufactures, which encouraged her cultivators to obtain this great surplus produce, and therefore indirectly, if not directly, created it. That commerce and manufactures produce this effect in a great degree is true; but that they
sometimes

sometimes fail to produce it, when carried to excess, is equally true. Undoubtedly agriculture cannot flourish without a vent for its commodities, either at home or abroad; but when this want has been adequately supplied, the interests of agriculture demand nothing more. When too great a part of a nation is engaged in commerce and manufactures, it is a clear proof, that, either from undue encouragement, or from other particular causes, a capital is employed in this way to much greater advantage than in domestic agriculture; and under such circumstances, it is impossible, that the land should not be robbed of much of the capital, which would naturally have fallen to its share. Dr. Smith justly observes, that the navigation act, and the monopoly of the colony trade, necessarily forced into a particular and not very advantageous channel a greater proportion of the capital of Great Britain, than would otherwise have gone to it; and by thus taking capital from other employments, and at the same time universally raising the rate of British mercantile profit, discouraged the improvement of the land.^a If the improvement of

^a Wealth of Nations, vol. ii, b. iv, c. vii, p. 435.

land, he goes on to say, affords a greater capital than what can be drawn from an equal capital in any mercantile employment, the land will draw capital from mercantile employments. If the profit be less, mercantile employments will draw capital from the improvement of land. The monopoly therefore, by raising the rate of British mercantile profit, and thus discouraging agricultural improvement, has necessarily retarded the natural increase of a great original source of revenue, the rent of land.^a

The East and West Indies are indeed so great an object, and afford employment with high profits to so great a capital, that it is impossible, that they should not draw capital from other employments, and particularly from the cultivation of the soil, the profits upon which in general are very small.

All corporations, patents, and exclusive privileges of every kind, which abound so much in the mercantile system, have in proportion to their extent the same effect. And the experience of the last twenty years seems to warrant us in concluding, that the high price of provisions arising from the abundance of commercial wealth, accompanied as it has been by

^a *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii, b. iv, c. vii, p. 436.

very great variations, and by a great rise in the price of labour, does not operate as an encouragement to agriculture sufficient to make it keep pace with the rapid strides of commerce.

It will be said perhaps, that land is always improved by the redundancy of commercial capital. But this effect is late and slow, and in the nature of things cannot operate powerfully, till this capital is really redundant, which it never is, while the interest of money and the profits of mercantile stock are high. We can not look forwards to any considerable effect of this kind, till the interest of money sinks to 3 per cent. When men can get 5 or 6 per cent for their money, without any trouble, they will hardly venture a capital upon land, where, including risks, and the profits upon their own labour and attendance, they may not get much more. Wars and loans, as far as internal circumstances are concerned, impede but little the progress of those branches of commerce, where the profits of stock are high; but affect very considerably the increase of that more essential and permanent source of wealth, the improvement of the land. It is in this point, I am inclined to believe, that the national debt of England has been most injurious to her. By
abforbing

abforbing the redundancy of commercial **capital**, and keeping up the rate of interest, it has prevented this capital from overflowing upon the soil. And a large mortgage* has thus been established

* The great practical error of the Economists appears to be on the subject of taxation; and this error does not necessarily flow from their confined and inadequate definition of wealth, but is a false inference from their own premises. Admitting that the surplus produce of the land is the fund, which pays every thing besides the food of the cultivators; yet it seems to be a mistake to suppose, that the owners of land are the sole proprietors of this surplus produce. Every man who has realized a capital in money has virtually a mortgage on the land for a certain portion of the surplus produce; and as long as the conditions of this mortgage remain unaltered (and the taxes, which affect him only in the character of a consumer, do not alter these conditions) the mortgagee pays a tax in the same manner as the landholder, finally. As consumers indeed it cannot be doubted, that even those who live upon the profits of stock and the wages of labour, particularly of professional labour, pay some taxes on necessaries for a very considerable time, and those on luxuries permanently; because the consumption of individuals, who possess large shares of the wealth which is paid in profits and wages, may be curtailed and turned into another channel, without impeding, in any degree, the continuance of the same quantity of stock, or the production of the same quantity of labour.

The real surplus produce of this country, or all the produce not actually consumed by the cultivators, is a very different thing, and should carefully be distinguished from the sum of the
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established on the lands of England, the interest of which is drawn from the payment of productive

the net rents of the landlords. This sum, it is supposed, does not much exceed a fifth part of the gross produce. The remaining four fifths are certainly not consumed by the labourers and horses employed in agriculture; but a very considerable portion of them is paid by the farmer in tithes, in taxes, in the instruments of agriculture, and in the manufactures used in his own family, and in the families of his labourers. It is in this manner, that a kind of mortgage is ultimately established on the land, by taxes, and the progress of commercial wealth; and in this sense, all taxes may be said to fall upon the land, though not on the landholders. It seems a little hard therefore, in taxing surplus produce, to make the landlords pay for what they do not receive. At the same time it must be confessed, that independently of these considerations, which makes a land tax partial, it is the best of all taxes, as it is the only one which does not tend to raise the price of commodities. Taxes on consumption, by which alone monied revenues can be reached, without an income tax, necessarily raise all prices to a degree greatly injurious to a country.

A land tax, or tax upon net rent, has little or no effect in discouraging the improvement of land, as many have supposed. It is only a tithe, or a tax in proportion to the gross produce, which does this. No man in his senses will be deterred from getting a clear profit of 20l. instead of 10l. because he is always to pay a fourth or fifth of his clear gains; but when he is to pay a tax in proportion to his gross produce, which in the case of capital laid out in improvements is scarcely ever accompanied with a proportional increase of his clear gains, it is a very different thing, and must necessarily impede,

tive labour, and dedicated to the support of idle consumers.

It must be allowed therefore, upon the whole, that our commerce has not done more for our agriculture, than our agriculture has for our commerce; and that the improved system of cultivation, which has taken place in spite of considerable discouragements, creates yearly a surplus produce, which enables the country, with but little assistance, to support so vast a body of people engaged in pursuits unconnected with the land.

impede, in a great degree, the progress of cultivation. I am astonished, that so obvious and easy a commutation for tithes as a land tax on improved rents has not been adopted. Such a tax would be paid by the same persons as before, only in a better form; and the change would not be felt, except in the advantage that would accrue to all the parties concerned, the landlord, the tenant, and the clergyman. Tithes undoubtedly operate as a high bounty on pasture, and a great discouragement to tillage, which in the present peculiar circumstances of the country is a very great disadvantage.

CHAP. IX.

Diferent Effects of the Agricultural and Commercial Systems.

ABOUT the middle of the last century we were genuinely an agricultural nation. Our commerce and manufactures were however then in a very respectable and thriving state; and if they had continued to bear the same relative proportion to our agriculture, they would evidently have gone on increasing constantly with the improving cultivation of the country. There is no apparent limit to the quantity of manufactures, which might in time be supported in this way. The increasing wealth of a country in such a state seems to be out of the reach of all common accidents. There is no discoverable germ of decay in the system; and in theory there is no reason to say, that it might not go on increasing in wealth and prosperity for thousands of years.

We have now however stepped out of the
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agricultural system, into a state in which the commercial system clearly predominates; and there is but too much reason to fear, that even our commerce and manufactures will ultimately feel the disadvantage of the change. It has been already observed, that we are exactly in the situation, in which a country feels most fully the effect of those common years of deficient crops, which in the natural course of things are to be expected. The competition of increasing commercial wealth, operating upon a supply of corn not increasing in the same proportion, must at all times tend to raise the nominal price of labour; but when scarce years are taken into the consideration, its effect in this way must ultimately be very great. During the late scarcities the price of labour has been continually rising, and it will not readily fall again. In every country there will be many causes, which, in practice, operating like friction in mechanics, prevent the price of labour from rising and falling exactly in proportion to the price of its component parts. But besides these causes, there is one very powerful cause in theory, which operates to prevent the price of labour from falling when once it has been raised. Supposing it to be raised by a temporary cause, such

such as a scarcity of provisions it is evident, that it will not fall again, unless some kind of stagnation take place in the competition among the purchasers of labour; but the power which the increase of the real price of labour, on the return of plenty, gives to the labourer of purchasing a greater quantity both of rude and manufactured produce, tends to prevent this stagnation, and strongly to counteract that fall in the price, which would otherwise take place.

Labour is a commodity, the price of which will not be so readily affected by the price of its component parts as any other. The reason why the consumer pays a tax on any commodity, or an advance in the price of any of its component parts, is, because if he cannot or will not pay this advance of price, the commodity will not be produced in the same quantity, and the next year there will be only such a proportion in the market, as is accommodated to the number of persons that will consent to pay the advance. But in the case of labour, the operation of withdrawing the commodity is much slower and more painful. Although the purchasers refuse to pay the advanced price, the same supply will necessarily remain in the market, not only the next year, but for some

years to come. Consequently, if no increase take place in the demand, and the tax or advance in the price of provisions be not so great, as to make it immediately obvious that the labourer cannot support his family, it is probable, that he will continue to pay this advance, till a relaxation in the rate of the increase of population causes the market to be under supplied with labour, and then of course the competition among the purchasers will raise the price above the proportion of the advance, in order to restore the necessary supply. In the same manner if an advance in the price of labour take place during two or three years of scarcity, it is probable, that on the return of plenty the real recompense of labour will continue higher than the usual average, till a too rapid increase of population causes a competition among the labourers, and a consequent diminution of the price of labour below the usual rate.

When a country in average years grows more corn than it consumes, and is in the habit of exporting a part of it, those great variations of price, which from the competition of commercial wealth often produce lasting effects, cannot occur to the same extent. The wages of labour can never rise very much above the common

mon price in other commercial countries; and under such circumstances, England would have nothing to fear from the fullest and most open competition. The increasing prosperity of other countries would only open to her a more extensive market for her commodities, and give additional spirit to all her commercial transactions.

The high price of corn and of rude produce in general, as far as it is occasioned by the freest competition among the nations of Europe, is a very great advantage, and is the best possible encouragement to agriculture; but when occasioned merely by the competition of monied wealth at home, its effect is different. In the one case, a great encouragement is given to production in general, and the more is produced the better. In the other case, the produce is necessarily confined to the home consumption. The cultivators are justly afraid of growing too much corn, as a considerable loss will be sustained upon that part of it which is sold abroad; and a glut in the home market will universally make the price fall below the fair and proper recompense to the grower. It is impossible, that a country under such circumstances should not

be subject to great and frequent variations in the price of corn.

If we were to endeavour to lower the price of labour by encouraging the importation of foreign corn, we should probably aggravate the evil tenfold. Experience warrants us in saying, that the fall in the price of labour would be slow and uncertain; but the decline of our agriculture would be certain. The British grower of corn could not, in his own markets, stand the competition of the foreign grower, in average years. Arable lands of a moderate quality would hardly pay the expense of cultivation. Rich soils alone would yield a rent. Round all our towns the appearances would be the same as usual; but in the interior of the country, much of the land would be neglected, and almost universally, where it was practicable, pasture would take place of tillage. This state of things would continue, till the equilibrium was restored, either by the fall of British rent and wages, or an advance in the price of foreign corn, or, what is more probable, by the union of both causes. But a period would have elapsed of considerable relative encouragement to manufactures, and relative discouragement to agriculture;

culture; a certain portion of capital would be taken from the land; and when the equilibrium was at length restored, the nation would probably be found dependant upon foreign supplies for a great portion of her subsistence; and unless some particular cause were to occasion a foreign demand greater than the home demand, her independence in this respect, could not be recovered. During this period even her commerce and manufactures would be in a most precarious state; and circumstances by no means improbable in the present state of Europe might reduce her population within the limits of her reduced cultivation.*

In the natural course of things, a country,

* Though it be true, that the high price of labour or taxes on agricultural capital ultimately fall on the rent, yet we must by no means throw out of our consideration the current leases. In the course of twenty years, I am inclined to believe, that the state of agriculture in any country might be very flourishing, or very much the reverse, according as the current leases had tended to encourage or discourage improvement. A general fall in the rent of land would be preceded by a period most unfavourable to the investment of agricultural capital; and consequently every tax which affects agricultural capital is peculiarly pernicious. Taxes which affect capitals in trade are almost immediately shifted off on the consumer: but taxes which affect agricultural capital fall, during the current leases, wholly on the farmer.

which depends for a considerable part of its supply of corn upon its poorer neighbours, may expect to see this supply gradually diminish, as these countries increase in riches and population, and have less surplus of their rude produce to spare.

The political relations of such a country may expose it, during a war, to have that part of its supplies of provisions, which it derives from foreign states, suddenly stopped, or greatly diminished; an event which could not take place without producing the most calamitous effects.

A nation in which commercial wealth predominates has an abundance of all those articles, which form the principal consumption of the rich, but is exposed to be straitened in its supplies of that article, which is absolutely necessary to all, and in which by far the greatest portion of the revenue of the industrious classes is expended.

A nation in which agricultural wealth predominates, though it may not produce at home such a surplus of luxuries and conveniences as the commercial nation, and may therefore be exposed possibly to some want of these commodities, has, on the other hand, a surplus of that article, which is essential to the well being of
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the whole state, and is therefore secure from want in what is of the greatest importance.

And if we cannot be so sure of the supply of what we derive from others, as of what we produce at home, it seems to be an advantageous policy in a nation, whose territory will allow of it, to secure a surplus of that commodity, a deficiency of which would strike most deeply at its happiness and prosperity.

It has been almost universally acknowledged, that there is no branch of trade more profitable to a country, even in a commercial point of view, than the sale of rude produce. In general its value bears a much greater proportion to the expense incurred in procuring it, than that of any other commodity whatever, and the national profit on its sale is in consequence greater. This is often noticed by Dr. Smith; but in combating the arguments of the Economists, he seems for a moment to forget it, and to speak of the superior advantage of exporting manufactures.

He observes, that a trading and manufacturing country exports what can subsist and accommodate but very few, and imports the subsistence and accommodation of a great number. The other exports the subsistence and accommodation

modation of a great number, and imports that of a very few only. The inhabitants of the one must always enjoy a much greater quantity of subsistence than what their own lands in the actual state of their cultivation could afford. The inhabitants of the other must always enjoy a much smaller quantity.*

In this passage he does not seem to argue with his usual accuracy. Though the manufacturing nation may export a commodity, which, in its actual shape, can only subsist and accommodate a very few; yet it must be recollected, that in order to prepare this commodity for exportation, a considerable part of the revenue of the country had been employed in subsisting and accommodating a great number of workmen. And with regard to the subsistence and accommodation which the other nation exports, whether it be of a great or a small number, it is certainly no more than sufficient to replace the subsistence, that had been consumed in the manufacturing nation, together with the profits of the master manufacturer and merchant, which, probably, are not so great as the profits of the farmer and the merchant in the agricultural nation. And though it may be true, that the

* *Wealth of Nations*, vol. iii, b. iv, c. ix, p. 27.

inhabitants of the manufacturing nation enjoy a greater quantity of subsistence, than what their own lands in the actual state of their cultivation could afford; yet an inference in favour of the manufacturing system, by no means follows, because the adoption of the one or the other system will make the greatest difference in their actual state of cultivation. If, during the course of a century, two landed nations were to pursue these two different systems, that is, if one of them were regularly to export manufactures, and import subsistence; and the other to export subsistence, and import manufactures, there would be no comparison at the end of the period between the state of cultivation in the two countries; and no doubt could rationally be entertained, that the country, which exported its raw produce, would be able to subsist and accommodate a much greater population than the other.

In the ordinary course of things, the exportation of corn is sufficiently profitable to the individuals concerned in it. But with regard to national advantage, there are four very strong reasons, why it is to be preferred to any other kind of export. In the first place, corn pays from its own funds the expenses of procuring it,

it, and the whole of what is sold is a clear national profit. If I set up a new manufacture, the persons employed in it must be supported out of the funds of subsistence already existing in the country, the value of which must be deducted from the price for which the commodity is sold, before we can estimate the clear national profit. But if I cultivate fresh land, or employ more men in the improvement of what was before cultivated, I increase the general funds of subsistence in the country. With a part of this increase I support all the additional persons employed, and the whole of the remainder, which is exported and sold, is a clear national gain; besides the advantage to the country of supporting an additional population equal to the additional number of persons so employed, without the slightest tendency to diminish the plenty of the rest.

Secondly, in all wrought commodities, the same quantity of capital, skill, and labour, employed, will produce the same or very nearly the same quantity of complete manufacture. But owing to the variations of the seasons, the same quantity of capital, skill, and labour in husbandry may produce in different years very different quantities of corn. Consequently, if the two commodities

commodities were equally valuable to man, from the greater probability of the occasional failure of corn than of manufactures, it would be of more consequence to have an average surplus of the former than of the latter.

Thirdly, corn being an article of the most absolutely necessity, in comparison with which all others will be sacrificed, a deficiency of it must necessarily produce a much greater advance of price, than a deficiency of any other kind of produce; and as the price of corn influences the price of so many other commodities, the evil effects of a deficiency will not only be more severe and more general, but more lasting, than the effects of a deficiency in any other commodity.

Fourthly, there appear to be but three ways of rendering the supplies of corn in a particular country more equable, and of preventing the evil effects of those deficiencies from unfavourable seasons, which in the natural course of things must be expected occasionally to recur. These are, 1. An immediate supply from foreign nations, as soon as the scarcity occurs. 2. Large public granaries. 3. The habitual growth of a quantity of corn for a more extended market than

than the average home consumption affords.^a Of the first, experience has convinced us, that the suddenness of the demand prevents it from being effectual. To the second, it is acknowledged by all, that there are very great and weighty objections. There remains then only the third.

These considerations seem to make it a point of the first consequence to the happiness and permanent prosperity of any country, to be able to carry on the export trade of corn as one considerable branch of its commercial transactions.

But how to give this ability, how to turn a nation from the habit of importing corn to the habit of exporting it, is the great difficulty. It has been generally acknowledged, and is frequently noticed by Dr. Smith, that the policy of modern Europe has led it to encourage the industry of the towns more than the industry of the country, or, in other words, trade more

^a A plan has lately been suggested in Mr. Oddy's *European Commerce* (page 511), of making this country an entrepôt of foreign grain, to be opened only for internal sale, when corn is above the importation price, whatever that may be. To this plan, if it can be executed, I see no objection; and it certainly deserves attention. It would not interfere with the home growth of corn, and would be a good provision against years of scarcity.

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than agriculture. In this policy, England has certainly not been behind the rest of Europe; perhaps indeed, except in one instance,^b it may be said that she has been the foremost. If things had been left to take their natural course, there is no reason to think, that the commercial part of the society would have increased beyond the surplus produce of the cultivators; but the high profits of commerce from monopolies, and other peculiar encouragements, have altered this natural course of things; and the body politic is in an artificial, and in some degree diseased state, with one of its principal members out of proportion to the rest. Almost all medicine is in itself bad; and one of the great evils of illness is the necessity of taking it. No person can well be more averse to medicine in the animal economy, or a system of expedients in political economy, than myself; but in the present state of the country something of the kind may be necessary, to prevent greater evils. It is a matter of very little comparative importance, whether we are fully supplied with broadcloth, linens, and muslins, or even with tea, sugar, and coffee; and no rational politician therefore would

^b The bounty on the exportation of corn.

think of proposing a bounty upon such commodities. But it is certainly a matter of the very highest importance, whether we are fully supplied with food; and if a bounty would produce such a supply, the most liberal political economist might be justified in proposing it; considering food as a commodity distinct from all others, and preeminently valuable.



CHAP. X.

Of Bounties on the Exportation of Corn.

IN discussing the policy of a bounty on the exportation of corn, it should be premised, that the private interests of the farmers and proprietors should never enter into the question. The sole object of our consideration ought to be the permanent interest of the consumer, in the character of which is comprehended the whole nation.

According to the general principles of political economy, it cannot be doubted, that it is for the interest of the civilized world, that each nation should purchase its commodities wherever they can be had the cheapest.

According to these principles, it is rather desirable, that some obstacles should exist to the excessive accumulation of wealth in any particular country; and that rich nations should be tempted to purchase their corn of poorer nations, as by these means the wealth of the civi-

lized world will not only be more rapidly increased, but more equably diffused.

It is evident, however, that local interests and political relations may modify the application of these general principles; and in a country with a territory fit for the production of corn, an independent, and at the same time a more equable supply of this necessary of life, may be an object of such importance, as to warrant a deviation from them.

It is undoubtedly true, that every thing will ultimately find its level, but this level is sometimes effected in a very harsh manner. England may export corn a hundred years hence without the assistance of a bounty; but this is much more likely to happen from the destruction of her manufactures, than from the increase of her agriculture; and a policy, which in so important a point may tend to soften the harsh corrections of general laws, seems to be justifiable.

The regulations respecting importation and exportation adopted in the corn laws, that were established in 1688 and 1700, seemed to have the effect of giving that encouragement to agriculture, which it so much wanted; at least they

they were followed by a growth of corn in the country considerably above the wants of the actual population, by a lower average price, and by a steadiness of prices, that had never been experienced before.

During the seventeenth century, and indeed the whole period of our history previous to it, the prices of wheat were subject to great fluctuations, and the average price was very high. For sixty three years before the year 1700, the average price of wheat per quarter was, according to Dr. Smith, 2l. 11s. 0 $\frac{1}{3}$ d., and for five years before 1650, it was 3l. 12s. 8d. From the time of the completion of the corn laws in 1700 and 1706, the prices became extraordinarily steady; and the average price for forty years, previous to the year 1750, sunk so low as 1l. 16s. per quarter. This was the period of our greatest exportations. In the year 1757, the laws were suspended, and in the year 1773 they were totally altered. The exports of corn have since been regularly decreasing, and the imports increasing. The average price of wheat for the forty years ending in 1800, was 2l. 9s. 5d; and for the last five years of this period, 3l. 6s. 6d. During this last term, the balance of the imports of all sorts of grain is

estimated at 2,938,357.^a and the dreadful fluctuations of price, which have occurred of late years, we are but too well acquainted with.

It is at all times dangerous, to be hasty in drawing general inferences from partial experience: but, in the present instance, the period that has been considered is of so considerable an extent; and the changes from fluctuating and high prices to steady and low prices, with a return to fluctuating and high prices again, correspond so accurately with the establishment and full vigour of the corn laws, and with their subsequent alterations and inefficacy; that it was certainly rather a bold assertion in Dr. Smith to say, that the fall in the price of corn must have happened in spite of the bounty, and could not possibly have happened in consequence of it.^b From a view of the facts, it does not at any rate seem probable, that the causes, whatever they may be, which have produced this effect, should have been continually impeded by the laws in question; and we have a right to expect, that he should defend a position so contrary to appearances, by the most powerful arguments.

^a Anderson's Investigation of the Circumstances which led to Scarcity, Table, p. 40.

^b Wealth of Nations, vol. ii, b. iv, c. v, p. 264.

As in the present state of this country the subject seems to be of the highest importance, it will be worth while to examine the validity of these arguments.

He observes, that both in years of plenty, and in years of scarcity, the bounty necessarily tends to raise the money price of corn somewhat higher, than it otherwise would be in the home market.^a

That it does so in years of plenty is undoubtedly true; but that it does so in years of scarcity appears to me as undoubtedly false. The only argument by which Dr. Smith supports this latter position is, by saying, that the exportation prevents the plenty of one year from relieving the scarcity of another. But this is certainly a very insufficient reason. The scarce year may not immediately follow the most plentiful year; and it is totally contrary to the habits and practice of farmers, to save the superfluity of six or seven years for a contingency of this kind. Great practical inconveniencies generally attend the keeping of so large a reserved store. Difficulties often occur from a want of proper accommodations for it. It is at all times liable to damage from vermin and other causes. When

^a Wealth of Nations, vol. ii, b. iv, c. v, p. 265.

very large, it is apt to be viewed with a jealous and grudging eye by the common people. And, in general, the farmer may either not be able to remain so long without his returns; or may not be willing to employ so considerable a capital in a way, in which the returns must necessarily be distant and precarious. On the whole, therefore, we cannot reasonably expect, that, upon this plan, the reserved store should in any degree be equal to that, which in a scarce year would be kept at home, in a country which was in the habit of constant exportation to a considerable amount; and we know, that even a very little difference in the degree of deficiency will often make a very great difference in the price.

Dr. Smith then proceeds to state very justly, that the defenders of the corn laws do not insist so much upon the price of corn in the actual state of tillage, as upon their tendency to improve this actual state, by opening a more extensive foreign market to the corn of the farmer, and securing to him a better price than he could otherwise expect for his commodity; which double encouragement, they imagine, must in a long period of years occasion such an increase in the production of corn, as may lower
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its price in the home market much more than the bounty can raise it, in the state of tillage then actually existing.^a

In answer to this he observes, that whatever extension of the foreign market can be occasioned by the bounty, must in every particular year be altogether at the expense of the home market, as every bushel of corn which is exported by means of the bounty, and which would not have been exported without the bounty, would have remained in the home market to increase the consumption, and to lower the price of that commodity.

In this observation he appears to me a little to misuse the term market. Because, by selling a commodity below what he calls its natural price, it is possible to get rid of a greater quantity of it, in any particular market, than would have gone off otherwise, it cannot justly be said, that by this process such a market is proportionally extended. Though the removal of the two taxes mentioned by Dr. Smith, as paid on account of the bounty, would certainly rather increase the power of the lower classes to purchase; yet in each particular year the consumption must be ultimately limited by the population; and the increase of consumption from

^a *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii, b. iv, c. v, p. 265.

the removal of these taxes might by no means be sufficient, to take off the whole superfluity of the farmers, without lowering the general price of corn, so as to deprive them of their fair recompense. If the price of British corn in the home market rise in consequence of the bounty, it is an unanswerable proof, that the effectual market for British corn is extended by it; and that the diminution of demand at home, whatever it may be, is more than counterbalanced by the extension of the demand abroad.

There cannot be a greater discouragement to the production of any commodity in a large quantity, than the fear of overstocking the market with it. Nor can there be a greater encouragement to such a production, than the certainty of finding an effectual market for any quantity, however great, that can be obtained. It should be observed further, that one of the principal objects of the bounty is to obtain a surplus above the home consumption, which may supply the deficiency of unfavourable years; but it is evident, that no possible extension of the home market can attain this object.

Dr. Smith goes on to say, that, if the two taxes paid by the people on account of the bounty, namely, the one to the government to pay this bounty, and the other paid in the ad-
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vanced price of the commodity, do not, in the actual state of the crop, raise the price of labour, and thus return upon the farmer; they must reduce the ability of the labouring poor to bring up their children, and, by thus restraining the population and industry of the country, must tend to stunt and restrain the gradual extension of the home market, and thereby, in the long run, rather to diminish, than to augment, the whole market and consumption of corn.*

I think it has been shown, and indeed it will scarcely admit of a doubt, that the system of exportation arising from the bounty has an evident tendency in years of scarcity to increase the supplies of corn; or to prevent their being so much diminished as they otherwise would be, which comes to the same thing. Consequently the labouring poor will be able to live better, and the population will be less checked in these particular years, than they would have been without the system of exportation arising from the bounty. But if the effect of the bounty, in this view of the subject, be only to repress a little the population in years of plenty, while it encourages it comparatively in years of scarcity;

* *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii, b. iv, c. v, p. 267.

its effect is evidently to regulate the population more equally according to that quantity of subsistence, which can permanently, and without occasional defalcations, be supplied. And this effect, I have no hesitation in saying, is one of the greatest advantages, which can possibly occur to a society; and contributes more to the happiness of the labouring poor, than can easily be conceived by those, who have not deeply considered the subject. In the whole compass of human events, I doubt if there be a more fruitful source of misery, or one more invariably productive of disastrous consequences, than a sudden start of population from two or three years of plenty, which must necessarily be repressed on the first return of scarcity, or even of average crops. It has been suggested, that, if we were in the habit of exporting corn in consequence of a bounty, the price would fall still lower in years of extraordinary abundance, than without such a bounty and such exportation; because the exuberance belonging to that part of the crop usually exported would fall upon the home market. But there seems to be no reason for supposing, that this would be the case. The quantity annually exported would by no means be fixed, but would depend upon the state of the
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the crop, and the demands of the home market. One great advantage of a foreign market, both with regard to buying and selling, is the improbability, that years of scarcity, or years of abundance, should in many different countries occur at the same time. In a year of abundance the fixed sum of the bounty would always bear a greater proportion to the cost of production. A greater encouragement would therefore be given to export, and a very moderate lowering of price would probably enable the farmer, to dispose of the whole of his excess in foreign markets.

The most plausible argument that Dr. Smith adduces against the corn laws is, that, as the money price of corn regulates that of all other home-made commodities, the advantage to the proprietor from the increased money price is merely apparent, and not real; since what he gains in his sales, he must lose in his purchases.*

This position, however, is not true, without many limitations. The money price of corn in a particular country is undoubtedly by far the most powerful ingredient in regulating the price of labour, and of all other commodities; but it is not enough for Dr. Smith's position,

* *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii, b. iv, c. v, p. 269.

that it should be the most powerful ingredient ; it must be shown, that, other causes remaining the same, the price of every article will rise and fall exactly in proportion to the price of corn ; and this does not appear to be the case. Dr. Smith himself excepts all foreign commodities ; but when we reflect upon the sum of our imports, and the quantity of foreign articles used in our manufactures, this exception alone is of very great importance. Wool and raw hides, two most important materials of home growth, do not, according to Dr. Smith's own reasonings, (Book i, c. xi, p. 363 et seq.) depend much upon the price of corn and the rent of land ; and the price of flax is of course greatly influenced by the quantity we import. But woollen cloths, leather, linen, cottons, tea, sugar, &c., which are comprehended in the above-named articles, form almost the whole of the clothing and luxuries of the industrious classes of society. Consequently, although that part of the wages of labour, which is expended in food, will rise in proportion to the price of corn, the whole of the wages will not rise in the same proportion. When great improvements in manufacturing machinery have taken place in any country, that part of the price of
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the wrought commodity, which pays the interest of the fixed capital employed in producing it, as this capital had been accumulated before the advance in the price of labour, will not rise in consequence of this advance, except as it requires gradual renovation. And in the case of great and numerous taxes on consumption, as those who live by the wages of labour must always receive wherewithal to pay them, at least all those upon necessaries, a rise or fall in the price of corn, though it would increase or decrease that part of the wages of labour which resolves itself into food, evidently would not increase or decrease that part, which was destined for the payment of taxes.

It cannot then be admitted as a general position, that the money price of corn in any country is an accurate measure of the real value of silver in that country. But all these considerations, though of great weight to the owners of land, will not influence the growth of corn beyond the current leases. At the expiration of a lease, any particular advantage, which the farmer had received from a favourable proportion between the price of corn and of labour, would be taken from him, and any disadvantage from an unfavourable proportion made up to him. The
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sole cause, which would determine the quantity of effective capital employed in agriculture, would be the extent of the effectual demand for corn; and if the bounty had really enlarged this demand, which it certainly would have done, it is impossible to suppose, that more capital would not be employed upon the land.

When Dr. Smith says, that the nature of things has stamped upon corn a real value, which cannot be altered by merely altering the money price; and that no bounty upon exportation, no monopoly of the home market, can raise that value, nor the freest competition lower it;^a it is evident, that he changes the question from the profits of the growers of corn or the proprietors of land, to the physical and absolute value of corn in itself. I certainly do not mean to say, that the bounty alters the physical value of corn, and makes a bushel of it support a greater number of labourers for a day than it did before; but I certainly do mean to say, that the bounty to the British cultivator does, in the actual state of things, really increase the demand for British corn; and thus encourages him to sow more than he otherwise would do, and enables him in consequence to employ

^a Wealth of Nations, vol. ii, b. iv, c. v, p. 278.

more bushels of corn in the maintenance of a greater number of labourers.

If Dr. Smith's theory were strictly true, and the real price of corn, or its price in the sum of all other commodities, never suffered any variation, it would be difficult to give a reason why we grow more corn now than we did 200 years ago. If no rise in the nominal price of corn were a real rise, or could enable the farmer to cultivate better, or determine more of the national capital to the land, it would appear, that agriculture was indeed in a most unfortunate situation, and that no adequate motive could exist to the further investment of capital in this branch of industry. But surely we cannot doubt, that the real price of corn varies, though it may not vary so much as the real price of other commodities; and that there are periods when all wrought commodities are cheaper, and periods when they are dearer, in proportion to the price of corn: and in the one case capital flows from manufactures to agriculture, and in the other from agriculture to manufactures. To overlook these periods, or consider them of slight importance, is unpardonable, because in every branch of trade these periods form the grand encouragement to an increase of supply. Undoubtedly the
profits

profits of trade in any particular branch of industry can never long remain higher than in others; but how are they lowered, except by influx of capital occasioned by these high profits? It never can be a national object permanently to increase the profits of any particular set of dealers. The national object is the increase of supply; but this object cannot be attained but by previously increasing the profits of these dealers, and thus determining a greater quantity of capital to this particular employment. The ship-owners and failors do not make greater profits now, than they did before the navigation act: but the object of the nation was not to increase the profits of ship-owners and failors, but the quantity of shipping and seamen; and this could not be done but by a law, which, by increasing the demand for them, raised the profits of the capital before employed in this way, and determined a greater quantity to flow into the same channel. The object of the nation in the corn laws is not the increase of the profits of the farmers, or the rents of the landlords; but the determination of a greater quantity of the national capital to the land, and the consequent increase of supply: and though in the case of an advance in the price of corn
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from an increased demand, the rise of wages, the rise of rents, and the fall of silver, tend to obscure in some degree our view of the subject; yet we cannot refuse to acknowledge, that the real price of corn varies during periods sufficiently long to affect the determination of capital, or we shall be reduced to the dilemma of owning, that no motive can exist to the further investment of capital in the production of corn.

The mode in which a bounty upon the exportation of corn operates seems to be this. Let us suppose, that the price at which the British grower can afford to sell his corn in average years is 55 shillings, and the price at which the foreign grower can sell it, 53 shillings. Thus circumstanced, it is evident, that the British grower cannot export corn even in years considerably above an average crop. In this state of things let a bounty of five shillings per quarter be granted on exported corn. Immediately as this bounty was established the exportation would begin, and go on, till the price in the home market had risen to the price at which British corn could be sold abroad with the addition of the bounty. The abstraction of a part of the home supply, or even the apprehension of it, would soon raise the price in the

home market ; and it is probable that the quantity exported before this rise had taken place would not, at the most, bear such a proportion to the whole quantity in the ports of Europe, as to lower the general price more than a shilling in the quarter. Consequently the British grower would sell his corn abroad for 52 shillings, which with the addition of the bounty would be 57 shillings, and what was sold at home would bear exactly the same price, throwing out of our consideration at present the expences of freight, &c. The British grower therefore, instead of 55 shillings at which he could afford to sell, would get 57 shillings for his whole crop. Dr. Smith has supposed, that a bounty of five shillings would raise the price of corn in the home market four shillings ; but this is evidently upon the supposition, that the growing price of corn was not lower abroad than at home, and in this case his supposition would probably be correct. In the case before supposed however, the extra profits of the farmer would be only two shillings. As far as this advance would go, it would raise the profits of farming, and encourage him to grow more corn. The next year therefore the supply would be increased in proportion to the number of purchasers

chasers of the year before, and to make this additional quantity go off, the price must fall; and it would of course fall both in the foreign and the home market, as while any exportation continues, the price in the home market will be regulated by the price in foreign markets with the addition of the bounty. This fall may be inconsiderable, but still the effect will be in this direction, and after the first year, the price of corn will for some time continue to fall towards its former level. In the mean time however, the cheapness of corn abroad might gradually tend to increase the number of purchasers, and extend the effectual demand for corn, not only at the late reduced prices, but at the original or even higher prices. But every extension of this kind would tend to raise the price of corn abroad to a nearer level with the growing price at home, and consequently would give the British farmer a greater advantage from the bounty. If the demand abroad extended only in proportion to the cheapness, the effect would be, that part of the agriculture of foreign countries would be checked to make room for the increased agriculture of Britain, and some of the foreign growers, who traded upon the smallest profits, would be jostled out of the markets.

At what time the advanced price at home would begin to affect the price of labour and of all other commodities, it would be very difficult to say; but it is probable, that the interval might be considerable, because the first and greatest rise, upon the supposition that has been made, would not be above threepence in the bushel, and this advance would for some time diminish every year. But after the full effect from this advance, whatever it might be, had taken place, the influence of the bounty would by no means be lost. For some years it would give the British grower an absolute advantage over the foreign grower. This advantage would of course gradually diminish, because it is the nature of all effectual demand to be ultimately supplied, and to oblige the producers to sell at the lowest price that they can afford. But after having experienced a period of very decided encouragement, the British grower will find himself at last on a level with the foreign grower, which he was not before the bounty, and in the habit of supplying a larger market than his own upon equal terms with his competitors. And after this, if the foreign and British markets continued to extend themselves equally, the British grower would continue to

proportion

proportion his supplies to both ; because, unless a particular increase of demand were to take place at home, he could never withdraw his foreign supply without lowering the price of his whole crop ; and the nation would thus be in possession of a constant store for years of scarcity.

To the present state of things, indeed, the supposition here made will not apply. In average years we do not grow enough for our own consumption. Our first object must therefore be to supply our own wants, before we aim at obtaining an excess, and the restrictive laws on importation are strongly calculated to produce this effect. It is difficult to conceive a more decided encouragement to the investment of capital in agriculture, than the certainty, that for many years to come the price will never fall so low as the growing price according to the existing leases. If such a certainty has no tendency to give encouragement to British agriculture, on account of the advance it may occasion in the price of labour, it may safely be pronounced, that no possible increase of wealth and population can ever encourage the production of corn.* In a nation which never imported corn
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* If the operation of the corn laws, as they were established

except in a scarcity, commerce could never get the start of agriculture; and restrictive laws on importation, as far as they go, tend to give a relative discouragement to manufactures, and a relative encouragement to agriculture. If without diminishing manufactures, they were merely to determine a greater part of the future annual accumulation to fall on the land, the effect would undoubtedly be in the highest degree desirable; but even allowing, that the present very rapid march of wealth in general were to suffer a slight relaxation in its progress, if there be any foundation whatever for the alarms that have of late been expressed respecting the advantageous employment of so rapidly increasing a capital, we might surely be willing to sacrifice a small portion of present riches, in order to attain a greater degree

in 1700, had continued uninterrupted, I cannot bring myself to believe, that we should now be in the habit of importing so much corn as we do at present. Putting the bounty on exportation out of the question, the restrictive laws on importation alone would have made it impossible. The demand for British corn would, for the last 30 years, have been both greater and more uniform than it has been; and it is contrary to every principle of supply and demand to suppose, that this would not have occasioned a greater growth. Dr. Smith's argument clearly proves too much, which is as bad as proving too little.

of security, independence, and permanent prosperity.

Having considered the effect of the bounty on the farmer, it remains to consider its effect on the consumer. It must be allowed, that all the direct effects of the bounty are to raise, and not to lower the price of corn to the consumer; but its indirect effects are both to lower the average price, and to prevent the variations above and below that price. If we take any period of some length prior to the establishment of the bounty, we shall find, that the average price of corn is most powerfully affected by years of scarcity. From 1637 to 1700, both inclusive, the average price of corn, according to Dr. Smith, was 2l. 11s. 0½d.; yet in 1688 the growing price, according to an estimate of Gregory King, which Dr. Smith supposes to be correct, was only 1l. 8s. It appears therefore, that during this period it was the price of scarcity, rather than the growing price, which influenced the general average. But this high average price would not proportionally encourage the cultivation of corn. Though the farmer might feel very sanguine during one or two years of high price, and project many improvements, yet the glut in the market, which would

follow, would depress him in the same degree, and destroy all his projects. Sometimes, indeed, a year of high price really tends to impoverish the land, and prepare the way for future scarcity. The period is too short to determine more capital to the land, and a temporary plenty is often restored by sowing ground that is not ready for it, and thus injuring the permanent interests of agriculture. It may easily happen therefore, that a very fluctuating price, although the general average be high, will not tend to encourage the determination of capital to the land in the same degree as a steadier price with a lower general average, provided that this average is above the growing price. And if the bounty has any tendency to encourage a greater supply, and to cause the general average to be more affected by the growing price than the price of scarcity, it may produce a benefit of very high magnitude to the consumer, while at the same time it furnishes a better encouragement to the farmer; two objects which have been considered as incompatible, though not with sufficient reason. For let us suppose, that the growing price in this country is 55 shillings per quarter, and that for three years out of the last ten the price from scarcity had been five guineas, for four years 55 shillings,

shillings, and for the remaining three years 52 shillings. In this case the average of the ten years will be a little above 3*l.* 9*s.* This is a most encouraging price; but the three years which were below the growing price would destroy in a great measure its effect; and it cannot be doubted, that agriculture would have received a much more beneficial impulse, if the price had continued steadily at 3 guineas during the whole time. With regard to the consumer, the advantage of the latter average need not be insisted on.

When Dr. Smith asserted, that a fall in the price of corn could not possibly happen in consequence of a bounty, he overlooked a distinction, which it is necessary to make in this case, between the growing price of corn in years of common plenty, and the average price of a period including years of scarcity, which are in fact two very different things. Supposing the wages of labour to be regulated more frequently by the former than the latter price, which perhaps is the case, it will readily be allowed, that the bounty could not lower the growing price; though it might very easily lower the average price of a long period, and I have no doubt whatever had this effect in a considerable degree during the first half of the last century.

The operation of the bounty on the value of silver is, in the same manner, in its direct effects to depreciate it, but its indirect effects may perhaps tend more powerfully to prevent it from falling. In the progress of wealth, when commerce outstrips agriculture, there is a constant tendency to a depreciation of silver; and a tendency to an opposite effect, when the balance leans to the side of agriculture. During the first half of the last century agriculture seemed to flourish more than commerce, and silver, according to Dr. Smith, seemed to rise in value in most of the countries in Europe. During the latter half of the century commerce seemed to have got the start of agriculture, and the effect not being counteracted by a deficiency of circulating medium, silver has been very generally depreciated. As far as this depreciation is common to the commercial world, it is comparatively^a of little importance; but undoubtedly

^a Even the depreciation which is common to the commercial world produces much evil to individuals who have fixed incomes, and one important national evil, that of indisposing landlords to let long leases of farms. With regard to leases, the operation of the bounty would certainly be favourable. It has appeared, that, after the advance occasioned on its first establishment, the price of corn would for many years tend to fall towards its former level, and if no other causes intervened,

undoubtedly those nations will feel it most, where this cause has prevailed in the greatest degree, and where the nominal price of labour has risen the highest, and has been most affected by the competition of commercial wealth, operating on a comparative deficiency of corn. It will certainly be allowed, that those landed nations, which supply the ports of Europe with corn, will be the least liable to this disadvantage; and even those small states whose wants are known will probably suffer less, than those whose wants, at the same time that they are quite uncertain, may be very considerable. That England is in the latter situation, and that the rapid progress of commercial wealth, combined with years of scarcity, has raised the nominal price of wages more than in any other country of Europe, will

a very considerable time might elapse, before it had regained the height from which it began to sink. Consequently after the first depreciation, future depreciation would be checked, and of course long leases more encouraged. The absolute depreciation occasioned by the establishment of the bounty would be perfectly inconsiderable, compared with the other causes of depreciation, which are constantly operating in this country. Independently of the funding system, the extended use of paper, the influx of commercial wealth, and the comparative deficiency of corn, every tax on the necessaries of life tends to lower the value of silver.

not be denied; and the natural consequence is, that silver is more depreciated here than in the rest of Europe.

If the bounty has any effect in weakening this cause of depreciation, by preventing the average price of corn from being so much affected by the price of scarcity, the ultimate advantage, which its indirect operation occasions, with regard to the value of silver, may more than counterbalance the present disadvantage of its direct operation.

On the whole therefore it appears, that the corn laws, by opening a larger, but more particularly by opening a steadier demand for British corn, must give a decided encouragement to British agriculture.^a

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^a On account of the tendency of population to increase in proportion to the means of subsistence, it has been supposed by some, that there would always be a sufficient demand at home for any quantity of corn which could be grown. But this is an error. It is undoubtedly true, that, if the farmers could gradually increase their growth of corn to any extent, and could sell it *sufficiently cheap*, a population would arise at home to demand the whole of it. But in this case, the great increase of demand arises solely from the cheapness, and must therefore be totally of a different nature from such a demand as, in the actual circumstances of the country, would encourage

This, it will be allowed, is an advantage of considerable magnitude; but this advantage cannot be attained without the attendant evil of establishing a fixed difference between the price of corn in Britain and in the ports of Europe, and as far as the nominal price of corn regulates the price of all other commodities, a proportional difference in the value of silver. With regard to the *permanent* interests of commerce there is great reason to believe, that this disadvantage would be more than counterbalanced by the tendency of a fuller and steadier supply of corn to prevent the future depreciation of silver in this country: but still it is a present evil; and the good and evil of the system must be compared with the good and evil of a perfect freedom in the commerce of grain, the name of which is undoubtedly most fascinating. The advantages of an unlimited freedom of importation and exportation are obvious. The spe-

encourage an increased supply. If the makers of superfine broad cloths would sell their commodity for a shilling a yard instead of a guinea, it cannot be doubted, that the demand would increase more than ten fold; but the certainty of such an increase of demand, in such a case, would have no tendency whatever, in the actual circumstances of any known country, to encourage the manufacture of broad cloths.

cific evil to be apprehended from it in a rich and commercial country is, that the rents of land and the wages of labour would not fall in proportion to the fall in the price of corn. If land yielded no other produce than corn, the proprietors would be absolutely obliged to lower their rents exactly in proportion to the diminished demand and diminished price, because, universally, it is price that determines rent, not rent that determines price; but in a country where the demands for the products of pasture are very great, and daily increasing, the rents of land would not be entirely determined by the price of corn; and though they would fall with a fall in the price of corn, they would not fall in proportion. In the same manner the wages of labour, being influenced not only by the price of corn, but by the competition of commercial wealth, and the other causes before enumerated, though they would probably fall with a fall in the price of corn would not fall in proportion. During the first half of the last century, the average price of corn, fell considerably, but, owing to the demand for labour arising from an increasing commerce, the price of labour did not fall with it. High rents and high wages, occasioned by an increased demand and an increased price of corn, cannot possibly

possibly stop cultivation, for the obvious reason, that the power of paying the advance is given previous to the advance taking place; but high rents and high wages supported by other causes than the price of corn tend most powerfully to stop it. Under these circumstances land, on which little labour has been bestowed, will generally yield a higher rent than that, on which much has been bestowed, and the bringing of fresh land under cultivation is most powerfully checked. A rich and commercial nation is thus by the natural course of things led more to pasture than tillage, and is tempted to become daily more dependent upon others for its supplies of corn. If all the nations of Europe could be considered as one great country, and if any one state could be as secure of its supplies from others, as the pasture districts of a particular state are from the corn districts in their neighbourhood, there would be no harm in this dependence, and no person would think of proposing corn laws. But can we safely consider Europe in this light? The fortunate situation of this country, and the excellence of its laws and government, exempt it above any other nation from foreign invasion and domestic tumult; and it is a pardonable

donable love of one's country, which under such circumstances produces an unwillingness to expose it, in so important a point as the supply of its principal food, to share in the changes and chances which may happen to the continent. How would the miseries of France have been aggravated during the revolution, if she had been dependent on foreign countries for the support of two or three millions of her people !

That we can readily turn ourselves from an importing to an exporting nation, in the article of corn, I would by no means pretend to say ; but both theory, and the experience of the first half of the last century, warrant us in concluding it practicable ; and we cannot but allow, that it is worth the experiment, as the permanence of our national prosperity may depend upon it.^a If we proceed in our present course, let us but for a moment reflect on the probable consequences. We can hardly doubt, that in the course of some years we shall draw

^a Since this was first written, a new system of corn laws has been established by the legislature, but it is not so powerful in its operation as that of 1688 and 1700. The new laws tend strongly to encourage the growth of an independent supply of corn, but not so strongly the production of an excess. An independent supply however is certainly the first and most important object.

from America, and the nations bordering on the Baltic, as much as two millions of quarters of wheat, besides other corn, the support of above two millions of people. If under these circumstances, any commercial discussion, or other dispute, were to arise with these nations, with what a weight of power they would negotiate! Not the whole British navy could offer a more convincing argument than the simple threat of shutting all their ports. I am not unaware, that in general, we may securely depend upon people's not acting directly contrary to their interest. But this consideration, all powerful as it is, will sometimes yield voluntarily to national indignation, and is sometimes forced to yield to the resentment of a sovereign. It is of sufficient weight in practice when applied to manufactures; because a delay in their sale is not of such immediate consequence, and from their smaller bulk they are easily smuggled. But in the case of corn, a delay of three or four months may produce the most complicated misery; and from the great bulk of corn, it will generally be in the power of a sovereign to execute almost completely his resentful purpose. Small commercial states, which depend nearly for the whole of their supplies on foreign powers, will

always have many friends. They are not of sufficient consequence to excite any general indignation against them, and if they cannot be supplied from one quarter, they will from another. But this is by no means the case with such a country as Great Britain, whose commercial ambition is peculiarly calculated to excite a general jealousy, and in fact has excited it to a very great degree. If our commerce continue increasing for a few years, and our commercial population with it, we shall be laid so bare to the shafts of fortune, that nothing but a miracle can save us from being struck. The periodical return of such seasons of dearth, as those which we have of late experienced, I consider as absolutely certain, upon our present importing system; but excluding from the question at present the dreadful distress that they occasion, which however no man of humanity can long banish from his mind, I would ask, is it politic, merely with a view to our national greatness, to render ourselves thus dependent upon others for our support, and put it in the power of a combination against us, to diminish our population two millions?

To restore our independence, and build our national greatness and commercial prosperity on
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the sure foundation of agriculture, it is evidently not sufficient, to propose premiums for tillage, to cultivate this or that waste, or even to pass a general enclosure bill, though these are all excellent as far as they go. If the increase of the commercial population keep pace with these efforts, we shall only be where we were before, with regard to the necessity of importation. The object required is, to alter the relative proportion between the commercial and the agricultural population of the country, which can only be done by some system, that will determine a greater proportion of the national capital to the land. I see no other way at present of effecting this object, but by corn laws adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the country and the state of foreign markets.^a All systems of peculiar restraints and encouragements are undoubtedly disagreeable, and the necessity of resorting to them may justly be la-

^a I do not mean to assert, that any laws of this kind would have sufficient power, in the present state of things, to restore the balance between our agricultural and commercial population; but I am decidedly of opinion, that they have this tendency. They should of course be supported by a general enclosure bill if possible, and by every relief that can safely be granted from taxes, tithes, and poor rates, in the cultivation of fresh lands.

mented. But the objection which Dr. Smith brings against bounties in general, that of forcing some part of the industry of the country into a channel less advantageous than that in which it would run of its own accord,^a does not apply in the present instance, on account of the preeminent qualities of the products of agriculture, and the dreadful consequences that attend the slightest failure of them. The nature of things has indeed stamped upon corn a peculiar value;^b and this remark, made by Dr. Smith for another purpose, may fairly be applied to justify the exception of this commodity from the objections against bounties in general. If throughout the commercial world every kind of trade were perfectly free, one should undoubtedly feel the greatest reluctance in proposing any interruption to such a system of general liberty; and indeed, under such circumstances, agriculture would not need peculiar encouragements. But under the present universal prevalence of the commercial system, with all its different expedients of encouragement and restraint, it is folly to except from our attention the great manufacture of corn, which

^a *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii, b. iv, c. v, p. 278.

^b *Ibid.*

supports all the rest. The high duties paid on the importation of foreign manufactures are so direct an encouragement to the manufacturing part of the society, that nothing but some encouragement of the same kind can place the manufacturers and cultivators of this country on a fair footing. Any system of encouragement therefore, which might be found necessary for the commerce of grain, would evidently be owing to the prior encouragements, which had been given to manufactures. If all be free, I have nothing to say; but if we protect and encourage, it seems to be folly not to encourage that production, which of all others is the most important and valuable.^a

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^a Though I have dwelt much on the importance of raising a quantity of corn in the country beyond the demands of the home consumption, yet I do not mean to recommend that general system of ploughing, which takes place in most parts of France, and defeats its own purpose. A large flock of cattle is not only necessary as a very valuable part of the food of the country, and as contributing very greatly to the comforts of a considerable portion of its population; but it is also necessary in the production of corn itself. A large surplus produce, in proportion to the number of persons employed, can never be obtained without a great flock of cattle. At the same time it does not follow, that we should throw all the land that is fit for it into pasture. It is an observation of

Let it not however be imagined, that the most enlightened system of agriculture, though it

Mr. Young, and I should think a just one, that the first and most obvious improvement in agriculture is to make the fallows of a country support the additional cattle and sheep wanted in it. (*Travels in France*, vol. i, p. 361.) I am by no means sanguine, however, as to the practicability of converting England again into an exporting country, while the demands for the products of pasture are daily increasing, from the increasing riches of the commercial part of the nation. But should this be really considered as impracticable, it seems to point out to us one of the great causes of the decay of nations. We have always heard, that states and empires have their periods of declension; and we learn from history, that the different nations of the earth have flourished in a kind of succession, and that poor countries have been continually rising on the ruins of their richer neighbours. Upon the commercial system, this kind of succession seems to be in the natural and necessary course of things, independently of the effects of war. If from the increasing riches of the commercial part of any nation, and the consequently increasing demands for the products of pasture, more land were daily laid down to grass, and more corn imported from other countries, the unavoidable consequence seems to be, that the increasing prosperity of these countries, which their exportations of corn would contribute to accelerate, must ultimately diminish the population and power of the countries which had fostered them. The ancients always attributed this natural weakness and old age of states to luxury. But the moderns, who have generally considered luxury as a principal encouragement to commerce and manufactures, and consequently a powerful instrument

it will undoubtedly be able to produce food beyond the demands of the actual population, can ever

instrument of prosperity, have, with great appearance of reason, been unwilling to consider it as a cause of decline. But allowing, with the moderns, all the advantages of luxury; and when it falls short of actual vice, they are certainly great; there seems to be a point beyond which it must necessarily become prejudicial to a state, and bring with it the seeds of weakness and decay. This point is when it is pushed so far, as to trench on the funds necessary for its support, and to become an impediment instead of an encouragement to agriculture.

I should be much misunderstood, if, from any thing that I have said in the four last chapters, I should be considered as not sufficiently aware of the advantages derived from commerce and manufactures. I look upon them as the most distinguishing characteristics of civilization, the most obvious and striking marks of the improvement of society, and calculated to enlarge our enjoyments, and add to the sum of human happiness. No great surplus produce of agriculture could exist without them, and if it did exist, it would be comparatively of very little value. But still they are rather the ornaments and embellishments of the political structure than its foundations. While these foundations are perfectly secure, we cannot be too solicitous to make all the apartments convenient and elegant; but if there be the slightest reason to fear, that the foundations themselves may give way, it seems to be folly to continue directing our principal attention to the less essential parts. There has never yet been an instance in history of a large nation continuing with undiminished vigour, to support four or five millions of its people on

ever be made to keep pace with an unchecked population. The errors that have arisen from
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imported corn; nor do I believe, that there ever will be such an instance in future. England is undoubtedly, from her insular situation, and commanding navy, the most likely to form an exception to this rule; but in spite even of the peculiar advantages of England it appears to be clear, that, if she continue yearly to increase her importations of corn, she cannot ultimately escape that decline which seems to be the natural and necessary consequence of excessive commercial wealth. I am not now speaking of the next twenty or thirty years, but of the next two or three hundred. And though we are little in the habit of looking so far forwards, yet it may be questioned, whether we are not bound in duty to make some exertions to avoid a system, which must necessarily terminate in the weakness and decline of our posterity. But whether we make any practical application of such a discussion or not, it is curious, to contemplate the causes of those reverses in the fates of empires, which so frequently changed the face of the world in past times, and may be expected to produce similar, though perhaps not such violent changes in future. War was undoubtedly in ancient times the principal cause of these changes; but it frequently only finished a work, which excess of luxury and the neglect of agriculture had begun. Foreign invasions, or internal convulsions, produce but a temporary and comparatively slight effect on such countries as Lombardy, Tuscany, and Flanders, but are fatal to such states as Holland and Hamburgh; and though the commerce and manufactures of England will probably always be supported in a great degree by her agriculture, yet that part which is not so supported will still remain subject to the reverses of dependent states.

the constant appearance of a full supply produced by the agricultural system, and the source of some other prejudices on the subject of population, will be noticed in the following chapter.

We should recollect, that it is only within the last twenty or thirty years, that we have become an importing nation. In so short a period, it could hardly be expected, that the evils of the system should be perceptible. We have however already felt some of its inconveniences; and if we persevere in it, its evil consequences may by no means be a matter of remote speculation.



CHAP. XI.

On the prevailing Errors respecting Population and Plenty.

IT has been observed, that many countries at the period of their greatest degree of populousness have lived in the greatest plenty, and have been able to export corn; but at other periods, when their population was very low, have lived in continual poverty and want, and have been obliged to import corn. Egypt, Palestine, Rome, Sicily, and Spain, are cited as particular exemplifications of this fact; and it has been inferred, that an increase of population in any state, not cultivated to the utmost, will tend rather to augment than diminish the relative plenty of the whole society; and that, as Lord Kaimes observes, a country cannot easily become too populous for agriculture; because agriculture has the signal property of producing food in proportion to the number of consumers.^a

The general facts, from which these inferences

^a Sketches of the History of Man, b, i, sketch i, p. 106, 107. 8vo. 1788.

are drawn, there is no reason to doubt; but the inferences by no means follow from the premises. It is the nature of agriculture, particularly when well conducted, to produce support for a considerable number above that which it employs; and consequently if these members of the society, or, as Sir James Steuart calls them, the free hands, do not increase, so as to reach the limit of the number which can be supported by the surplus produce, the whole population of the country may continue for ages increasing with the improving state of agriculture, and yet always be able to export corn. But this increase, after a certain period, will be very different from the natural and unrestricted increase of population; it will merely follow the slow augmentation of produce from the gradual improvement of agriculture, and population will still be checked by the difficulty of procuring subsistence. It is very justly observed by Sir James Steuart, that the population of England in the middle of the last century, when the exports of corn were considerable, was still checked for want of food.^a The precise measure of the population in a country thus circumstanced will not indeed be the quantity of food, because

^a Polit. Econ. vol. i, b. i, c. xv, p. 100.

part of it is exported, but the quantity of employment. The state of this employment however will necessarily regulate the wages of labour, on which depends the power of the lower classes of people to procure food; and according as the employment of the country is increasing, whether slowly or rapidly, these wages will be such, as either to check or to encourage early marriages, such, as to enable a labourer to support only two or three, or as many as five or six children.

The quantity of employment in any country will not of course vary from year to year, in the same manner as the quantity of produce must necessarily do, from the variation of the seasons; and consequently the check from want of employment will be much more steady in its operation, and be much more favourable to the lower classes of people, than the check from the immediate want of food. The first will be the preventive check; the second the positive check. When the demand for labour is either stationary, or increasing very slowly, people not seeing any employment open by which they can support a family, or the wages of common labour being inadequate to this purpose, will of course be deterred from marrying. But if a demand

demand for labour continue increasing with some rapidity, although the supply of food be uncertain, on account of variable seasons and a dependence on other countries, the population will evidently go on, till it is positively checked by famine, or the diseases arising from severe want.

Scarcity and extreme poverty therefore may or may not accompany an increasing population, according to circumstances: but they must necessarily accompany a permanently declining population; because there never has been, nor probably ever will be, any other cause than want of food, which makes the population of a country permanently decline. In the numerous instances of depopulation which occur in history, the causes of it may always be traced to the want of industry, or the ill direction of that industry, arising from violence, bad government, ignorance, &c. which first occasions a want of food, and of course depopulation follows. When Rome adopted the custom of importing all her corn, and laying all Italy into pasture, she soon declined in population. The causes of the depopulation of Egypt and Turkey have already been alluded to; and in the case of Spain, it was certainly not the numerical loss of people occasioned

fioned by the expulsion of the Moors; but the industry and capital thus expelled, which permanently injured her population. When a country has been depopulated by violent causes, if a bad government, with its usual concomitant insecurity of property ensue, which has generally been the case in all those countries which are now less peopled than formerly, neither the food nor the population can recover itself and the inhabitants will probably live in severe want. But when an accidental depopulation takes place, in a country which was before populous and industrious, and in the habit of exporting corn, if the remaining inhabitants be left at liberty to exert, and do exert, their industry in the same direction as before, it is a strange idea to entertain, that they would then be unable to supply themselves with corn in the same plenty; particularly as the diminished numbers would of course cultivate principally the more fertile parts of their territory, and not be obliged, as in their more populous state, to apply to ungrateful soils. Countries in this situation would evidently have the same chance of recovering their former number, as they had originally of reaching this number; and indeed if absolute
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populousness were necessary to relative plenty, as some agriculturists have supposed^a, it would be impossible for new colonies to increase with the same rapidity as old states.

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^a Among others, I allude more particularly to Mr. Anderson, who, in a *Calm Investigation of the Circumstances which have led to the present Scarcity of Grain in Britain*, (published in 1801) has laboured with extraordinary earnestness, and I believe with the best intentions possible, to impress this curious truth on the minds of his countrymen. The particular position which he attempts to prove is, *that an increase of population in any state, whose fields have not been made to attain their highest possible degree of productiveness, (a thing that probably has never yet been seen on this globe) will necessarily have its means of subsistence rather augmented than diminished by that augmentation of its population; and the reverse.* The proposition is, to be sure, expressed rather obscurely; but from the context, his meaning evidently is, that every increase of population tends to increase relative plenty, and vice versa. He concludes his proofs by observing, that, if the facts which he has thus brought forward and connected, do not serve to remove the fears of those, who doubt the possibility of this country producing abundance to sustain its increasing population, were it to augment in a ratio greatly more progressive than it has yet done, he should doubt whether they could be convinced of it, were one even to rise from the dead to tell them so. Mr. A. is perhaps justified in this doubt, from the known incredulity of the age, which might cause people to remain unconvinced in both cases. I agree with Mr. A. however, entirely, respecting the importance of directing a greater part of

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The prejudices on the subject of population bear a very striking resemblance to the old prejudices about specie, and we know how slowly and with what difficulty these last have yielded to juster conceptions. Politicians observing, that states which were powerful and prosperous were almost invariably populous, have mistaken an effect for a cause, and concluded, that their population was the cause of their prosperity, instead of their prosperity being the cause of their population; as the old political economists concluded, that the abundance of specie was the cause of national wealth, instead of the effect of it. The annual produce of the land and labour, in both these instances, became in consequence a secondary consideration; and its increase, it was conceived, would naturally follow the increase of specie in the one case, or of population in the other. The folly of endeavouring by forcible means to increase the quantity of specie in any country, and the absolute impossibility of accumulating the national industry to agriculture; but from the circumstance of its being possible for a country, with a certain direction of its industry, always to export corn, although it may be very populous, he has been led into the strange error of supposing, that an agricultural country could support an unchecked population.

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mulating it beyond a certain level by any human laws that can be devised, are now fully established, and have been completely exemplified in the instances of Spain and Portugal: but the illusion still remains respecting population; and under this impression, almost every political treatise has abounded in proposals to encourage population, with little or no comparative reference to the means of its support. Yet surely the folly of endeavouring to increase the quantity of specie in any country, without an increase of the commodities which it is to circulate, is not greater, than that of endeavouring to increase the number of people, without an increase of the food which is to maintain them; and it will be found, that the level above which no human laws can raise the population of a country is a limit more fixed and impassable than the limit to the accumulation of specie. However improbable in fact, it is possible to conceive, that means might be invented of retaining a quantity of specie in a state, greatly beyond what was demanded by the produce of its land and labour; but when by great encouragements population has been raised to such a height, that this produce is meted out to each individual in the smallest portions that can support life, no

stretch of ingenuity can even conceive the possibility of going further.

It has appeared, I think, clearly, in the review of different societies given in the former part of this work, that those countries, the inhabitants of which were sunk in the most barbarous ignorance, or oppressed by the most cruel tyranny, however low they might be in actual population, were very populous in proportion to their means of subsistence; and upon the slightest failure of the seasons generally suffered the severities of want. Ignorance and despotism seem to have no tendency to destroy the passion, which prompts to increase; but they effectually destroy the checks to it from reason and foresight. The improvident barbarian, who thinks only of his present wants, or the miserable peasant, who, from his political situation, feels little security of reaping what he has sown, will seldom be deterred from gratifying his passions by the prospect of inconveniences, which cannot be expected to press on him under three or four years. But though this want of foresight, which is fostered by ignorance and despotism, tends thus rather to encourage the procreation of children, it is absolutely fatal to the industry which is to support them. Industry cannot

cannot exist without foresight and security. The indolence of the savage is well known; and the poor Egyptian or Abyssinian Farmer without capital, who rents land which is let out yearly to the highest bidder, and who is constantly subject to the demands of his tyrannical masters, to the casual plunder of an enemy, and, not unfrequently, to the violation of his miserable contract, can have no heart to be industrious, and, if he had, could not exercise that industry with success. Even poverty itself, which appears to be the great spur to industry, when it has once passed certain limits, almost ceases to operate. The indigence which is hopeless destroys all vigorous exertion, and confines the efforts to what is sufficient for bare existence. It is the hope of bettering our condition, and the fear of want, rather than want itself, that is the best stimulus to industry; and its most constant and best directed efforts will almost invariably be found among a class of people above the class of the wretchedly poor.

The effect of ignorance and oppression will therefore always be to destroy the springs of industry, and consequently to diminish the annual produce of the land and labour in any country; and this diminution will inevitably be followed

by a decrease of the population, in spite of the birth of any number of children whatever annually. The desire of immediate gratification, and the removal of the restraints to it from prudence, may perhaps, in such countries, prompt universally to early marriages; but when these habits have once reduced the people to the lowest possible state of poverty, they can evidently have no further effect upon the population. Their only effect must be on the degree of mortality; and there is no doubt, that, if we could obtain accurate bills of mortality in those southern countries, where very few women remain unmarried, and all marry young, the proportion of the annual deaths would be 1 in 17, 18, or 20, instead of 1 in 34, 36, or 40, as in European states, where the preventive check operates.

That an increase of population, when it follows in its natural order, is both a great positive good in itself, and absolutely necessary to a further increase in the annual produce of the land and labour of any country, I should be the last to deny. The only question is, what is the natural order of its progress? In this point Sir James Steuart, who has in general explained this subject so well, appears to me to have fallen
into

into an error. He determines, that multiplication is the efficient cause of agriculture, and not agriculture of multiplication.^a But though it may be allowed, that the increase of people beyond what could easily subsist on the natural fruits of the earth first prompted man to till the ground; and that the view of maintaining a family, or of obtaining some valuable consideration in exchange for the products of agriculture, still operates as the principal stimulus to cultivation; yet it is clear, that these products, in their actual state, must be beyond the lowest wants of the existing population, before any permanent increase can possibly be supported. We know, that a multiplication of births has in numberless instances taken place, which has produced no effect upon agriculture, and has merely been followed by an increase of diseases; but perhaps there is no instance, where a permanent increase of agriculture has not effected a permanent increase of population somewhere or other. Consequently, agriculture may with more propriety be termed the efficient cause of population, than population of agriculture;^b though they
 certainly

^a Polit. Econ. vol. i, b. i, c. xviii, p. 114.

^b Sir James Steuart explains himself afterwards by saying,
 P 3 that

certainly react upon each other, and are mutually necessary to each other's support. This indeed seems to be the hinge on which the subject turns, and all the prejudices respecting population have, perhaps, arisen from a mistake about the order of precedence.

The author of *L'Ami des Hommes*, in a chapter on the effects of a decay of agriculture upon population, acknowledges, that he had fallen into a fundamental error in considering population as the source of revenue; and that he was afterwards fully convinced, that revenue was the source of population.^a From a want of attention to this most important distinction, statesmen, in pursuit of the desirable object of population, have been led to encourage early marriages, to reward the fathers of families, and to disgrace celibacy; but this, as the same author justly observes, is to dress and water a piece of land without sowing it, and yet to expect a crop.

Among the other prejudices, which have pre- that he means principally the multiplication of those persons, who have some valuable consideration to give for the products of agriculture; but this is evidently not mere increase of population, and such an explanation seems to admit the incorrectness of the general proposition.

^a Tom. viii, p. 84, 12mo. 9 vols. 1762.

vailed on the subject of population, it has been generally thought, that while there is either waste among the rich, or land remaining uncultivated in any country, the complaints for want of food cannot be justly founded; or at least that the pressure of distress upon the poor is to be attributed to the ill conduct of the higher classes of society, and the bad management of the land. The real effect however of these two circumstances is merely to narrow the limit of the actual population; but they have little or no influence on what may be called the average pressure of distress on the poorer members of society. If our ancestors had been so frugal and industrious, and had transmitted such habits to their posterity, that nothing superfluous was now consumed by the higher classes, no horses were used for pleasure, and no land was left uncultivated, a striking difference would appear in the state of the actual population; but probably none whatever, in the state of the lower classes of people, with respect to the price of labour, and the facility of supporting a family. The waste among the rich, and the horses kept for pleasure, have indeed a little the effect of the consumption of grain in distilleries, noticed before with regard to China. On the

supposition, that the food consumed in this manner may be withdrawn on the occasion of a scarcity, and be applied to the relief of the poor, they operate certainly, as far as they go, like granaries which are only opened at the time that they are most wanted, and must therefore tend rather to benefit than to injure the lower classes of society.

With regard to uncultivated land, it is evident, that its effect upon the poor is neither to injure nor to benefit them. The sudden cultivation of it will indeed tend to improve their condition for a time, and the neglect of lands before cultivated will certainly make their situation worse for a certain period; but when no changes of this kind are going forward, the effect of uncultivated land on the lower classes operates merely like the possession of a smaller territory. It is indeed a point of very great importance to the poor, whether a country be in the habit of exporting or importing corn; but this point is not necessarily connected with the complete or incomplete cultivation of the whole territory, but depends upon the proportion of the surplus produce, to those who are supported by it; and in fact this proportion is generally the greatest, in countries which have not yet completed the
cultivation

cultivation of all their territory. If every inch of land in this country were well cultivated, there would be no reason to expect, merely from this circumstance, that we should be able to export corn. Our power in this respect would depend entirely on the proportion of the surplus produce to the commercial population; and this of course would in its turn depend on the direction of capital to agriculture or commerce.

It is not probable, that any country with a large territory should ever be completely cultivated; and I am inclined to think, that we often draw very inconsiderate conclusions against the industry and government of states from the appearance of uncultivated lands in them. It seems to be the clear and express duty of every government, to remove all obstacles, and give every facility to the enclosure and cultivation of land; but when this has been done, the rest must be left to the operation of individual interest; and upon this principle it cannot be expected, that any new land should be brought into cultivation, the manure and the labour necessary for which might be employed to greater advantage on the improvement of land already in cultivation; and this is a case, which will very frequently occur. In countries possessed
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of a large territory, there will always be a great quantity of land of a middling quality, which requires constant dressing to prevent it from growing worse, but which would admit of very great improvement, if a greater quantity of manure and labour could be employed upon it. The great obstacle to the melioration of land is the difficulty, the expense, and sometimes the impossibility of procuring a sufficient quantity of dressing. As this instrument of improvement, therefore, is in practice limited, whatever it may be in theory, the question will always be, how it may be most profitably employed; and in any instance, where a certain quantity of dressing and labour, employed to bring new land into cultivation, would have yielded a permanently greater produce, if employed upon old land, both the individual and the nation are losers. Upon this principle, it is not uncommon for farmers in some situations never to dress their poorest land, but to get from it merely a scanty crop every three or four years, and to employ the whole of their manure, which they practically feel is limited, on those parts of their farms, where it will produce a greater proportional effect.

The case will be different of course, in a
small

small territory with a great population, supported on funds not derived from their own soil. In this case there will be little or no choice of land, and a comparative superabundance of manure; and under such circumstances the poorest soils may be brought under cultivation. But for this purpose, it is not mere population that is wanted, but a population which can obtain the produce of other countries, while it is gradually improving its own; otherwise it would be immediately reduced in proportion to the limited produce of this small and barren territory; and the melioration of the land might perhaps never take place; or if it did, it would take place very slowly indeed, and the population would always be exactly measured by this tardy rate, and could not possibly increase beyond it.

This subject is illustrated in the cultivation of the Campine in Brabant, which, according to the Abbé Mann,^a consisted originally of the most barren and arid sand. Many attempts were made by private individuals to bring it under cultivation, but without success; which

^a Memoir on the Agriculture of the Netherlands, published in vol. i of Communications to the Board of Agriculture, p. 225.

proves, that, as a farming project, and considered as a sole dependence, the cultivation of it would not answer. Some religious houses, however, at last settled there; and being supported by other funds, and improving the land merely as a secondary object, they by degrees, in the course of some centuries, brought nearly the whole under cultivation, letting it out to farmers as soon as it was sufficiently improved.

There is no spot, however barren, which might not be made rich this way, or by the concentrated population of a manufacturing town: but this is no proof whatever, that, with respect to population and food, population has the precedence; because this concentrated population could not possibly exist, without the preceding existence of an adequate quantity of food in the surplus produce of some other district.

In a country like Brabant or Holland, where territory is the principal want, and not manure, such a district as the Campine is described to be may perhaps be cultivated with advantage. But in countries possessed of a large territory, and with a considerable quantity of land of a middling quality, the attempt to cultivate such a spot would be a palpable misdirection and waste

waste both of individual and national resources.

The French have already found their error in bringing under cultivation too great a quantity of poor land. They are now sensible, that they have employed in this way a portion of labour and dressing, which would have produced a permanently better effect, if it had been applied to the further improvement of better land. Even in China, which is so fully cultivated and so fully peopled, barren heaths have been noticed in some districts; which prove, that, distressed as the people appear to be for subsistence, it does not answer to them to employ any of their manure on such spots. These remarks will be still further confirmed, if we recollect, that, in the cultivation of a large surface of bad land, there must necessarily be a very great waste of seed corn.

We should not therefore be too ready to make inferences against the internal economy of a country from the appearance of uncultivated heaths, without other evidence. But the fact is, that, as no country has ever reached, or probably ever will reach, its highest possible acme of produce, it appears always as if the want of industry, or the ill-direction of that industry.

dustry, was the actual limit to a further increase of produce and population, and not the absolute refusal of nature to yield any more: but a man who is locked up in a room may be fairly said to be confined by the walls of it, though he may never touch them; and with regard to the principle of population, it is never the question, whether a country will produce *any more*, but whether it may be made to produce a sufficiency to keep pace with an unchecked increase of people. In China, the question is not, whether a certain additional quantity of rice might be raised by improved culture; but whether such an addition could be expected during the next twenty-five years, as would be sufficient to support an additional three hundred millions of people. And in this country, it is not the question, whether by cultivating all our commons we could raise considerably more corn than at present; but whether we could raise sufficient for a population of twenty millions in the next twenty-five years, and forty millions in the next fifty years.

The allowing of the produce of the earth to be absolutely unlimited scarcely removes the weight of a hair from the argument; which depends

pende entirely upon the differently increasing ratios of population and food: and all that the most enlightened governments, and the most persevering and best guided efforts of industry can do, is to make the necessary checks to population operate more equably, and in a direction to produce the least evil; but to remove them is a task absolutely hopeless.



ESSAY, &c.

BOOK IV.

OF OUR FUTURE PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE
REMOVAL OR MITIGATION OF THE EVILS
ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF POPU-
LATION.

CHAP. I.

Of moral restraint, and our obligation to practise this virtue.

As it appears, that, in the actual state of every society which has come within our review, the natural progress of population has been constantly and powerfully checked; and as it seems evident, that no improved form of government, no plans of emigration, no benevolent institutions, and no degree or direction of national industry, can prevent the continued action of a great check to population in some form or other;

it follows, that we must submit to it as an inevitable law of nature; and the only inquiry that remains is, how it may take place with the least possible prejudice to the virtue and happiness of human society. All the immediate checks to population, which have been observed to prevail in the same and different countries, seem to be resolvable into moral restraint, vice, and misery; and if our choice be confined to these three, we cannot long hesitate in our decision respecting which it would be most eligible to encourage.

In the first edition of this essay I observed, that as from the laws of nature it appeared, that some check to population must exist, it was better that this check should arise from a foresight of the difficulties attending a family, and the fear of dependent poverty, than from the actual presence of want and sickness. This idea will admit of being pursued further; and I am inclined to think, that, from the prevailing opinions respecting population, which undoubtedly originated in barbarous ages, and have been continued and circulated by that part of every community which may be supposed to be interested in their support, we have been prevented from
attending

attending to the clear dictates of reason and nature on this subject.

Natural and moral evil seem to be the instruments employed by the Deity in admonishing us to avoid any mode of conduct, which is not suited to our being, and will consequently injure our happiness. If we be intemperate in eating and drinking, we are disordered; if we indulge the transports of anger, we seldom fail to commit acts of which we afterwards repent; if we multiply too fast, we die miserably of poverty and contagious diseases. The laws of nature in all these cases are similar and uniform. They indicate to us, that we have followed these impulses too far, so as to trench upon some other law, which equally demands attention. The uneasiness we feel from repletion, the injuries that we inflict on ourselves or others in anger, and the inconveniencies we suffer on the approach of poverty, are all admonitions to us to regulate these impulses better; and if we heed not this admonition, we justly incur the penalty of our disobedience, and our sufferings operate as a warning to others.

From the inattention of mankind hitherto to the consequences of increasing too fast, it must be presumed, that these consequences are not so

immediately and powerfully connected with the conduct which leads to them, as in the other instances; but the delayed knowledge of any particular effects does not alter their nature, or our obligation to regulate our conduct accordingly, as soon as we are satisfied of what this conduct ought to be. In many other instances it has not been till after long and painful experience, that the conduct most favourable to the happiness of man has been forced upon his attention. The kind of food, and the mode of preparing it, best suited to the purposes of nutrition and the gratification of the palate; the treatment and remedies of different disorders; the bad effects on the human frame of low and marshy situations; the invention of the most convenient and comfortable clothing; the construction of good houses; and all the advantages and extended enjoyments, which distinguish civilized life, were not pointed out to the attention of man at once; but were the slow and late result of experience, and of the admonitions received by repeated failures

Diseases have been generally considered as the inevitable inflictions of Providence; but perhaps a great part of them may more justly be considered as indications, that we have offended
against

againſt ſome of the laws of nature. The plague at Conſtantinople, and in other towns of the Eaſt, is a conſtant admonition of this kind to the inhabitants. The human conſtitution cannot ſupport ſuch a ſtate of filth and torpor; and as dirt, ſqualid poverty, and indolence, are in the higheſt degree unfavourable to happineſs and virtue, it ſeems a benevolent diſpenſation, that ſuch a ſtate ſhould by the laws of nature produce diſeaſe and death, as a beacon to others to avoid ſplitting on the ſame rock.

The prevalence of the plague in London till the year 1666 operated in a proper manner on the conduct of our anceſtors; and the removal of nuiſances, the conſtruction of drains, the widening of the ſtreets, and the giving more room and air to their houſes, had the effect of eradicating completely this dreadful diſorder, and of adding greatly to the health and happineſs of the inhabitants.

In the hiſtory of every epidemic it has almoſt invariably been obſerved, that the lower claſſes of people, whoſe food was poor and inſufficient, and who lived crowded together in ſmall and dirty houſes, were the principal victims. In what other manner can nature point out to us, that, if we increaſe too faſt for the means of

subsistence, so as to render it necessary for a considerable part of the society to live in this miserable manner, we have offended against one of her laws? This law she has declared exactly in the same manner, as she declares that intemperance in eating and drinking will be followed by ill health; and that however grateful it may be to us at the moment, to indulge these passions to excess, this indulgence will ultimately produce unhappiness. It is as much a law of nature, that repletion is bad for the human frame, as that eating and drinking, unattended with this consequence, are good for it.

An implicit obedience to the impulses of our natural passions would lead us into the wildest and most fatal extravagancies; and yet we have the strongest reasons for believing, that all these passions are so necessary to our being, that they could not be generally weakened or diminished, without injuring our happiness. The most powerful and universal of all our desires is the desire of food, and of those things, such as clothing, houses, &c., which are immediately necessary to relieve us from the pains of hunger and cold. It is acknowledged by all, that these desires put in motion the greatest part of that activity, from which the multiplied improve-
ments

ments and advantages of civilized life are derived; and that the pursuit of these objects, and the gratification of these desires, form the principal happiness of the larger half of mankind, civilized or uncivilized, and are indispensably necessary to the more refined enjoyments of the other half. We are all conscious of the inestimable benefits, that we derive from these desires, when directed in a certain manner; but we are equally conscious of the evils resulting from them, when not directed in this manner; so much so, that society has taken upon itself to punish most severely what it considers as an irregular gratification of them. And yet the desires in both cases are equally natural, and, abstractedly considered, equally virtuous. The act of the hungry man, who satisfies his appetite by taking a loaf from the shelf of another, is in no respect to be distinguished from the act of him, who does the same thing with a loaf of his own, but by its consequences. From the consideration of these consequences, we feel the most perfect conviction, that, if people were not prevented from gratifying their natural desires with the loaves in the possession of others, the number of loaves would universally diminish. This experience is the foundation of the

laws relating to property, and of the distinctions of virtue and vice, in the gratification of desires, otherwise perfectly the same.

If the pleasure arising from the gratification of these propensities were universally diminished in vividness, violations of property would become less frequent; but this advantage would be greatly overbalanced by the narrowing of the sources of enjoyment. The diminution in the quantity of all those productions, which contribute to human gratification, would be much greater in proportion than the diminution of thefts; and the loss of general happiness on the one side would be beyond comparison greater than the gain of happiness on the other. When we contemplate the constant and severe toils of the greatest part of mankind, it is impossible not to be forcibly impressed with the reflection, that the sources of human happiness would be most cruelly diminished, if the prospect of a good meal, a warm house, and a comfortable fireside in the evening, were not incitements sufficiently vivid, to give interest and cheerfulness to the labours and privations of the day.

After the desire of food, the most powerful and general of our desires is the passion between
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the sexes, taken in an enlarged sense. Of the happiness spread over human life by this passion very few are unconscious. Virtuous love, exalted by friendship, seems to be that sort of mixture of sensual and intellectual enjoyment, particularly suited to the nature of man, and most powerfully calculated to awaken the sympathies of the soul, and produce the most exquisite gratifications. Perhaps there is scarcely a man, who has once experienced the genuine delight of virtuous love, however great his intellectual pleasures may have been, that does not look back to the period as the sunny spot in his whole life, where his imagination loves most to bask, which he recollects and contemplates with the fondest regret, and which he would most wish to live over again.

It has been said by Mr. Godwin, in order to show the evident inferiority of the pleasures of sense, “ Strip the commerce of the sexes of all its attendant circumstances, and it would be generally despised.” He might as well say to a man who admired trees, strip them of their spreading branches and lovely foliage, and what beauty can you see in a bare pole? But it was the tree with the branches and foliage, and not without them; that excited admiration. It is
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“ the symmetry of person, the vivacity, the voluptuous softness of temper, the affectionate kindness of feeling, the imagination and the wit”^a of a woman, which excite the passion of love, and not the mere distinction of her being a female.

It is a very great mistake to suppose, that the passion between the sexes only operates and influences human conduct, when the immediate gratification of it is in contemplation. The formation and steady pursuit of some particular plan of life has been justly considered as one of the most permanent sources of happiness; but I am inclined to believe, that there are not many of these plans formed, that are not connected in a considerable degree with the prospect of the gratification of this passion, and with the support of children arising from it. The evening meal, the warm house, and the comfortable fireside, would lose half of their interest, if we were to exclude the idea of some object of affection, with whom they were to be shared.

We have also great reason to believe, that the passion between the sexes has the most powerful tendency to soften and meliorate the human character, and keep it more alive to all the

^a Political Justice, vol i, b. i, c. v, p. 72, 8vo.

kindlier emotions of benevolence and pity. Observations on savage life have generally tended to prove, that nations, in which this passion appeared to be less vivid, were distinguished by a ferocious and malignant spirit, and particularly by tyranny and cruelty to the sex. If indeed this bond of conjugal affection were considerably weakened, it seems probable, either that the man would make use of his superior physical strength, and turn his wife into a slave, as among the generality of savages; or at best, that every little inequality of temper, which must necessarily occur between two persons, would produce a total alienation of affection; and this could hardly take place, without a diminution of parental fondness and care, which would have the most fatal effect on the happiness of society.

It may be further remarked, that observations on the human character in different countries warrant us in the conclusion, that the passion is stronger, and its general effects in producing gentleness, kindness, and suavity of manners, much more powerful, where obstacles are thrown in the way of very early and universal gratification. In some of the southern countries, where every impulse may be almost immediately indulged, the passion sinks into mere animal desire,

fire, is soon weakened and almost extinguished by excess, and its influence on the character is extremely confined. But in European countries, where, though the women be not secluded, yet manners have imposed considerable restraints on this gratification, the passion not only rises in force, but in the universality and beneficial tendency of its effects; and has often the most influence in the formation and improvement of the character, where it is the least gratified.

Considering then the passion between the sexes in all its bearings and relations, and including the endearing engagement of parent and child resulting from it, few will be disposed to deny, that it is one of the principal ingredients of human happiness. Yet experience teaches us, that much evil flows from the irregular gratification of it; and though the evil be of little weight in the scale, when compared with the good, yet its absolute quantity cannot be inconsiderable, on account of the strength and universality of the passion. It is evident however, from the general conduct of all governments in their distribution of punishments, that the evil resulting from this cause is not so great and so immediately dangerous to society, as the irregular gratification of the desire of property; but placing

placing this evil in the most formidable point of view, we should evidently purchase a diminution of it at a very dear price, by the extinction or diminution of the passion which causes it; a change, which would probably convert human life either into a cold and cheerless blank, or a scene of savage and merciless ferocity.

A careful attention to the remote as well as immediate effects of all the human passions, and all the general laws of nature, leads us strongly to the conclusion, that, under the present constitution of things, few or none of them would admit of being greatly diminished, without narrowing the sources of good, more powerfully than the sources of evil. And the reason seems to be obvious. They are, in fact, the materials of all our pleasures, as well as of all our pains; of all our happiness, as well as of all our misery; of all our virtues, as well as of all our vices. It must therefore be regulation and direction that are wanted, not diminution or extinction.

It is justly observed by Dr. Paley, that “ Human passions are either necessary to human welfare, or capable of being made, and in a great majority of instances, are in fact, made conducive to its happiness. These passions are strong and general; and perhaps would not
“ answer

“ answer their purpose, unless they were so.
 “ But strength and generality, when it is expe-
 “ dient that particular circumstances should be
 “ respected, become, if left to themselves, excess
 “ and misdirection. From which excess and
 “ misdirection the vices of mankind (the causes
 “ no doubt of much misery) appear to spring.
 “ This account, while it shows us the principle
 “ of vice, shows us at the same time the pro-
 “ vince of reason and self-government.”^a

Our virtue therefore, as reasonable beings,
 evidently consists in educing from the general
 materials, which the Creator has placed under
 our guidance, the greatest sum of human hap-
 piness; and as natural impulses are abstract-
 edly considered good, and only to be distin-
 guished by their consequences, a strict attention
 to these consequences, and the regulation of our
 conduct conformably to them, must be con-
 sidered as our principal duty.

The fecundity of the human species is, in
 some respects, a distinct consideration from the
 passion between the sexes, as it evidently de-
 pends more upon the power of women in bear-
 ing children, than upon the strength or weak-
 ness of this passion. It is however a law ex-

^a Natural Theology, c. xxvi, p. 547.

actly similar in its great features to all the other laws of nature. It is strong and general, and apparently would not admit of any very considerable diminution, without being inadequate to its object; the evils arising from it are incidental to these necessary qualities of strength and generality; and these evils are capable of being very greatly mitigated, and rendered comparatively light, by human energy and virtue. We cannot but conceive, that it is an object of the Creator, that the earth should be replenished; and it appears to me clear, that this could not be effected without a tendency in population to increase faster than food; and as with the present law of increase, the peopling of the earth does not proceed very rapidly, we have undoubtedly some reason to believe, that this law is not too powerful for its apparent object. The desire of the means of subsistence would be comparatively confined in its effects, and would fail of producing that general activity so necessary to the improvement of the human faculties, were it not for the strong and universal effort of population, to increase with greater rapidity than its supplies. If these two tendencies were exactly balanced, I do not see what motive there would
be

be sufficiently strong, to overcome the acknowledged indolence of man, and make him proceed in the cultivation of the soil. The population of any large territory, however fertile, would be as likely to stop at five hundred, or five thousand, as at five millions, or fifty millions. Such a balance therefore would clearly defeat one great purpose of creation; and if the question be merely a question of degree, a question of a little more or a little less strength, we may fairly distrust our competence to judge of the precise quantity necessary to answer the object with the smallest sum of incidental evil. In the present state of things we appear to have under our guidance a great power, capable of peopling a desert region in a small number of years; and yet, under other circumstances, capable of being confined by human energy and virtue to any limits however narrow, at the expense of a small comparative quantity of evil. The analogy of all the other laws of nature would be completely violated, if in this instance alone there were no provision for accidental failures, no resources against the vices of mankind, or the partial mischiefs resulting from other general laws. To effect the apparent object without any attendant evil, it is evident, that a perpetual change

change in the law of increase would be necessary, varying with the varying circumstances of each country. But instead of this, it is not only more consonant to the analogy of the other parts of nature, but we have reason to think, that it is more conducive to the formation and improvement of the human mind, that the law should be uniform, and the evils incidental to it, under certain circumstances, be left to be mitigated or removed by man himself. His duties in this case vary with his situation; and he is thus kept more alive to the consequences of his actions, and his faculties have evidently greater play and opportunity of improvement, than if the evil were removed by a perpetual change of the law according to circumstances.

Even if from passions too easily subdued, or the facility of illicit intercourse, a state of celibacy were a matter of indifference, and not a state of some privation, the end of nature in the peopling of the earth would be apparently liable to be defeated. It is of the very utmost importance to the happiness of mankind, that they should not increase too fast; but it does not appear, that the object to be accomplished would admit of any very considerable diminution in the desire of marriage. It is clearly the duty of

each individual not to marry, till he has a prospect of supporting his children; but it is at the same time to be wished, that he should retain undiminished his desire of marriage, in order that he may exert himself to realize this prospect, and be stimulated to make provision for the support of greater numbers.

It is evidently therefore regulation and direction, that are required with regard to the principle of population, not diminution or alteration. And if moral restraint be the only virtuous mode of avoiding the incidental evils arising from this principle, our obligation to practise it will evidently rest exactly upon the same foundation, as our obligation to practise any of the other virtues, the foundation of utility.

Whatever indulgence we may be disposed to allow to occasional failures in the discharge of a duty of acknowledged difficulty, yet of the strict line of duty we cannot doubt. Our obligation not to marry till we have a fair prospect of being able to support our children will appear to deserve the attention of the moralist, if it can be proved, that an attention to this obligation is of most powerful effect in the prevention of misery; and that, if it were the general custom to follow the first impulse of
nature,

nature, and marry at the age of puberty, the universal prevalence of every known virtue, in the greatest conceivable degree, would fail of rescuing society from the most wretched and desperate state of want, and all the diseases and famines, which usually accompany it.



CHAP. II.

Of the Effects which would result to Society from the prevalence of this virtue.

ONE of the principal reasons, which have prevented an assent to the doctrine of the constant tendency of population to increase beyond the means of subsistence, is a great unwillingness to believe, that the Deity would by the laws of nature bring beings into existence, which by the laws of nature could not be supported in that existence. But if in addition to that general activity and direction of our industry put in motion by these laws, we further consider, that the incidental evils arising from them are constantly directing our attention to the proper check to population, moral restraint; and if it appear, that, by a strict obedience to those duties, which are pointed out to us by the light of nature and reason, and are confirmed and sanctioned by revelation, these evils may be avoided; the objection will, I trust, be removed, and all apparent imputation on the goodness of the Deity be done away.

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The heathen moralists never represented happiness as attainable on earth, but through the medium of virtue; and among their virtues prudence ranked in the first class, and by some was even considered as including every other. The christian religion places our present as well as future happiness in the exercise of those virtues, which tend to fit us for a state of superior enjoyment; and the subjection of the passions to the guidance of reason, which, if not the whole, is a principal branch of prudence, is in consequence most particularly inculcated.

If for the sake of illustration, we might be permitted to draw a picture of society, in which each individual endeavoured to attain happiness by the strict fulfilment of those duties, which the most enlightened of the ancient philosophers deduced from the laws of nature, and which have been directly taught, and received such powerful sanctions in the moral code of Christianity, it would present a very different scene, from that which we now contemplate. Every act, which was prompted by the desire of immediate gratification, but which threatened an ultimate overbalance of pain, would be considered as a breach of duty; and consequently no man, whose earnings were only sufficient to maintain

two children, would put himself in a situation in which he might have to maintain four or five, however he might be prompted to it by the passion of love. This prudential restraint, if it were generally adopted, by narrowing the supply of labour in the market, would, in the natural course of things, soon raise its price. The period of delayed gratification would be passed in saving the earnings, which were above the wants of a single man, and in acquiring habits of sobriety, industry, and economy, which would enable him in a few years to enter into the matrimonial contract without fear of its consequences. The operation of the preventive check in this way, by constantly keeping the population within the limits of the food, though constantly following its increase, would give a real value to the rise of wages, and the sums saved by labourers before marriage, very different from those forced advances in the price of labour, or arbitrary parochial donations, which, in proportion to their magnitude and extensiveness, must of necessity be followed by a proportional advance in the price of provisions. As the wages of labour would thus be sufficient, to maintain with decency a large family, and as every married couple would set out with a sum
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for contingencies, all squalid poverty would be removed from society; or at least be confined to a very few, who had fallen into misfortunes, against which no prudence or foresight could provide.

The interval between the age of puberty and the period at which each individual might venture on marriage must, according to the supposition, be passed in strict chastity; because the law of chastity cannot be violated without producing evil. The effect of any thing like a promiscuous intercourse, which prevents the birth of children, is evidently to weaken the best affections of the heart, and in a very marked manner to degrade the female character. And any other intercourse would, without improper arts, bring as many children into the society as marriage, with a much greater probability of their becoming a burden to it.

These considerations show, that the virtue of chastity is not, as some have supposed, a forced produce of artificial society; but that it has the most real and solid foundation in nature and reason; being apparently the only virtuous mean of avoiding the vice and misery, which result so often from the principle of population.

In such a society as we have been supposing,

it might be necessary for both sexes, to pass many of the early years of life in the single state; and if this were general, there would certainly be room for a much greater number to marry afterwards, so that fewer, upon the whole, would be condemned to pass their lives in celibacy. If the custom of not marrying early prevailed generally, and if violations of chastity were equally dishonourable in both sexes, a more familiar and friendly intercourse between them might take place without danger. Two young people might converse together intimately, without its being immediately supposed, that they either intended marriage or intrigue; and a much better opportunity would thus be given to both sexes of finding out kindred dispositions, and of forming those strong and lasting attachments, without which the married state is generally more productive of misery than of happiness. The earlier years of life would not be spent without love, though without the full gratification of it. The passion, instead of being extinguished, as it now too frequently is by early sensuality, would only be repressed for a time, that it might afterwards burn with a brighter, purer, and steadier flame; and the happiness of the married state, instead of an opportunity of
immediate

immediate indulgence, would be looked forward to as the prize of industry and virtue, and the reward of a genuine and constant attachment^a.

The passion of love is a powerful stimulus in the formation of character, and often prompts to the most noble and generous exertions; but this is only when the affections are centred in one object; and generally when full gratification is delayed by difficulties.^b The
heart

^a Dr. Currie, in his interesting observations on the character and condition of the Scotch peasantry, which he has prefixed to his life of Burns, remarks, with a just knowledge of human nature, that, "in appreciating the happiness and virtue of a community, there is perhaps no single criterion on which so much dependence may be placed as the state of the intercourse between the sexes. Where this displays ardour of attachment, accompanied by purity of conduct, the character and the influence of women rise, our imperfect nature mounts in the scale of moral excellence; and from the source of this single affection, a stream of felicity descends, which branches into a thousand rivulets, that enrich and adorn the field of life. Where the attachment between the sexes sinks into an appetite, the heritage of our species is comparatively poor, and man approaches to the condition of the brutes that perish." Vol. i, p. 18.

^b Dr. Currie observes, that the Scottish peasant in the course of his passion often exerts a spirit of adventure, of which a Spanish cavalier need not be ashamed. Burns' Works, vol. i, p. 16. It is not to be doubted, that this kind of romantic passion, which, Dr. C. says, characterizes the attachment

heart is perhaps never so much disposed to virtuous conduct, and certainly at no time is the virtue of chastity so little difficult to men, as when under the influence of such a passion. Late marriages taking place in this way would be very different from those of the same name at present, where the union is too frequently prompted solely by interested views, and the parties meet not unfrequently with exhausted constitutions, and generally with exhausted affections. The late marriages at present are indeed principally confined to the men; and there are few, however advanced in life they may be, who, if they determine to marry, do not fix their choice on a very young wife. A young woman without fortune, when she has passed her twenty-fifth year, begins to fear, and with reason, that she may lead a life of celibacy; and with a heart capable of forming a strong attachment, feels as each year creeps on her hopes of finding an object on which to rest her affections gradually diminishing, and the uneasiness of her situation aggravated by the silly and un-

attachment of the humblest people of Scotland, and which has been greatly fostered by the elevation of mind given to them by a superior education, has had a most powerful and most beneficial influence on the national character.

just prejudices of the world. If the general age of marriage among women were later, the period of youth and hope would be prolonged, and fewer would be ultimately disappointed.

That a change of this kind would be a most decided advantage to the more virtuous half of society, we cannot for a moment doubt. However impatiently the privation might be borne by the men, it would be supported by the women readily and cheerfully; and if they could look forwards with just confidence to marriage at twenty-eight or thirty, I fully believe, that, if the matter were left to their free choice, they would clearly prefer waiting till this period, to the being involved in all the cares of a large family at twenty five. The most eligible age of marriage however could not be fixed; but must depend entirely on circumstances and situation. There is no period of human life, at which nature more strongly prompts to an union of the sexes, than from seventeen or eighteen to twenty. In every society above that state of depression, which almost excludes reason and foresight, these early tendencies must necessarily be restrained; and if, in the actual state of things, such a restraint on the impulses of nature be found unavoidable, at what time can we be consistently

consistently released from it, but at that period, whatever it may be, when, in the existing circumstances of the society, a fair prospect presents itself of maintaining a family?

The difficulty of moral restraint will perhaps be objected to this doctrine. To him who does not acknowledge the authority of the Christian religion, I have only to say, that, after the most careful investigation, this virtue appears to be absolutely necessary, in order to avoid certain evils, which would otherwise result from the general laws of nature. According to his own principles, it is his duty to pursue the greatest good consistent with these laws; and not to fail in this important end, and produce an overbalance of misery, by a partial obedience to some of the dictates of nature, while he neglects others. The path of virtue, though it be the only path which leads to permanent happiness, has always been represented by the heathen moralists as of difficult ascent.

To the Christian I would say, that the Scriptures most clearly and precisely point it out to us as our duty, to restrain our passions within the bounds of reason; and it is a palpable disobedience of this law, to indulge our desires in such a manner as reason tells us will unavoidably
end

end in misery. The Christian cannot consider the difficulty of moral restraint as any argument against its being his duty ; since in almost every page of the sacred writings, man is described as encompassed on all sides by temptations, which it is extremely difficult to resist ; and though no duties are enjoined, which do not contribute to his happiness on earth as well as in a future state, yet an undeviating obedience is never represented as an easy task.

There is in general so strong a tendency to love in early youth, that it is extremely difficult at this period to distinguish a genuine from a transient passion. If the earlier years of life were passed by both sexes in moral restraint, from the greater facility that this would give to the meeting of kindred dispositions, it might even admit of a doubt, whether more happy marriages would not take place, and consequently more pleasure from the passion of love, than in a state such as that of America, the circumstances of which would allow of a very early union of the sexes. But if we compare the intercourse of the sexes in such a society as I have been supposing, with that which now exists in Europe, taken under all its circumstances, it may safely be asserted, that, independently of the load

of misery which would be removed, the sum of pleasurable sensations from the passion of love would be increased in a very great degree.

If we could suppose such a system general, the accession of happiness to society in its internal economy would scarcely be greater than in its external relations. It might fairly be expected, that war, that great pest of the human race, would, under such circumstances, soon cease to extend its ravages so widely and so frequently, as it does at present.

One of its first causes and most powerful impulses was undoubtedly an insufficiency of room and food; and greatly as the circumstances of mankind have changed since it first began, the same cause still continues to operate and to produce, though in a smaller degree, the same effects. The ambition of princes would want instruments of destruction, if the distresses of the lower classes of people did not drive them under their standards. A recruiting serjeant always prays for a bad harvest, and a want of employment, or in other words, a redundant population.

In the earlier ages of the world, when war was the great business of mankind, and the
drains

drains of population from this cause were, beyond comparison, greater than in modern times, the legislators and statesmen of each country, adverting principally to the means of offence and defence, encouraged an increase of people in every possible way, fixed a stigma on barrenness and celibacy, and honoured marriage. The popular religions followed these prevailing opinions. In many countries the prolific power of nature was the object of solemn worship. In the religion of Mahomet, which was established by the sword, and the promulgation of which in consequence could not be unaccompanied by an extraordinary destruction of its followers, the procreation of children to glorify the Creator was laid down as one of the principal duties of man; and he, who had the most numerous offspring, was considered as having best answered the end of his creation. The prevalence of such moral sentiments had naturally a great effect in encouraging marriage; and the rapid procreation, which followed, was partly the effect and partly the cause of incessant war. The vacancies occasioned by former desolations made room for the rearing of fresh supplies; and the overflowing rapidity, with which these supplies followed, constantly furnished fresh incitements
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and fresh instruments for renewed hostilities. Under the influence of such moral sentiments it is difficult to conceive how the fury of incessant war should ever abate.

It is a pleasing confirmation of the truth and divinity of the Christian religion, and of its being adapted to a more improved state of human society, that it places our duties respecting marriage and the procreation of children in a different light from that in which they were before beheld.

Without entering minutely into the subject, which would evidently lead too far, I think it will be admitted, that, if we apply the spirit of St. Paul's declarations respecting marriage to the present state of society, and the known constitution of our nature, the natural inference seems to be, that, when marriage does not interfere with higher duties, it is right; when it does, it is wrong. According to the genuine principles of moral science, "The method of coming at the will of God from the light of nature is, to inquire into the tendency of the action to promote or diminish the general happiness."^a There are perhaps few actions, that tend so directly to diminish the general happiness, as to

^a Paley's Moral Philosophy, vol. i, b. ii, c. iv, p. 65.

marry without the means of supporting children. He who commits this act, therefore, clearly offends against the will of God; and having become a burden on the society in which he lives, and plunged himself and family into a situation, in which virtuous habits are preserved with more difficulty than in any other, he appears to have violated his duty to his neighbours and to himself, and thus to have listened to the voice of passion in opposition to his higher obligations.

In a society, such as I have supposed, all the members of which endeavour to attain happiness by obedience to the moral code derived from the light of nature, and enforced by strong sanctions in revealed religion, it is evident, that no such marriages could take place; and the prevention of a redundant population, in this way, would remove one of the principal encouragements to offensive war; and at the same time tend powerfully to eradicate those two fatal political disorders, internal tyranny and internal tumult, which mutually produce each other.

Indisposed to a war of offence, in a war of defence, such a society would be strong as a rock of adamant. Where every family possessed

the necessaries of life in plenty, and a decent portion of its comforts and conveniences, there could not exist that hope of change, or at best that melancholy and disheartening indifference to it, which sometimes prompts the lower classes of people to say, "let what will come, we can not be worse off than we are now." Every heart and hand would be united to repel an invader, when each individual felt the value of the solid advantages which he enjoyed, and a prospect of change presented only a prospect of being deprived of them.

As it appears therefore, that it is in the power of each individual to avoid all the evil consequences to himself and society resulting from the principle of population, by the practice of a virtue clearly dictated to him by the light of nature, and expressly enjoined in revealed religion; and as we have reason to think, that the exercise of this virtue to a certain degree would tend rather to increase than diminish individual happiness; we can have no reason to impeach the justice of the Deity, because his general laws make this virtue necessary, and punish our offences against it by the evils attendant upon vice, and the pains that accompany the various forms of premature death. A really virtuous society,

society, such as I have supposed, would avoid these evils. It is the apparent object of the Creator to deter us from vice by the pains which accompany it, and to lead us to virtue by the happiness that it produces. This object appears to our conceptions to be worthy of a benevolent Creator. The laws of nature respecting population tend to promote this object. No imputation, therefore, on the benevolence of the Deity, can be founded on these laws, which is not equally applicable to any of the evils necessarily incidental to an imperfect state of existence.



CHAP. III.

Of the only effectual mode of improving the condition of the Poor.

HE who publishes a moral code, or system of duties, however firmly he may be convinced of the strong obligation on each individual strictly to conform to it, has never the folly to imagine, that it will be universally or even generally practised. But this is no valid objection against the publication of the code. If it were, the same objection would always have applied; we should be totally without general rules; and to the vices of mankind arising from temptation would be added a much longer list, than we have at present, of vices from ignorance.

Judging merely from the light of nature, if we feel convinced of the misery arising from a redundant population on the one hand, and of the evils and unhappiness, particularly to the female sex, arising from promiscuous intercourse, on the other, I do not see how it is possible for any person, who acknowledges the principle of utility

utility as the great foundation of morals, to escape the conclusion, that moral restraint, or the abstaining from marriage till we are in a condition to support a family, with a perfectly moral conduct during that period, is the strict line of duty; and when revelation is taken into the question, this duty undoubtedly receives very powerful confirmation. At the same time I believe, that few of my readers can be less sanguine in their expectations of any great change in the general conduct of men on this subject, than I am: and the chief reason why in the last chapter I allowed myself to suppose the universal prevalence of this virtue was, that I might endeavour to remove any imputation on the goodness of the Deity, by showing, that the evils arising from the principle of population were exactly of the same nature as the generality of other evils, which excite fewer complaints; that they were increased by human ignorance and indolence, and diminished by human knowledge and virtue; and on the supposition, that each individual strictly fulfilled his duty, would be almost totally removed; and this without any general diminution of those sources of pleasure, arising from the regulated indulgence of the passions, which have been

justly considered as the principal ingredients of human happiness.

If it will answer any purpose of illustration, I see no harm in drawing the picture of a society, in which each individual is supposed strictly to fulfil his duties; nor does a writer appear to be justly liable to the imputation of being visionary, unless he make such universal or general obedience necessary to the practical utility of his system, and to that degree of moderate and partial improvement, which is all that can rationally be expected from the most complete knowledge of our duties.

But in this respect there is an essential difference between that improved state of society, which I have supposed in the last chapter, and most of the other speculations on this subject. The improvement there supposed, if we ever should make approaches towards it, is to be effected in the way in which we have been in the habit of seeing all the greatest improvements effected, by a direct application to the interest and happiness of each individual. It is not required of us, to act from motives, to which we are unaccustomed; to pursue a general good, which we may not distinctly comprehend, or the effect of which may be weakened by distance

tance and diffusion. The happiness of the whole is to be the result of the happiness of individuals, and to begin first with them. No cooperation is required. Every step tells. He who performs his duty faithfully will reap the full fruits of it, whatever may be the number of others who fail. This duty is intelligible to the humblest capacity. It is merely, that he is not to bring beings into the world, for whom he cannot find the means of support. When once this subject is cleared from the obscurity thrown over it by parochial laws and private benevolence, every man must feel the strongest conviction of such an obligation. If he cannot support his children, they must starve; and if he marry in the face of a fair probability, that he shall not be able to support his children, he is guilty of all the evils, which he thus brings upon himself, his wife, and his offspring. It is clearly his interest, and will tend greatly to promote his happiness, to defer marrying, till by industry and economy he is in a capacity to support the children, that he may reasonably expect from his marriage; and as he cannot in the mean time gratify his passions, without violating an express command of God, and running a great risk of injuring himself,

or some of his fellow creatures, considerations of his own interest and happiness will dictate to him the strong obligation to a moral conduct, while he remains unmarried.

However powerful may be the impulses of passion, they are generally in some degree modified by reason. And it does not seem entirely visionary to suppose, that, if the true and permanent cause of poverty were clearly explained, and forcibly brought home to each man's bosom, it would have some, and perhaps not an inconsiderable influence on his conduct: at least the experiment has never yet been fairly tried. Almost every thing, that has been hitherto done for the poor, has tended, as if with solicitous care, to throw a veil of obscurity over this subject, and to hide from them the true cause of their poverty. When the wages of labour are hardly sufficient to maintain two children, a man marries, and has five or six. He of course finds himself miserably distressed. He accuses the insufficiency of the price of labour to maintain a family. He accuses his parish for their tardy and sparing fulfilment of their obligation to assist him. He accuses the avarice of the rich, who suffer him to want what they can so well spare. He accuses the partial and unjust institutions

tations of society, which have awarded him an inadequate share of the produce of the earth. He accuses perhaps the dispensations of Providence, which have assigned to him a place in society so beset with unavoidable distress and dependance. In searching for objects of accusation, he never adverts to the quarter, from which his misfortunes originate. The last person that he would think of accusing is himself, on whom in fact the principal blame lies, except in as far as he has been deceived by the higher classes of society. He may perhaps wish, that he had not married, because he now feels the inconveniences of it; but it never enters into his head, that he can have done any thing wrong. He has always been told, that to raise up subjects for his king and country is a very meritorious act. He has done this act, and yet is suffering for it. He naturally thinks, that he is suffering for righteousness sake; and it cannot but strike him as most extremely unjust and cruel in his king and country, to allow him thus to suffer, in return for giving them what they are continually declaring that they particularly want.

Till these erroneous ideas have been corrected, and the language of nature and reason
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has been generally heard on the subject of population, instead of the language of error and prejudice, it cannot be said, that any fair experiment has been made with the understandings of the common people; and we cannot justly accuse them of improvidence and want of industry, till they act as they do now, after it has been brought home to their comprehensions, that they are themselves the cause of their own poverty; that the means of redress are in their own hands, and in the hands of no other persons whatever; that the society in which they live, and the government which presides over it, are without any direct power in this respect; and, however ardently they may desire to relieve them, and whatever attempts they may make to do so, are really and truly unable to execute what they benevolently wish, but unjustly promise; that when the wages of labour will not maintain a family, it is an incontrovertible sign, that their king and country do not want more subjects, or at least that they cannot support them; that if they marry in this case, so far from fulfilling a duty to society, they are throwing a useless burden on it, at the same time that they are plunging themselves into distress; and that they are acting directly contrary

trary to the will of God, and bringing down upon themselves various diseases, which might all, or the greater part, have been avoided, if they had attended to the repeated admonitions, which he gives by the general laws of nature to every being capable of reason.

Dr. Paley, in his *Moral Philosophy*, observes, that “in countries in which subsistence is become scarce, it behoves the state to watch over the public morals with increased solicitude; for nothing but the instinct of nature, under the restraint of chastity, will induce men to undertake the labour, or consent to the sacrifice of personal liberty and indulgence, which the support of a family in such circumstances requires^a.” That it is always the duty of a state, to use every exertion likely to be effectual in discouraging vice and promoting virtue, and that no temporary circumstances ought to cause any relaxation in these exertions, is certainly true. The means therefore proposed are always good; but the particular end in view in this case appears to be absolutely criminal. We wish to force people into marriage, when from the acknowledged scarcity of subsistence they will have little

^a Vol. ii, c. xi, p. 352.

chance of being able to support their children. We might as well force people into the water, who are unable to swim. In both cases we rashly tempt Providence. Nor have we more reason to believe, that a miracle will be worked to save us from the misery and mortality resulting from our conduct in the one case, than in the other.

The object of those, who really wish to better the condition of the lower classes of society, must be to raise the relative proportion between the price of labour and the price of provisions, so as to enable the labourer to command a larger share of the necessaries and comforts of life. We have hitherto principally attempted to attain this end by encouraging the married poor, and consequently increasing the number of labourers, and overstocking the market with a commodity, which we still say that we wish to be dear. It would seem to have required no great spirit of divination, to foretel the certain failure of such a plan of proceeding. There is nothing however like experience. It has been tried in many different countries, and for many hundred years, and the success has always been answerable to the nature of the scheme. It is really time now to try something else.

When

When it was found, that oxygene, or pure vital air, would not cure consumptions, as was expected, but rather aggravated their symptoms; a trial was made of an air of the most opposite kind. I wish we had acted with the same philosophical spirit in our attempts to cure the disease of poverty; and having found, that the pouring in of fresh supplies of labour only tended to aggravate the symptoms, had tried what would be the effect of withholding a little these supplies.

In all old and fully-peopled states it is from this method, and this alone, that we can rationally expect any essential and permanent melioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

In an endeavour to raise the proportion of the quantity of provisions to the number of consumers in any country, our attention would naturally be first directed to the increasing of the absolute quantity of provisions; but finding, that, as fast as we did this, the number of consumers more than kept pace with it, and that with all our exertions we were still as far as ever behind, we should be convinced, that our efforts directed only in this way would never succeed. It would appear to be setting the tortoise to catch
the

the hare. Finding therefore, that from the laws of nature we could not proportion the food to the population, our next attempt should naturally be, to proportion the population to the food. If we can persuade the hare to go to sleep, the tortoise may have some chance of overtaking her.

We are not however to relax our efforts in increasing the quantity of provisions; but to combine another effort with it, that of keeping the population, when once it has been overtaken, at such a distance behind, as to effect the relative proportion which we desire; and thus unite the two grand desiderata, a great actual population, and a state of society, in which squalid poverty and dependence are comparatively but little known; two objects which are far from being incompatible.

If we be really serious in what appears to be the object of such general research, the mode of essentially and permanently bettering the condition of the poor, we must explain to them the true nature of their situation, and show them, that the withholding of the supplies of labour is the only possible way of really raising its price; and that they themselves, being the possessors of this

this commodity, have alone the power to do this.

I cannot but consider this mode of diminishing poverty as so perfectly clear in theory, and so invariably confirmed by the analogy of every other commodity that is brought to market, that nothing, but its being shown to be calculated to produce greater evils than it proposes to remedy, can justify us in not making the attempt to put it into execution.



CHAP. VI.

Objections to this mode considered.

ONE objection, which perhaps will be made to this plan, is that from which alone it derives its value—a market rather understocked with labour. This must undoubtedly take place in a certain degree; but by no means in such a degree, as to affect the wealth and prosperity of the country. The way in which we are going on at present, and the enormous increase in the price of provisions, which seems to threaten us, will tend much more effectually to enable foreigners to undersell us in the markets of Europe, than the plan now proposed. If the population of this country were better proportioned to its food, the nominal price of labour might be lower than it is now, and yet be sufficient to maintain a wife and six children. But putting this subject of a market understocked with labour in the most unfavourable point of view, if the rich will not submit to a slight inconvenience necessarily attendant on the attainment

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ment of what they profess to desire, they cannot really be in earnest in their professions. Their benevolence to the poor must be either childish play or hypocrisy; it must be either to amuse themselves, or to pacify the minds of the common people with a mere show of attention to their wants. To wish to better the condition of the poor by enabling them to command a greater quantity of the necessaries and comforts of life, and then to complain of high wages, is the act of a silly boy, who gives away his cake and then cries for it. A market overstocked with labour, and an ample remuneration to each labourer, are objects perfectly incompatible with each other. In the annals of the world they never existed together; and to couple them even in imagination betrays a gross ignorance of the simplest principles of political economy.

A second objection that may be made to this plan is, the diminution of population that it would cause. It is to be considered however, that this diminution is merely relative; and when once this relative diminution had been effected, by keeping the population stationary, while the supply of food had increased, it might then start afresh, and continue increasing for ages, with the

increase of food, maintaining always the same relative proportion to it. I can easily conceive, that this country, with a proper direction of the national industry, might, in the course of some centuries, contain two or three times its present population, and yet every man in the kingdom be much better fed and clothed than he is at present. While the springs of industry continue in vigour, and a sufficient part of that industry is directed to agriculture, we need be under no apprehensions of a deficient population; and nothing perhaps would tend so strongly to excite a spirit of industry and economy among the poor, as a thorough knowledge, that their happiness must always depend principally upon themselves; and that, if they obey their passions in opposition to their reason, or be not industrious and frugal while they are single men, to save a sum for the common contingencies of the married state, they must expect to suffer the natural evils, which Providence has prepared for those who disobey its repeated admonitions.

A third objection which may be started to this plan, and the only one which appears to me to have any kind of plausibility, is, that by endeavouring to urge the duty of moral restraint

on the poor, we may increase the quantity of vice relating to the sex.

I should be extremely sorry to say any thing, which could either directly or remotely be construed unfavourably to the cause of virtue; but I certainly cannot think, that the vices which relate to the sex are the only vices, which are to be considered in a moral question; or that they are even the greatest and most degrading to the human character. They can rarely or never be committed without producing unhappiness somewhere or other, and therefore ought always to be strongly reprobated: but there are other vices, the effects of which are still more pernicious; and there are other situations, which lead more certainly to moral offences than the refraining from marriage. Powerful as may be the temptations to a breach of chastity, I am inclined to think, that they are impotent, in comparison of the temptations arising from continued distress. A large class of women, and many men, I have no doubt, pass a considerable part of their lives consistently with the laws of chastity; but I believe there will be found very few, who pass through the ordeal of squalid and hopeless poverty, or even of long continued em-

barrasted circumstances, without a great moral degradation of character.

In the higher and middle classes of society, it is a melancholy and distressing sight to observe, not unfrequently, a man of a noble and ingenuous disposition, once feelingly alive to a sense of honour and integrity, gradually sinking under the pressure of circumstances, making his excuses at first with a blush of conscious shame, afraid of seeing the faces of his friends from whom he may have borrowed money, reduced to the meanest tricks and subterfuges to delay or avoid the payment of his just debts; till ultimately grown familiar with falsehood, and at enmity with the world, he loses all the grace and dignity of man.

To the general prevalence of indigence, and the extraordinary encouragements which we afford in this country to a total want of foresight and prudence among the common people,^a
is

^a Mr. Colquhoun, speaking of the poor laws, observes, that
 “ in spite of all the ingenious arguments which have been
 “ used in favour of a system, admitted to be wisely conceived
 “ in its origin, the effects it has produced incontestably prove,
 “ that, with respect to the mass of the poor, there is some-
 “ thing radically wrong in the execution. If it were not so,
 “ it

is to be attributed a considerable part of those continual depredations on property, and other more atrocious crimes, which drive us to the painful resource of such a number of executions.^a According to Mr. Colquhoun, above twenty thousand miserable individuals of various classes rise up every morning, without knowing how or by what means they are to be supported during the passing day, or where in many instances they are to lodge on the succeeding night.^b It is by these unhappy persons, that the principal depredations on the public are committed: and supposing but few of them to be married, and driven to these acts, from the necessity of supporting their children; yet still it will not cease to be true, that the too great frequency of

“ it is impossible, that there could exist in the metropolis such
 “ an inconceivable portion of human misery, amidst examples
 “ of munificence and benevolence unparallelled in any age or
 “ country.” *Police of Metropolis*, c. xiii. p. 359.

In the effects of the poor laws, I fully agree with Mr. Colquhoun; but I cannot agree with him in admitting, that the system was well conceived in its origin. I attribute still more evil to the original ill conception, than to the subsequent ill execution.

^a Mr. Colquhoun observes, that “ Indigence in the present
 “ state of society may be considered as a principal cause of
 “ the increase of crimes.” *Police of Metropolis*, c. xiii,
 p. 352.

^b *Id.* c. xi, p. 313.

marriage among the poorest classes is one of the principal causes of the temptations to these crimes. A considerable part of these unhappy wretches will probably be found to be the offspring of such marriages, educated in workhouses where every vice is propagated, or bred up at home in filth and rags, and with an utter ignorance of every moral obligation.^a A still greater part perhaps consists of persons, who, being unable for some time to get employment owing to the full supply of labour, have been urged to these extremities by their temporary wants; and, having thus lost their characters, are rejected, even when their labour may be wanted, by the well-founded caution of civil society.^b

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^a Police of Metropolis, c. xi, xii, p. 355, 370.

^b Police of the Metropolis, c. xiii, p. 353 et seq. In so large a town as London, which must necessarily encourage a prodigious influx of strangers from the country, there must be always a great many persons out of work; and it is probable, that some public institution for the relief of the casual poor upon a plan familiar to that proposed by Mr. Colquhoun (c. xiii, p. 371.) would, under very judicious management, produce more good than evil. But for this purpose it would be absolutely necessary, that, if work were provided by the institution, the sum that a man could earn by it should be less than the worst paid common labour; otherwise the claimants would rapidly increase, and the funds would soon be inadequate

When indigence does not produce overt acts of vice, it palsies every virtue. Under the continued temptations to a breach of chastity, occasional failures may take place, and the moral sensibility in other respects not be very strikingly impaired; but the continued temptations which

quate to their object. In the institution at Hamburg, which appears to have been the most successful of any yet established, the nature of the work was such, that, though paid above the usual price, a person could not easily earn by it more than eighteen pence a week. It was the determined principle of the managers of the institution, to reduce the support which they gave lower than what any industrious man or woman in such circumstances could earn. (*Account of the management of the poor in Hamburg, by C. Voght, p. 18.*) And it is to this principle, that they attribute their success. It should be observed however, that neither the institution at Hamburg, nor that planned by Count Rumford in Bavaria, has subsisted long enough for us to be able to pronounce on their permanent good effects. It will not admit of a doubt, that institutions for the relief of the poor, on their first establishment, remove a great quantity of distress. The only question is, whether, as succeeding generations arise, the increasing funds necessary for their support, and the increasing numbers that become dependent, are not greater evils, than that which was to be remedied; and whether the country will not ultimately be left with as much mendicity as before, besides all the poverty and dependence accumulated in the public institutions. This seems to be nearly the case in England at present. I do not believe, that we should have more beggars if we had no poor laws.

beset hopeless poverty, and the strong sense of injustice that generally accompanies it from an ignorance of its true cause, tend so powerfully to sour the disposition, to harden the heart, and deaden the moral sense, that, generally speaking, virtue takes her flight clear away from the tainted spot, and does not often return.

Even with respect to the vices which relate to the sex, marriage has been found to be by no means a complete remedy. Among the higher classes, our Doctours Commons, and the lives that many married men are known to lead, sufficiently prove this; and the same kind of vice, though not so much heard of among the lower classes of people, owing to their indifference and want of delicacy on these subjects, is probably not very much less frequent.

Add to this, that squalid poverty, particularly when joined with idleness, is a state the most unfavourable to chastity, that can well be conceived. The passion is as strong, or nearly so, as in other situations; and every restraint on it from personal respect, or a sense of morality, is generally removed. There is a degree of squalid poverty, in which, if a girl was brought up, I should say, that her being really modest at twenty was an absolute miracle. Those persons
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must have extraordinary minds indeed, and such as are not usually formed under familiar circumstances, who can continue to respect themselves, when no other person whatever respects them. If the children thus brought up were even to marry at twenty, it is probable, that they would have passed some years in vicious habits before that period.

If after all, however, these arguments should appear insufficient; if we reprobate the idea of endeavouring to encourage the virtue of moral restraint among the poor, from a fear of producing vice; and if we think, that to facilitate marriage by all possible means is a point of the first consequence to the morality and happiness of the people; let us act consistently, and before we proceed, endeavour to make ourselves acquainted with the mode by which alone we can effect our object.

CHAP. V.

Of the consequences of pursuing the opposite mode.

IT is an evident truth, that, whatever may be the rate of increase in the means of subsistence, the increase of population must be limited by it, at least after the food has once been divided into the smallest shares that will support life. All the children born, beyond what would be required to keep up the population to this level, must necessarily perish, unless room be made for them by the deaths of grown persons. It has appeared indeed clearly in the course of this work, that in all old states the marriages and births depend principally upon the deaths, and that there is no encouragement to early unions so powerful as a great mortality. To act consistently therefore, we should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavouring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality; and if we dread the too frequent visitation of the horrid form of famine, we should sedulously encourage the other forms of destruction, which

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we compel nature to use. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations.^a But above all, we should reprobate specific remedies for ravaging diseases; and those benevolent, but much mistaken men, who have thought they were doing a service to mankind by projecting schemes for the total extirpation of particular disorders. If by these and similar means the annual mortality were increased from 1 in 36 or 40, to 1 in 18 or 20,

^a Necker, speaking of the proportion of the births in France, makes use of a new and instructive expression on this subject, though he hardly seems to be sufficiently aware of it himself. He says, “ Le nombre des naissances est à celui des habitans
 “ de un à vingt-trois et vingt-quatre dans les lieux *contrariés par*
 “ *la nature, ou par des circonstances morales: ce meme rapport*
 “ dans la plus grande partie de la France, est de un à 25, 25½.
 “ &c. 26.” *Administ. des Finances*, tom i, c. ix, p. 254. 12mo. It would appear therefore, that we had nothing more to do, than to settle people in marshy situations, and oppress them by a bad government, in order to attain what politicians have hitherto considered as so desirable—a great proportion of marriages and a greater proportion of births.

we might probably every one of us marry at the age of puberty, and yet few be absolutely starved.

If however, we all marry at this age, and yet still continue our exertions to impede the operations of nature, we may rest assured, that all our efforts will be vain. Nature will not, nor cannot be defeated in her purposes. The necessary mortality must come, in some form or other; and the extirpation of one disease will only be the signal for the birth of another perhaps more fatal. We cannot lower the waters of misery by pressing them down in different places, which must necessarily make them rise somewhere else: the only way in which we can hope to effect our purpose is by drawing them off. To this course nature is constantly directing our attention by the chastisements, which await a contrary conduct. These chastisements are more or less severe, in proportion to the degree in which her admonitions produce their intended effect. In this country at present these admonitions are by no means entirely neglected. The preventive check to population prevails to a considerable degree, and her chastisements are in consequence moderate: but if we were all to marry at the age of puberty, they would be severe

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vere indeed. Political evils would probably be added to physical. A people goaded by constant distress, and visited by frequent returns of famine, could not be kept down by a cruel despotism. We should approach to the state of the people in Egypt or Abyssinia; and I would ask, whether in that case it is probable, that we should be more virtuous?

Physicians have long remarked the great changes, which take place in diseases; and that, while some appear to yield to the efforts of human care and skill, others seem to become in proportion more malignant and fatal. Dr. William Heberden published, not long since, some valuable observations on this subject deduced from the London bills of mortality. In his preface, speaking of these bills, he says, “the gradual changes they exhibit in particular diseases correspond to the alterations, which in time are known to take place, in the channels through which the great stream of mortality is constantly flowing.”^a In the body of his work afterwards, speaking of some particular diseases, he observes with that candour which always distinguishes true science:

^a Observations on the Increase and Decrease of different Diseases. Preface, p. v, 4to. 1801.

“ It is not easy to give a satisfactory reason for
“ all the changes, which may be observed to
“ take place in the history of diseases. Nor is
“ it any disgrace to physicians, if their causes
“ are often so gradual in their operation, or so
“ subtle, as to elude investigation.”^a

I hope I shall not be accused of presumption, in venturing to suggest, that, under certain circumstances, such changes must take place; and perhaps without any alteration in those proximate causes, which are usually looked to on these occasions. If this should appear to be true, it will not seem extraordinary, that the most skilful and scientific physicians, whose business it is principally to investigate proximate causes, should sometimes search for these causes in vain.

In a country which keeps its population at a certain standard, if the average number of marriages and births be given, it is evident, that the average number of deaths will also be given; and, to use Dr. Heberden's metaphor, the channels, through which the great stream of mortality is constantly flowing, will always convey off a given quantity. Now if we stop up any

^a Observations on the Increase and Decrease of different Diseases, p. 43, 4to. 1801.

of these channels, it is most perfectly clear, that the stream of mortality must run with greater force through some of the other channels; that is, if we eradicate some diseases, others will become proportionally more fatal. In this case the only distinguishable cause is the damming up a necessary outlet of mortality.^a Nature, in the attainment of her great purposes, seems always to seize upon the weakest part. If this part be made strong by human skill, she seizes upon the next weakest part, and so on in succession; not like a capricious deity, with an intention to sport with our sufferings, and constantly to defeat our labours; but like a kind though sometimes severe instructor, with the intention of teaching us to make all parts strong, and to chase vice and misery from the earth. In avoiding one fault we are too apt to run into some other; but we always find nature faithful to her great object, at every false step we commit, ready to admonish us of our errors, by the infliction of some physical or moral evil. If the prevalence of the preventive check to population in a sufficient degree were to remove many

^a The way in which it operates is probably by increasing poverty, in consequence of a supply of labour too rapid for the demand.

of those diseases, which now afflict us, yet be accompanied by a considerable increase of the vice of promiscuous intercourse, it is probable, that the disorders and unhappinesses, the physical and moral evils arising from this vice, would increase in strength and degree; and, admonishing us severely of our error, would point to the only line of conduct approved by nature, reason, and religion, abstinence from marriage till we can support our children and chastity till that period arrives.

In the case just stated, in which the population and the number of marriages are supposed to be fixed, the necessity of a change in the mortality of some diseases, from the diminution or extinction of others, is capable of mathematical demonstration. The only obscurity, which can possibly involve this subject, arises from taking into consideration the effect that might be produced by a diminution of mortality in increasing the population, or in decreasing the number of marriages. That the removal of any of the particular causes of mortality can have no further effect upon population than the means of subsistence will allow, and that it has little influence on these means of subsistence, are facts, of which I hope the reader is already convinced.

Of

Of its operation in tending to prevent marriage, by diminishing the demand for fresh supplies of children, I have no doubt; and there is reason to think, that it had this effect, in no inconsiderable degree, on the extinction of the plague, which had so long and so dreadfully ravaged this country. Dr. Heberden draws a striking picture of the favourable change observed in the health of the people of England since this period; and justly attributes it to the improvements which have gradually taken place, not only in London but in all great towns; and in the manner of living throughout the kingdom, particularly with respect to cleanliness and ventilation.^a But these causes would not have produced the effect observed, if they had not been accompanied by an increase of the preventive check; and probably the spirit of cleanliness, and better mode of living, which then began to prevail, by spreading more generally a decent and useful pride, principally contributed to this increase. The diminution in the number of marriages, however, was not sufficient to make up for the great decrease of mortality, from the extinction of the plague, and the striking reduction of the deaths in the dysentery.^b While these and

^a Observ. on Inc. and Dec. of Diseases; p. 35. ^b Id. p. 34.

some other disorders became almost evanescent, consumption, palsy, apoplexy, gout, lunacy, and the small-pox, became more mortal.^a The widening of these drains was necessary to carry off the population, which still remained redundant, notwithstanding the increased operation of the preventive check, and the part which was annually disposed of and enabled to subsist by the increase of agriculture.

Dr. Haygarth, in the sketch of his benevolent plan for the extermination of the casual small-pox, draws a frightful picture of the mortality, which has been occasioned by this distemper; attributes to it the slow progress of population; and makes some curious calculations on the favourable effects, which would be produced in this respect by its extermination.^b His conclusions however, I fear, would not follow from his premises. I am far from doubting, that millions and millions of human beings have been destroyed by the small-pox. But were its devastations, as Dr. Haygarth supposes, many thousand degrees greater than the plague,^c I should still doubt, whether the average population of the earth had been diminished by them. The small-pox is certainly one of the channels, and a very

^a Observ. on Inc. and Dec. of Diseases, p. 36 et seq.

^b Vol. i, part ii, sect. v and vi.

^c Id. l. viii, p. 164.

broad one, which nature has opened for the last thousand years, to keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence; but had this been closed, others would have become wider, or new ones would have been formed. In ancient times the mortality from war and the plague was incomparably greater than in modern. On the gradual diminution of this stream of mortality, the generation and almost universal prevalence of the small-pox is a great and striking instance of one of those changes in the channels of mortality, which ought to awaken our attention, and animate us to patient and persevering investigation. For my own part I feel not the slightest doubt, that, if the introduction of the cow-pox should extirpate the small-pox, and yet the number of marriages continue the same, we shall find a very perceptible difference in the increased mortality of some other diseases. Nothing could prevent this effect but a sudden start in our agriculture; and should this take place, which I fear we have not much reason to expect, it will not be owing to the number of children saved from death by the cow-pox inoculation, but to the alarms occasioned among the people of property by the late scarcities, and to the increased gains of farmers, which have been so absurdly repro-

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bated.

bated. I am strongly however inclined to believe, that the number of marriages will not, in this case, remain the same; but that the gradual light, which may be expected to be thrown on this interesting topic of human inquiry, will teach us how to make the extinction of a mortal disorder a real blessing to us, a real improvement in the general health and happiness of the society.

If, on contemplating the increase of vice which might contingently follow an attempt to inculcate the duty of moral restraint, and the increase of misery that must necessarily follow the attempts to encourage marriage and population, we come to the conclusion, not to interfere in any respect, but to leave every man to his own free choice, and responsible only to God for the evil which he does in either way; this is all I contend for; I would on no account do more; but I contend, that at present we are very far from doing this.

Among the lower classes, where the point is of the greatest importance, the poor laws afford a direct, constant, and systematical encouragement to marriage, by removing from each individual that heavy responsibility, which he would incur by the laws of nature, for bringing beings into the world which he could not support. Our
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private benevolence has the same direction as the poor laws, and almost invariably tends to facilitate the rearing of families, and to equalize as much as possible the circumstances of married and single men.

Among the higher classes of people, the superior distinctions which married women receive, and the marked inattentions to which single women of advanced age are exposed, enable many men, who are agreeable neither in mind nor person, and are besides in the wane of life, to choose a partner among the young and fair, instead of being confined, as nature seems to dictate, to persons of nearly their own age and accomplishments. It is scarcely to be doubted, that the fear of being an old maid, and of that silly and unjust ridicule, which folly sometimes attaches to this name, drives many women into the marriage union with men whom they dislike, or at best to whom they are perfectly indifferent. Such marriages must to every delicate mind appear little better than legal prostitutions; and they often burden the earth with unnecessary children, without compensating for it by an accession of happiness or virtue to the parties themselves.

Throughout all the ranks of society, the

vailing opinions respecting the duty and obligation of marriage cannot but have a very powerful influence. The man who thinks, that, in going out of the world without leaving representatives behind him, he shall have failed in an important duty to society, will be disposed to force rather than to repress his inclinations on this subject; and when his reason represents to him the difficulties attending a family, he will endeavour not to attend to these suggestions, will still determine to venture, and will hope, that in the discharge of what he conceives to be his duty he shall not be deserted by Providence.

In a civilized country, such as England, where a taste for the decencies and comforts of life prevails among a very large class of people, it is not possible, that the encouragements to marriage from positive institutions and prevailing opinions should entirely obscure the light of nature and reason on this subject; but still they contribute to make it comparatively weak and indistinct. And till this obscurity is entirely removed, and the poor are undeceived with respect to the principal cause of their past poverty, and taught to
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know, that their future happiness or misery must depend chiefly upon themselves, it cannot be said, that; with regard to the great question of marriage, we leave every man to his own free and fair choice.



CHAP. VI.

Effects of the knowledge of the principal cause of poverty on Civil Liberty.

It may appear, perhaps, that a doctrine, which attributes the greatest part of the sufferings of the lower classes of society exclusively to themselves, is unfavourable to the cause of liberty, as affording a tempting opportunity to governments of oppressing their subjects at pleasure, and laying the whole blame on the laws of nature and the imprudence of the poor. We are not however to trust to first appearances; and I am strongly disposed to believe, that those who will be at the pains to consider this subject deeply will be convinced, that nothing would so powerfully contribute to the advancement of rational freedom, as a thorough knowledge generally circulated of the principal cause of poverty; and that the ignorance of this cause, and the natural consequences of this ignorance, form at present one of the chief obstacles to its progress.

The pressure of distress on the lower classes
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of people, with the habit of attributing this distress to their rulers, appears to me to be the rock of defence, the castle, the guardian spirit of despotism. It affords to the tyrant the fatal and unanswerable plea of necessity. It is the reason, that every free government tends constantly to its destruction; and that its appointed guardians become daily less jealous of the encroachments of power. It is the reason, that so many noble efforts in the cause of freedom have failed; and that almost every revolution, after long and painful sacrifices, has terminated in a military despotism. While any dissatisfied man of talents has power to persuade the lower classes of people, that all their poverty and distress arise solely from the iniquity of the government, though perhaps the greatest part of what they suffer is unconnected with this cause, it is evident, that the seeds of fresh discontents and fresh revolutions are continually sowing. When an established government has been destroyed, finding that their poverty is not removed, their resentment naturally falls upon the successors to power; and when these have been immolated without producing the desired effect, other sacrifices are called for, and so on without end. Are we to be surprised, that, under such circumstances,

stances, the majority of well-disposed people, finding that a government with proper restrictions was unable to support itself against the revolutionary spirit, and weary and exhausted with perpetual change to which they could see no end, should give up the struggle in despair, and throw themselves into the arms of the first power, which could afford them protection against the horrors of anarchy?

A mob, which is generally the growth of a redundant population goaded by resentment for real sufferings, but totally ignorant of the quarter from which they originate, is of all monsters the most fatal to freedom. It fosters a prevailing tyranny, and engenders one where it was not: and though, in its dreadful fits of resentment, it appears occasionally to devour its un-fightly offspring; yet no sooner is the horrid deed committed, than, however unwilling it may be to propagate such a breed, it immediately groans with a new birth.

Of the tendency of mobs to produce tyranny we may not be long without an example in this country. As a friend to freedom, and naturally an enemy to large standing armies, it is with extreme reluctance that I am compelled to acknowledge, that had it not been for the great organized

organized force in the country, the distresses of the people during the late scarcities, encouraged by the extreme ignorance and folly of many among the higher classes, might have driven them to commit the most dreadful outrages, and ultimately to involve the country in all the horrors of famine. Should such periods often recur, a recurrence which we have too much reason to apprehend from the present state of the country, the prospect which opens to our view is melancholy in the extreme. The English constitution will be seen hastening with rapid strides to the *Euthanasia* foretold by Hume, unless its progress be interrupted by some popular commotion; and this alternative presents a picture still more appalling to the imagination. If political discontents were blended with the cries of hunger, and a revolution were to take place by the instrumentality of a mob clamouring for want of food, the consequences would be unceasing change and unceasing carnage, the bloody career of which nothing but the establishment of some complete despotism could arrest.

We can scarcely believe, that the appointed guardians of British liberty should quietly have acquiesced in those gradual encroachments of power,

power, which have taken place of late years, but from the apprehension of these still more dreadful evils. Great as has been the influence of corruption, I cannot yet think so meanly of the country gentlemen of England as to believe, that they would thus have given up a part of their birthright of liberty, if they had not been actuated by a real and genuine fear, that it was then in greater danger from the people than from the crown. They appeared to surrender themselves to government on condition of being protected from the mob; but they never would have made this melancholy and disheartening surrender, if such a mob had not existed either in reality or in imagination. That the fears on this subject were artfully exaggerated, and increased beyond the limits of just apprehension, is undeniable; but I think it is also undeniable, that the frequent declamation which was heard against the unjust institutions of society, and the delusive arguments on equality which were circulated among the lower classes, gave us just reason to suppose, that, if the *vox populi* had been allowed to speak, it would have appeared to be the voice of error and absurdity, instead of the *vox Dei*.

To say that our conduct is not to be regulated
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by circumstances, is to betray an ignorance of the most solid and incontrovertible principles of morality. Though the admission of this principle may sometimes afford a cloak to changes of opinion, that do not result from the purest motives; yet the admission of a contrary principle would be productive of infinitely worse consequences. The phrase of existing circumstances has, I believe, not unfrequently created a smile in the English House of Commons; but the smile should have been reserved for the application of the phrase, and not have been excited by the phrase itself. A very frequent repetition of it has indeed, of itself, rather a suspicious air; and its application should always be watched with the most jealous and anxious attention; but no man ought to be judged *in limine* for saying, that existing circumstances had obliged him to alter his opinions and conduct. The country gentlemen were perhaps too easily convinced, that existing circumstances called upon them to give up some of the most valuable privileges of Englishmen; but as far as they were really convinced of this obligation, they acted consistently with the clearest rule of morality.

The degree of power to be given to the civil
government,

government, and the measure of our submission to it, must be determined by general expediency; and in judging of this expediency every circumstance is to be taken into consideration; particularly the state of public opinion, and the degree of ignorance and delusion prevailing among the common people. The patriot who might be called upon by the love of his country to join with heart and hand in a rising of the people for some specific attainable object of reform, if he knew that they were enlightened respecting their own situation, and would stop short when they had attained their demand, would be called upon by the same motive to submit to very great oppression rather than give the slightest countenance to a popular tumult, the members of which, at least the greater number of them, were persuaded that the destruction of the Parliament, the Lord Mayor, and the monopolizers, would make bread cheap, and that a revolution would enable them all to support their families. In this case it is more the ignorance and delusion of the lower classes of people, that occasions the oppression, than the actual disposition of the government to tyranny.

That there is however in all power a constant

stant tendency to encroach is an incontrovertible truth, and cannot be too strongly inculcated. The checks which are necessary to secure the liberty of the subject will always in some degree embarrass and delay the operations of the executive government. The members of this government feeling these inconveniencies, while they are exerting themselves, as they conceive, in the service of their country, and conscious perhaps of no ill intention towards the people, will naturally be disposed, on every occasion, to demand the suspension or abolition of these checks; but if once the convenience of ministers be put into competition with the liberties of the people, and we get into a habit of relying on fair assurances and personal character, instead of examining, with the most scrupulous and jealous care, the merits of each particular case, there is an end of British freedom. If we once admit the principle, that the government must know better with regard to the quantity of power which it wants, than we can possibly do with our limited means of information, and that therefore it is our duty to surrender up our private judgments, we may just as well at the same time surrender up the whole of our constitution. Government is a quarter in which liberty

erty is not nor cannot be very faithfully preserved. If we are wanting to ourselves, and inattentive to our great interests in this respect, it is the height of folly and unreasonableness to expect, that government will attend to them for us. Should the British constitution ultimately lapse into a despotism, as has been prophesied, I shall think, that the country gentlemen of England will have really much more to answer for than the ministers.

To do the country gentlemen justice, however, I should readily acknowledge, that in the partial desertion of their posts as guardians of British freedom, which has already taken place, they have been actuated more by fear than corruption. And the principal reason of this fear was, I conceive, the ignorance and delusions of the common people, and the prospective horrors which were contemplated, if in such a state of mind they should by any revolutionary movement obtain an ascendant.

The circulation of Paine's Rights of Man, it is supposed, has done great mischief among the lower and middling classes of people in this country. This is probably true; but not because man is without rights, or that these rights ought not to be known; but because Mr. Paine

has

has fallen into some fundamental errors respecting the principles of government, and in many important points has shown himself totally unacquainted with the structure of society, and the different moral effects to be expected from the physical difference between this country and America. Mobs of the same description as those collections of people known by this name in Europe could not exist in America. The number of people without property is there, from the physical state of the country, comparatively small; and therefore the civil power, which is to protect property, cannot require the same degree of strength. Mr. Paine very justly observes, that whatever the apparent cause of any riots may be, the real one is always want of happiness; but when he goes on to say, it shows that something is wrong in the system of government, that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved, he falls into the common error of attributing all want of happiness to government. It is evident, that this want of happiness might have existed, and from ignorance might have been the principal cause of the riots, and yet be almost wholly unconnected with any of the proceedings of government. The redundant population of an old state fur-

nishes materials of unhappiness, unknown to such a state as that of America; and if an attempt were to be made to remedy this unhappiness, by distributing the produce of the taxes to the poorer classes of society, according to the plan proposed by Mr. Paine, the evil would be aggravated a hundred fold, and in a very short time no sum that the society could possibly raise would be adequate to the proposed object.

Nothing would so effectually counteract the mischiefs occasioned by Mr. Paine's Rights of Man, as a general knowledge of the real rights of man. What these rights are it is not my business at present to explain; but there is one right which man has generally been thought to possess, which I am confident he neither does nor can possess, a right to subsistence when his labour will not fairly purchase it. Our laws indeed say, that he has this right, and bind the society to furnish employment and food to those, who cannot get them in the regular market; but in so doing they attempt to reverse the laws of nature; and it is in consequence to be expected, not only that they should fail in their object, but that the poor, who were intended to be benefitted, should suffer most cruelly from
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this inhuman deceit which is practised upon them.

The Abbé Raynal has said, that “ Avant toutes les loix sociales l’homme avoit le droit de subsister.” He might with just as much propriety have said, that before the institution of social laws, every man had a right to live a hundred years. Undoubtedly he had then, and has still, a good right to live a hundred years, nay a thousand, *if he can*, without interfering with the right of others to live; but the affair in both cases is principally an affair of power, not of right. Social laws very greatly increase this power, by enabling a much greater number to subsist than could subsist without them, and so far very greatly enlarge *le droit de subsister*; but neither before nor after the institution of social laws could an unlimited number subsist; and before, as well as since, he who ceased to have the power ceased to have the right.

If the great truths on these subjects were more generally circulated, and the lower classes of people could be convinced, that by the laws of nature, independently of any particular institutions, except the great one of property, which is absolutely necessary in order to attain any considerable produce, no person has any

^a Raynal, *Hist. des Indes*, vol. x, f. x, p. 322, 8vo.

claim of *right* on society for subsistence, if his labour will not purchase it, the greatest part of the mischievous declamation on the unjust institutions of society would fall powerless to the ground. The poor are by no means inclined to be visionary. Their distresses are always real, though they are not attributed to the real causes. If these real causes were properly explained to them, and they were taught to know how small a part of their present distress was attributable to government, and how great a part to causes totally unconnected with it, discontent and irritation among the lower classes of people would show themselves much less frequently than at present; and when they did show themselves, would be much less to be dreaded. The efforts of turbulent and discontented men in the middle classes of society might safely be disregarded, if the poor were so far enlightened respecting the real nature of their situation, as to be aware that by aiding them in their schemes of renovation, they would probably be promoting the ambitious views of others, without in any respect benefitting themselves. And the country gentlemen, and men of property in England, might securely return to a wholesome jealousy of the encroachments of power; and
instead

instead of daily sacrificing the liberties of the subject on the altar of public safety, might, without any just apprehension from the people, not only tread back all their late steps, but firmly insist upon those gradual reforms, which the lapse of time and the storms of the political world have rendered necessary, to prevent the gradual destruction of the British constitution.

All improvements in governments must necessarily originate with persons of some education, and these will of course be found among the people of property. Whatever may be said of a few, it is impossible to suppose, that the great mass of the people of property should be really interested in the abuses of government. They merely submit to them from the fear, that an endeavour to remove them might be productive of greater evils. Could we but take away this fear, reform and improvement would proceed with as much facility as the removal of nuisances, or the paving and lighting of the streets. In human life we are continually called upon to submit to a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater; and it is the part of a wise man, to do this readily and cheerfully; but no wise man will submit to any evil, if he can get rid of it without danger. Remove all apprehension from the tyranny or folly of

the people, and the tyranny of government could not stand a moment. It would then appear in its proper deformity, without palliation, without pretext, without protector. Naturally feeble in itself, when it was once stripped naked, and deprived of the support of public opinion and of the great plea of necessity, it would fall without a struggle. Its few interested defenders would hide their heads abashed, and would be ashamed any longer to advocate a cause, for which no human ingenuity could invent a plausible argument.

The most successful supporters of tyranny are without doubt those general declaimers, who attribute the distresses of the poor, and almost all the evils to which society is subject, to human institutions and the iniquity of governments. The falsity of these accusations, and the dreadful consequences that would result from their being generally admitted and acted upon, make it absolutely necessary, that they should at all events be resisted; not only on account of the immediate revolutionary horrors to be expected from a movement of the people acting under such impressions, a consideration which must at all times have very great weight, but on account of the extreme probability, that
such

such a revolution would terminate in a much worse despotism, than that which it had destroyed. On these grounds a genuine friend of freedom, a zealous advocate for the real rights of man, might be found among the defenders of a considerable degree of tyranny. A cause bad in itself might be supported by the good and the virtuous, merely because that which was opposed to it was much worse; and at the moment, it was absolutely necessary to make a choice between the two. Whatever therefore may be the intention of those indiscriminate accusations against governments, their real effect undoubtedly is, to add a weight of talents and principles to the prevailing power, which it never would have received otherwise.

It is a truth, which I trust has been sufficiently proved in the course of this work, that under a government constructed upon the best and purest principles, and executed by men of the highest talents and integrity, the most squalid poverty and wretchedness might universally prevail from an inattention to the prudential check to population. And as this cause of unhappiness has hitherto been so little understood, that the efforts of society have always tended rather to aggravate than to lessen it, we have

the strongest reasons for supposing, that, in all the governments with which we are acquainted, a great part of the misery to be observed among the lower classes of the people arises from this cause.

The inference therefore, which Mr. Paine and others have drawn against governments from the unhappiness of the people, is palpably unfair; and before we give a sanction to such accusations, it is a debt we owe to truth and justice, to ascertain how much of this unhappiness arises from the principle of population, and how much is fairly to be attributed to government. When this distinction has been properly made, and all the vague, indefinite, and false accusations removed, government would remain, as it ought to be, clearly responsible for the rest; and the amount of this would still be such as to make the responsibility very considerable. Though government has but little power in the direct and immediate relief of poverty, yet its indirect influence on the prosperity of its subjects is striking and incontestible. And the reason is, that, though it is comparatively impotent in its efforts to make the food of a country keep pace with an unrestricted increase of population, yet its influence is great in giving the best direction to those checks, which in some form or other

other must necessarily take place. It has clearly appeared in the former part of this work, that the most despotic and worst governed countries, however low they might be in actual population, were uniformly the most populous in proportion to their means of subsistence, and the necessary effect of this state of things must of course be very low wages. In such countries the checks to population arise more from the sickness and mortality consequent on poverty, than from the prudence and foresight which restrain the frequency and universality of early marriages. The checks are more of the positive and less of the preventive kind.

The first grand requisite to the growth of prudential habits is the perfect security of property; and the next perhaps is that respectability and importance, which are given to the lower classes by equal laws, and the possession of some influence in the framing of them. The more excellent therefore is the government, the more does it tend to generate that prudence and elevation of sentiment, by which alone in the present state of our being can poverty be avoided.

It has been sometimes asserted, that the only reason why it is advantageous, that the people should have some share in the government, is that

that a representation of the people tends best to secure the framing of good and equal laws ; but that, if the same object could be attained under a despotism, the same advantage would accrue to the community. If however the representative system, by securing to the lower classes of society a more equal and liberal mode of treatment from their superiors, gives to each individual a greater personal respectability, and a greater fear of personal degradation ; it is evident, that it will powerfully cooperate with the security of property in animating the exertions of industry, and in generating habits of prudence ; and thus more powerfully tend to increase the riches and prosperity of the lower classes of the community, than if the same laws had existed under a despotism.

But though the tendency of a free constitution and a good government to diminish poverty be certain ; yet their effect in this way must necessarily be indirect and slow, and very different from the direct and immediate relief, which the lower classes of people are too frequently in the habit of looking forward to as the consequence of a revolution. This habit of expecting too much, and the irritation occasioned by disappointment, continually give a
wrong

wrong direction to their efforts in favour of liberty, and constantly tend to defeat the accomplishment of those gradual reforms in government, and that slow melioration of the condition of the lower classes of society, which are really attainable.

It is of the very highest importance therefore, to know distinctly what government cannot do, as well as what it can do. If I were called upon to name the cause, which, in my conception, had more than any other contributed to the very slow progress of freedom, so disheartening to every liberal mind, I should say, that it was the confusion that had existed respecting the causes of the unhappiness and discontents which prevail in society; and the advantage which governments had been able to take, and indeed had been compelled to take, of this confusion, to confirm and strengthen their power. I cannot help thinking therefore, that a knowledge generally circulated, that the principal cause of want and unhappiness is only indirectly connected with government, and totally beyond its power directly to remove; and that it depends upon the conduct of the poor themselves; would, instead of giving any advantage to governments,

vernments, give a great additional weight to the popular side of the question, by removing the dangers with which from ignorance it is at present accompanied ; and thus tend, in a very powerful manner, to promote the cause of rational freedom.



CHAP. VII.

Plan of the gradual abolition of the Poor Laws proposed.

IF the principles in the preceding chapters should stand the test of examination, and we should ever feel the obligation of endeavouring to act upon them, the next inquiry would be, in what way we ought practically to proceed. The first grand obstacle, which presents itself in this country, is the system of the poor laws, which has been justly stated to be an evil, in comparison of which the national debt, with all its magnitude of terror, is of little moment.^a The rapidity with which the poor rates have increased of late years presents us indeed with the prospect of such an extraordinary proportion of paupers in the society, as would seem to be incredible in a nation flourishing in arts, agriculture, and commerce, and with a government which has generally been allowed to be the

^a Reports of the Society for bettering the condition of the poor, vol. iii, p. 21.

best, that has hitherto stood the test of experience.^a

Greatly as we may be shocked at such a prospect, and ardently as we may wish to remove it, the evil is now so deeply seated, and the relief given by the poor laws so widely extended, that no man of humanity could venture to propose their immediate abolition. To mitigate their effects however, and stop their future increase, to which, if left to continue upon their present plan, we can see no probable termination, it has been proposed to fix the whole sum to be raised, at its present rate, or any other that might be determined upon; and to make a law, that on no account this sum should be exceeded. The objection to this plan is, that a very large sum would be still to be raised, and a great number of people to be supported; the consequence of which would be, that the poor would not be easily able to distinguish the alteration that had been made. Each individual

^a It has been said, that during the late scarcities half of the population of the country received relief. If the poor's rates continue increasing as rapidly as they have done on the average of the last ten years, how melancholy are our future prospects! The system of the poor laws has been justly stated by the French to be *la plaie politique de l'Angleterre la plus devorante.* (Comité de Mendicité.)

would think, that he had as good a right to be supported when he was in want as any other person; and those who unfortunately chanced to be in distress, when the fixed sum had been collected, would think themselves particularly ill used on being excluded from all assistance, while so many others were enjoying this advantage. If the sum collected were divided among all that were in want, however their numbers might increase, though such a plan would not be so unfair with regard to those who became dependent after the sum had been fixed, it would undoubtedly be very hard upon those who had been in the habit of receiving a more liberal supply, and had done nothing to justify its being taken from them; and in both cases, it would be certainly unjust in the society to undertake the support of the poor, and yet, if their numbers increased, to feed them so sparingly, that they must necessarily die of hunger and disease.

I have reflected much on the subject of the poor laws, and hope therefore that I shall be excused in venturing to suggest a mode of their gradual abolition, to which I confess that at present I can see no material objection. Of this indeed I feel nearly convinced, that, should we ever become sufficiently sensible of the wide-
spreading

spreading tyranny, dependence, indolence, and unhappiness, which they create, as seriously to make an effort to abolish them, we shall be compelled by a sense of justice to adopt the principle, if not the plan, which I shall mention. It seems impossible to get rid of so extensive a system of support, consistently with humanity, without applying ourselves directly to its vital principle, and endeavouring to counteract that deeply-seated cause, which occasions the rapid growth of all such establishments, and invariably renders them inadequate to their object. As a previous step even to any considerable alteration in the present system, which would contract, or stop the increase of the relief to be given, it appears to me, that we are bound in justice and honour formally to disclaim the *right* of the poor to support.

To this end, I should propose a regulation to be made, declaring, that no child born from any marriage, taking place after the expiration of a year from the date of the law; and no illegitimate child born two years from the same date, should ever be entitled to parish assistance. And to give a more general knowledge of this law, and to enforce it more strongly on the minds of the lower classes of people, the clergyman of each

each

each parish should, after the publication of banns, read a short address, stating the strong obligation on every man to support his own children; the impropriety, and even immorality, of marrying without a prospect of being able to do this; the evils which had resulted to the poor themselves, from the attempt which had been made to assist by public institutions in a duty which ought to be exclusively appropriated to parents; and the absolute necessity which had at length appeared of abandoning all such institutions, on account of their producing effects totally opposite to those which were intended.

This would operate as a fair, distinct, and precise notice, which no man could well mistake; and without pressing hard on any particular individuals, would at once throw off the rising generation from that miserable and helpless dependence upon the government and the rich, the moral as well as physical consequences of which are almost incalculable.

After the public notice which I have proposed had been given, and the system of poor laws had ceased with regard to the rising generation, if any man chose to marry, without a prospect of being able to support a family, he should have the most perfect liberty so to do. Though to

marry in this case, is in my opinion clearly an immoral act, yet it is not one which society can justly take upon itself to prevent or punish; because the punishment provided for it by the laws of nature, falls directly and most severely upon the individual who commits the act, and through him, only more remotely and feebly, on the society. When nature will govern and punish for us, it is a very miserable ambition to wish to snatch the rod from her hands, and draw upon ourselves the odium of executioner. To the punishment therefore of nature he should be left, the punishment of want. He has erred in the face of a most clear and precise warning, and can have no just reason to complain of any person but himself, when he feels the consequences of his error. All parish assistance should be denied him: and if the hand of private charity be stretched forth in his relief, the interests of humanity imperiously require, that it should be administered sparingly. He should be taught to know, that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to suffer for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of *right* on society for the smallest portion of food, beyond that which his labour would fairly purchase;

chafe ; and that if he and his family were saved from suffering the extremities of hunger, he would owe it to the pity of some kind benefactor, to whom, therefore, he ought to be bound by the strongest ties of gratitude.

If this system were pursued, we need be under no apprehensions, that the number of persons in extreme want would be beyond the power and the will of the benevolent to supply. The sphere for the exercise of private charity would, I am confident, be less than it is at present; and the only difficulty would be, to restrain the hand of benevolence from assisting those in distress in so indiscriminate a manner as to encourage indolence and want of foresight in others.

With regard to illegitimate children, after the proper notice had been given, they should not be allowed to have any claim to parish assistance, but be left entirely to the support of private charity. If the parents desert their child they ought to be made answerable for the crime. The infant is, comparatively speaking, of little value to the society, as others will immediately supply its place. Its principal value is on account of its being the object of one of the most delightful passions in human nature—

parental affection. But if this value be disregarded by those who are alone in a capacity to feel it, the society cannot be called upon to put itself in their place; and has no further business in its protection, than to punish the crime of desertion or intentional ill-treatment in the persons whose duty it is to provide for it.

At present the child is taken under the protection of the parish,^a and generally dies, at least in London, within the first year. The loss to the society is the same; but the crime is diluted by the number of people concerned, and the death passes as a visitation of Providence, instead of being considered as the necessary consequence of the conduct of its parents, for which they ought to be held responsible to God and to society.

The desertion of both parents, however, is not so common as the desertion of one. When a servant or labouring man has an illegitimate child, his running away is perfectly a matter of course; and it is by no means uncommon for a

^aI fully agree with Sir F. M. Eden, in thinking, that the constant public support which deserted children receive is the cause of their very great numbers in the two most opulent countries of Europe, France and England. *State of the Poor*, vol. i, p. 339.

man with a wife and large family to withdraw into a distant county, and leave them to the parish; indeed I once heard a hard-working good sort of man propose to do this, as the best mode of providing for a wife and six children.^a If the simple fact of these frequent desertions were related in some countries, a strange inference would be drawn against the English character; but the wonder would cease when our public institutions were explained.

By the laws of nature, a child is confided directly and exclusively to the protection of its parents. By the laws of nature, the mother of a child is confided almost as strongly and exclusively to the man who is the father of it. If these ties were suffered to remain in the state in which nature has left them, and the man were convinced that the woman and the child depended solely upon him for support, I scarcely believe, that there are ten men breathing so atrocious as to desert them. But our laws, in opposition to the laws of nature, say,

^a “ That many of the poorer classes of the community
 “ avail themselves of the liberality of the law, and leave their
 “ wives and children on the parish, the reader will find
 “ abundant proof in the subsequent part of this work.” Sir
 F. M. Eden on the State of the Poor, vol. i, p. 339.

that if the parents forsake their child, other persons will undertake to support it; or if the man forsake the woman she shall still meet with protection elsewhere; that is, we take all possible pains to weaken and render null the ties of nature, and then say that men are unnatural. But the fact is, that the society itself, in its body politic, is the unnatural character, for framing laws that thus counteract the laws of nature, and give premiums to the violation of the best and most honourable feelings of the human heart.

It is a common thing in most parishes, when the father of an illegitimate child can be seized, to endeavour to frighten him into marriage by the terrors of a jail; but such a proceeding cannot surely be too strongly reprobated. In the first place, it is a most shallow policy in the parish officers; for if they succeed, the effect upon the present system will generally be, the having three or four children to provide for, instead of one. And in the next place, it is difficult to conceive a more gross and scandalous profanation of a religious ceremony. Those who believe, that the character of a woman is salved by such a forced engagement, or that the moral worth of the man is enhanced by affirm-
ing

ing a lie before God, have, I confess, very different ideas of delicacy and morality, from those which I have been taught to consider as just. If a man deceive a woman into a connexion with him under a promise of marriage, he has undoubtedly been guilty of a most atrocious act, and there are few crimes which merit a more severe punishment; but the last that I should choose is that which will oblige him to affirm another falsehood, which will probably render the woman that he is to be joined to miserable, and will burden the society with a family of paupers.

The obligation on every man to support his children, whether legitimate or illegitimate, is so clear and strong, that it would be just to arm society with any power to enforce it, which would be likely to answer the purpose. But I am inclined to believe, that no exercise of the civil power, however rigorous, would be half so effectual, as a knowledge generally circulated, that children were in future to depend solely for support upon their parents, and would be left only to casual charity if they were deserted.

It may appear to be hard, that a mother and her children, who had been guilty of no particular crime themselves, should suffer for the ill

conduct of the father; but this is one of the invariable laws of nature; and knowing this, we should think twice upon the subject, and be very sure of the ground on which we go, before we presume *systematically* to counteract it.

I have often heard the goodness of the Deity impeached on account of that part of the decalogue in which he declares, that he will visit the sins of the father upon the children; but the objection has not perhaps been sufficiently considered. Without a most complete and fundamental change in the whole constitution of human nature; without making man an angel, or at least something totally different from what he is at present; it seems absolutely necessary, that such a law should prevail. Would it not require a perpetual miracle, which is, perhaps, a contradiction in terms, to prevent children from being affected in their moral and civil condition by the conduct of their parents? What man is there, that has been brought up by his parents, who is not at the present moment enjoying something from their virtues, or suffering something from their vices; who, in his moral character, has not been elevated in some degree, by their prudence, their justice, their benevolence, their temperance, or depressed
by

by the contraries; who in his civil condition, has not been raised, by their reputation, their foresight, their industry, their good fortune, or lowered by their want of character, their imprudence, their indolence, and their adversity? And how much does a knowledge of this transmission of blessings contribute to excite and invigorate virtuous exertion? Proceeding upon this certainty, how ardent and incessant are the efforts of parents to give their children a good education, and to provide for their future situation in the world. If a man could neglect or desert his wife and children without their suffering any injury, how many individuals there are, who, not being very fond of their wives, or being tired of the shackles of matrimony, would withdraw from household cares and difficulties, and resume their liberty and independence as single men! But the consideration, that children may suffer for the faults of their parents, has a strong hold even upon vice; and many who are in such a state of mind, as to disregard the consequences of their habitual course of life, as far as relates to themselves, are yet greatly anxious, that their children should not suffer from their vices and follies. In the moral government of the world, it seems evidently necessary, that the sins of the fathers should be visited

visited upon the children; and if in our overweening vanity we imagine, that we can govern a private society better by endeavouring *systematically* to counteract this law, I am inclined to believe, that we shall find ourselves very greatly mistaken.

If the plan which I have proposed were adopted, the poor's rates in a few years would begin very rapidly to decrease, and in no great length of time would be completely extinguished; and yet, as far as it appears to me at present, no individual would be either deceived or injured, and consequently no person could have a just right to complain.

The abolition of the poor laws however is not of itself sufficient; and the obvious answer to those who lay too much stress upon this system is, to desire them to look at the state of the poor in some other countries, where such laws do not prevail, and to compare it with their condition in England. But this comparison, it must be acknowledged, is in many respects unfair; and would by no means decide the question of the utility or inutility of such a system. England possesses very great natural and political advantages, in which perhaps the countries, that we should in this case compare with

with her, would be found to be palpably deficient. The nature of her soil and climate is such, that those almost universal failures in the crops of grain, which are known in some countries, never occur in England. Her insular situation and extended commerce are peculiarly favourable for importation. Her numerous manufactures employ nearly all the hands that are not engaged in agriculture, and afford the means of a regular distribution of the annual produce of the land and labour to the whole of her inhabitants. But, above all, throughout a very large class of the people, a decided taste for the conveniencies and comforts of life, a strong desire of bettering their condition, that master-spring of public prosperity, and, in consequence, a most laudable spirit of industry and foresight are observed to prevail. These dispositions, so contrary to the hopeless indolence remarked in despotic countries, are generated by the constitution of the English government, and the excellence of its laws, which secure to every individual the produce of his industry. When, therefore, on a comparison with other countries, England appears to have the advantage in the state of her poor, the superiority is entirely to be attributed to these favourable circumstances,
and

and not to the poor laws. A woman with one bad feature may greatly excel in beauty some other, who may have this individual feature tolerably good; but it would be rather strange to assert, in consequence, that the superior beauty of the former was occasioned by this particular deformity. The poor laws have constantly tended to counteract the natural and acquired advantages of this country. Fortunately these advantages have been so considerable, that though weakened they could not be overcome; and to these advantages, together with the checks to marriage, which the laws themselves create, it is owing that England has been able to bear up so long against this pernicious system. Probably there is not any other country in the world, except perhaps Holland before the revolution, which could have acted upon it so completely, for the same period of time, without utter ruin.

It has been proposed by some to establish poor laws in Ireland; but from the wretched and degraded state of the common people, and the total want of that decent pride, which in England prevents so many from having recourse to parish assistance, there is little reason to doubt, that, on the establishment of such laws, the whole

whole of the landed property would very soon be absorbed, or the system be given up in despair.

In Sweden, from the dearths which are not unfrequent, owing to the general failure of crops in an unpropitious climate, and the impossibility of great importations in a poor country, an attempt to establish a system of parochial relief such as that in England, if it were not speedily abandoned from the physical impossibility of executing it, would level the property of the kingdom from one end to the other, and convulse the social system in such a manner, as absolutely to prevent it from recovering its former state on the return of plenty.

Even in France, with all her advantages of situation and climate, the tendency to population is so great, and the want of foresight among the lower classes of the people so conspicuous, that if poor laws were established the landed property would soon sink under the burden, and the wretchedness of the people at the same time be increased. On these considerations the committee *de Mendicité*, at the beginning of the revolution, very properly and judiciously rejected the establishment of such a system, which had been proposed.

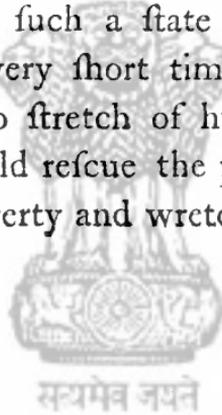
The exception of Holland, if it were an exception, would arise from very particular circumstances—her extensive foreign trade, and her numerous colonial emigrations, compared with the smallness of her territory; and the extreme unhealthiness of a great part of the country, which occasions a much greater average mortality than is common in other states. These, I conceive, were the unobserved causes, which principally contributed to render Holland so famous for her management of her poor, and able to employ and support all who applied for relief.

No part of Germany is sufficiently rich to support an extensive system of parochial relief; but I am inclined to think, that from the absence of it the lower classes of the people, in some parts of Germany, are in a better situation than those of the same class in England. In Switzerland, for the same reason, their condition, before the late troubles, was perhaps universally superior. And in a journey through the duchies of Holstein and Sleswick, belonging to Denmark, the houses of the lower classes of people appeared to me to be neater and better, and in general there were fewer indications of poverty and wretchedness among them, than among the same ranks in this country.

Even

Even in Norway, notwithstanding the disadvantage of a severe and uncertain climate, from the little that I saw in a few weeks residence in the country, and the information that I could collect from others, I am inclined to think, that the poor were, on the average, better off than in England. Their houses and clothing were superior, and though they had no white bread, they had much more meat, fish, and milk, than our labourers; and I particularly remarked, that the farmers' boys were much stouter and healthier looking lads than those of the same description in England. This degree of happiness, superior to what could be expected from the soil and climate, arises almost exclusively from the degree in which the preventive check to population operates; and the establishment of a system of poor laws, which would destroy this check, would at once sink the lower classes of the people into a state of the most miserable poverty and wretchedness; would diminish their industry, and consequently the produce of the land and labour of the country; would weaken the resources of ingenuity in times of scarcity; and ultimately involve the country in all the horrors of continual famines.

If, as in Ireland, and in Spain, and many of the southern countries, the people be in so degraded a state, as to propagate their species like brutes, totally regardless of consequences, it matters little whether they have poor laws or not. Misery in all its various forms must be the predominant check to their increase. Poor laws, indeed, will always tend to aggravate the evil, by diminishing the general resources of the country, and in such a state of things could exist only for a very short time; but with or without them, no stretch of human ingenuity and exertion could rescue the people from the most extreme poverty and wretchedness.



CHAP. VIII.

Of the modes of correcting the prevailing opinions on Population.

IT is not enough to abolish all the positive institutions which encourage population; but we must endeavour at the same time, to correct the prevailing opinions, which have the same, or perhaps even a more powerful effect. This must necessarily be a work of time; and can only be done by circulating juster notions on these subjects, in writings and conversation; and by endeavouring to impress as strongly as possible on the public mind, that it is not the duty of man simply to propagate his species, but to propagate virtue and happiness; and that, if he has not a tolerably fair prospect of doing this, he is by no means called upon to leave descendants.

Among the higher ranks of society, we have not much reason to apprehend the too great frequency of marriage. Though the circulation of juster notions on this subject might, even in this part of the community, do much good,

and prevent many unhappy marriages; yet whether we make particular exertions for this purpose, or not, we may rest assured, that the degree of proper pride and spirit of independence almost invariably connected with education and a certain rank in life will secure the operation of the prudential check to marriage to a considerable extent. All that the society can reasonably require of its members is, that they should not have families without being able to support them. This may be fairly enjoined as a positive duty. Every restraint beyond this must be considered as a matter of choice and taste; but from what we already know of the habits which prevail among the higher ranks of life, we have reason to think that little more is wanted to attain the object required, than to award a greater degree of respect and of personal liberty to single women, and to place them nearer upon a level with married women; a change, which independently of any particular purpose in view, the plainest principles of equity seem to demand.

If among the higher classes of society, the object of securing the operation of the prudential check to marriage to a sufficient degree appear to be attainable without much difficulty,
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the obvious mode of proceeding with the lower classes of society, where the point is of the principal importance, is to endeavour to infuse into them a portion of that knowledge and foresight, which so much facilitates the attainment of this object in the educated part of the community.

The fairest chance of accomplishing this end would probably be by the establishment of a system of parochial education upon a plan similar to that proposed by Dr Smith.* In addition to the usual subjects of instruction, and those which he has mentioned, I should be disposed to lay considerable stress on the frequent explanation of the real state of the lower classes of society, as affected by the principle of population, and their consequent dependence on themselves for the chief part of their happiness or misery. It would be by no means necessary or proper in these explanations, to underrate in the smallest degree, the desirableness of marriage. It should always be represented as, what it really is, a state peculiarly suited to the nature of man, and calculated greatly to advance his happiness and remove the temptations to vice; but like property or any other desirable

* Wealth of Nations, vol. iii, b. v, c. i, p. 187.

object, its advantages should be shown to be unattainable, except under certain conditions. And a strong conviction in a young man of the desirableness of marriage, with a conviction at the same time, that the power of supporting a family was the only condition which would enable him really to enjoy its blessings, would be the most effectual motive imaginable to industry and sobriety before marriage, and would powerfully urge him to save that superfluity of income which single labourers necessarily possess, for the accomplishment of a rational and desirable object, instead of dissipating it, as is now usually done, in idleness and vice.

If in the course of time a few of the simplest principles of political economy could be added to the instructions given in these schools, the benefit to society would be almost incalculable.^a In some conversations with labouring men,

^a Dr. Smith proposes, that the elementary parts of geometry and mechanics should be taught in these parish schools; and I cannot help thinking, that the common principles by which markets are regulated might be made sufficiently clear, to be of considerable use. It is certainly a subject that, as it interests the lower classes of people nearly, would be likely to attract their attention. At the same time it must be confessed, that it is impossible to be in any degree sanguine on this point, recollecting

men, during the late scarcities, I confess that I was to the last degree disheartened, at observing their inveterate prejudices on the subject of grain; and I felt very strongly the almost absolute incompatibility of a government really free, with such a degree of ignorance. The delusions are of such a nature, that if acted upon, they must at all events be repressed by force;

collecting how very ignorant in general the educated part of the community is of these principles. If, however, political economy cannot be taught to the common people, I really think, that it ought to form a branch of a university education. Scotland has set us an example in this respect, which we ought not to be so slow to imitate. It is of the very utmost importance, that the gentlemen of the country, and particularly the clergy, should not from ignorance aggravate the evils of scarcity, every time that it unfortunately occurs. During the late dearths half of the gentlemen and clergymen in the kingdom richly deserved to have been prosecuted for sedition. After inflaming the minds of the common people against the farmers and corn-dealers, by the manner in which they talked of them, or preached about them, it was but a feeble antidote to the poison which they had infused, coldly to observe, that, however the poor might be oppressed or cheated, it was their duty to keep the peace. It was little better than Antony's repeated declaration, that the conspirators were all honourable men; which did not save either their houses or their persons from the attacks of the mob. Political economy is perhaps the only science of which it may be said, that the ignorance of it is not merely a deprivation of good, but produces great positive evil.

and it is extremely difficult to give such a power to the government as will be sufficient at all times for this purpose, without the risk of its being employed improperly, and endangering the liberty of the subject.

We have lavished immense sums on the poor, which we have every reason to think, have constantly tended to aggravate their misery. But in their education, and in the circulation of those important political truths that most nearly concern them, which are perhaps the only means in our power of really raising their condition, and of making them happier men and more peaceable subjects, we have been miserably deficient. It is surely a great national disgrace, that the education of the lower classes of people in England should be left merely to a few Sunday schools, supported by a subscription from individuals, who of course can give to the course of instruction in them any kind of bias which they please. And even the improvement of Sunday schools, (for objectionable as they are in some points of view, and imperfect in all, I cannot but consider them as an improvement) is of very late date.

The arguments which have been urged against instructing the people appear to me to be

be not only illiberal, but to the last degree feeble; and they ought, on the contrary, to be extremely forcible, and to be supported by the most obvious and striking necessity, to warrant us in withholding the means of raising the condition of the lower classes of people, when they are in our power. Those who will not listen to any answer to these arguments drawn from theory, cannot, I think, refuse the testimony of experience; and I would ask, whether the advantage of superior instruction, which the lower classes of people in Scotland are known to possess, has appeared to have any tendency towards creating a spirit of tumult and discontent amongst them. And yet from the natural inferiority of its soil and climate, the pressure of want is more constant, and the dearths are not only more frequent, but more dreadful than in England. In the case of Scotland, the knowledge circulated among the common people, though not sufficient essentially to better their condition by increasing, in an adequate degree, their habits of prudence and foresight, has yet the effect of making them bear with patience the evils which they suffer, from being aware of the folly and inefficacy of turbulence. The quiet and peaceable habits of the instructed

Scotch peasant, compared with the turbulent disposition of the ignorant Irishman, ought not to be without effect upon every impartial reasoner.

The principal argument that I have heard advanced against a system of national education in England is, that the common people would be put in a capacity to read such works as those of Paine, and that the consequences would probably be fatal to government. But on this subject I agree most cordially with Dr. Smith^a in thinking, that an instructed and well-informed people would be much less likely to be led away by inflammatory writings, and would be much better able to detect the false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues, than an ignorant people. One or two readers in a parish are sufficient to circulate any quantity of sedition; and if these be gained to the democratic side, they will probably have the power of doing much more mischief, by selecting the passages best suited to their hearers, and choosing the moments when their oratory is likely to have the most effect, than if each individual in the parish had been in a capacity to read and judge of the whole work himself;

^a Wealth of Nations, vol. iii, b. v, c. i, p. 192.

and at the same time to read and judge of the opposing arguments, which we may suppose would also reach him.

But in addition to this, a double weight would undoubtedly be added to the observation of Dr. Smith, if these schools were made the means of instructing the people in the real nature of their situation; if they were taught, what is really true, that without an increase of their own industry and prudence no change of government could essentially better their condition; that, though they might get rid of some particular grievance, yet in the great point of supporting their families they would be but little, or perhaps not at all benefitted; that a revolution would not alter in their favour the proportion of the supply of labour to the demand, or the quantity of food to the number of the consumers; and that if the supply of labour were greater than the demand, and the demand for food greater than the supply, they might suffer the utmost severity of want, under the freest, the most perfect, and best executed government, that the human imagination could conceive.

A knowledge of these truths so obviously tends to promote peace and quietness, to weaken
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the effect of inflammatory writings, and to prevent all unreasonable and ill-directed opposition to the constituted authorities, that those who would still object to the instruction of the people may fairly be suspected of a wish to encourage their ignorance, as a pretext for tyranny, and an opportunity of increasing the power and the influence of the executive government.

Besides explaining the real situation of the lower classes of society, as depending principally upon themselves for their happiness or misery, the parochial schools would, by early instruction and the judicious distribution of rewards, have the fairest chance of training up the rising generation in habits of sobriety, industry, independence, and prudence, and in a proper discharge of their religious duties; which would raise them from their present degraded state, and approximate them, in some degree, to the middle classes of society, whose habits, generally speaking, are certainly superior.

In most countries among the lower classes of people, there appears to be something like a standard of wretchedness, a point below which they will not continue to marry and propagate their species. This standard is different in different countries, and is formed by various concurring circumstances

cumstances of soil, climate, government, degree of knowledge, and civilization, &c. The principal circumstances which contribute to raise it are liberty, security of property, the spread of knowledge, and a taste for the conveniences and the comforts of life. Those which contribute principally to lower it are despotism and ignorance.

In an attempt to better the condition of the lower classes of society, our object should be to raise this standard as high as possible, by cultivating a spirit of independence, a decent pride, and a taste for cleanliness and comfort. The effect of a good government in increasing the prudential habits and personal respectability of the lower classes of society has already been insisted on; but certainly this effect will always be incomplete without a good system of education, and indeed it may be said, that no government can approach to perfection, that does not provide for the instruction of the people. The benefits derived from education are among those, which may be enjoyed without restriction of numbers; and as it is in the power of governments to confer these benefits, it is undoubtedly their duty to do it.

CHAP. IX.

Of the direction of our charity.

AN important and interesting inquiry yet remains, relating to the mode of directing our private charity, so as not to interfere with the great object in view, of meliorating the condition of the lower classes of people, by preventing the population from pressing too hard against the limits of the means of subsistence.

The emotion which prompts us to relieve our fellow-creatures in distress is, like all our other natural passions, general, and in some degree indiscriminate and blind. Our feelings of compassion may be worked up to a higher pitch by a well-wrought scene in a play, or a fictitious tale in a novel, than by almost any events in real life: and if among ten petitioners we were to listen only to the first impulses of our feelings, without making further inquiries, we should undoubtedly give our assistance to the best actor of the party. It is evident therefore, that
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the impulse of benevolence, like the impulses of love, of anger, of ambition, the desire of eating and drinking, or any other of our natural propensities, must be regulated by experience, and frequently brought to the test of utility, or it will defeat its intended purpose.

The apparent object of the passion between the sexes is the continuation of the species, and the formation of such an intimate union of views and interests between two persons, as will best promote their happiness, and at the same time secure the proper degree of attention to the helplessness of infancy and the education of the rising generation; but if every man were to obey at all times the impulses of nature in the gratification of this passion, without regard to consequences, the principal part of these important objects would not be attained, and even the continuation of the species might be defeated by a promiscuous intercourse.

The apparent end of the impulse of benevolence is, to draw the whole human race together, but more particularly that part of it which is of our own nation and kindred, in the bonds of brotherly love; and by giving men an interest in the happiness and misery of their fellow-creatures, to prompt them, as they have power,

to mitigate the partial evils arising from general laws, and thus to increase the sum of human happiness; but if our benevolence be indiscriminate, and the degree of apparent distress be made the sole measure of our liberality, it is evident, that it will be exercised almost exclusively upon common beggars, while modest unobtrusive merit, struggling with unavoidable difficulties, yet still maintaining some slight appearances of decency and cleanliness, will be totally neglected. We shall raise the worthless above the worthy; we shall encourage indolence and check industry; and in the most marked manner subtract from the sum of human happiness.

Our experience has indeed informed us, that the impulse of benevolence is not so strong as the passion between the sexes, and that generally speaking, there is much less danger to be apprehended from the indulgence of the former than of the latter; but independently of this experience, and of the moral codes founded upon it, a youth of eighteen would be as completely justified in indulging the sexual passion with every object capable of exciting it, as in following indiscriminately every impulse of his benevolence. They are both natural passions, which are excited

cited by their appropriate objects, and to the gratification of which we are prompted by the pleasurable sensations which accompany them. As animals, or till we know their consequences, our only business is to follow these dictates of nature; but as reasonable beings, we are under the strongest obligations to attend to their consequences; and if they be evil to ourselves or others, we may justly consider it as an indication, that such a mode of indulging these passions is not suited to our state, or conformable to the will of God. As moral agents therefore, it is clearly our duty to restrain their indulgence in these particular directions; and by thus carefully examining the consequences of our natural passions, and frequently bringing them to the test of utility, gradually to acquire a habit of gratifying them only in that way, which, being unattended with evil, will clearly add to the sum of human happiness, and fulfil the apparent purpose of the Creator.

Though utility therefore can never be the immediate excitement to the gratification of any passion, it is the test by which alone we can know, whether it ought or ought not to be indulged; and is therefore the surest foundation of all morality, which can be collected from
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the light of nature. All the moral codes, which have inculcated the subjection of the passions to reason, have been, as I conceive, really built upon this foundation, whether the promulgators of them were aware of it or not.

I remind the reader of these truths, in order to apply them to the habitual direction of our charity; and if we keep the criterion of utility constantly in view, we may find ample room for the exercise of our benevolence, without interfering with the great purpose, which we have to accomplish.

One of the most valuable parts of charity is its effect upon the giver. It is more blessed to give, than to receive. Supposing it to be allowed, that the exercise of our benevolence in acts of charity is not, upon the whole, really beneficial to the poor; yet we could never sanction any endeavour to extinguish an impulse, the proper gratification of which has so evident a tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. But it is particularly satisfactory and pleasing to find, that the mode of exercising our charity, which, when brought to the test of utility, will appear to be most beneficial to the poor, is precisely that, which will have the best and most improving effect on the mind of the donor.

The quality of charity, like that of mercy,

“ is not strained ;

“ It droppeth as the gentle rain from Heav'n

“ Upon the earth beneath.”

The immense sums distributed to the poor in this country, by the parochial laws, are improperly called charity. They want its most distinguishing attribute ; and, as it might be expected from an attempt to force that which loses its essence the moment that it ceases to be voluntary, their effects upon those from whom they are collected are as prejudicial as on those to whom they are distributed. On the side of the receivers of this mis-called charity, instead of real relief, we find accumulated distress and more extended poverty ; on the side of the givers, instead of pleasurable sensations, unceasing discontent and irritation.

In the great charitable institutions supported by voluntary contributions, some of which are certainly of a prejudicial tendency, the subscriptions, I am inclined to fear, are sometimes given grudgingly, and rather because they are expected by the world from certain stations and certain fortunes, than because they are prompted by motives of genuine benevolence ; and as the greater part of the subscribers do not interest themselves in the management of the funds, or

in the fate of the particular objects relieved, it is not to be expected, that this kind of charity should have any strikingly beneficial influence on the minds of the majority who exercise it.

Even in the relief of common beggars, we shall find, that we are often as much influenced by the desire of getting rid of the importunities of a disgusting object, as by the pleasure of relieving it. We wish that it had not fallen in our way, rather than rejoice in the opportunity given us of assisting a fellow-creature. We feel a painful emotion at the sight of so much apparent misery; but the pittance we give does not relieve it. We know that it is totally inadequate to produce any essential effect. We know besides, that we shall be addressed in the same manner at the corner of the next street; and we know that we are liable to the grossest impositions. We hurry therefore sometimes by them, and shut our ears to their importunate demands. We give no more than we can help giving without doing actual violence to our feelings. Our charity is in some degree forced; and, like forced charity, it leaves no satisfactory impression on the mind, and cannot therefore have any very beneficial and improving effect on the heart and affections.

But it is far otherwise with that voluntary
and

and active charity, which makes itself acquainted with the objects which it relieves ; which seems to feel, and to be proud of the bond that unites the rich with the poor ; which enters into their houses, informs itself not only of their wants, but of their habits and dispositions ; checks the hopes of clamorous and obtrusive poverty, with no other recommendation but rags ; and encourages, with adequate relief, the silent and retiring sufferer, labouring under unmerited difficulties. This mode of exercising our charity presents a very different picture from that of any other ; and its contrast with the common mode of parish relief cannot be better described than in the words of Mr. Townsend, in the conclusion of his admirable dissertation on the Poor Laws.

“ Nothing in nature can be more disgusting
 “ than a parish pay-table, attendant upon which,
 “ in the same objects of misery, are too often
 “ found combined, snuff, gin, rags, vermin, in-
 “ solence, and abusive language : nor in nature
 “ can any thing be more beautiful than the
 “ mild complacency of benevolence hastening
 “ to the humble cottage to relieve the wants
 “ of industry and virtue, to feed the hungry,
 “ to clothe the naked, and to soothe the sor-
 “ rows of the widow with her tender orphans ;
 “ nothing

“ nothing can be more pleasing, unless it be
“ their sparkling eyes, their bursting tears, and
“ their uplifted hands, the artless expressions of
“ unfeigned gratitude for unexpected favours.
“ Such scenes will frequently occur, whenever
“ men shall have power to dispose of their own
“ property.”

I conceive it to be almost impossible, that any person could be much engaged in such scenes without daily making advances in virtue. No exercise of our affections can have a more evident tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. It is almost exclusively this species of charity, that blesteth him that gives; and, in a general view, it is almost exclusively this species of charity, which blesteth him that takes; at least it may be asserted, that there is hardly any other mode of exercising our charity, in which large sums can be distributed, without a greater chance of producing evil than good.

The discretionary power of giving or withholding relief, which is, to a certain extent, vested in parish officers and justices, is of a very different nature, and will have a very different effect, from the discrimination which may be exercised by voluntary charity. Every man in this country, under certain circumstances,

stances, is entitled by law to parish assistance; and unless his disqualification be clearly proved, has a right to complain if it be withheld. The inquiries necessary to settle this point, and the extent of the relief to be granted, too often produce evasion and lying on the part of the petitioner, and afford an opening to partiality and oppression in the overseer. If the proposed relief be given, it is of course received with unthankfulness; and if it be denied, the party generally thinks himself severely aggrieved, and feels resentment and indignation at his treatment

In the distribution of voluntary charity, nothing of this kind can take place. The person who receives it is made the proper subject of the pleasurable sensation of gratitude; and those who do not receive it cannot possibly conceive themselves in the slightest degree injured. Every man has a right to do what he will with his own, and cannot, in justice, be called upon to render a reason why he gives in the one case, and abstains from it in the other. This kind of despotic power, essential to voluntary charity, gives the greatest facility to the selection of worthy objects of relief, without being accompanied by any ill consequences; and has further

a most beneficial effect from the degree of uncertainty, which must necessarily be attached to it. It is in the highest degree important to the general happiness of the poor, that no man should look to charity as a fund, on which he may confidently depend. He should be taught that his own exertions, his own industry and foresight, were his only just ground of dependence; that if these failed, assistance in his distresses could only be the subject of rational hope; and that even the foundation of this hope must be in his own good conduct, and the consciousness that he had not involved himself in these difficulties by his indolence or imprudence.

That in the distribution of our charity we are under a strong moral obligation to inculcate this lesson on the poor by a proper discrimination, is a truth of which I cannot feel a doubt. If all could be completely relieved, and poverty banished from the country, even at the expense of three fourths of the fortunes of the rich, I would be the last to say a single syllable against relieving all, and making the degree of distress alone the measure of our bounty. But as experience has proved, I believe without a single exception, that poverty and misery have always increased in proportion to the quantity of indiscriminate

criminate charity, are we not bound to infer, reasoning as we usually do from the laws of nature, that it is an intimation that such a mode of distribution is not the proper office of benevolence ?

The laws of nature say, with St. Paul, " If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." They also say, that he is not rashly to trust to Providence. They appear indeed to be constant and uniform for the express purpose of telling him what he is to trust to, and that, if he marry without being able to support a family, he must expect severe want. These intimations appear from the constitution of human nature to be absolutely necessary, and to have a strikingly beneficial tendency. If in the direction either of our public or our private charity we say, that though a man will not work, yet he shall eat; and though he marry without being able to support a family, yet his family shall be supported : it is evident, that we do not merely endeavour to mitigate the partial evils arising from general laws, but regularly and systematically to counteract the obviously beneficial effects of these general laws themselves. And we cannot easily conceive, that the Deity should implant

any passion in the human breast for such a purpose.

In the great course of human events, the best-founded expectations will sometimes be disappointed; and industry, prudence, and virtue, not only fail of their just reward, but be involved in unmerited calamities. Those who are thus suffering in spite of the best-directed endeavours to avoid it, and from causes which they could not be expected to foresee, are the genuine objects of charity. In relieving these we exercise the appropriate office of benevolence, that of mitigating the partial evils arising from general laws; and in this direction of our charity therefore we need not apprehend any ill consequences. Such objects ought to be relieved, according to our means, liberally and adequately, even though the worthless were starving,

When indeed this first claim on our benevolence was satisfied, we might then turn our attention to the idle and improvident; but the interests of human happiness most clearly require, that the relief which we afford them should be scanty. We may perhaps take upon ourselves, with great caution, to mitigate

tigate the punishments which they are suffering from the laws of nature, but on no account to remove them entirely. They are deservedly at the bottom in the scale of society; and if we raise them from this situation, we not only palpably defeat the end of benevolence, but commit a most glaring injustice to those who are above them. They should on no account be enabled to command so much of the necessaries of life, as can be obtained by the worst-paid common labour. The brownest bread, with the coarsest and scantiest apparel, is the utmost which they should have the means of purchasing.

It is evident, that these reasonings do not apply to those cases of urgent distress arising from disastrous accidents, unconnected with habits of indolence and improvidence. If a man break a leg or an arm, we are not to stop to inquire into his moral character, before we lend him our assistance; but in this case we are perfectly consistent, and the touchstone of utility completely justifies our conduct. By affording the most indiscriminate assistance in this way, we are in little danger of encouraging people to break their arms and legs. According to the touchstone of utility, the high approbation
which

which Christ gave to the conduct of the good Samaritan, who followed the immediate impulse of his benevolence in relieving a stranger in the urgent distress of an accident, does not, in the smallest degree, contradict the expression of St. Paul, "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat."

We are not however, in any case, to lose a present opportunity of doing good, from the mere supposition that we may possibly meet with a worthier object. In all doubtful cases, it may safely be laid down as our duty to follow the natural impulse of our benevolence; but when, in fulfilling our obligations as reasonable beings to attend to the consequences of our actions, we have, from our own experience and that of others, drawn the conclusion, that the exercise of our benevolence in one mode is prejudicial, and in another is beneficial in its effects, we are certainly bound, as moral agents, to check our natural propensities in the one direction, and to encourage them and acquire the habits of exercising them in the other.

CHAP. X.

Different plans of improving the condition of the Poor considered.

IN the distribution of our charity, or in any efforts which we may make to better the condition of the lower classes of society, there is another point relating to the main argument of this work, to which we must be particularly attentive. We must on no account do any thing, which tends directly to encourage marriage, or to remove, in any regular and systematic manner, that inequality of circumstances, which ought always to exist between the single man and the man with a family. The writers who have best understood the principle of population appear to me all to have fallen into very important errors on this point.

Sir James Steuart, who is fully aware of what he calls vicious procreation, and of the misery that attends a redundant population, recommends, notwithstanding, the general establishment of foundling hospitals; the taking of children under certain circumstances from their
 parents,

parents, and supporting them at the expense of the state; and particularly laments the inequality of condition between the married and single man, so ill-proportioned to their respective wants.^a He forgets, in these instances, that if, without the encouragement to multiplication, of foundling hospitals, or of public support for the children of some married persons, and under the discouragement of great pecuniary disadvantages on the side of the married man, population be still redundant, which is evinced by the inability of the poor to maintain all their children; it is a clear proof, that the funds destined for the maintenance of labour cannot properly support a greater population; and that, if further encouragements to multiplication be given and discouragements removed, the result must be, an increase somewhere or other of that vicious procreation, which he so justly reprobates.

Mr. Townsend, who in his dissertation on the Poor Laws has treated this subject with great skill and perspicuity, appears to me to conclude with a proposal, which violates the principles on which he had reasoned so well. He wishes to make the benefit clubs, or friendly

^aPolitical Economy, vol. i, b. i, c. xiii.

societies, which are now voluntarily established in many parishes, compulsory and universal; and proposes as a regulation, that an unmarried man should pay a fourth part of his wages, and a married man with four children, not more than a thirtieth part.^a

I must first remark, that the moment these subscriptions are made compulsory, they will necessarily operate exactly like a direct tax upon labour, which, as Dr. Smith justly states, will always be paid, and in a more expensive manner, by the consumer. The landed interest therefore would receive no relief from this plan, but would pay the same sum as at present, only in the advanced price of labour and of commodities, instead of in the parish rates. A compulsory subscription of this kind would have almost all the ill effects of the present system of relief, and though altered in name would still possess the essential spirit of the poor laws.

Dean Tucker, in some remarks on a plan of the same kind, proposed by Mr. Pew, observed, that after much talk and reflection on the subject, he had come to the conclusion, that they must be voluntary associations, and not compulsory assemblies. A voluntary subscription is

Dissertation on the Poor Laws, p. 89, 2d. edit. 1787.

like a tax upon a luxury, and does not necessarily raise the price of labour.

It should be recollected also, that in a voluntary association of a small extent, over which each individual member can exercise a superintendence, it is highly probable, that the original agreements will all be strictly fulfilled, or if they be not, every man may at least have the redress of withdrawing himself from the club. But in an universal compulsory subscription, which must necessarily become a national concern, there would be no security whatever for the fulfilment of the original agreements; and when the funds failed, which they certainly would do, when all the idle and dissolute were included, instead of some of the most industrious and provident, as at present, a larger subscription would probably be demanded, and no man would have the right to refuse it. The evil would thus go on increasing as the poor rates do now. If indeed the assistance given were always specific, and on no account to be increased, as in the present voluntary associations, this would certainly be a striking advantage; but the same advantage might be completely attained by a similar distribution of the sums collected by the parish rates. On the whole
therefore,

therefore, it appears to me, that, if the friendly societies were made universal and compulsory, it would be merely a different mode of collecting parish rates; and any particular mode of distribution might be as well adopted upon one system as upon the other.

With regard to the proposal of making single men pay a fourth part of their earnings weekly, and married men with families only a thirtieth part, it would evidently operate as a heavy fine upon bachelors, and a high bounty upon children; and is therefore directly adverse to the general spirit, in which Mr. Townsend's excellent dissertation is written. Before he introduces this proposal, he lays it down as a general principle, that no system for the relief of the poor can be good, which does not regulate population by the demand for labour;^a but this proposal clearly tends to encourage population without any reference to the demand for labour, and punishes a young man for his prudence in refraining from marriage, at a time perhaps, when this demand is so small, that the wages of labour are totally inadequate to the support of a family. I should be averse to any compulsory system whatever for the poor; but certainly if

^a P. 84.

single men were compelled to pay a contribution for the future contingencies of the married state, they ought in justice to receive a benefit proportioned to the period of their privation; and the man who had contributed a fourth of his earnings for merely one year ought not to be put upon a level with him, who had contributed this proportion for ten years.

Mr. Arthur Young, in most of his works, appears clearly to understand the principle of population, and is fully aware of the evils, which must necessarily result from an increase of people beyond the demand for labour and the means of comfortable subsistence. In his tour through France he has particularly laboured this point, and shown most forcibly the misery, which results in that country from the excess of population occasioned by the too great division of property. Such an increase he justly calls merely a multiplication of wretchedness. “ Couples marry and procreate on the idea, “ not the reality, of a maintenance; they increase beyond the demand of towns and “ manufactures; and the consequence is, distress, and numbers dying of diseases arising “ from insufficient nourishment.”

* Travels in France, vol. i, c. xii, p. 408.

In another place he quotes a very sensible passage from the report of the committee of mendicity, which, alluding to the evils of overpopulation, concludes thus, “ Il faudroit enfin
“ necessairement que le prix de travail baiffat
“ par la plus grand concurrence de travailleurs,
“ d’ou resulteroit un indigence complete pour
“ ceux qui ne trouveroient pas de travail, et
“ une subsistence incomplete pour ceux mêmes
“ auxquels il ne seroit pas refusé.” And in remarking upon this passage, he observes,
“ France itself affords an irrefragable proof of
“ the truth of these sentiments; for I am
“ clearly of opinion, from the observations I
“ made in every province of the kingdom,
“ that her population is so much beyond the
“ proportion of her industry and labour, that
“ she would be much more powerful and in-
“ finitely more flourishing, if she had five or
“ six millions less of inhabitants. From her
“ too great population she presents in every
“ quarter such spectacles of wretchedness, as
“ are absolutely inconsistent with that degree
“ of national felicity, which she was capable of
“ attaining, even under the old government.
“ A traveller much less attentive than I was to
“ objects of this kind must see at every turn
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“ most unequivocal signs of distress. That these
 “ should exist, no one can wonder, who con-
 “ siders the price of labour and of provisions,
 “ and the misery into which a small rise in the
 “ price of wheat throws the lower classes.”

“ If you would see,” he says, “ a district
 “ with as little distress in it as is consistent
 “ with the political system of the old govern-
 “ ment of France, you must assuredly go where
 “ there are no little proprietors at all. You must
 “ visit the great farms in Beauce, Picardy, part
 “ of Normandy, and Artois, and there you will
 “ find no more population than what is regu-
 “ larly employed and regularly paid; and if in
 “ such districts you should, contrary to this
 “ rule, meet with much distress, it is twenty to
 “ one but that it is in a parish which has some
 “ commons, which tempt the poor to have
 “ cattle—to have property—and in consequence
 “ misery. When you are engaged in this po-
 “ litical tour, finish it by seeing England, and
 “ I will show you a set of peasants well clothed,
 “ well nourished, tolerably drunken from super-
 “ fluity, well lodged, and at their ease; and yet
 “ amongst them, not one in a thousand has
 “ either land or cattle.”^b A little further on,

^a Travels in France vol i, c. xvii, p. 469.

^b Id. p. 471.
 alluding

alluding to encouragements to marriage, he says of France; “ the predominant evil of the kingdom is the having so great a population, that she can neither employ, nor feed it; why then encourage marriage? would you breed more people, because you have more already than you know what to do with? You have so great a competition for food, that your people are starving or in misery; and you would encourage the production of more, to increase that competition. It may almost be questioned, whether the contrary policy ought not to be embraced; whether difficulties should not be laid on the marriage of those, who cannot make it appear, that they have the prospect of maintaining the children that shall be the fruit of it? But why encourage marriages, which are sure to take place in all situations, in which they ought to take place? There is no instance to be found of plenty of regular employment being first established, where marriages have not followed in a proportionate degree. The policy therefore, at best, is useless, and may be pernicious.”

After having once so clearly understood the principle of population, as to express these and

many other sentiments on the subject, equally just and important, it is not a little surprising to find Mr. Young in a pamphlet, entitled, *The Question of Scarcity plainly stated, and Remedies considered*, (published in 1800), observing, that

“ the means, which would of all others perhaps
 “ tend most surely to prevent future scarcities
 “ so oppressive to the poor as the present,
 “ would be to secure to every country labourer
 “ in the kingdom, that has three children and
 “ upwards, half an acre of land for potatoes;
 “ and grafs enough to feed one or two cows.^a
 “ * * * * If each had his ample potato ground
 “ and a cow, the price of wheat would be of
 “ little more consequence to them, than it is
 “ to their brethren in Ireland.”

“ Every one admits the system to be good,
 “ but the question is how to enforce it.”

I was by no means aware, that the excellence of the system had been so generally admitted. For myself I strongly protest against being included in the general term of *every one*, as I should consider the adoption of this system, as the most cruel and fatal blow to the happiness of the lower classes of people in this country, that they had ever received.

^a P. 77.

Mr. Young however goes on to say, that
“ The magnitude of the object should make us
“ disregard any difficulties, but such as are in-
“ superable: none such would probably occur,
“ if something like the following means were
“ resorted to.

“ I. Where there are common pastures, to
“ give to a labouring man having children
“ a right to demand an allotment propor-
“ tioned to the family, to be set out by the
“ parish officers, &c. * * * and a cow bought.
“ Such labourer to have both for life, paying
“ 40s. a year till the price of the cow, &c. was
“ reimbursed: at his death to go to the labour-
“ er having the most numerous family, for life,
“ paying shillings a week to the widow
“ of his predecessor.

“ II. Labourers thus demanding allotments
“ by reason of their families to have land af-
“ signed and cows bought, till the proportion so
“ allotted amounts to one of the extent of
“ the common.

“ III. In parishes where there are no com-
“ mons, and the quality of the land adequate,
“ every cottager having children, to
“ whose cottage there is not within a given
“ time land sufficient for a cow, and half an

“ acre of potatoes, assigned at a fair average
 “ rent, subject to appeal to the sessions, to have
 “ a right to demand shillings per week
 “ of the parish for every child, till such land be
 “ assigned; leaving to landlords and tenants the
 “ means of doing it. Cows to be found by the
 “ parish under an annual reimbursement.^a”

“ The great object is, by means of milk and
 “ potatoes, to take the mass of the country poor
 “ from the consumption of wheat, and to give
 “ them substitutes equally wholesome and nou-
 “ rishing, and as independent of scarcities, na-
 “ tural and artificial, as the providence of the
 “ Almighty will admit.^b”

· Would not this plan operate, in the most direct manner, as an encouragement to marriage and bounty on children, which Mr. Young has with so much justice reprobated in his travels in France? and does he seriously think, that it would be an eligible thing to feed the mass of the people in this country on milk and potatoes, and make them as independent of the price of corn, and of the demand for labour, as their brethren in Ireland?

The specific cause of the poverty and misery of the lower classes of people in France and Ireland is, that from the extreme subdivision of

^a P. 78.

^b P. 79.

property in the one country, and the facility of obtaining a cabin and potatoes in the other, a population is brought into existence, which is not demanded by the quantity of capital and employment in the country; and the consequence of which must therefore necessarily be, as is very justly expressed in the report of the committee of mendicity before mentioned, to lower in general the price of labour by too great competition; from which must result complete indigence to those who cannot find employment, and an incomplete subsistence even to those who can.

The obvious tendency of Mr. Young's plan is, by encouraging marriage and furnishing a cheap food, independent of the price of corn, and of course of the demand for labour, to place the lower classes of people exactly in this situation.

It may perhaps be said, that our poor laws at present regularly encourage marriage and children, by distributing relief in proportion to the size of families; and that this plan, which is proposed as a substitute, would merely do the same thing in a less objectionable manner. But surely, in endeavouring to get rid of the evil of the poor laws, we ought not to retain their most

pernicious quality : and Mr. Young must know as well as I do, that the principal reason why poor laws have invariably been found ineffectual in the relief of the poor is, that they tend to encourage a population, which is not regulated by the demand for labour. Mr. Young himself, indeed, expressly takes notice of this effect in England, and observes, that notwithstanding the unrivalled prosperity of her manufactures, “ population is sometimes too active, “ as we see clearly by the dangerous increase of “ poor’s rates in country villages.”

But the fact is, that Mr. Young’s plan would be incomparably more powerful in encouraging a population beyond the demand for labour, than our present poor laws. A laudable repugnance to the receiving of parish relief, arising partly from a spirit of independence not yet extinct, and partly from the disagreeable mode in which the relief is given, undoubtedly deters many from marrying with a certainty of falling on the parish ; and the proportion of births and marriages to the whole population, which has before been noticed, clearly proves, that the poor laws do not encourage marriage so much as might be expected from theory. But the case

* Travels in France, vol. i, c. xvii, p. 470.

would be very different. if, when a labourer had an early marriage in contemplation the terrific forms of workhouses and parish officers, which might disturb his resolution, were to be exchanged for the fascinating visions of land and cows. If the love of property, as Mr. Young has repeatedly said, will make a man do much, it would be rather strange if it would not make him marry; an action to which, it appears from experience, that he is by no means disinclined.

The population, which would be thus called into being, would be supported by the extended cultivation of potatoes, and would of course go on without any reference to the demand for labour. In the present state of things, notwithstanding the flourishing condition of our manufactures, and the numerous checks to our population, there is no practical problem so difficult, as to find employment for the poor; but this difficulty would evidently be aggravated a hundred fold, under the circumstances here supposed.

In Ireland, or in any other country, where the common food is potatoes, and every man who wishes to marry may obtain a piece of ground sufficient, when planted with this root, to support a family, prizes may be given till the treasury

fury is exhausted for essays on the best means of employing the poor; but till some stop to the progress of population naturally arising from this state of things takes place, the object in view is really a physical impossibility.^a

Mr. Young has intimated, that, if the people were fed upon milk and potatoes, they would be more independent of scarcities than at present; but why this should be the case I really cannot comprehend. Undoubtedly people who live upon potatoes will not be much affected by a scarcity of wheat; but is there any contradiction in the supposition of a failure in the crops of potatoes? I believe it is generally understood, that they are more liable to suffer damage during the winter than grain. From the much greater quantity of food yielded by a given piece of land when planted with potatoes, than under any other kind of cultivation, it would

^a Dr. Crumpe's prize essay on the best means of finding employment for the people is an excellent treatise, and contains most valuable information; but till the capital of the country is better proportioned to its population, it is perfectly chimerical, to expect success in any project of the kind. I am also strongly disposed to believe, that the indolent and turbulent habits of the lower Irish can never be corrected, while the potatoe system enables them to increase so much beyond the regular demand for labour.

naturally

naturally happen, that, for some time after the introduction of this root as the general food of the lower classes of people, a greater quantity would be grown than was demanded, and they would live in plenty. Mr. Young, in his Travels through France, observes, that, “ In districts
 “ which contain immense quantities of waste
 “ land of a certain degree of fertility, as in the
 “ roots of the Pyrenees, belonging to com-
 “ munities ready to sell them, economy and
 “ industry, animated with the views of settling
 “ and marrying, flourish greatly; in such neigh-
 “ bourhoods something like an American in-
 “ crease takes place, and if the land be cheap
 “ little distress is found. But as procreation
 “ goes on rapidly under such circumstances, the
 “ least check to subsistence is attended with
 “ great misery; as wastes becoming dearer, or
 “ the best portions being sold, or difficulties
 “ arising in the acquisition; all which circum-
 “ stances I met with in those mountains. The
 “ moment that any impediment happens, the
 “ distress of such people will be proportioned
 “ to the activity and vigour, which had ani-
 “ mated population.”

This description will apply exactly to what

^a Travels in France, vol. i, c. xvii, p. 409.

would take place in this country, on the distribution of small portions of land to the common people, and the introduction of potatoes as their general food. For a time the change might appear beneficial, and of course the idea of property would make it, at first, highly acceptable to the poor; but as Mr. Young in another place says, “ You presently arrive at the limit, beyond
 “ which the earth, cultivate it as you please,
 “ will feed no more mouths; yet those simple
 “ manners, which instigate to marriage, still
 “ continue; what then is the consequence, but
 “ the most dreadful misery imaginable?”

When the commons were all divided, and difficulties began to occur in procuring potato grounds, the habits of early marriages, which had been introduced, would occasion the most complicated distress; and when from the increasing population, and diminishing sources of subsistence, the average growth of potatoes was not more than the average consumption, a scarcity of potatoes would be, in every respect, as probable as a scarcity of wheat at present, and when it did arrive, it would be beyond all comparison more dreadful.

When the common people of a country live

* Travels in France, vol. i, c. xvii, p. 409.

principally upon the dearest grain, as they do in England on wheat, they have great resources in a scarcity; and barley, oats, rice, cheap soups, and potatoes, all present themselves as less expensive, yet at the same time wholesome means of nourishment; but when their habitual food is the lowest in this scale, they appear to be absolutely without resource, except in the bark of trees, like the poor Swedes; and a great portion of them must necessarily be starved. Wheaten bread, roast beef, and turbot, which might not fail at the same time, are indeed in themselves unexceptionable substitutes for potatoes, and would probably be accepted as such without murmuring by the common people; but the misfortune is, that a large population, which had been habitually supported by milk and potatoes, would find it difficult to obtain these substitutes in sufficient quantities, even if the whole benevolence of the kingdom were called into action for the purpose.

The wages of labour will always be regulated by the proportion of the supply to the demand. And as, upon the potato system, a supply more than adequate to the demand would very soon take place, and this supply might be continued at a very cheap rate, on account of the cheapness

ness of the food which would furnish it, the common price of labour would soon be regulated principally by the price of potatoes instead of the price of wheat, as at present; and the rags and wretched cabins of Ireland would follow of course.

When the demand for labour occasionally exceeds the supply, and wages are regulated by the price of the dearest grain, they will generally be such as to yield something besides mere food, and the common people may be able to obtain decent houses and decent clothing. If the contrast between the state of the French and English labourers, which Mr. Young has drawn, be in any degree near the truth, the advantage on the side of England has been occasioned precisely and exclusively by these two circumstances; and if, by the adoption of milk and potatoes as the general food of the common people, these circumstances were totally altered, so as to make the supply of labour constantly in a great excess above the demand for it, and regulate wages by the price of the cheapest food, the advantage would be immediately lost, and no efforts of benevolence could prevent the most general and abject poverty.

Upon the same principle it would by no means

means be eligible, that the cheap soups of Count Rumford should be adopted as the general food of the common people. They are excellent inventions for public institutions, and as occasional resources; but if they were once universally adopted by the poor, it would be impossible to prevent the price of labour from being regulated by them; and the labourer, though at first he might have more to spare for other expenses, besides food, would ultimately have much less to spare than before.

The desirable thing, with a view to the happiness of the common people, seems to be, that their habitual food should be dear, and their wages regulated by it; but that, in a scarcity, or other occasional distress, the cheaper food should be readily and cheerfully adopted.^a With a view of rendering this transition easier, and at the same time of making a useful distinction between those who are dependent on parish relief, and those who are not, I should think that one plan, which Mr. Young proposes, would be

^a It is certainly to be wished, that every cottage in England should have a garden to it, well stocked with vegetables. A little variety of food is in every point of view highly useful. Potatoes are undoubtedly a most valuable assistance, though I should be very sorry ever to see them the principal dependence of our labourers.

extremely eligible. This is “ to pass an act
“ prohibiting relief, so far as subsistence is con-
“ cerned, in any other manner than by pota-
“ toes, rice, and soup; not merely as a measure
“ of the moment, but permanently.” I do
not think, that this plan would necessarily intro-
duce these articles as the common food of the
lower classes; and if it merely made the tran-
sition to them in periods of distress easier, and
at the same time drew a more marked line
than at present between dependence and inde-
pendence, it would have a very beneficial effect.

As it is acknowledged, that the introduction
of milk and potatoes, or of cheap soups, as the
general food of the lower classes of people,
would lower the price of labour, perhaps some
cold politician might propose to adopt the sys-
tem, with a view of underselling foreigners in
the markets of Europe. I should not envy the
feelings, which could suggest such a proposal. I
really cannot conceive any thing much more de-
testable, than the idea of knowingly condemning
the labourers of this country to the rags and

* *Question of Scarcity, &c.* p. 80. This might be done,
at least with regard to workhouses. In assisting the poor at
their own homes, it might be subject to some practical diffi-
culties.

wretched cabins of Ireland, for the purpose of felling a few more broad cloths and calicoes.

The

^a In this observation I have not the least idea of alluding to Mr. Young, who, I firmly believe, ardently wishes to meliorate the condition of the lower classes of people; though I do not think, that his plan would effect the object in view. He either did not see those consequences, which I apprehended from it; or he has a better opinion of the happiness of the common people in Ireland than I have. In his Irish tour he seemed much struck with the plenty of potatoes which they possessed, and the absence of all apprehension of want. Had he travelled in 1800 and 1801, his impressions would by all accounts have been very different. From the facility which has hitherto prevailed in Ireland of procuring potato grounds, scarcities have certainly been rare, and all the effects of the system have not yet been felt, though certainly enough to make it appear very far from desirable.

Mr. Young has since pursued his idea more in detail, in a pamphlet entitled, *An Inquiry into the Propriety of applying Wastes to the better Maintenance and Support of the Poor.* But the impression on my mind is still the same; and it appears to be calculated, to assimilate the condition of the labourers of this country to that of the lower classes of the Irish. Mr. Young seems, in a most unaccountable manner, to have forgotten all his general principles on this subject. He has treated the question of a provision for the poor, as if it was merely, How to provide in the cheapest and best manner for a *given number* of people. If this had been the sole question, it would never have taken so many hundred years to resolve. But the real question is, How to provide for those who are in want, in such a manner, as to prevent a continual

The wealth and power of nations are, after all, only desirable as they contribute to happiness. In this point of view, I should be very far from undervaluing them, considering them, in general, as absolutely necessary means to attain the end; but if any particular case should occur, in which they appeared to be in direct opposition to each other, we cannot rationally doubt which ought to be postponed.

Fortunately, however, even on the narrowest political principles, the adoption of such a system would not answer. It has always been observed, that those, who work chiefly on their own property, work very indolently and unwillingly when employed for others; and it must necessarily happen, when, from the general adoption of a very cheap food, the population of a country increases considerably beyond the demand for labour, that habits of idleness and turbulence will be generated, most peculiarly unfavourable to a flourishing state of manu-

accumulation of their numbers? and it will readily occur to the reader, that a plan of giving them land and cows cannot promise much success in this respect. If, after all the commons had been divided, the poor laws were still to continue in force, no good reason can be assigned, why the rates should not in a few years be as high as they are at present, independently of all that had been expended in the purchase of land and stock.

factures.

factures. In spite of the cheapness of labour in Ireland, there are few manufactures, which can be prepared in that country for foreign sale so cheap as in England: and this is in great measure owing to the want of those industrious habits, which can only be produced by regular employment.



CHAP. XI.

Of the necessity of general principles on this subject.

IT has been observed by Hume, that of all sciences there is none where first appearances are more deceitful than in politics. The remark is undoubtedly very just, and is most peculiarly applicable to that department of the science, which relates to the modes of improving the condition of the lower classes of society.

We are continually hearing declamations against theory and theorists, by men who pride themselves upon the distinction of being practical. It must be acknowledged, that bad theories are very bad things, and the authors of them useless, and sometimes pernicious members of society. But these advocates of practice do not seem to be aware, that they themselves very often come under this description, and that a great part of them may be classed among the most mischievous theorists of their time. When a man faithfully relates any facts, which have come

* Essay xi, vol. i, p. 431. 8vo.

within the scope of his own observation, however confined it may have been, he undoubtedly adds to the sum of general knowledge, and confers a benefit on society. But when from this confined experience, from the management of his own little farm, or the details of the workhouse in his neighbourhood, he draws a general inference, as is very frequently the case, he then at once erects himself into a theorist: and is the more dangerous, because, experience being the only just foundation for theory, people are often caught merely by the sound of the word, and do not stop to make the distinction between that partial experience, which, on such subjects, is no foundation whatever for a just theory, and that general experience, on which alone a just theory can be founded.

There are perhaps few subjects on which human ingenuity has been more exerted, than the endeavour to meliorate the condition of the poor; and there is certainly no subject in which it has so completely failed. The question between the theorist who calls himself practical, and the genuine theorist is, whether this should prompt us to look into all the holes and corners of workhouses, and content ourselves with mulcting the parish officers for their waste of

cheese parings and candle ends, and with distributing more soups and potatoes; or to recur to general principles, which show us at once the cause of the failure, and prove that the system has been from the beginning radically erroneous. There is no subject to which general principles have been so seldom applied; and yet in the whole compass of human knowledge I doubt if there be one, in which it is so dangerous to lose sight of them; because the partial and immediate effect of a particular mode of giving assistance are so often directly opposite to the general and permanent effects.

It has been observed in particular districts, where cottagers are possessed of small pieces of land, and are in the habit of keeping cows, that during the late scarcities some of them were able to support themselves without parish assistance, and others with comparatively little.^a

According to the partial view in which this subject has been always contemplated, a general inference has been drawn from such instances, that, if we could place all our labourers in a similar situation, they would all be equally com-

^a See an inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the Counties of Lincoln and Rutland by Robert Gourlay. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxxvii, p. 514.

comfortable, and equally independent of the parish. This is an inference, however, that by no means follows. The advantage, which cottagers who at present keep cows enjoy, arises in a great measure from its being peculiar, and would be considerably diminished, if it were made general.

A farmer or gentleman has, we will suppose, a certain number of cottages on his farm. Being a liberal man, and liking to see all the people about him comfortable, he may join a piece of land to his cottage sufficient to keep one or two cows, and give besides high wages. His labourers will of course live in plenty, and be able to rear up large families; but his farm may not require many hands; and though he may choose to pay those that he employs well, he will not probably wish to have more labourers on his land than his work requires. He does not therefore build more houses; and the children of the labourers whom he employs must evidently emigrate, and settle in other countries. While such a system continues peculiar to certain families, or certain districts, the emigrants would easily be able to find work in other places; and it cannot be doubted, that the individual labourers employed on these farms are in

an enviable situation, and such as we might naturally wish was the lot of all our labourers. But it is perfectly clear, that such a system could not, in the nature of things, possess the same advantages, if it were made general; because there would then be no countries, to which the children could emigrate with the same prospect of finding work. Population would evidently increase beyond the demand of towns and manufactories, and the price of labour would universally fall.

It should be observed also, that one of the reasons, why the labourers who at present keep cows are so comfortable, is, that they are able to make considerable profit of the milk which they do not use themselves; an advantage which would evidently be very much diminished, if the system were universal. And though they were certainly able to struggle through the late scarcities with less assistance than their neighbours, as might naturally be expected, from their having other resources besides the article which in those individual years was scarce; yet if the system were universal, there can be no reason assigned, why they would not be subject to suffer as much from a scarcity of grass and a mortality

mortality among cows,^a as our common labourers do now from a scarcity of wheat. We should be extremely cautious therefore of trusting to such appearances, and of drawing a general inference from this kind of partial experience.

The main principle, on which the society for increasing the comforts and bettering the condition of the poor professes to proceed, is excellent. To give effect to that masterspring of industry, the desire of bettering our condition,^b is the true mode of improving the state of the lower classes; and we may safely agree with Mr. Bernard, in one of his able prefaces, that whatever encourages and promotes habits of industry, prudence, foresight, virtue, and cleanliness, among the poor, is beneficial to them and to the country; and whatever removes or diminishes the incitements to any of these qualities is de-

^a At present the loss of a cow, which must now and then happen, is generally remedied by a petition and subscription; and as the event is considered as a most serious misfortune to a labourer, these petitions are for the most part attended to; but if the cow system were universal, losses would occur so frequently, that they could not possibly be repaired in the same way, and families would be continually dropping from comparative plenty into want.

^b Preface to vol. ii, of the Reports.

trimental to the state, and pernicious to the individual.^a

Mr. Bernard indeed himself seems in general to be fully aware of the difficulties, which the society has to contend with in the accomplishment of its object. But still it appears to be in some danger of falling into the error before alluded to, of drawing general inferences from insufficient experience. Without adverting to the plans respecting cheaper foods and parish shops, recommended by individuals, the beneficial effects of which depend entirely upon their being peculiar to certain families or certain parishes, and would be lost if they were general, by lowering the wages of labour; I shall only notice one observation of a more comprehensive nature, which occurs in the preface to the second volume of the Reports. It is there remarked, that the experience of the society seemed to warrant the conclusion, that the best mode of relieving the poor was, by assisting them at their own homes, and placing out their children as soon as possible in different employments, apprenticeships, &c. I really believe, that this is the best, and it is certainly the most agreeable mode, in which occasional and discrimi-

^a Preface to vol. iii of the Reports.

minate assistance can be given. But it is evident, that it must be done with caution, and cannot be adopted as a general principle, and made the foundation of universal practice. It is open exactly to the same objection as the cow system, which has just been noticed, and that part of the act of the 43d of Elizabeth, which directs the overseers to employ and provide for the children of the poor. A particular parish, where all the children, as soon as they were of a proper age, were taken from their parents and placed out in proper situations, might be very comfortable; but if the system were general, and the poor saw, that all their children would be thus provided for, every employment would presently be overstocked with hands, and the consequences need not be again repeated.

Nothing can be more clear, than that it is within the power of money, and of the exertions of the rich, adequately to relieve a particular family, a particular parish, and even a particular district. But it will be equally clear, if we reflect a moment on the subject, that it is totally out of their power, to relieve the whole country in the same way; at least without providing a regular vent for the overflowing numbers in emigration, or without the prevalence of a particular virtue among

among the poor, which the distribution of this assistance tends obviously to discourage.

Even industry itself is, in this respect, not very different from money. A man who possesses a certain portion of it, above what is usually possessed by his neighbours, will, in the actual state of things, be almost sure of a competent livelihood; but if all his neighbours were to become at once as industrious as himself, the absolute portion of industry which he before possessed would no longer be a security against want. Hume fell into a very great error, when he asserted, that “almost all the moral as well as natural evils of human life arise from idleness;” and for the cure of these ills required only, that the whole species should possess naturally an equal diligence with that, which many individuals are able to attain by habit and reflection.* It is evident, that this given degree of industry possessed by the whole species, if not combined with another virtue of which he takes no notice, would totally fail of rescuing society from want and misery, and would scarcely remove a single moral or physical evil of all those to which he alludes.

I am aware of an objection, which will, with

* Dialogues on Natural Religion, Part xi, p. 212.

great appearance of justice, be urged against the general scope of these reasonings. It will be said, that to argue thus, is at once to object to every mode of assisting the poor, as it is impossible, in the nature of things, to assist people individually, without altering their relative situation in society, and proportionally depressing others; and that as those who have families are the persons naturally most subject to distress, and as we are certainly not called upon to assist those who do not want our aid, we must necessarily, if we act at all, relieve those who have children, and thus encourage marriage and population.

I have already observed however, and I here repeat it again, that the general principles on these subjects ought not to be pushed too far, though they should always be kept in view; and that many cases may occur, in which the good resulting from the relief of the present distress may more than overbalance the evil to be apprehended from the remote consequence.

All relief in instances of distress, not arising from idle and improvident habits, clearly comes under this description; and in general it may be observed, that it is only that kind of *systematic* and *certain* relief, on which the poor can confidently

confidently depend, whatever may be their conduct, that violates general principles in such a manner as to make it clear, that the general consequence is worse than the particular evil.

Independently of this discriminate and occasional assistance, the beneficial effects of which I have fully allowed in a preceding chapter, I have before endeavoured to show, that much might be expected from a better and more general system of education. Every thing that can be done in this way has indeed a very peculiar value; because education is one of those advantages, which not only all may share without interfering with each other, but the raising of one person may actually contribute to the raising of others. If, for instance, a man by education acquires that decent kind of pride, and those juster habits of thinking, which will prevent him from burdening society with a family of children which he cannot support, his conduct, as far as an individual instance can go, tends evidently to improve the condition of his fellow labourers; and a contrary conduct from ignorance would tend as evidently to depress it.

I cannot help thinking also, that something might be done towards bettering the situation of the poor by a general improvement of their cottages,

cottages, if care were taken, at the same time, not to make them so large as to allow of two families settling in them; and not to increase their number faster than the demand for labour required. One of the most salutary and least pernicious checks to the frequency of early marriages in this country is the difficulty of procuring a cottage, and the laudable habits, which prompt a labourer rather to defer his marriage some years in the expectation of a vacancy, than to content himself with a wretched mud cabin, like those in Ireland.^a

Even the cow system, upon a more confined plan, might not be open to objection. With any view of making it a substitute for the Poor Laws, and of giving labourers a right to demand land and cows in proportion to their families; or of taking the common people from the consumption of wheat, and feeding them

^a Perhaps, however, this is not often left to his choice, on account of the fear which every parish has of increasing its poor. There are many ways by which our poor laws operate in counteracting their first obvious tendency to increase population, and this is one of them. I have little doubt, that it is almost exclusively owing to these counteracting causes, that we have been able to persevere in this system so long, and that the condition of the poor has not been so much injured by it, as might have been expected.

on milk and potatoes, it appears to me, I confess, truly preposterous: but if it were so ordered, as merely to provide a comfortable situation for the better and more industrious class of labourers, and to supply at the same time a very important want among the poor in general, that of milk for their children; I think that it would be extremely beneficial, and might be made a very powerful incitement to habits of industry, economy, and prudence. With this view however, it is evident, that only a certain portion of labourers in each parish could be embraced in the plan; that good conduct, and not mere distress, should have the most valid claim to preference; that too much attention should not be paid to the number of children; and that universally, those who had saved money enough for the purchase of a cow, should be preferred, to those who required to be furnished with one by the parish.^a

^a The act of Elizabeth, which prohibited the building of cottages, unless four acres of land were annexed to them, is probably impracticable in a manufacturing country like England; but upon this principle, certainly the greatest part of the poor might possess land; because the difficulty of procuring such cottages would always operate as a powerful check to their increase. The effect of such a plan would be very different from that of Mr. Young.

To facilitate the saving of small sums of money for this purpose, and encourage young labourers to economize their earnings with a view to a provision for marriage, it might be extremely useful, to have country banks, where the smallest sums would be received, and a fair interest paid for them. At present, the few labourers that save a little money are often greatly at a loss to know what to do with it; and under such circumstances we cannot be much surpris'd, that it should sometimes be ill employed, and last but a short time. It would probably be essential to the success of any plan of this kind, that the labourer should be able to draw out his money whenever he wanted it, and have the most perfect liberty of disposing of it in every respect as he pleas'd. Though we may regret, that money so hardly earned should sometimes be spent to little purpose; yet it seems to be a case, in which we have no right to interfere; nor, if we had, would it in a general view be advantageous; because the knowledge of possessing this liberty would be of more use in encouraging the practice of saving, than any restriction of it in preventing the misuse of money so saved.

One should undoubtedly be extremely unwill-

ling, not to make as much use as possible of that known stimulus to industry and economy, the desire of, and the attachment to property: but it should be recollected, that the good effects of this stimulus show themselves principally when this property is to be procured, or preserved, by personal exertions; and that they are by no means so general under other circumstances. If any idle man with a family could demand and obtain a cow and some land, I should expect to see both very often neglected.

It has been observed, that those cottagers, who keep cows, are more industrious and more regular in their conduct, than those who do not. This is probably true, and what might naturally be expected; but the inference, that the way to make all people industrious is to give them cows, may by no means be quite so certain. Most of those who keep cows at present have purchased them with the fruits of their own industry. It is therefore more just to say, that their industry has given them a cow, than that a cow has given them their industry; though I would by no means be understood to imply, that the sudden possession of property never generates industrious habits.

The practical good effects, which have been
already

already experienced from cottagers keeping cows,^a arise in fact from the system being nearly such as the confined plan which I have mentioned. In the districts where cottagers of this description most abound, they do not bear a very large proportion to the population of the whole parish; they consist in general of the better sort of labourers, who have been able to purchase their own cows; and the peculiar comforts of their situation arise more from the relative, than the positive advantages which they possess.

From observing therefore their industry and comforts, we should be very cautious of inferring, that we could give the same industry and comforts to all the lower classes of people, by giving them the same possessions. There is nothing, that has given rise to such a cloud of errors, as a confusion between relative and positive, and between cause and effect.

It may be said however, that any plan of generally improving the cottages of the poor, or of enabling more of them to keep cows, would evidently give them the power of rearing a

^a Inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the Counties of Lincoln and Rutland, by Robert Gourlay. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxxvii, p. 514.

greater number of children, and, by thus encouraging population, violate the principles which I have endeavoured to establish. But if I have been successful in making the reader comprehend the principal bent of this work, he will be aware, that the precise reason why I think that more children ought not to be born than the country can support is, that the greatest possible number of those that are born may be supported. We cannot, in the nature of things, assist the poor in any way, without enabling them to rear up to manhood a greater number of their children. But this is, of all other things, the most desirable, both with regard to individuals and the public. Every loss of a child from the consequences of poverty must evidently be preceded and accompanied by great misery to individuals; and in a public view every child, that dies under ten years of age, is a loss to the nation of all that had been expended in its subsistence till that period. Consequently, in every point of view, a decrease of mortality at all ages, is what we ought to aim at. We cannot however effect this object, without first crowding the population in some degree by making more children grow up to manhood; but we shall do no harm in this respect,

spect, if, at the same time, we can impress these children with the idea, that, to possess the same advantages as their parents, they must defer marriage till they have a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family. And it must be candidly confessed, that, if we cannot do this, all our former efforts will have been thrown away. It is not in the nature of things, that any permanent and general improvement in the condition of the poor can be effected without an increase in the preventive check; and unless this take place, either with or without our efforts, every thing that is done for the poor must be temporary and partial: a diminution of mortality at present will be balanced by an increased mortality in future; and the improvement of their condition in one place will proportionally depress it in another. This is a truth so important, and so little understood, that it can scarcely be too often insisted on.

Dr. Paley, in a chapter on population, provision, &c., in his *Moral Philosophy*, observes, that the condition most favourable to the population of a country, and at the same time to its general happiness is, “that of a laborious frugal
“ people ministering to the demands of an opu-

“lent luxurious nation.”^a Such a form of society has not, it must be confessed, an inviting aspect. Nothing but the conviction of its being absolutely necessary could reconcile us to the idea of ten millions of people condemned to incessant toil, and to the privation of every thing but absolute necessaries, in order to minister to the excessive luxuries of the other million. But the fact is, that such a form of society is by no means necessary. It is by no means necessary, that the rich should be excessively luxurious, in order to support the manufactures of a country; or that the poor should be deprived of all luxuries, in order to make them sufficiently numerous. The best, and in every point of view the most advantageous manufactures in this country, are those which are consumed by the great body of the people. The manufactures which are

^a Vol. ii, c. xi, p. 359. From a passage in Dr. Paley's late work on Natural Theology, I am inclined to think, that subsequent reflection has induced him to modify some of his former ideas on the subject of population. He has stated most justly (ch. xxv, p. 539), that mankind will in every country breed up to a certain point of distress. If this be allowed, that country will evidently be the happiest, where the degree of distress at this point is the least; and consequently, if the spread of luxury, by producing the check sooner, tend to diminish this degree of distress, it is certainly desirable.

confined exclusively to the rich are not only trivial, on account of the comparative smallness of their quantity ; but are further liable to the great disadvantage of producing much occasional misery among those employed in them, from changes of fashion. It is the spread of luxury therefore among the mass of the people, and not an excess of it in a few, that seems to be most advantageous, both with regard to national wealth and national happiness ; and what Dr. Paley considers as the true evil and proper danger of luxury, I should be disposed to consider as its true good and peculiar advantage. If indeed, it be allowed, that in every society, not in the state of a new colony, some powerful check to population must prevail ; and if it be observed, that a taste for the comforts and conveniencies of life will prevent people from marrying, under the certainty of being deprived of these advantages ; it must be allowed, that we can hardly expect to find any check to marriage so little prejudicial to the happiness and virtue of society as the general prevalence of such a taste ; and consequently, that the spread of luxury^a in this sense

^a In a note to the tenth chapter of the last book, I have mentioned the point at which alone it is probable, that luxury

sense of the term is particularly desirable, and one of the best means of raising that standard of wretchedness alluded to in the eighth chapter of this book.

It has been generally found, that the middle parts of society are most favourable to virtuous and industrious habits, and to the growth of all kinds of talents. But it is evident, that all cannot be in the middle. Superior and inferior parts are in the nature of things absolutely necessary; and not only necessary, but strikingly beneficial. If no man could hope to rise, or fear to fall in society; if industry did not bring with it its reward, and indolence its punishment; we could not expect to see that animated activity in bettering our condition, which now forms the master-spring of public prosperity. But in contemplating the different states of Europe, we observe a very considerable difference in the relative proportions of the superior, the middle, and the inferior parts; and from the effect of these differences it seems probable, that

becomes really prejudicial to a country. But this point does not depend upon the spread of luxury, as diminishing the frequency of marriage among the poor, but upon the proportion which those employed in preparing or procuring luxuries bear to the funds which are to support them.

our best grounded expectations of an increase in the happiness of the mass of human society are founded in the prospect of an increase in the relative proportions of the middle parts. And if the lower classes of people had acquired the habit of proportioning the supplies of labour to a stationary or even decreasing demand, without an increase of misery and mortality, as at present, we might even venture to indulge a hope, that at some future period the processes for abridging human labour, the progress of which has of late years been so rapid, might ultimately supply all the wants of the most wealthy society with less personal labour than at present; and if they did not diminish the severity of individual exertion, might, at least, diminish the number of those employed in severe toil. If the lowest classes of society were thus diminished, and the middle classes increased, each labourer might indulge a more rational hope of rising by diligence and exertion into a better station; the rewards of industry and virtue would be increased in number; the lottery of human society would appear to consist of fewer blanks and more prizes; and the sum of social happiness would be evidently augmented.

To indulge however in any distant views of
this

this kind, unaccompanied by the evils usually attendant on a stationary or decreasing demand for labour, we must suppose the general prevalence of such prudential habits among the poor, as would prevent them from marrying, when the actual price of labour, joined to what they might have saved in their single state, would not give them the prospect of being able to support a wife and five or six children without assistance. And undoubtedly such a degree of prudential restraint would produce a very striking melioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

It may be said perhaps, that even this degree of prudence might not always avail, as when a man marries he cannot tell what number of children he shall have, and many have more than six. This is certainly true; and in this case I do not think, that any evil would result from making a certain allowance to every child above this number; not with a view of rewarding a man for his large family, but merely of relieving him from a species of distress, which it would be unreasonable in us to expect that he should calculate upon. And with this view, the relief should be merely such as to place him exactly in the same situation, as if he had had six children.

children. Montesquieu disapproves of an edict of Lewis the Fourteenth, which gave certain pensions to those who had ten and twelve children, as being of no use in encouraging population.^a For the very reason that he disapproves of it, I should think, that some law of the kind might be adopted without danger, and might relieve particular individuals from a very pressing and unlooked for distress, without operating in any respect as an encouragement to marriage.

If at some future period any approach should be made towards the more general prevalence of prudential habits with respect to marriage among the poor, from which alone any permanent and general improvement of their condition can arise; I do not think, that the narrowest politician need be alarmed at it, from the fear of its occasioning such an advance in the price of labour, as will enable our commercial competitors to underfell us in foreign markets. There are four circumstances that might be expected to accompany it, which would probably either prevent, or fully counterbalance any effect of this kind. These are, 1st, The more equable and lower price of provisions, from the demand being less frequently above the supply. 2dly,

^a *Esprit des Loix*, liv. xxiii, c. xxvii.

The removal of that heavy burden on agriculture, and that great addition to the present wages of labour, the poors rates. 3dly, The national saving of a great part of that sum, which is expended without return in the support of those children, who die prematurely from the consequences of poverty. And, lastly, The more general prevalence of economical and industrious habits, particularly among unmarried men, which would prevent that indolence, drunkenness, and waste of labour, which at present are too frequently a consequence of high wages.



सत्यमेव जयते

CHAP. XII.

Of our rational expectations respecting the future improvement of Society.

IN taking a general and concluding view of our rational expectations respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population, it may be observed, that though the increase of population in a geometrical ratio be incontrovertible, and the period of doubling, when unchecked, has been uniformly stated in this work rather below than above the truth; yet there are some natural consequences of the progress of society and civilization, which necessarily repress its full effects. These are, more particularly, great towns and manufactures, in which we can scarcely hope, and certainly not expect to see any very material change. It is undoubtedly our duty, and in every point of view highly desirable, to make towns and manufacturing employments as little injurious as possible to the duration of human life; but, after all our efforts, it is probable, that they will
 always

always remain less healthy than country situations and country employments; and consequently, operating as positive checks, will diminish in some degree the necessity of the preventive check.

In every old state it is observed, that a considerable number of grown-up people remain for a time unmarried. The duty of practising the common and acknowledged rules of morality during this period has never been controverted in theory, however it may have been opposed in practice. This branch of the duty of moral restraint has scarcely been touched by the reasonings of this work. It rests on the same foundation as before, neither stronger nor weaker. And knowing how incompletely this duty has hitherto been fulfilled, it would certainly be visionary, to expect any very material change for the better in future.

The part which has been affected by the reasonings of this work is not therefore that, which relates to our conduct during the period of celibacy, but to the duty of extending this period till we have a prospect of being able to maintain our children. And it is by no means visionary to indulge a hope of some favourable change in this respect; because it is found by
experience,

experience, that the prevalence of this kind of prudential restraint is extremely different in different countries, and in the same countries at different periods.

It cannot be doubted, that throughout Europe in general, and most particularly in the northern states, a decided change has taken place in the operation of this prudential restraint, since the prevalence of those warlike and enterprising habits, which destroyed so many people. In later times the gradual diminution and almost total extinction of the plagues, which so frequently visited Europe in the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, produced a change of the same kind. And in this country it is not to be doubted, that the proportion of marriages has become smaller, since the improvement of our towns, the less frequent returns of epidemics, and the adoption of habits of greater cleanliness. During the late scarcities it appears, that the number of marriages diminished; and the same motives, which prevented many people from marrying during such a period, would operate precisely in the same way, if, in future, the additional number of children reared to manhood, from the introduction of the cow-pox, were to be such as to crowd

crowd all employments, lower the price of labour, and make it more difficult to support a family.

Universally, the practice of mankind on the subject of marriage has been much superior to their theories; and however frequent may have been the declamations on the duty of entering into this state, and the advantage of early unions to prevent vice, each individual has practically found it necessary, to consider of the means of supporting a family before he ventured to take so important a step. That great *vis medicatrix reipublicæ*, the desire of bettering our condition, and the fear of making it worse, has been constantly in action, and has been constantly directing people into the right road, in spite of all the declamations which tended to lead them aside. Owing to this powerful spring of health in every state, which is nothing more than an inference from the general course of the laws of nature irresistibly forced on each man's attention, the prudential check to marriage has increased in Europe; and it cannot be unreasonable to conclude, that it will still make further advances. If this take place, without any marked and decided increase of a vicious intercourse

tercourse with the sex, the happiness of society will evidently be promoted by it; and with regard to the danger of such increase, it is consolatory to remark, that those countries in Europe, where marriages are the least frequent, are by no means particularly distinguished by vices of this kind. It has appeared, that Norway, Switzerland, England, and Scotland, are above all the rest in the prevalence of the preventive check; and though I do not mean to insist particularly on the virtuous habits of these countries, yet I think, that no person would select them as the countries most marked for profligacy of manners. Indeed, from the little that I know of the continent, I should have been inclined to select them as most distinguished for contrary habits, and as rather above than below their neighbours in the chastity of their women, and consequently in the virtuous habits of their men. Experience therefore seems to teach us, that it is possible for moral and physical causes to counteract the effects, that might at first be expected from an increase of the check to marriage; but allowing all the weight to these effects, which is in any degree probable, it may be safely asserted, that the diminution of the vices

arising from indigence would fully counter-balance them; and that all the advantages of diminished mortality, and superior comforts, which would certainly result from an increase of the preventive check, may be placed entirely on the side of the gains to the cause of happiness and virtue.

It is less the object of the present work to propose new plans of improving society, than to inculcate the necessity of resting contented with that mode of improvement, which is dictated by the course of nature, and of not obstructing the advances, which would otherwise be made in this way.

It would be undoubtedly highly advantageous, that all our positive institutions, and the whole tenour of our conduct to the poor, should be such as actively to cooperate with that lesson of prudence inculcated by the common course of human events; and if we take upon ourselves sometimes to mitigate the natural punishments of imprudence, that we could balance it by increasing the rewards of an opposite conduct. But much would be done, if merely the institutions which directly tend to encourage marriage were gradually changed, and we ceased to cir-
culate

culate opinions and inculcate doctrines, which positively counteract the lessons of nature.

The limited good, which it is sometimes in our power to effect, is often lost by attempting too much, and by making the adoption of some particular plan essentially necessary even to a partial degree of success. In the practical application of the reasonings of this work, I hope that I have avoided this error. I wish to press on the recollection of the reader, that, though I may have given some new views of old facts, and may have indulged in the contemplation of a considerable degree of *possible* improvement, that I might not absolutely shut out that prime cheerer hope; yet in my expectations of probable improvement, and in suggesting the means of accomplishing it, I have been very cautious. The gradual abolition of the poor laws has already often been proposed, in consequence of the practical evils, which have been found to flow from them, and the danger of their becoming a weight absolutely intolerable on the landed property of the kingdom. The establishment of a more extensive system of national education has neither the advantage of novelty with some, nor its disadvantages with others,

to recommend it. The practical good effects of education have long been experienced in Scotland; and almost every person who has been placed in a situation to judge, has given his testimony, that education appears to have a considerable effect in the prevention of crimes,^a and the promotion of industry, morality, and regular conduct. Yet these are the only plans which have been offered; and though the adoption of them in the modes suggested would very powerfully contribute to forward the object of this work, and better the condition of the poor; yet if nothing be done in this way, I shall not absolutely despair of some partial good effects from the general tenour of the reasoning.

If the principles which I have endeavoured to establish be false, I most sincerely hope to see

^a Mr. Howard found fewer prisoners in Switzerland and Scotland, than other countries, which he attributed to a more regular education among the lower classes of the Swiss and the Scotch. During the number of years which the late Mr. Fielding presided at Bow-street, only six Scotchmen were brought before him. He used to say, that of the persons committed the greater part were Irish. Preface to vol. iii of the Reports of the Society for bettering the condition of the poor, p. 32.

them

them completely refuted; but if they be true, the subject is so important, and interests the question of human happiness so nearly, that it is impossible that they should not in time be more fully known, and more generally circulated, whether any particular efforts be made for the purpose or not.

Among the higher and middle classes of society, the effect of this knowledge would, I hope, be to direct without relaxing their efforts in bettering the condition of the poor; to show them what they can, and what they cannot do; and that, although much may be done by advice and instruction, by encouraging habits of prudence and cleanliness, by discriminate charity, and by any mode of bettering the present condition of the poor, which is followed by an increase of the preventive check; yet that, without this last effect, all the former efforts would be futile; and that, in any old and well peopled state, to assist the poor in such a manner as to enable them to marry as early as they please, and rear up large families, is a physical impossibility. This knowledge, by tending to prevent the rich from destroying the good effects of their own exertions, and wasting their efforts in a direction where success is unattainable, would confine their

attention to the proper objects, and thus enable them to do more good.

Among the poor themselves, its effects would be still more important. That the principal and most permanent cause of poverty has little or no direct relation to forms of government, or the unequal division of property; and that, as the rich do not in reality possess the power of finding employment and maintenance for the poor, the poor cannot, in the nature of things, possess the right to demand them; are important truths flowing from the principle of population, which when properly explained would by no means be above the most ordinary comprehensions. And it is evident, that every man in the lower classes of society, who became acquainted with these truths, would be disposed to bear the distresses, in which he might be involved, with more patience; would feel less discontent and irritation at the government, and the higher classes of society, on account of his poverty; would be on all occasions less disposed to insubordination and turbulence; and if he received assistance, either from any public institution, or from the hand of private charity, he would receive it with more thankfulness, and more justly appreciate its value.

If

If these truths were by degrees more generally known, which in the course of time does not seem to be improbable from the natural effects of the mutual interchange of opinions, the lower classes of people, as a body, would become more peaceable and orderly, would be less inclined to tumultuous proceedings in seasons of scarcity, and would at all times be less influenced by inflammatory and seditious publications, from knowing how little the price of labour and the means of supporting a family depend upon a revolution. The mere knowledge of these truths, even if they did not operate sufficiently to produce any marked change in the prudential habits of the poor with regard to marriage, would still have a most beneficial effect on their conduct in a political light; and undoubtedly one of the most valuable of these effects would be the power, that would result to the higher and middle classes of society, of gradually improving their governments,* without the apprehension of those revolutionary excesses, the fear of which, at present, threatens to deprive
Europe

* I cannot believe, that the removal of all unjust grounds of discontent against constituted authorities would render the people torpid and indifferent to advantages, which are really

Europe even of that degree of liberty, which she had before experienced to be practicable, and the salutary effects of which she had long enjoyed.

From a review of the state of society in former periods, compared with the present, I should certainly say, that the evils resulting from the principle of population have rather diminished than increased, even under the disadvantage of an almost total ignorance of their real cause. And if we can indulge the hope, that this ignorance will be gradually dissipated, it does not seem unreasonable to expect, that they will be still further diminished. The increase of absolute population, which will of course take place, will evidently tend but little to weaken this expectation, as every thing depends upon the relative proportions between population and food, and not on the absolute number of people. In the former part of this

attainable. The blessings of civil liberty are so great, that they surely cannot need the aid of false colouring to make them desirable. I should be sorry to think, that the lower classes of people could never be animated to assert their rights but by means of such illusory promises, as will generally make the remedy of resistance much worse than the disease, that it was intended to cure.

work it appeared, that the countries, which possessed the fewest people, often suffered the most from the effects of the principle of population; and it can scarcely be doubted, that, taking Europe throughout, fewer famines and fewer diseases arising from want have prevailed in the last century, than those which preceded it.

On the whole therefore, though our future prospects respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population may not be so bright as we could wish, yet they are far from being entirely disheartening, and by no means preclude that gradual and progressive improvement in human society, which, before the late wild speculations on this subject, was the object of rational expectation. To the laws of property and marriage, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love, which prompts each individual to exert himself in bettering his condition, we are indebted for all the noblest exertions of human genius, for every thing that distinguishes the civilized from the savage state. A strict inquiry into the principle of population obliges us to conclude, that we shall never be able to throw down the ladder, by which we have risen to this eminence; but it by no means proves, that we may not rise higher by the same means.

means. The structure of society, in its great features, will probably always remain unchanged. We have every reason to believe, that it will always consist of a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers; but the condition of each, and the proportion which they bear to each other, may be so altered, as greatly to improve the harmony and beauty of the whole. It would indeed be a melancholy reflection, that while the views of physical science are daily enlarging, so as scarcely to be bounded by the most distant horizon, the science of moral and political philosophy should be confined within such narrow limits, or at best be so feeble in its influence, as to be unable to counteract the obstacles to human happiness arising from a single cause. But however formidable these obstacles may have appeared in some parts of this work, it is hoped, that the general result of the inquiry is such, as not to make us give up the improvement of human society in despair. The partial good which seems to be attainable is worthy of all our exertions; is sufficient to direct our efforts, and animate our prospects. And although we cannot expect, that the virtue and happiness of mankind will keep pace with the brilliant career of physical discovery, yet if we
are

are not wanting to ourselves, we may confidently indulge the hope, that, to no unimportant extent, they will be influenced by its progress, and will partake in its success.



A P P E N D I X.

IN the preface to the second edition of this Essay, I expressed a hope, that the detailed manner, in which I had treated the subject, and pursued it to its consequences, though it might open the door to many objections, and expose me to much severity of criticism, might be subservient to the important end of bringing a subject so nearly connected with the happiness of society into more general notice. Conformably to the same views I should always have felt willing to enter into the discussion of any serious objections, that were made to my principles or conclusions, to abandon those which appeared to be false, and to throw further lights, if I could, on those which appeared to be true. But though the work has excited a degree of public attention much greater than I could have presumed to expect, yet very little has been written to controvert it; and of that little, the greatest part is so full of illiberal declamation, and so entirely destitute of argument, as to be evidently beneath notice. What I have to say therefore at present will be directed rather more to the objections, which have been urged in conversation, than to those which have appeared in
print.

print. My object is to correct some of the misrepresentations, which have gone abroad respecting two or three of the most important points of the Essay; and I should feel greatly obliged to those, who have not had leisure to read the whole work, if they would cast their eyes over the few following pages, that they may not, from the partial and incorrect statements which they have heard, mistake the import of some of my opinions, and attribute to me others which I have never held.

The first grand objection that has been made to my principles is, that they contradict the original command of the Creator, to increase and multiply and replenish the earth. But those who have urged this objection have certainly either not read the work, or have directed their attention solely to a few detached passages, and have been unable to seize the bent and spirit of the whole. I am fully of opinion, that it is the duty of man, to obey this command of his Creator, nor is there in my recollection a single passage in the work, which, taken with the context, can, to any reader of intelligence, warrant the contrary inference.

Every express command given to man by his Creator is given in subordination to those great and uniform laws of nature, which he had previously established; and we are forbidden both by reason and religion to expect, that these laws will be changed in order to enable us to execute more readily

readily any particular precept. It is undoubtedly true, that, if man were enabled miraculously to live without food, the earth would be very rapidly replenished : but as we have not the slightest ground of hope, that such a miracle will be worked for this purpose, it becomes our positive duty as reasonable creatures, and with a view of executing the commands of our Creator, to inquire into the laws which he has established for the multiplication of the species. And when we find not only from the speculative contemplation of these laws, but from the far more powerful and imperious suggestions of our senses, that man cannot live without food, it is a folly exactly of the same *kind* to attempt to obey the will of our Creator by increasing population without reference to the means of its support, as to attempt to obtain an abundant crop of corn by sowing it on the way side and in hedges, where it cannot receive its proper nourishment. Which is it, I would ask, that best seconds the benevolent intentions of the Creator in covering the earth with esculent vegetables, he who with care and foresight duly ploughs and prepares a piece of ground, and sows no more seed than he expects will grow up to maturity, or he who scatters a profusion of seed indifferently over the land, without reference to the soil on which it falls, or any previous preparation for its reception ?

It is an utter misconception of my argument to
infer,

infer, that I am an enemy to population. I am only an enemy to vice and misery, and consequently to that unfavourable proportion between population and food, which produces these evils. But this unfavourable proportion has no necessary connection with the quantity of absolute population, which a country may contain. On the contrary, it is more frequently found in countries which are very thinly peopled, than in those which are populous.

The bent of my argument on the subject of population may be illustrated by the instance of a pasture farm. If a young grazier were told to stock his land well, as on his stock would depend his profits, and the ultimate success of his undertaking, he would certainly have been told nothing, but what was strictly true. And he would have to accuse himself, not his advisers, if, in pursuance of these instructions, he were to push the breeding of his cattle, till they became lean and half-starved. His instructor, when he talked of the advantages of a large stock, meant undoubtedly stock in proper condition, and not such a stock, as though it might be numerically greater was in value much less. The expression of stocking a farm well does not refer to particular numbers, but merely to that proportion which is best adapted to the farm, whether it be a poor or a rich one, whether it will carry fifty head of cattle or five hundred. It is undoubtedly extremely desirable, that it should carry the
greater

greater number, and every effort should be made to effect this object; but surely that farmer could not be considered as an enemy to a large quantity of stock, who should insist upon the folly and impropriety of attempting to breed such a quantity, before the land was put into a condition to bear it.

The arguments which I have used respecting the increase of population are exactly of the same nature as these just mentioned. I believe that it is the intention of the Creator, that the earth should be replenished; but certainly with a healthy, virtuous, and happy population, not an unhealthy, vicious, and miserable one. And if in endeavouring to obey the command to increase and multiply, we people it only with beings of this latter description, and suffer accordingly, we have no right to impeach the justice of the command, but our irrational mode of executing it.

In the desirableness of a great and efficient population, I do not differ from the warmest advocates of increase. I am perfectly ready to acknowledge with the writers of old, that it is not extent of territory, but extent of population, that measures the power of states. It is only as to the mode of obtaining a vigorous and efficient population, that I differ from them; and in thus differing I conceive myself entirely borne out by experience, that great test of all human speculations.

* This opinion I have expressed, pag. 491 of the 4to. edit. and p. 239, vol. ii, 8vo. edit.

It appears from the undoubted testimony of registers, that a large proportion of marriages and births is by no means necessarily connected with a rapid increase of population, but is often found in countries where it is either stationary or increasing very slowly. The population of such countries is not only comparatively inefficient from the general poverty and misery of the inhabitants, but invariably contains a much larger proportion of persons in those stages of life, in which they are unable to contribute their share to the resources or the defence of the state.

This is most strikingly illustrated in an instance which I have quoted from M. Muret, in a chapter on Switzerland, where it appeared, that in proportion to the same population, the Lyonois produced 10 births, the Pays de Vaud 11, and a particular parish in the Alps only 8; but that at the age of 20 these three very different numbers were all reduced to the same.* In the Lyonois nearly half of the population was under the age of puberty, in the Pays de Vaud one third, and in the parish of the Alps only one fourth. The inference from such facts is unavoidable, and of the highest importance to society.

The power of a country to increase its resources, or defend its possessions, must depend principally upon its efficient population, upon that part of the

* Pag. 271, 4to. edit. and p. 399, vol. i, 8vo. edit.

population which is of an age to be employed effectually in agriculture, commerce, or war; but it appears with an evidence little short of demonstration, that in a country, the resources of which do not naturally call for a larger proportion of births, such an increase, so far from tending to increase this efficient population, would tend materially to diminish it. It would undoubtedly at first increase the number of souls in proportion to the means of subsistence, and consequently cruelly increase the pressure of want; but the numbers of persons rising annually to the age of puberty might not be so great as before, a larger part of the produce would be distributed without return to children, who would never reach manhood; and the additional population, instead of giving additional strength to the country, would essentially lessen this strength, and operate as a constant obstacle to the creation of new resources.

We are a little dazzled at present by the population and power of France, and it is known, that she has always had a large proportion of births: but if any reliance can be placed on what are considered as the best authorities on this subject, it is quite certain, that the advantages which she enjoys do not arise from any thing peculiar in the structure of her population; but solely from the great absolute quantity of it, derived from her immense extent of fertile territory.

Necker, speaking of the population of France, says, that it is so composed, that a million of individuals present neither the same force in war, nor the same capacity for labour, as an equal number in a country where the people are less oppressed and fewer die in infancy.^a And the view which Arthur Young has given of the state of the lower classes of the people at the time he travelled in France, which was just at the commencement of the revolution, leads directly to the same conclusion. According to the *Statistique générale et particulière de la France* lately published, the proportion of the population under twenty is almost $\frac{9}{20}$; in England it is probably not much more than $\frac{7}{20}$.^b Consequently

^a Necker sur les Finances, Tom. i, ch. ix, p. 263, 12mo.

^b I do not mention these numbers here, as vouching in any degree for their accuracy, but merely for the sake of illustrating the subject. Unfortunately there are no data respecting the classifications of the population of different countries according to age, on which any reliance can be placed with safety. I have reason to think, that those which are given in the *Statistique Générale* were not taken from actual enumerations, and the proportion of the population under 20, mentioned in the text, for England, is entirely conjectural, and certainly too small. Of this, however, we may be quite sure, that when two countries, from the proportion of their births to deaths, increase nearly at the same rate, the one, in which the births and deaths bear the greatest proportion to the whole population, will have the smallest comparative number of persons above the age of puberty. That England and Scotland have, in every million of people which they contain, more individuals fit for labour, than France, the data we have are sufficient

quently out of a population of ten millions England would have a million more of persons above twenty than France, and would upon this supposition have at least three or four hundred thousand more males of a military age. If our population were of the same description as that of France, it must be increased numerically by more than a million and a half, in order to enable us to produce from England and Wales the same number of persons above the age of twenty as at present; and if we had only an increase of a million, our efficient strength in agriculture, commerce, and war, would be in the most decided manner diminished, while at the same time the distresses of the lower classes would be dread-

to determine; but in what degree this difference exists cannot be ascertained, without better information than we at present possess. On account of the more rapid increase of population in England than in France before the revolution, England ought, *cæteris paribus*, to have had the largest proportion of births, yet in France the proportion was $\frac{1}{25}$ or $\frac{1}{26}$, and in England only $\frac{1}{38}$.

The proportion of persons capable of bearing arms has been sometimes calculated at one fourth, and sometimes at one fifth, of the whole population of a country. The reader will be aware of the prodigious difference between the two estimates, supposing them to be applicable to two different countries. In the one case, a population of 20 millions would yield five millions of effective men; and in the other case, the same population would only yield 4 millions. We cannot surely doubt which of the two kinds of population would be of the most valuable description both with regard to actual strength, and the creation of fresh resources. Probably, however, there are no two countries in Europe, in which the difference in this respect is so great as that between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{5}$.

fully increased. Can any rational man say, that an additional population of this description would be desirable, either in a moral or political view? And yet this is the kind of population, which invariably results from direct encouragements to marriage, or from the want of personal respectability, which is occasioned by ignorance and despotism.

It may perhaps be true, that France fills her armies with greater facility and less interruption to the usual labours of her inhabitants than England; and it must be acknowledged, that poverty and want of employment are powerful aids to a recruiting serjeant; but it would not be a very humane project, to keep our people always in want, for the sake of enlisting them cheaper; nor would it be a very politic project, to diminish our wealth and strength with the same economical view. We cannot attain incompatible objects. If we possess the advantage of being able to keep nearly all our people constantly employed, either in agriculture or commerce, we cannot expect to retain the opposite advantage of their being always at leisure, and willing to enlist for a very small sum.* But we may rest perfectly assured, that while we have the efficient population, we shall never want men to fill our armies, if we propose to them adequate motives,

* This subject is strikingly illustrated in Lord Selkirk's lucid and masterly observations on the present state of the Highlands, and on the causes and probable consequences of emigration, to which I can with confidence refer the reader,

In many parts of the Essay I have dwelt much on the advantage of rearing the requisite population of any country from the smallest number of births. I have stated expressly, that a decrease of mortality at all ages is what we ought chiefly to aim at; and as the best criterion of happiness and good government, instead of the largeness of the proportion of births, which was the usual mode of judging, I have proposed the smallness of the proportion dying under the age of puberty. Conscious that I had never intentionally deviated from these principles, I might well be rather surpris'd to hear, that I had been consider'd by some as an enemy to the introduction of the vaccine inoculation, which is calculated to attain the very end, that I have uniformly consider'd as so desirable. I have indeed intimated what I still continue most firmly to believe, that if the resources of the country would not permanently admit of a greatly accelerated rate of increase in the population (and whether they would or not must certainly depend upon other causes besides the number of lives saved by the vaccine inoculation),^a one of two things would

^a It should be remarked however, that a young person saved from death is more likely to contribute to the creation of fresh resources than another birth. It is a great loss of labour and food to begin over again. And universally it is true, that, under similar circumstances, that article will come the cheapest to market, which is accompanied by fewest failures.

happen, either an increased mortality of some other diseases, or a diminution in the proportion of births. But I have expressed my conviction, that the latter effect would take place; and therefore consistently with the opinions which I have always maintained, I ought to be, and am one of the warmest friends to the introduction of the cow-pox. In making every exertion, which I think likely to be effectual, to increase the comforts and diminish the mortality among the poor, I act in the most exact conformity to my principles. Whether those are equally consistent, who profess to have the same object in view, and yet measure the happiness of nations by the large proportion of marriages and births, is a point which they would do well to consider.

It has been said by some, that the natural checks to population will always be sufficient to keep it within bounds, without resorting to any other aids; and one ingenious writer has remarked, that I have not deduced a single original fact from real observations, to prove the inefficiency of the checks which already prevail.^a These remarks are correctly true, and are truisms exactly of the same kind as the assertion, that man cannot live without food. For, undoubtedly as long as this continues to be a law of his nature, what are here called the natural

^a I should like much to know what description of facts this gentleman had in view, when he made this observation. If I could have found one of the kind, which seems here to be alluded to, it would indeed have been truly original.

checks cannot possibly fail of being effectual. Besides the curious truism that these assertions involve, they proceed upon the very strange supposition, that the *ultimate* object of my work is to check population, as if any thing could be more desirable, than the most rapid increase of population unaccompanied by vice and misery. But of course my ultimate object is to diminish vice and misery, and any checks to population, which may have been suggested, are solely as means to accomplish this end. To a rational being, the prudential check to population ought to be considered as equally natural with the check from poverty and premature mortality, which these gentlemen seem to think so entirely sufficient and satisfactory; and it will readily occur to the intelligent reader, that one class of checks may be substituted for another, not only without essentially diminishing the population of a country, but even under a constantly progressive increase of it.⁴

On the possibility of increasing very considerably the effective population of this country, I have expressed myself in some parts of my work more sanguinely, perhaps, than experience would warrant. I have said, that in the course of some centuries it might contain two or three times as many inha-

⁴ Both Norway and Switzerland, where the preventive check prevails the most, are increasing with some rapidity in their population; and in proportion to their means of subsistence, they can produce more males of a military age than any other country of Europe.

bitants as at present, and yet every person be both better fed and better clothed.^a And in the comparison of the increase of population and food at the beginning of the Essay, that the argument might not seem to depend upon a difference of opinion respecting facts, I have allowed the produce of the earth to be unlimited, which is certainly going too far. It is not a little curious therefore, that it should still continue to be urged against me as an argument, that this country might contain two or three times as many inhabitants; and it is still more curious, that some persons, who have allowed the different ratios of increase on which all my principal conclusions are founded, have still asserted, that no difficulty or distress could arise from population, till the productions of the earth could not be further increased. I doubt whether a stronger instance could readily be produced of the total absence of the power of reasoning, than this assertion, after such a concession, affords. It involves a greater absurdity than the saying, that because a farm can by proper management be made to carry an additional flock of four head of cattle every year, that therefore no difficulty or inconvenience would arise if an additional forty were placed in it yearly.

The power of the earth to produce subsistence is certainly not unlimited, but it is strictly speaking

^a P. 512, 4to, edit. p. 274, vol. ii, 8vo edit.

indefinite;

indefinite; that is, its limits are not defined, and the time will probably never arrive when we shall be able to say, that no further labour or ingenuity of man could make further additions to it. But the power of obtaining an additional quantity of food from the earth by proper management, and in a certain time, has the most remote relation imaginable to the power of keeping pace with an unrestricted increase of population. The knowledge and industry, which would enable the natives of New Holland to make the best use of the natural resources of their country, must, without an absolute miracle, come to them gradually and slowly; and even then, as it has amply appeared, would be perfectly ineffectual as to the grand object; but the passions which prompt to the increase of population are always in full vigour, and are ready to produce their full effect even in a state of the most helpless ignorance and barbarism. It will be readily allowed, that the reason why New Holland, in proportion to its natural powers, is not so populous as China, is the want of those human institutions which protect property and encourage industry; but the misery and vice which prevail almost equally in both countries, from the tendency of population to increase faster than the means of subsistence, form a distinct consideration, and arise from a distinct cause. They arise from the incomplete discipline of the human passions; and no per-

son with the slightest knowledge of mankind has ever had the hardihood to affirm, that human institutions could completely discipline all the human passions. But I have already treated this subject so fully in the course of the work, that I am ashamed to add any thing further here.

The next grand objection, which has been urged against me, is my denial of the *right* of the poor to support.

Those who would maintain this objection with any degree of consistency are bound to show, that the different ratios of increase with respect to population and food, which I attempted to establish at the beginning of the Essay, are fundamentally erroneous; as on the supposition of their being true, the conclusion is inevitable. If it appear, as it must appear on these ratios being allowed, that it is not possible for the industry of man to produce sufficient food for all that would be born, if every person were to marry at the time when he was first prompted to it by inclination, it follows irresistibly, that all cannot have a *right* to support. Let us for a moment suppose an equal division of property in any country. If under these circumstances one half of the society were by prudential habits so to regulate their increase, that it exactly kept pace with their increasing cultivation, it is evident, that they would always remain as rich as at first. If the other half during the same time married at the age
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of puberty, when they would probably feel most inclined to it, it is evident, that they would soon become wretchedly poor. But upon what plea of justice or equity could this second half of the society claim a right, in virtue of their poverty, to any of the possessions of the first half? This poverty had arisen entirely from their own ignorance or imprudence; and it would be perfectly clear, from the manner in which it had come upon them, that if their plea were admitted, and they were not suffered to feel the particular evils resulting from their conduct, the whole society would shortly be involved in the same degree of wretchedness. Any voluntary and temporary assistance, which might be given as a measure of charity by the richer members of the society to the others, while they were learning to make a better use of the lessons of nature, would be quite a distinct consideration, and without doubt most properly applied; but nothing like a claim of *right* to support can possibly be maintained, till we deny the premises; till we affirm, that the American increase of population is a miracle, and does not arise from the greater facility of obtaining the means of subsistence.^a

In

^a It has been said, that I have written a quarto volume to prove, that population increases in a geometrical, and food in an arithmetical ratio; but this is not quite true. The first of these propositions I considered as proved the moment the American increase was related, and the second proposition as soon as it was enunciated. The chief object of my work was to inquire what effects

In fact whatever we may say in our declamations on this subject, almost the whole of our *conduct* is founded on the nonexistence of this right. If the poor had really a claim of *right* to support, I do not think, that any man could justify his wearing broad cloth, or eating as much meat as he likes for dinner; and those who assert this right, and yet are rolling in their carriages, living every day luxuriously, and keeping even their horses on food of which their fellow creatures are in want, must be allowed to act with the greatest inconsistency. Taking an individual instance without reference to consequences, it appears to me, that Mr. Godwin's argument is irresistible. Can it be pretended for a moment, that a part of the mutton which I expect to eat to day would not be much more beneficially employed on some hard working labourer, who has not perhaps tasted animal food for the last week, or on some poor family, who cannot command sufficient food of any kind fully to satisfy the cravings of appetite? If these instances were not of a nature to multiply in proportion as such wants were indiscriminate these laws, which I considered as established in the first six pages, had produced, and were likely to produce on society; a subject not very readily exhausted. The principal fault of my details is, that they are not sufficiently particular; but this was a fault, which it was not in my power to remedy. It would be a most curious, and to every philosophical mind, a most interesting piece of information, to know the exact share of the full power of increase, which each existing check prevents; but at present I see no mode of obtaining such information.

minutely

minately gratified, the gratification of them, as it would be practicable, would be highly beneficial; and in this case I should not have the smallest hesitation in most fully allowing the right. But as it appears clearly, both from theory and experience, that, if the claim were allowed, it would soon increase beyond the *possibility* of satisfying it; and that the practical attempt to do so would involve the human race in the most wretched and universal poverty; it follows necessarily, that our conduct, which denies the right, is more suited to the present state of our being, than our declamations which allow it.

The great author of nature, indeed, with that wisdom which is apparent in all his works, has not left this conclusion to the cold and speculative consideration of general consequences. By making the passion of self-love beyond comparison stronger than the passion of benevolence, he has at once impelled us to that line of conduct, which is essential to the preservation of the human race. If all that might be born could be adequately supplied, we cannot doubt, that he would have made the desire of giving to others as ardent as that of supplying ourselves. But as under the present constitution of things this is not so, he has enjoined every man to pursue, as his primary object, his own safety and happiness, and the safety and happiness of those immediately connected with him; and it is highly
instructive

instructive to observe, that, in proportion as the sphere contracts, and the power of giving effectual assistance increases, the desire increases at the same time. In the case of children, who have certainly a claim of *right* to the support and protection of their parents, we generally find parental affection nearly as strong as self-love: and except in a few anomalous cases, the last morsel will be divided into equal shares.

By this wise provision the most ignorant are led to promote the general happiness, an end which they would have totally failed to attain, if the moving principle of their conduct had been benevolence.^a Benevolence indeed, as the great and constant source of action, would require the most perfect knowledge of causes and effects, and therefore can only be the attribute of the Deity. In a being so short-sighted as man, it would lead into the grossest errors, and soon transform the fair and cultivated soil of civilized society into a dreary scene of want and confusion.

But though benevolence cannot in the present state of our being be the great moving principle of human actions, yet as the kind correcter of the evils arising from the other stronger passion, it is essential to human happiness, it is the balm and

^a In saying this let me not be supposed to give the slightest sanction to the system of morals inculcated in the *Fable of the Bees*, a system which I consider as absolutely false, and directly contrary to the just definition of virtue. The great art of Dr. Mandeville consisted in misnomers.

consolation and grace of human life, the source of our noblest efforts in the cause of virtue, and of our purest and most refined pleasures. Conformably to that system of general laws, according to which the Supreme Being appears with very few exceptions to act, a passion so strong and general as self-love could not prevail without producing much partial evil: and to prevent this passion from degenerating into the odious vice of selfishness,^a to make us sympathise in the pains and pleasures of our fellow-creatures, and feel the same *kind* of interest in their happiness and misery as in our own, though diminished in degree; to prompt us often to put ourselves in their place, that we may understand their wants, acknowledge their rights, and do them good as we have opportunity; and to remind us continually, that even the passion which urges us to procure plenty for ourselves was not implanted in us for our own exclusive advantage, but as the means of procuring the greatest plenty for all; these appear to be the objects and offices of benevolence. In every situation of life there is ample room for the exercise of this virtue: and as each individual rises in society, as he advances in know-

^a It seems proper to make a decided distinction between self-love and selfishness, between that passion, which under proper regulations is the source of all honourable industry, and of all the necessaries and conveniences of life, and the same passion pushed to excess, when it becomes useless and disgusting, and consequently vicious.

ledge and excellence, as his power of benefitting others becomes greater, and the necessary attention to his own wants less, it will naturally come in for an increasing share among his constant motives of action. In situations of high trust and influence it ought to have a very large share, and in all public institutions be the great moving principle. Though we have often reason to fear, that our benevolence may not take the most beneficial direction, we need never apprehend, that there will be too much of it in society. The foundations of that passion, on which our preservation depends, are fixed so deeply in our nature, that no reasonings or addresses to our feelings can essentially disturb it. It is just therefore and proper, that all the positive precepts should be on the side of the weaker impulse; and we may safely endeavour to increase and extend its influence as much as we are able, if at the same time we are constantly on the watch, to prevent the evil which may arise from its misapplication.

The law which in this country entitles the poor to relief is undoubtedly different from a full acknowledgment of the natural right; and from this difference, and the many counteracting causes that arise from the mode of its execution, it will not of course be attended with the same consequences. But still it is an approximation to a full acknowledgment, and as such appears to produce much evil, both with regard to the habits and the
temper

temper of the poor. I have in consequence ventured to suggest a plan of gradual abolition, which, as might be expected, has not met with universal approbation. I can readily understand any objections that may be made to it on the plea, that, the right having been once acknowledged in this country, the revocation of it might at first excite discontents; and should therefore most fully concur in the propriety of proceeding with the greatest caution, and of using all possible means of preventing any sudden shock to the opinions of the poor. But I have never been able to comprehend the grounds of the further assertion, which I have sometimes heard made, that if the poor were really convinced, that they had no claim of right to relief, they would in general be more inclined to be discontented and seditious. On these occasions the only way I have of judging is to put myself in imagination in the place of the poor man, and consider how I should feel in his situation. If I were told, that the rich by the laws of nature and the laws of the land were bound to support me, I could not, in the first place, feel much obligation for such support; and in the next place, if I were given any food of an inferior kind, and could not see the absolute necessity of the change, which would probably be the case, I should think that I had good reason to complain. I should feel, that the laws had been violated to my injury, and that

I had been unjustly deprived of my right. Under these circumstances, though I might be deterred by the fear of an armed force from committing any overt acts of resistance, yet I should consider myself as perfectly justified in so doing, if this fear were removed; and the injury, which I believed that I had suffered, might produce the most unfavourable effects on my general dispositions towards the higher classes of society. I cannot indeed conceive any thing more irritating to the human feelings, than to experience that degree of distress, which, in spite of all our poor laws and benevolence, is not unfrequently felt in this country; and yet to believe, that these sufferings were not brought upon me either by my own faults, or by the operation of those general laws, which like the tempest, the blight, or the pestilence, are continually falling hard on particular individuals, while others entirely escape, but were occasioned solely by the avarice and injustice of the higher classes of society.

On the contrary, if I firmly believe, that by the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, I had no claim of *right* to support, I should, in the first place, feel myself more strongly bound to a life of industry and frugality; but if want, notwithstanding, came upon me, I should consider it in the light of sickness, as an evil incidental to my present state of being, and which, if I could not avoid, it was my duty to bear with fortitude and resignation. I should know
from

from past experience, that the best title I could have to the assistance of the benevolent would be the not having brought myself into distress by my own idleness or extravagance. What I received would have the best effect on my feelings towards the higher classes. Even if it were much inferior to what I had been accustomed to, it would still, instead of an injury, be an obligation; and conscious that I had no claim of *right*, nothing but the fear of absolute famine, which would overcome all other considerations, could morally justify resistance.

I cannot help believing, that, if the poor in this country were convinced, that they had no claim of *right* to support; and yet in scarcities and all cases of urgent distress were liberally relieved, which I think they would be; the bond which unites the rich with the poor would be drawn much closer than at present, and the lower classes of society, as they would have less real reason for irritation and discontent, would be much less subject to these uneasy sensations.

Among those who have objected to my declaration, that the poor have no claim of *right* to support, is Mr. Young, who, with a harshness not quite becoming a candid inquirer after truth, has called my proposal for the gradual abolition of the poor laws a horrible plan, and asserted, that the execution of it would be a most iniquitous proceeding. Let this plan however be compared for a moment with

that which he himself and others have proposed, of fixing the sum of the poor's rates, which on no account is to be increased. Under such a law, if the distresses of the poor were to be aggravated ten-fold, either by the increase of numbers or the recurrence of a scarcity, the same sum would invariably be appropriated to their relief. If the statute which gives the poor a right to support were to remain unexpunged, we should add to the cruelty of starving them the extreme injustice of still *professing* to relieve them. If this statute were expunged or altered, we should virtually deny the right of the poor to support, and only retain the absurdity of saying, that they had a right to a certain sum; an absurdity on which Mr. Young justly comments with much severity in the case of France.^a In both cases

^a The National Assembly of France, though they disapproved of the English poor laws, still adopted their principle, and declared, that the poor had a right to pecuniary assistance; that the Assembly ought to consider such a provision as one of its first and most sacred duties; and that with this view, an expense ought to be incurred to the amount of 50 millions a year. Mr. Young justly observes, that he does not comprehend how it is possible to regard the expenditure of 50 millions a sacred duty, and not extend that 50 to 100, if necessity should demand it, the 100 to 200, the 200 to 300, and so on in the same miserable progression which has taken place in England. *Travels in France*, c. xv, p. 439.

I should be the last man to quote Mr. Young against himself, if I thought he had left the path of error for the path of truth, as such kind of inconsistency I hold to be highly praiseworthy. But thinking on the contrary, that he has left truth for error, it is surely

eases the hardships which they would suffer would be much more severe, and would come upon them in a much more unprepared state, than upon the plan proposed in the Essay.

According to this plan all that are already married, and even all that are engaged to marry during the course of the year, and all their children, would be relieved as usual; and only those who marry subsequently, and who of course may be supposed to have made better provision for contingencies, would be out of the pale of relief.

Any plan for the abolition of the poor laws must presuppose a general acknowledgment, that they are essentially wrong, and that it is necessary to tread back our steps. With this acknowledgment, whatever objections may be made to my plan, in the too frequently short-sighted views of policy, I have no fear of comparing it with any other, that has yet been advanced, in point of justice and humanity; and of course the terms iniquitous and horrible "pass by me like the idle wind, which I regard not."

Mr. Young it would appear has now given up this plan. He has pleaded for the privilege of being inconsistent, and has given such reasons for it, that I am disposed to acquiesce in them, provided surely justifiable to remind him of his former opinions. We may recal to a vicious man his former virtuous conduct, though it would be useless and indelicate to remind a virtuous man of the vices which he had relinquished.

he confines the exercise of this privilege to different publications, in the interval between which he may have collected new facts; but I still think it not quite allowable in the same publication: and yet it appears, that in the very paper, in which he has so severely condemned my scheme, the same arguments, which he has used to reprobate it, are applicable with equal force against his own proposal, as he has there explained it.

He allows, that his plan can provide only for a certain number of families, and has nothing to do with the increase from them;^a but in allowing this, he allows, that it does not reach the grand difficulty attending a provision for the poor. In this most essential point, after reprobating me for saying, that the poor have no claim of *right* to support, he is compelled to adopt the very same conclusion; and to own, that “it might be prudent to consider the
 “miser, to which the progressive population might
 “be subject, when there was not a sufficient de-
 “mand for them in towns and manufactures, as an
 “evil which it was absolutely and physically im-
 “possible to prevent.” Now the sole reason why I say, that the poor have no claim of *right* to support, is the physical impossibility of relieving this progressive population. Mr. Young expressly acknowledges this physical impossibility; yet with an inconsistency scarcely credible still declaims against my declaration.

^a Annals of Agriculture, No. 239, p. 219.

The power which the society may possess of relieving a certain portion of the poor is a consideration perfectly distinct from the general question; and I am quite sure I have never said, that it is not our duty to do all the good that is practicable. But this limited power of assisting individuals cannot possibly establish a general right. If the poor have really a natural right to support, and if our present laws be only a confirmation of this right, it ought certainly to extend unimpaired to all who are in distress, to the increase from the cottagers as well as to the cottagers themselves: and it would be a palpable injustice in the society, to adopt Mr. Young's plan, and purchase from the present generation the disfranchisement of their posterity.

Mr. Young objects very strongly to that passage of the Essay,^a in which I observe, that a man, who plunges himself into poverty and dependence by marrying without any prospect of being able to maintain his family, has more reason to accuse himself, than the price of labour, the parish, the avarice of the rich, the institutions of society, and the dispensations of Providence; except in as far as he has been deceived by those, who ought to have instructed him. In answer to this, Mr. Young says, that the poor fellow is justified in every one of these complaints, that of Providence alone excepted; and that, seeing other cottagers living comfortably

^a Book iv, c. iii, p. 506, 4to. edit. vol. ii, p. 264, 265, 8vo.

with three or four acres of land, he has cause to accuse institutions, which deny him that which the rich could well spare, and which would give him all he wants.^a I would beg Mr. Young for a moment to consider how the matter would stand, if his own plan were completely executed. After all the commons had been divided as he has proposed, if a labourer had more than one son, in what respect would the second or third be in a different situation from the man that I have supposed? Mr. Young cannot possibly mean to say, that, if he had the very natural desire of marrying at twenty, he would still have a right to complain, that the society did not give him a house and three or four acres of land. He has indeed expressly denied this absurd consequence, though in so doing he has directly contradicted the declaration just quoted.^b The progressive population, he says, would, according to his system, be cut off from the influence of the poor laws, and the encouragement to marry would remain exactly in that proportion less than at present. Under these circumstances, without land, without the prospect of parish relief, and with the price of labour only sufficient to maintain two children, can Mr. Young seriously think, that the poor man, if he be really aware of his situation, does not do wrong in marrying, and ought not to accuse himself for following

^a Annals of Agriculture, No 239, p. 226.

^b Annals of Agriculture, No. 239, p. 214.

what Mr. Young calls the dictates of God, of nature, and of revelation? Mr. Young cannot be unaware of the wretchedness, that must inevitably follow a marriage under such circumstances. His plan makes no provision whatever for altering these circumstances. He must therefore totally disregard all the misery arising from excessive poverty; or, if he allows, that these supernumerary members must necessarily wait, either till a cottage with land becomes vacant in the country, or that by emigrating to towns they can find the means of providing for a family, all the declamation, which he has urged with such pomp against deferring marriage in my system, would be equally applicable in his own system. In fact, if Mr. Young's plan really attained the object, which it professes to have in view, that of bettering the condition of the poor; and did not defeat its intent by encouraging a too rapid multiplication, and consequently lowering the price of labour; it cannot be doubted, that not only the supernumerary members just mentioned, but all the labouring poor, must wait longer before they could marry, than they do at present.

The following proposition may be said to be capable of mathematical demonstration. In a country the resources of which will not permanently admit of an increase of population more rapid than the existing rate, no improvement in the condition of the people, which would tend to diminish mortality, could *possibly* take place without being accompanied by

by a smaller proportion of births, supposing of course no particular increase of emigration.^a To a person who has considered the subject, there is no proposition in Euclid, which brings home to the mind a stronger conviction than this; and there is no truth so invariably confirmed by all the registers of births, deaths, and marriages, that have ever been collected. In this country it has appeared, that, according to the returns of the population Act, the proportion of births to deaths is about 4 to 3. This proportion with a mortality of 1 in 40^b would double the population in 83 years and a half; and as we cannot suppose, that the country could admit of more than a quadrupled population in the next hundred and sixty-six years, we may safely say, that its re-

^a With regard to the resources of emigration, I refer the reader to the 4th chapter, Book iii, of the Essay. Nothing is more easy than to say, that three fourths of the habitable globe are yet unpeopled, but it is by no means so easy to fill these parts with flourishing colonies. The peculiar circumstances which have caused the spirit of emigration in the Highlands, so clearly explained in the able work of Lord Selkirk before referred to, are not of constant recurrence; nor is it by any means to be wished, that they should be so. And yet without some such circumstances, people are by no means very ready to leave their native soil, and will bear much distress at home, rather than venture on these distant regions. I am of opinion, that it is both the duty and interest of governments to facilitate emigration; but it would surely be unjust to oblige people to leave their country and kindred against their inclinations.

^b Table iii, p. 238, 4to edit; and Table ii, p. 535, 536, vol. i, 8vo. edit.

forces will not allow of a permanent rate of increase greater than that which is taking place at present. But if this be granted, it follows as a direct conclusion, that if Mr. Young's plan, or any other, really succeeded in bettering the condition of the poor, and enabling them to rear more of their children, the vacancies in cottages in proportion to the number of expectants would happen slower than at present, and the age of marriage must inevitably be later. Those, therefore, who propose plans for bettering the condition of the poor, and yet at the same time reprobate later or fewer marriages, are guilty of the most puerile inconsistency; and I cannot but be perfectly astonished, that Mr. Young, who once understood the subject, should have indulged himself in such a poor declamation about passions, profligacy, burning, and ravens. It is in fact a silly, not to say impious, declamation against the laws of nature and the dispensations of Providence.

With regard to the expression of later marriages, it should always be recollected, that it refers to no particular age, but is entirely comparative. The marriages in England are later than in France, the natural consequence of that prudence and respectability generated by a better government; and can we doubt, that good has been the result? The marriages in this country now are later than they were before the revolution, and I feel firmly persuaded, that the increased healthiness observed of late years could

Two not possibly have taken place, without this lengthening circumstance. Two or three years in the average age of marriage, by lengthening each considerably and tending, in a small degree, both to diminish the prolificness of marriages, and the number of born living to be married, may make a considerable difference in the rate of increase, and be adequate to allow for a considerably diminished mortality. But I would on no account talk of any limits whatever. The only plain and intelligible measure with regard to marriage is the having a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family. If the possession of one of Mr. Young's cottages would give the labourer this prospect, he would be quite right to marry; but if it did not, or if he could only obtain a rented house without land, and the wages of labour were only sufficient to maintain two children, does Mr. Young, who cuts him off from the influence of the poor laws, presume to say, that he would still be right in marrying? *

Mr. Young has asserted, that I have made perfect chastity in the single state absolutely necessary to the success of my plan; but this surely is a misrepresentation. Perfect virtue is indeed absolutely ne-

* The lowest prospect, with which a man can be justified in marrying, seems to be the power, when in health, of earning such wages, as at the average price of corn will maintain the average number of living children to a marriage.

cessary,

cessary, to enable man to avoid *all* the moral and physical evils, which depend upon his own conduct; but who ever expected perfect virtue upon earth? I have said what I conceive to be strictly true, that it is our duty to defer marriage, till we can feed our children; and that it is also our duty, not to indulge ourselves in vicious gratifications: but I have never said, that I expected either, much less both of these duties, to be completely fulfilled. In this, and a number of other cases, it may happen, that the violation of one of two duties will enable a man to perform the other with greater facility; but if they be really both duties, and both practicable, no power *on earth* can absolve a man from the guilt of violating either. This can only be done by that God, who can weigh the crime against the temptation, and will temper justice with mercy. The moralist is still bound to inculcate the practice of both duties, and each individual must be left to act under the temptations, to which he is exposed, as his conscience shall dictate. Whatever I may have said in drawing a picture *professedly* visionary, for the sake of illustration, in the practical application of my principles I have taken man as he is, with all his imperfections on his head. And thus viewing him, and knowing that some checks to population must exist, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying, that the prudential check

check to marriage is better than premature mortality. And in this decision I feel myself completely justified by experience.

In every instance that can be traced, in which an improved government has given to its subjects a greater degree of foresight, industry, and personal dignity, these effects, under similar circumstances of increase, have invariably been accompanied by a diminished proportion of marriages. This is a proof, that an increase of moral worth in the general character is not at least *incompatible* with an increase of temptations with respect to one particular vice; and the instances of Norway, Switzerland, England, and Scotland, adduced in the last chapter of the Essay, show, that in comparing different countries together, a smaller proportion of marriages and births does not necessarily imply the greater prevalence even of this particular vice. This is surely quite enough for the legislator. He cannot estimate with tolerable accuracy the degree, in which chastity in the single state prevails. His general conclusions must be founded on general results, and these are clearly in his favour.

To much of Mr. Young's plan, as he has at present explained it, I should by no means object. The peculiar evil, which I apprehended from it, that of taking the poor from the consumption of wheat, and feeding them on milk and potatoes, might certainly be avoided by a limitation of the number of cottages;

cottages ; and I entirely agree with him in thinking, that we should not be deterred from making 500, 000 families more comfortable, because we cannot extend the same relief to all the rest. I have indeed myself ventured to recommend a general improvement of cottages, and even the cow system on a limited scale ; and perhaps with proper precautions a certain portion of land might be given to a considerable body of the labouring classes.

If the law which entitles the poor to support were to be repealed, any plan, which would tend to render such repeal more palatable on its first promulgation, I should most highly approve ; and in this view, some kind of compact with the poor might be very desirable. A plan of letting land to labourers under certain conditions has lately been tried in the parish of Long Newnton in Gloucestershire, and the result, with a general proposal founded on it, has been submitted to the public by Mr. Estcourt. The present success has been very striking ; but in this, and every other case of the kind, we should always bear in mind, that no experiment respecting a provision for the poor can be said to be complete, till succeeding generations have arisen.^a I doubt if there ever has been an instance

^a In any plan, particularly of a distribution of land, as a compensation for the relief given by the poor laws, the succeeding generations would form the grand difficulty. All others would be perfectly trivial in comparison. For a time every

instance of any thing like a liberal institution for the poor, which did not succeed on its first establishment, however it might have failed afterwards. But this consideration should by no means deter us from making such experiments, when present good is to be obtained by them, and a future overbalance of evil not justly to be apprehended. It should only make us less rash in drawing our inferences.

With regard to the general question of the advantages to the lower classes of possessing land, it should be recollected, that such possessions are by no means a novelty. Formerly this system prevailed in almost every country with which we are acquainted, and prevails at present in many countries, where the peasants are far from being remarkable for their comforts, but are, on the contrary, very poor, and particularly subject to scarcities. With respect to this latter evil, indeed, it is quite obvious, that a peasantry, which depends principally on its possessions in land, must be more exposed to it, than one which depends on the general wages of labour. When a year of deficient crops occurs in a country of any extent and diversity of soil, it is always partial, and some districts are more affected than others. But when a bad

thing might go on very smoothly, and the rates be much diminished; but afterwards, they would either increase again as rapidly as before, or the scheme would be exposed to all the same objections which have been made to mine, without the same justice and consistency to palliate them.

crop

crop of grafs, corn, or potatoes, or a mortality among cattle, falls on a poor man whose principal dependance is on two or three acres of land, he is in the most deplorable and helpless fituation. He is comparatively without money to purchase supplies, and is not for a moment to be compared with the man who depends on the wages of labour, and who will of course be able to purchase that portion of the general crop, whatever it may be, to which his relative fituation in the society entitles him. In Sweden where the farmers labourers are paid principally in land, and often keep two or three cows, it is not uncommon for the peasants of one district to be almost starving, while their neighbours at a little distance are living in comparative plenty. It will be found indeed generally, that, in almost all the countries which are particularly subject to scarcities and famines, either the farms are very small or the labourers are paid principally in land. China, Indostan and the former state of the Highlands of Scotland furnish some proofs among many others of the truth of this observation; and in reference to the small properties of France, Mr. Young himself in his tour particularly notices the distress arising from the least failure of the crops; and observes, that such a deficiency as in England passes almost without notice, in France is attended with dreadful calamities.^a

^a Travels in France, vol. i, c. xii, p. 409. That country will probably be the least liable to scarcities, in which agriculture is carried on as the most flourishing *manufacture* of the state.

Should any plan therefore of assisting the poor by land be adopted in this country, it would be absolutely essential to its ultimate success, to prevent them from making it their principal dependence. And this might probably be done by attending strictly to the two following rules. Not to let the division of land be so great, as to interrupt the cottager essentially in his usual labours; and always to stop in the further distribution of land and cottages, when the price of labour, independent of any assistance from land, would not at the average price of corn maintain three, or at least two children. Could the matter be so ordered, that the labourer in working for others should still continue to earn the same real command over the necessaries of life that he did before, a very great accession of comfort and happiness might accrue to the poor from the possession of land, without any evil that I can foresee at present. But if these points were not attended to, I should certainly fear an approximation to the state of the poor in France, Sweden, and Ireland; nor do I think, that any of the partial experiments that have yet taken place afford the slightest presumption to the contrary. The result of these experiments is indeed exactly such as one should have expected. Who could ever have doubted, that, if without lowering the price of labour, or taking the labourer off from his usual occupations, you could give him the produce of one or two acres of land and the benefit of a cow, you would decidedly raise his condition? But it by no means follows, that he
would

would retain this advantage, if the system were so extended, as to make the land his principal dependence, to lower the price of labour, and, in the language of Mr. Young, to take the poor from the consumption of wheat, and feed them on milk and potatoes. It does not appear to me so marvellous, as it does to Mr. Young, that the very same system, which in Lincolnshire and Rutlandshire may produce now the most comfortable peasantry in the British dominions, should in the end, if extended without proper precautions, assimilate the condition of the labourers of this country to that of the lower classes of the Irish.

It is generally dangerous and impolitic in a government, to take upon itself to regulate the supply of any commodity in request, and probably the supply of labourers forms no exception to the general rule. I would on no account therefore propose a positive law to regulate their increase; but as any assistance, which the society might give them, cannot, in the nature of things, be unlimited, the line may fairly be drawn where we please; and with regard to the increase from this point, every thing would be left as before to individual exertion and individual speculation.

If any plan of this kind were adopted by the government, I cannot help thinking, that it might be made the means of giving the best kind of encouragement and reward to those who are em-

ployed in our defence. If the period of enlisting were only for a limited time, and at the expiration of that time every person, who had conducted himself well, was entitled to a house and a small portion of land, if a country labourer, and to a tenement in a town and a small pension, if an artificer, all inalienable, a very strong motive would be held out to young men, not only to enter into the service of their country, but to behave well in that service; and in a short time, there would be such a martial population at home, as the unfortunate state of Europe seems in a most peculiar manner to require. As it is only limited assistance, that the society can possibly give, it seems in every respect fair and proper, that in regulating this limit some important end should be attained.

If the poor laws be allowed to remain exactly in their present state, we ought at least to be aware, to what cause it is owing, that their effects have not been more pernicious than they are observed to be; that we may not complain of, or alter those parts, without which we should really not have the power of continuing them. The law which obliges each parish to maintain its own poor is open to many objections. It keeps the overseers and churchwardens continually on the watch to prevent new comers, and constantly in a state of dispute with other parishes. It thus prevents the free circulation of labour from place to place, and renders its price
very

very unequal in different parts of the kingdom. It disposes all landlords rather to pull down than to build cottages on their estates; and this scarcity of habitations in the country, by driving more to the towns than would otherwise have gone, gives a relative discouragement to agriculture, and a relative encouragement to manufactures. These, it must be allowed, are no inconsiderable evils; but if the cause which occasions them were removed, evils of much greater magnitude would follow. I agree with Mr. Young in thinking, that there is scarcely a parish in the kingdom, where, if more cottages were built, and let at any tolerably moderate rents, they would not be immediately filled with new couples. I even agree with him in thinking, that in some places this want of habitations operates too strongly in preventing marriage. But I have not the least doubt, that, considered generally, its operation in the present state of things is most beneficial; and that it is almost exclusively owing to this cause, that we have been able so long to continue the poor laws. If any man could build a hovel by the road side, or on the neighbouring waste, without molestation; and yet were secure, that he and his family would always be supplied with work and food by the parish, if they were not readily to be obtained elsewhere; I do not believe, that it would be long before the physical impossibility of execut-

ing the letter of the poor laws would appear. It is of importance therefore to be aware, that it is not because this or any other society has really the power of employing and supporting all that might be born, that we have been able to continue the present system; but because by the indirect operation of this system, not adverted to at the time of its establishment, and frequently reprobated since, the number of births is always very greatly limited, and thus reduced within the pale of possible support.

The obvious tendency of the poor laws is certainly to encourage marriage, but a closer attention to all their indirect as well as direct effects may make it a matter of doubt how far they really do this. They clearly tend, in their general operation, to discourage sobriety and economy, to encourage idleness and the desertion of children, and to put virtue and vice more on a level than they otherwise would be; but I will not presume to say positively, that they tend to encourage population. It is certain, that the proportion of births in this country compared with others in similar circumstances is very small; but this was to be expected from the superiority of the government, the more respectable state of the people, and the more general spread of a taste for cleanliness and conveniences. And it will readily occur to the reader, that owing to these causes, combined with the twofold operation of the poor laws, it must be extremely difficult to ascertain,

tain, with any degree of precision, what has been their effect on population.*

The only argument of a general nature against the *Essay*, which strikes me as having any considerable force, is the following. It is against the application of its principles, not the principles themselves, and has not, that I know of, been yet advanced in its present form. It may be said, that, according to my own reasonings and the facts stated in my work, it appears, that the diminished proportion of births, which I consider as absolutely necessary to the permanent improvement of the condition of the poor, invariably follows an improved government, and the greater degree of personal respectability which it gives to the lower classes of society. Consequently allowing the desirableness of the end, it is not necessary, in order to obtain it, to risk the promulgation of any new opinions, which may alarm the prejudices of the poor, and the effect of which we cannot with certainty foresee; but we have

*The most favourable light, in which the poor laws can possibly be placed, is to say, that under all the circumstances, with which they have been accompanied, they do not encourage marriage; and undoubtedly the returns of the Population Act seem to warrant the assertion. Should this be true, many of the objections which have been urged in the *Essay* against the poor laws will of course be removed; but I wish to press on the attention of the reader, that they will in that case be removed in strict conformity to the general principles of the work, and in a manner which will confirm, rather than to invalidate, the main positions which were attempted to establish.

only to proceed in improving our civil polity, conferring the benefits of education upon all, and removing every obstacle to the general extension of all those privileges and advantages, which may be enjoyed in common; and we may be quite sure, that the effect which I look forward to, and which can alone render these advantages permanent, will follow.

I acknowledge the truth and force of this argument, and have only to observe in answer to it, that it is difficult to conceive, that we should not proceed with more celerity and certainty towards the end in view, if the principal causes, which tend to promote or retard it, were generally known. In particular, I cannot help looking forward to a very decided improvement in the habits and temper of the lower classes, when their real situation has been clearly explained to them; and if this were done gradually and cautiously, and accompanied with proper moral and religious instructions, I should not expect any danger from it. I am always unwilling to believe, that the general dissemination of truth is prejudicial. Cases of the kind are undoubtedly conceivable, but they should be admitted with very great caution. If the general presumption in favour of the advantage of truth were once essentially shaken, all ardour in its cause would share the same fate, and the interests of knowledge and virtue most decidedly suffer. It is besides a species of arrogance

arrogance not lightly to be encouraged, for any man to suppose, that he has penetrated further into the laws of nature than the great Author of them intended, further than is consistent with the good of mankind.

Under these impressions I have freely given my opinions to the public. In the truth of the general principles of the Essay I confess that I feel such a confidence, that, till something has been advanced against them very different indeed from any thing that has hitherto appeared, I cannot help considering them as incontrovertible. With regard to the application of these principles the case is certainly different; and as dangers of opposite kinds are to be guarded against, the subject will of course admit of much latitude of opinion. At all events, however, it must be allowed, that, whatever may be our determination respecting the advantages or disadvantages of endeavouring to circulate the truths on this subject among the poor, it must be highly advantageous, that they should be known to all those, who have it in their power to influence the laws and institutions of society. That the body of an army should not in all cases know the particulars of their situation may possibly be desirable; but that the leaders should be in the same state of ignorance will hardly, I think, be contended.

If it be really true, that without a diminished
proportion

proportion of births^a we cannot attain any *permanent* improvement in the health and happiness of the mass of the people, and secure that description of population, which, by containing a larger share of adults, is best calculated to create fresh resources, and consequently to encourage a continued increase of efficient population; it is surely of the highest importance, that this should be known, that, if we take no steps directly to promote this effect, we should not at least, under the influence of the former prejudices on this subject, endeavour to counteract it^b.

And

^a It should always be recollected, that a diminished *proportion* of births may take place under a constant annual increase of the absolute number. This is in fact exactly what has happened in England and Scotland during the last forty years.

^b We should be aware, that a scarcity of men, owing either to great losses, or to some particular and unusual demand, is liable to happen in every country; and in no respect invalidates the general principle, that has been advanced. Whatever may be the tendency to increase, it is quite clear, that an extraordinary supply of men cannot be produced either in six months, or six years; but even with a view to a more than usual supply, causes which tend to diminish mortality are not only more certain but more rapid in their effects, than direct encouragements to marriage. An increase of births may, and often does, take place, without the ultimate accomplishment of our object; but supposing the births to remain the same, it is impossible for a diminished mortality not to be accompanied by an increase of effective population.

We are very apt to be deceived on this subject by the almost
constant

And if it be thought unadvisable to abolish the poor laws, it cannot be doubted, that a knowledge of those general principles, which render them inefficient in their humane intentions, might be applied so far to modify them and regulate their execution, as to remove many of the evils with which they are accompanied, and make them less objectionable.

There is only one subject more which I shall notice, and that is rather a matter of feeling than of argument. Many persons, whose understandings are not of that description, that they can regulate

constant demand for labour, which prevails in every prosperous country; but we should consider, that in countries which can but just keep up their population, as the price of labour must be sufficient to rear a family of a certain number, a single man would have a superfluity, and labour would be in constant demand at the price of the subsistence of an individual. It cannot be doubted, that in this country we could soon employ double the number of labourers, if we could have them at our own price; because supply will produce demand, as well as demand supply. The present great extension of the cotton trade did not originate in an extraordinary increase of demand at the former prices, but in an increased supply at a much cheaper rate, which of course immediately produced an extended demand. As we cannot however obtain men at sixpence a day by improvements in machinery, we must submit to the necessary conditions of their rearing; and there is no man, who has the slightest feeling for the happiness of the most numerous class of society, or has even just views of policy on the subject, who would not rather choose, that the requisite population should be obtained by such a price of labour, combined with such habits, as would occasion a very small mortality, than from a great proportion of births, of which comparatively few would reach manhood.

their belief or disbelief by their likes or dislikes, have professed their perfect conviction of the truth of the general principles contained in the Essay; but at the same time have lamented this conviction, as throwing a darker shade over our views of human nature, and tending particularly to narrow our prospects of future improvement. In these feelings I cannot agree with them. If, from a review of the past, I could not only believe, that a fundamental and very extraordinary improvement in human society was possible, but feel a firm confidence that it would take place, I should undoubtedly be grieved to find, that I had overlooked some cause, the operation of which would at once blast my hopes. But if the contemplation of the past history of mankind, from which alone we can judge of the future, renders it almost impossible to feel such a confidence, I confess that I had much rather believe, that some real and deeply-seated difficulty existed, the constant struggle with which was calculated to rouse the natural inactivity of man, to call forth his faculties, and invigorate and improve his mind; a species of difficulty which it must be allowed is most eminently and peculiarly suited to a state of probation; than that nearly all the evils of life might with the most perfect facility be removed, but for the perverseness and wickedness of those who influence human institutions.^a

A person

^a The misery and vice arising from the pressure of the population too hard against the limits of subsistence, and the misery and

A person who held this latter opinion must necessarily live in a constant state of irritation and disappointment. The ardent expectations, with which he might begin life, would soon receive the most cruel check. The regular progress of society, under the most favourable circumstances, would to him appear slow and unsatisfactory; but instead even of this regular progress, his eye would be more frequently presented with retrograde movements, and the most disheartening reverses. The changes, to which he had looked forward with delight, would be found big with new and unlooked-for evils, and the characters, on which he had reposed the most confidence, would be seen frequently deserting his favourite cause, either from the lessons of experience or the temptation of power. In this state of constant disappointment, he would be but too apt to attribute every thing to the worst motives; he would be inclined to give up the cause of improvement in despair; and judging of the whole from a part, nothing but a peculiar goodness of heart, and amiableness of disposition, could preserve him from

and vice arising from promiscuous intercourse, may be considered as the Scylla and Charybdis of human life. That it is possible for each individual to steer clear of both these rocks is certainly true, and a truth which I have endeavoured strongly to maintain; but that these rocks do not form a difficulty independent of human institutions, no person with any knowledge of the subject can venture to assert.

that

that fickly and disgusting misanthropy, which is but too frequently the end of such characters.

On the contrary, a person who held the other opinion, as he would set out with more moderate expectations, would of course be less liable to disappointment. A comparison of the best with the worst states of society, and the obvious inference from analogy, that the best were capable of further improvement, would constantly present to his mind a prospect sufficiently animating, to warrant his most persevering exertions. But aware of the difficulties with which the subject was surrounded, knowing how often in the attempt to attain one object some other had been lost, and that though society had made rapid advances in some directions, it had been comparatively stationary in others, he would be constantly prepared for failures. These failures, instead of creating despair, would only create knowledge; instead of checking his ardour, would only give it a wiser and more successful direction; and having founded his opinion of mankind on broad and general grounds, the disappointment of any particular views would not change this opinion; but even in declining age he would probably be found believing as firmly in the reality and general prevalence of virtue, as in the existence and frequency of vice; and to the last, looking forward with a just confidence to those improvements in society, which the history of the past, in spite of all the

the

the reverses with which it is accompanied, seems clearly to warrant.

It may be true, that if ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise; but if ignorance be not bliss, as in the present instance; if all false views of society must not only impede decidedly the progress of improvement, but necessarily terminate in the most bitter disappointments to the individuals who form them; I shall always think, that the feelings and prospects of those, who make the justest estimates of our future expectations, are the most consolatory; and that the characters of this description are happier themselves, at the same time that they are beyond comparison more likely to contribute to the improvement and happiness of society.*

* While the last sheet of this Appendix was printing, I heard with some surprise, that an argument had been drawn from the Principle of Population in favour of the slave trade. As the just conclusion from that principle appears to me to be exactly the contrary, I cannot help saying a few words on the subject.

If the only argument against the slave trade had been, that, from the mortality it occasioned, it was likely to unpeople Africa, or extinguish the human race, some comfort with regard to these fears might, indeed, be drawn from the Principle of Population; but as the necessity of the abolition has never, that I know of, been urged on the ground of these apprehensions, a reference to the laws which regulate the increase of the human species was certainly most unwise in the friends of the slave trade.

The abolition of the slave trade is defended principally by the two following arguments:

1st. That the trade to the coast of Africa for slaves, together with their subsequent treatment in the West Indies, is productive

of so much human misery, that its continuance is disgraceful to us as men and as Christians.

2d. That the culture of the West India islands could go on with equal advantage and much greater security, if no further importation of slaves were to take place.

With regard to the first argument, it appears, in the Essay on the Principle of Population, that so great is the tendency of mankind to increase, that nothing but some physical or moral check, operating in an *excessive* and *unusual* degree, can permanently keep the population of a country below the average means of subsistence. In the West India islands a constant recruit of labouring negroes is necessary; and consequently the immediate checks to population must operate with *excessive* and *unusual* force. All the checks to population were found resolvable into moral restraint, vice, and misery. In a state of slavery moral restraint cannot have much influence; nor in any state will it ever continue permanently to diminish the population. The whole effect, therefore, is to be attributed to the *excessive* and *unusual* action of vice and misery; and a reference to the facts contained in the Essay incontrovertibly proves, that the condition of the slaves in the West Indies, taken altogether, is most wretched, and that the representations of the friends of the abolition cannot easily have been exaggerated.

It will be said, that the principal reason, why the slaves in the West Indies constantly diminish, is, that the sexes are not in equal numbers, a considerable majority of males being always imported; but this very circumstance decides at once on the cruelty of their situation, and must necessarily be one powerful cause of their degraded moral condition.

It may be said also, that many towns do not keep up their numbers, and yet the same objection is not made to them on that account. But the cases will admit of no comparison. If, for the sake of better society or higher wages, people are willing to expose themselves to a less pure air, and greater temptations to vice, no hardship is suffered, that can reasonably be complained of. The superior mortality of towns falls principally upon children,
and

and is scarcely noticed by people of mature age. The sexes are in equal numbers, and every man after a few years of industry may look forward to the happiness of domestic life. If during the time that he is thus waiting, he acquires vicious habits which indispose him to marriage, he has nobody to blame except himself. But with the negroes the case is totally different. The unequal number of the sexes shuts out at once the majority of them from all chance of domestic happiness. They have no hope of this kind to sweeten their toils, and animate their exertions; but are necessarily condemned either to unceasing privation, or to the most vicious excesses; and thus shut out from every cheering prospect, we cannot be surprised, that they are in general ready to welcome that death, which so many meet with in the prime of life.

The second argument is no less powerfully supported by the Principle of Population than the first. It appears, from a very general survey of different countries, that under every form of government, however unjust and tyrannical, in every climate of the known world, however apparently unfavourable to health, it has been found, that population, with the sole exception above alluded to, has been able to keep itself up to the level of the means of subsistence. Consequently, if by the abolition of the trade to Africa the slaves in the West Indies were placed only in a *tolerable* situation, if their civil condition and moral habits were only made to *approach* to those, which prevail among the mass of the human race in the worst-governed countries of the world, it is contrary to the general laws of nature to suppose, that they would not be able by procreation fully to supply the effective demand for labour; and it is difficult to conceive, that a population so raised would not be in every point of view preferable to that which exists at present.

It is perfectly clear, therefore, that a consideration of the laws, which govern the increase and decrease of the human species, tends to strengthen, in the most powerful manner, all the arguments in favour of the abolition.

With regard to the state of society among the African nations,

it will readily occur to the reader, that, in describing it, the question of the slave trade was foreign to my purpose ; and I might naturally fear, that if I entered upon it I should be led into too long a digression. But certainly all the facts, which I have mentioned, and which are taken principally from Park, if they do not absolutely *prove*, that the wars in Africa are excited and aggravated by the traffic on the coast, tend powerfully to confirm the *supposition*. The state of Africa, as I have described it, is exactly such as we should expect in a country, where the capture of men was considered as a more advantageous employment than agriculture or manufactures. Of the state of these nations some hundred years ago, it must be confessed, that we have little knowledge that we can depend upon: but allowing that the regular plundering excursions, which Park describes, are of the most ancient date; yet it is impossible to suppose, that any circumstance which, like the European traffic, must give additional value to the plunder thus acquired, would not powerfully aggravate them, and effectually prevent all progress towards a happier order of things. As long as the nations of Europe continue barbarous enough to purchase slaves in Africa, we may be quite sure, that Africa will continue barbarous enough to supply them.

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